

# Building capacity in urban schools: emphasizing partnerships between counselor education and elementary schools

Capacity  
building  
partnerships

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Post-COVID-19, public K–12 schools are still facing the consequences of the years of interrupted learning. Schools serving minoritized students are particularly at risk for facing challenges with academics, behavior and student social emotional health. The university counseling programs are in positions to build capacity in urban schools while also supporting counselors-in-training through service-learning opportunities.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The following conceptual manuscript demonstrates how counselor education counseling programs and public schools can harness the capacity-building benefits of university–school partnerships. While prevalent in fields like special education, counselor educators have yet to heed the hall to participate in mutually beneficial partnership programs.

**Findings** – Using the multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and the components of the university–school partnerships, counselor educators and school stakeholders can work together to support student mental health, school staff well-being and counselor-in-training competence.

**Originality/value** – The benefits and opportunities within the university–school partnerships are well documented. However, few researchers have described a model to support partnerships between the university counseling programs and urban elementary schools. We provide a best practice model using the principles of university–school partnerships and a school's existing MTSS framework.

**Keywords** Service-learning, Student mental health, Capacity building partnerships, Multi-tiered systems of support, School–university partnerships

**Paper type** Practitioner paper

The following conceptual manuscript describes implementing the Capacity Building Partnership (CBP) model between counselor education programs and urban, under-resourced schools. While applicable to various school tiers and settings, the authors describe implementation in an elementary school. The model and case example come from the authors' experiences participating in and leading a partnership between an institution of higher learning and a public elementary school. The authors developed the model based on three years of partnership; currently, the authors are continuing to explore the efficacy of the

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model through the first author's dissertation research. The authors share the model and example to encourage further collaboration between the counseling university programs and public schools.

Schools are still facing the consequences of interrupted learning. In a survey of teacher perceptions, 77% of respondents indicated they had a "good or great deal of concern" for their students' social and emotional learning loss ([The Inverness Institute, 2023](#), to note section). Such concern is highlighted in the following quote from a teacher in an elementary school with 37% low-income students: "everyone is spread too thin. . ." ([The Inverness Institute, 2023](#) teacher reports section). Teachers' perspectives paint a picture of an education system in dire need of support. However, teachers are not alone in their assessment of the school environment; principals similarly reflected on leading staff and students during and after COVID-19 as the "wild, wild west" ([Reyes-Guerra et al., 2021](#), p. 7). Even with the possibility of COVID-19 abating ([Kimball, 2023](#)), public schools are still stretched thin. Between teaching shortages ([Meckler, 2022](#)), school safety worries ([Meckler, 2022](#)), academic gaps ([Wakelyn, 2022](#)), behavior concerns ([Jacobson, 2022](#)) and increased mental health concerns ([Centers for Disease Control \[CDC\], 2022](#)), school leaders find themselves with more problems than solutions.

When narrowed to schools serving minoritized students, the results are even bleaker. COVID-19 policies, such as school closures and remote learning, disproportionately impacted younger students and students from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds ([Hammerstein et al., 2021](#)). Similarly, the Northwest Evaluation Agency (NWEA; [Kuhfeld & Lewis, 2022](#)) reported that learning loss was most pronounced for elementary students in schools with higher rates of poverty. Researchers further indicated that minoritized students also experienced increased mental health concerns when compared to their peers of higher SES ([Hawrilenko et al., 2021](#)).

Considering COVID-19's disproportionate impact on minoritized students ([Hammerstein et al., 2021](#); [Hawrilenko et al., 2021](#); [Kuhfeld & Lewis, 2022](#)), schools serving minoritized students may have even greater stakes for creatively engaging innovative solutions. One solution with a rich research base is university-school partnerships. Given the dire mental health needs of elementary students, particularly those in the under-resourced urban settings, we present a case for partnerships between counselor education counseling programs and elementary schools as a capacity-building approach post-COVID-19, using the theoretical underpinning of multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). For the purpose of our manuscript, we rely on the research base within the university-school partnerships (e.g. [Lawson, 2013](#); [Muro et al., 2015](#); [Swick et al., 2021](#); [Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012](#); [Walsh & Backe, 2013](#); [Walsh et al., 2000](#)) and define, "capacity building" as a mutually beneficial relationship in which both the partnering university and school receive benefits. To support our case, we will first provide context for partnership and explore connections to the nine essentials (National Association for Professional Development Schools [[NAPDS](#)], 2021). Next, we will review the impacts of COVID-19, specific to the urban school settings and describe the specific needs of urban school settings, post-COVID-19. Further, we will describe the necessity of partnerships between counselor education counseling programs and elementary schools and their potential to be efficacious and sustainable in response to the needs described. Finally, we will outline a partnership framework between urban schools and counselor education programs to support positive student and faculty outcomes using the MTSS.

### **The nine essentials**

The authors of the current paper include an Assistant Professor within counselor education and a previous school counselor and current counselor education doctoral student. The second author supports university-school partnerships in her role as the coordinator of the

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Play Therapy counseling track. The first author supports a university–school partnership as a part of her dissertation research. The following conceptual article represents learning and findings from three years of partnering with an urban, under-resourced elementary school. The first author is currently supporting a university–school partnership using the proposed conceptual model for her dissertation research. Our partnership framework specifically aligns with calls to “advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners” (NAPDS, 2021, Essential #1); support counselor-in-training development through clinical practice (Essential #2); promote collaboration and dissemination of results among stakeholders (Essential #5); and emphasizes clearly defined roles and responsibilities (Essential #8). We will continue exploring alignment with The Nine Essentials (NAPDS, 2021) throughout the model and case example.

### COVID-19 and urban school settings

Before COVID-19, the opportunity gap between minoritized students and nonminoritized students was growing (e.g. Eizadirad, 2019; Gorski, 2017; Welner & Carter, 2013). While researchers still understanding COVID-19’s long-term academic outcomes, the ongoing results suggest that inequity in urban schools has only deepened post-COVID-19. COVID-19 created an unprecedented upheaval in educational practices across the United States of America. Depending upon the area, schools’ decisions to close and reopen varied tremendously. While researchers indicated that school responses to COVID-19 appeared equitable, the researchers also noted that the student experience of COVID-19 appeared inequitable (Harris *et al.*, 2020). Their findings, consistent with other studies (e.g. Hammerstein *et al.*, 2021; Hawrilenko *et al.*, 2021; Kuhfeld & Lewis, 2022), indicate that COVID-19 disproportionately impacted minoritized students, such as students attending urban, under-resourced schools. Many researchers point to unique challenges of the urban school settings that contributed to difficult outcomes for students, families and school communities, such as the limited availability of internet access during virtual learning and the emotional weight of racial tensions and unrest resulting from the tragic and publicized deaths of minoritized individuals (Russo, 2022). Researchers refer to the double weight of COVID-19 and racial unrest as a “double pandemic” (Many *et al.*, 2022). Cotto and Woulfin (2021) also described inequitable choices faced by parents in urban school districts as complicated by issues of childcare, technological access, school safety measures and more. Novice teachers in an urban school setting described their experience of teaching through a double pandemic as one characterized by disruption and transition (Many *et al.*, 2022). While COVID-19 may exacerbate inequity, researchers have demonstrated high needs of schools in urban areas even before COVID-19. Dolph (2017) described test scores, graduation rates and student performance as some of the warranted concerns with urban schools. Dolph (2017) further described community poverty, high teacher turnover and limited resources as factors that contribute to concerning student outcomes. Researchers also explored factors such as decaying infrastructure (Evans & Kim, 2013), racism (Kraft *et al.*, 2015) and community violence (Kraft *et al.*, 2015) as limiting factors that can potentially create difficult learning spaces.

While the needs may be great, researchers have also demonstrated the resiliency and passion of students and their families in urban schools (Bryan, 2005; Bryan *et al.*, 2020). Researchers (Bryan & Henry, 2012) described the compounding benefits of collaboration in the urban school settings and discussed the importance of engaging in partnerships from a strengths-based and equity-focused perspective. Further, researchers consistently demonstrate the value of meaningful relationships as protective against many of the difficulties faced in urban, under-resourced school settings (Agirdag *et al.*, 2012; Kumi-

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Yeboah *et al.*, 2021; McHugh *et al.*, 2013; Schwartz *et al.*, 2017). Accordingly, researchers that attempt to respond to needs in the urban school settings should do so in such a way that honors strengths, centers equity and builds relationships (Ceballos *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, researchers also describe the environment of urban schools post-COVID-19 as one ripe for creative and re-imagined change (Beard *et al.*, 2021; Many *et al.*, 2022). Beard *et al.* (2021) summarized the challenges of COVID-19 and encouraged educators, researchers and policymakers to re-invest in resources to support student well-being. Similarly, Barnett (2021) encouraged schools to specifically foster hope in students by promoting student's agency, creating opportunities and providing choices. While education in urban schools may appear increasingly untenable and is certainly replete with challenges, school stakeholders are also creatively in search of sustaining, cost-effective and capacity-building solutions to support students' mental health. One such solution could be university-school partnerships.

#### *University-school partnerships*

Researchers have established the efficacy of university-school partnerships as an effective means to support universities and schools (Lawson, 2013; Muro *et al.*, 2015; Swick *et al.*, 2021; Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012; Walsh & Backe, 2013; Walsh *et al.*, 2000). Additionally, partnerships may be an appropriate resource to respond to school needs post-COVID-19 as researchers have already demonstrated the utility of university-school partnerships to respond to shifts in educational needs (Walsh & Backe, 2013), such as *No Child Left Behind* (2001) and *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015). Researchers have demonstrated the efficacy of university-school partnerships in various disciplines: teaching (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2019; Jones *et al.*, 2016), special education (Hoppey, 2016), play therapy (Taylor *et al.*, 2022), school counseling (Bryan, 2005; Bryan *et al.*, 2020) and mental health (Jenkins *et al.*, 2023; Walter *et al.*, 2019). However, researchers in counselor education have yet to explore partnership opportunities, despite calls within the profession (Barrio-Minton *et al.*, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2023).

#### *University-school partnerships in counselor education*

Counselor education is an appropriate host for the university-school partnerships. Like general education, counselor education prepares new professionals (i.e. counselors-in-training) to support populations (i.e. clients). While general education prepares teachers, counselor education prepares counselors. Counselor educators have a responsibility to prepare competent and ethical counselors-in-training (CITs) (CACREP, 2024). Especially after COVID-19, counselor education can use university-school partnerships to support local school communities while also supporting CIT growth and development. Thus, the opportunity for partnership is ripe as researchers have clearly delineated best practices within the university-school partnerships: shared conceptual understanding, mutuality in roles and relationships, sound operational strategies and evaluation of both partnership and outcomes (Walsh & Backe, 2013). Finally, researchers have established a rich research record of utilizing partnerships specifically in the urban school settings (e.g. Allahwala *et al.*, 2013; Bryan, 2005; Bryan *et al.*, 2020; Officer *et al.*, 2013; Sanders, 2009; Walter *et al.*, 2019). Counselor educators can utilize best practices from the existing research to support ongoing partnerships within counselor education.

#### *University-school partnerships in urban schools*

Few researchers to date have described university-school partnerships as a vehicle to support student mental health post-COVID-19 (e.g. Jenkins *et al.*, 2023). Some researchers described the efficacy of utilizing partnerships as a support during COVID-19 (e.g. Hodges

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*et al.*, 2020). Notably, *School-University Partnerships* curated a themed issue, “The Response and Responsibility of School-University Partnerships in a Time of Crisis” (Dresden *et al.*, 2021). Thus, an opportunity remains to specifically position partnership as a support, post-COVID-19. Researchers have demonstrated that partnerships between the universities and urban schools provide crucial support to students, thus enhancing the capacity to serve more students on an individualized level. Researchers described results such as increased attendance and college-going behavior (Officer *et al.*, 2013), improved student mental health (Walter *et al.*, 2019) and dissemination of trauma-informed best practices (Hodges *et al.*, 2020). Researchers have also demonstrated that positive partnership results are not only limited to students; Walter *et al.* (2019) identified improvements to staff’s capacity to provide mental health services to students after engaging in partnership.

While there remain opportunities for counselor education researchers to explore partnership opportunities after COVID-19, researchers in other fields have begun exploring partnerships as a support to schools, post-COVID-19. Hodges *et al.* (2020) described how teachers can utilize partnerships to increase their capacity while providing digital instruction. Hodges *et al.* (2020) discussed partnerships as poised to not only respond to COVID-19 challenges but also mitigate them. While focused on virtual learning only, Hodges *et al.* (2020) demonstrated how the universities can support needs in schools by providing evidenced-based social-emotion learning (SEL) support. Specifically, Hodges *et al.* (2020) described the ways that universities can share knowledge and disseminate best practices from the university outward to schools and families. Similarly, Jenkins *et al.* (2023) presented university-school partnerships as a vehicle to support students’ mental health in schools, post-COVID-19. However, their research did not include a framework to guide partnership. Thus, university-school partnerships can specifically leverage a school’s existing MTSS framework to support students’ mental health and staff capacity post-COVID-19.

### MTSS

MTSS is a preventative framework that supports student academic, social-emotional and behavioral outcomes using a three-tiered approach (Stoiber & Gettinger, 2015). Tier I refers to universal support for all students, Tier II refers to targeted intervention for some students and Tier III refers to ongoing intervention and support for a few students (Stoiber & Gettinger, 2015). MTSS is compatible with university-school partnerships, given the similar emphasis on strategies that support student well-being. Researchers clearly demonstrate that MTSS is concerned with evidenced-based practices (EBP; Mahoney, 2020; Stoiber & Gettinger, 2015; Thompson & Cox, 2016) while a core component of university-school partnerships is sound operational strategies (Walsh & Backe, 2013). Additionally, researchers have already demonstrated the efficacy of utilizing MTSS as both a framework to support student mental health (Jenkins *et al.*, 2023; Marsh & Mathur, 2020) and partnerships with K–12 schools (Jenkins *et al.*, 2023; Walter *et al.*, 2019).

While MTSS implementation is associated with improved outcomes (Stoiber & Gettinger, 2015), it is not without challenges. Researchers demonstrate difficulty in implementation in urban schools, especially implementation of effective Tier II supports given issues with capacity (Braun *et al.*, 2020). However, researchers also consistently demonstrate that successful Tier II intervention supports improved student outcomes (Kern *et al.*, 2020; Majeika *et al.*, 2020; McDaniel *et al.*, 2022) and can support increased staff capacity in the schools in which partnership is implemented (Walter *et al.*, 2019). Given the struggles urban schools face in implementing Tier II, university-school partnerships can specifically leverage their resources to support intervention implementation across all tiers with a particular emphasis on Tier II. We propose using MTSS to guide university–

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### Capacity building partnerships (CBP)

The CBP model, developed by the current authors based on their experiences supporting partnerships between counselor education counseling programs and urban, under-resourced elementary schools, incorporates research on the efficacy of both MTSS and university–school partnerships to describe a capacity-building approach to partnership. Given the challenges faced in urban schools post-COVID-19, the CBP model is timely and responsive to current school challenges. [Table 1](#) describes how the CBP Model incorporates best practices within university–school partnerships ([Walsh & Backe, 2013](#)) and demonstrates action steps and outcomes within each practice. Additionally, we bolster the model by outlining the alignment with The Nine Essentials ([NAPDS, 2021](#)). [Figure 1](#) describes interventions within each tier of MTSS. We list, “sharing resources, knowledge, and best practices,” as well as, “supporting professional development and training,” throughout all tiers, as universities and schools can engage in reciprocally beneficial partnerships by engaging in the listed activities, regardless of Tier. The university and school teams can utilize both [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#) to inform what partnership and intervention looks like in their specific setting. While currently a conceptual model, future researchers can utilize case study research methods to describe partnership in practice, using the CBP model. Our model emphasizes partnerships between counselor education counseling programs and urban, elementary schools as that is our area of experience and research; yet the flexibility of the model translates to rural, suburban and urban school settings of all tiers.

#### *Case illustration*

*Implementing the CBP model.* The following illustration depicts how a university counseling program and elementary school may utilize both [Table 1](#) and [Figure 1](#) to engage in partnership that incorporates the CBP model. We created the following illustration from our previous experiences to serve as a model example for capacity building partnerships between the universities and schools.

Ms. Blake is a school counselor in an urban elementary school that serves a high transient student body with 100% of students receiving free and reduced lunch. After COVID-19, Ms. Blake is struggling to meet the increasing social–emotional needs of her students. Ms. Blake is the only school counselor at her elementary school, and she serves a caseload of 450 students. Ms. Blake does her best to work with school staff to provide Tier I classroom social–emotional learning lessons for all students, but she is finding it increasingly difficult to provide small group support to students in Tier II. Dr Seams is an associate professor in school counseling at a CACREP-accredited university. She notices that her students often come into practicum feeling unprepared and unconfident. Dr Seams wants to provide opportunities for her students to work in the school settings prior to their practicum and internship experiences.

*Shared conceptual understanding.* Ms. Blake and Dr Seams met at a local meeting for their American School Counselor Association (ASCA) branch during the end of both of their school years. As they begin discussing their individual concerns, they realized they may be able to help one another achieve professional goals in their respective careers. Ms. Blake and Dr Seams scheduled a time to meet in the coming weeks. At their meeting, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams discussed partnering with one another to support both of their identified needs. Ms. Blake checked with her administration and district research team and received initial approval. Similarly, Dr Seams submitted a proposed protocol to her university internal



University–school partnership best practice	Action step	Outcome	Nine essentials
Shared conceptual understanding	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. University program and school connect to establish partnership</li> <li>2. University and school select leads for both settings</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. University and school formally establish partnership through Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)</li> <li>2. University and school complete appropriate paperwork through the university's internal review board (IRB) and the district research team</li> </ol>	Essential 1, 4, 6 and 7
Mutuality in roles and relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. University lead (UL) and school lead (SL) meet to discuss unique needs and challenges by conducting a Needs Assessment</li> <li>2. UL and SL identify complementary strengths (resources, time, knowledge, subjects, etc.)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. UL and SL evaluate challenges and prioritize goals</li> <li>2. UL and SL identify a goal(s) for each setting (university and school) that responds to needs and leverages identified strengths</li> </ol>	Essential 1, 3 and 8
Sound operational strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. UL and SL determine participants from the university and school and what Tier(s) intervention will take place</li> <li>2. UL and SL select evidenced-based interventions based on available resources and identified needs</li> <li>3. UL and SL follow procedures set by IRB and district research team</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. UL and SL create an intervention protocol outlining steps to intervention across multiple tiers</li> <li>2. UL and SL determine schedule to meet and monitor progress for intervention</li> <li>3. UL and SL determine appropriate supports for university and school students while intervention takes place (i.e. supervision and staff onsite for acute issues)</li> </ol>	Essential 1, 2 and 9
Evaluation of both partnership and outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At the conclusion of the intervention, UL and SL collect data to determine implementation fidelity and program outcomes</li> <li>2. If appropriate and/or desired, UL and SL present and/or publish findings</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. UL and SL evaluate partnership</li> <li>2. UL and SL collaborate on findings to ensure sustainability of partnership</li> <li>3. UL and SL present their findings to school staff</li> <li>4. UL disseminates findings to professional associations and journals</li> </ol>	Essential 5

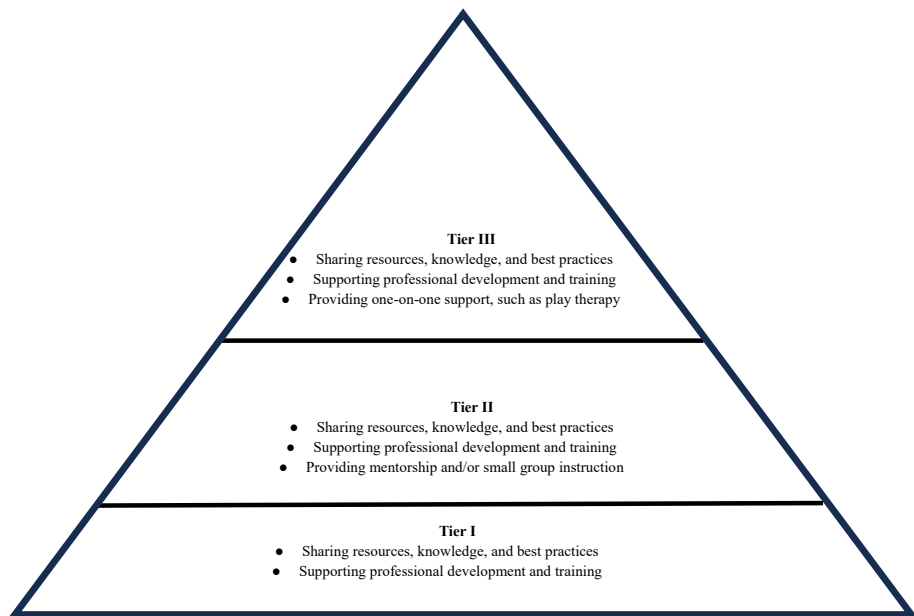
**Table 1.**  
The CBP model and  
alignment with  
university–school  
partnerships

**Note(s):** Adapted from [Walsh and Backe's \(2013\)](#) best practices in university–school partnerships and incorporating The Nine Essentials ([NAPDS, 2021](#))

**Source(s):** Created by authors

review board (IRB) and likewise received initial approval. By completing the steps as described, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams incorporate a cohesive mission, prioritize reflective

**Figure 1.**  
The CBP model and  
example MTSS  
interventions



**Source(s):** Created by authors

practice, organized agreements and sustainable structures; thus implementing the following Nine Essentials (NAPDS, 2021): 1, 4, 6 and 7.

*Mutuality in roles and relationships.* To solidify the partnership, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams completed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). With their paperwork completed, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams discussed their unique challenges and strengths in their respective locations. Ms. Blake identified her goal for partnership as serving students with Tier II small group social-emotional learning (SEL) services. Dr Seams identified her goal as providing pre-practicum students with experience in school settings providing services to students. They put their partnership in place during the following fall of the school year. In doing so, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams continue to support a comprehensive mission (Essential #1), provide ongoing learning and leadership opportunities (Essential #3) and articulate well-defined roles (Essential #8) (NAPDS, 2021).

*Sound operational strategies.* With their goals in mind, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams created an intervention protocol using the MTSS framework already in place at Ms. Blake's school. Ms. Blake continued providing Tier I services to all students by supporting morning meeting curriculum in every classroom that emphasizes SEL characteristics. They determined that university students will provide mentorship services to identified students needing Tier II SEL support. Ms. Blake worked with administration and school staff to identify students, and she also sent home permission slips to students' families; Dr Seams recruited, trained and provided ongoing support to university students serving as mentors. Ms. Blake and Dr Seams meet once per week at the start of the intervention and plan to then meet once a month after the intervention is successfully in place to review progress and discuss how the partnership is going. Ms. Blake and Dr Seams excitedly prepared for their upcoming intervention by continuing to meet and correspond regularly. As the school year progressed, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams put their partnership plan in place by implementing their identified



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goals in Tier I and Tier II. Through implementation, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams align their work with Essentials #1 (a comprehensive mission), #2 (clinical preparation) and #9 (resources and recognition) (NAPDS, 2021).

*Evaluation of both partnership and outcomes.* At the conclusion of the semester, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams assessed the efficacy of their intervention by evaluating implementation fidelity and program outcomes. To assess implementation fidelity, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams used a variety of their collected data, such as document analysis, observations and focus groups and they assessed adherence, duration, quality of delivery and participant responsiveness to answer whether their intended intervention was implemented as planned (Rojas-Andrade & Bahamondes, 2019; Vroom, Massey, Yampolskaya, & Levin, 2020). To assess program outcomes, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams collected teacher and family reports of students' progress and conducted focus groups with the university mentors. After completing their evaluation, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams determined that university mentors would enjoy more opportunities to reflect on their experience mentoring as it is happening. As a result of their evaluation, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams made changes for their coming semester and instituted supervision with the university mentors every other week as a more formalized mechanism of mentor support. They also prepared a poster to present together at their local ASCA Conference to disseminate best practices to those individuals who may benefit from their experience. While not without challenges, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams continued relying on one another to meet their individual goals. In doing so, Ms. Blake received additional capacity to continue serving students on her caseload while Dr Seams noticed that her university students were better prepared and more confident for their practicum and internship placements. After two successful years of partnership, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams explored opportunities to scale up their partnership by intervening in Tier III for individual students with greater needs. By intentionally evaluating their partnership and outcomes, Ms. Blake and Dr Seams implement Essential #5: "public sharing of results" (NAPDS, 2021, p. 4).

## Discussion

The partnership between Ms. Blake and Dr Seams illustrates the capacity-building impact that both university counseling programs and elementary schools can achieve when working together. Future researchers can validate the efficacy and sustainability of partnerships between counseling programs and elementary schools through empirical studies. However, in the meantime, capacity building partnerships continue to occur between other disciplines. In their seminal work, editors Yendol-Hoppey *et al.* (2017) describe the value of partnerships specifically in the urban school settings. However, like much of the research on university-school partnerships, Yendol-Hoppey *et al.* (2017) primarily situate their audience as urban educators. However, the values that Yendel-Hoppey and others describe are relevant to counselor education. In a specific profile of a partnership programs, Dennis *et al.* (2015) illustrated partnerships as innovative and equity based. Such values are similarly rooted in counselor education. Further, given increasing concerns for students' mental health, the time is ripe for university counseling programs and K-12 schools to work together to benefit future counselors and identified students requiring additional mental health support.

## Implications for counselor educators

While researchers have established an extensive research base to explore the efficacy of university-school partnerships in the urban school settings (Bryan, 2005; Bryan *et al.*, 2020), researchers in counselor education have not yet explored partnership opportunities to the extent of their colleagues in other disciplines (Barrio-Minton *et al.*, 2021). However, counselor education is well-suited to the task of bridging the research-practice gap by exploring

opportunities to partner with local schools, as some researchers in counselor education have already demonstrated (e.g. [Taylor et al., 2022](#)). Future researchers in counselor education should similarly heed the call of engaging in partnership research by using the research methods most common in partnership literature: case study design and action research. Future researchers can speak more clearly to the efficacy of partnership by specifically evaluating program implementation, not just outcomes. In doing so, counselor educators can respond to the call of past participants by providing research on how to better evaluate partnership program efficacy ([Kirschenbaum & Reagan, 2001](#)). Counselor educators can add to the existing research base by empirically evaluating whether partnership programs are capacity-building for the urban school settings. To do so, researchers can analyze rich outcome data, such as student academic and behavioral outcomes and stakeholders' perceptions of partnership using qualitative interviews. Finally, researchers can utilize [Carey et al.' \(2008\)](#) Outcome Research Coding Protocol to continue building the research base for university–school partnerships as efficacious support for school capacity and students' mental health. Researchers in other disciplines have charted a course to demonstrate how counselor educators can successfully engage in partnership research; therefore, counselor educators are well-positioned to respond to the call and contribute to the growing literature.

### **Limitations**

Educational issues are complex and there is no one easy solution. Such problems are even more complex when experienced in under-resourced, urban schools, given the compounding effects of inequity, low resources and additional challenges. However, issues in urban, under-resourced schools are also urgent and demand innovative and creative solutions. University–school partnerships may represent a cost-effective intervention that responds to current school needs. By prioritizing capacity and using MTSS as the intervening structure, CBP represents an innovative and creative solution that schools can utilize as a needed resource within their existing toolbelt. However, the CBP model is not without limitations. First and foremost, the current framework is conceptual; while the CBP model draws on an extensive literature base, researchers have not validated its use through rigorous inquiry. Future researchers can respond to this limitation by engaging in research evaluating the efficacy of the CBP model. Additionally, while MTSS is an evidenced-based framework that exists in schools throughout the country, different schools may implement MTSS differently. In doing so, the conceptual framework of the CBP model may look different from school to school. However, the flexibility of the CBP model is also strength, in that it allows universities and schools to tailor the partnership program to the specific needs of the university and school. Finally, the CBP model relies on leadership and communication between two distinct organizations – to ensure successful implementation, the CBP model necessitates buy-in from the university and school as well as continued investment with one another to ensure the partnership is effective. Further, given the nature of information sharing, both the university and school will need to seek approval from the appropriate ethical oversight committee, including IRB and district approval. Such a commitment, while cost-effective, requires a substantial time and human capital investment in the early stages. Schools and universities should seriously consider their resources and time availability before engaging in the CBP model. Researchers can continue demonstrating the efficacy of university–school partnerships by establishing such partnerships as cost effective and sustainable.

### **Conclusion**

The research on the university–school partnerships is not new (e.g. [Lawson, 2013](#); [Muro et al., 2015](#); [Swick et al., 2021](#); [Vernon-Dotson & Floyd, 2012](#); [Walsh & Backe, 2013](#); [Walsh et al.,](#)

2000); however, researchers can apply the established research to a new problem: building capacity for mental health in schools post-COVID-19. Researchers are just beginning to describe the ways in which partnership opportunities can respond to school needs as experienced during (Hodges *et al.*, 2020) and after (Jenkins *et al.*, 2023) COVID-19. However, the CBP model extends the current research by specifically outlining the ways in which counseling programs and urban schools can utilize MTSS to guide partnership. While the CBP model represents an exciting next step in partnership research, future researchers can continue extending the research base by demonstrating the efficacy of the CBP model using empirical research methods. Until then, practitioners can use the CBP model to guide partnership opportunities, build capacity and support student mental health in their own settings.

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