Building Partnership Capacity and Sustainability in Financially Challenging Times

Introduction
Creating and sustaining quality partnerships requires strategic planning, continuous operational reflection, and innovation. This is especially true in an era of declining resources for public universities and communities. In this financially challenging climate, we present strategies for long-term partnerships development and capacity building, mobilization of resources, and long-term systemic change focused on eliminating gender and racial educational inequality.

The Promoting Academic Success (PAS) Initiative
PAS is an initiative designed to improve academic outcomes for young African American, Latino, and American Indian boys, 4 to 10 years old, in a medium-sized urban school district. The purpose of the initiative is to prevent the very real and growing achievement gap of minority males as they progress through middle school and high school. To that end, the collaboration between the PAS school district initiative is to prevent the very real and growing achievement gap of minority males as they progress through middle school and high school. To that end, the collaboration between the PAS school district and the university conducts:

- Professional development for teachers/principal/teacher leaders
- Intergenerational mentoring for young minority boys
- Extended school learning opportunities for participants

PAS Partners
The PAS partners include a local school district, the local Head Start Office, local city government, the Michigan Works Workforce Investment Act, and Michigan State University. The PAS partnership may be represented in the following organizational chart:

**PAS Organizational Chart**

- Project Co-Directors
  - Project Co-Directors
- Implementation Team Meeting Committee
- Steering Committee
- Program Element Activities

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<tr>
<th>Program Element</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<td>Increased learning opportunities for students</td>
<td>- Redirect federal or state targeted funding, i.e., Title I funds, to afterschool and summer school learning programs, using project data to document need and impact.</td>
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<td>Teacher professional development</td>
<td>- Raise level of institutional awareness and commitment to addressing disparities and the need for continued professional development using local and Title I funds.</td>
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<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>- Create a community marketing and promotion plan to reach all stakeholders.</td>
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<td>Research</td>
<td>- Recommend a board appointed committee to monitor progress in reducing disparities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Evaluation</td>
<td>- Require professional development on gender and racial/ethnic educational inequality.</td>
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**Principles for Developing Partnership Capacity and Sustainability**

- Ensure open, honest, and frequent communication
- Build transparency and visibility to all stakeholders
- Create an environment of shared decision making
- Address challenges and barriers as a team
- Regularly evaluate progress
- Institutionalise best practices

**Strategies for Developing Partnership and Sustainability Based on PAS Initiative Partnership**

1. Establish benchmarks for emerging, developing and sustaining levels of implementation
2. Ensure commitment and ownership of the initiative by all partners from all levels of each institution so that the initiative is not dependent on a single individual
3. Identify critical roles for all stakeholders and help them to assume leadership in those roles
4. Address race, ethnicity, and gender in a straightforward, evidence-based fashion
5. Use data generated by the initiative to maintain focus on the objective, outcome desired and track progress towards goals
6. Discuss how interventions can be adapted on an on-going basis as interventions are not 100% replicable, especially in community contexts
7. Expand the partnership to include other key community stakeholders
8. Create a systemic partnership, as all involved are bound in multiple ways

**Conclusion**
Many university-school district partnerships face challenges inherent in large urban school districts, i.e., funding limitations and competing priorities, staffing and student transiency in schools, and sustaining faculty involvement. However, we believe that by focusing on capacity building and sustainability from the beginning, it is possible to build a partnership that will have long-lasting impact for students, parents, and the community.

**Illustrative Examples of Sustainability Plans Developed in the PAS Initiative**

- Increased learning opportunities for students
- Teacher professional development
- Mentoring

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