

# Advancing Place-Based University-Community Partnerships at the Garcia West Dallas STEM School

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# The Challenge - Why School-Community Partnerships Often Fall Short

- Traditional partnerships are often extractive rather than reciprocal
- Universities "parachute in" without understanding local context
- Community organizations lack sustained capacity-building support
- Schools struggle to coordinate multiple partner relationships

**Key Question:** *How do we move from transactional to transformational partnerships?*

*Bender, 2008; Koekkoek et al., 2021; Mtawa et al., 2016; Mulligan & Nadarajah, 2008*

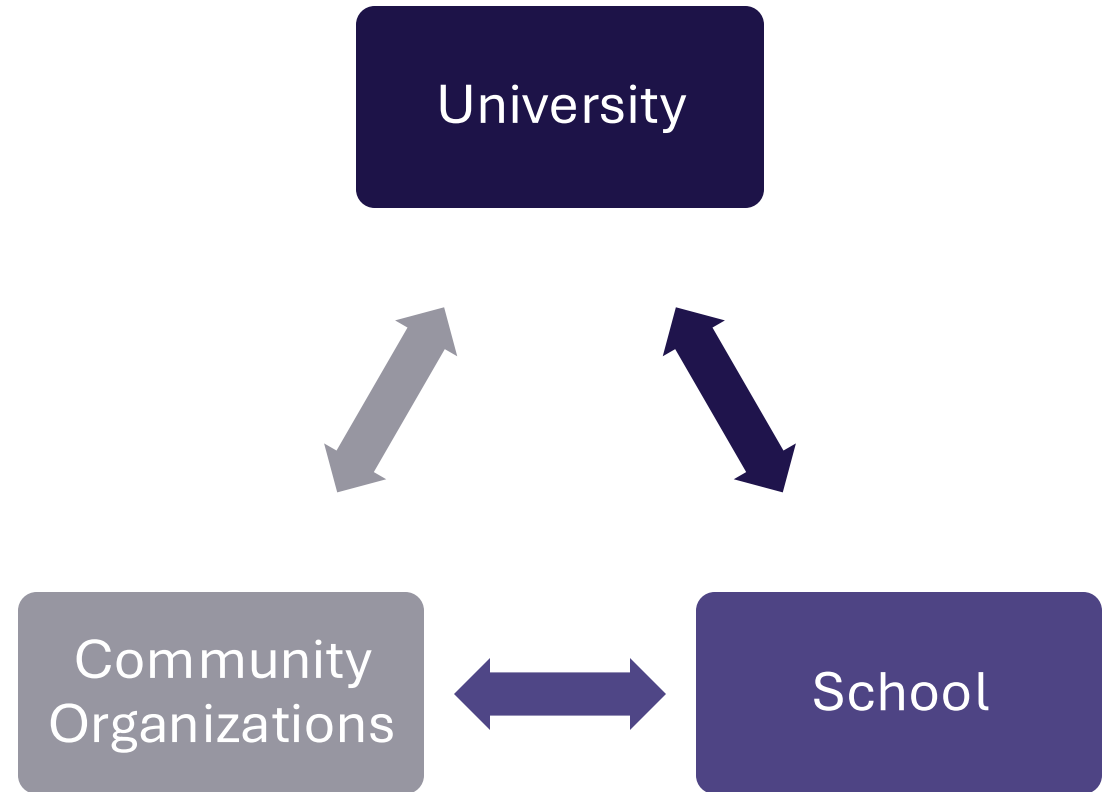
# Our Solution - The School Zone



- **Location:** Garcia West Dallas STEM School
- **Model:** Monthly capacity-building workshops + individualized consultations
- **Partners:** Local nonprofits, university researchers, school staff
- **Goal:** Strengthen nonprofit capacity while addressing school-identified needs
- **Framework:** Place-Based Community Engagement (PBCE)

# PBCE Framework in Action

- **Place Consciousness**
- **Shared Leadership**
- **Reciprocal Partnerships**
- **Addressing Inequities**
- **Long-term Commitment**



*Yamamura & Koth, 2019*

# Spring 2025 Pilot Implementation

- **Who We Worked With**

- **KERA**
- **Readers2Leaders**
- **Wesley Rankin Community Center**
- **Brother Bill's Helping Hand**

- **What We Did**

- Monthly workshops focused on program evaluation capacity
- One-on-one consultations tailored to organizational needs
- Collaborative design sessions for community-responsive programming

# Case Study 1 - KERA

- **Challenge:** History of university research treating communities as "lab rats"
- **Our Approach:** Co-designed evaluation processes with community input
- **Key Strategies:**
  - Modified IRB protocols based on community feedback
  - Empathy interviews with families
  - Bilingual communication tools
  - Cross-sector partnership coordination

*"There's a long history, obviously of maybe not abusive research, but close to abusive research where people go in kind of use, you know, like, like, 'Oh, these are the lab rats that we're doing our experiment on.' And that's really not how educational research should be."*



# Case Study 2 – Readers2Leaders

- **Challenge:** Moving beyond superficial feedback
- **Our Approach:** Deeper feedback mechanisms that inform program development
- **Key Strategies:**
  - Meaningful student voice collection
  - Geographic barrier analysis
  - Transportation equity solutions
  - Place-conscious program design

*Last year we did do a student survey, but it was like, I like the snacks, I like game day, and I'm like cool, great. I'm glad you like those things, you know, but kind of what else. I think that one could be like a bigger conversation, like how we rate students or questions for students to help get them there"*



# Shared Challenges Across Cases

- **Transportation & Geography**
- **Funder Requirements vs. Community Needs**
- **Sustainability**
- **Power Dynamics**





# Key Outcomes & Lessons Learned

## What Worked

- Deep relationship-building created trust and authentic collaboration
- Flexible evaluation approaches honored community-defined success
- Cross-sector coordination amplified individual organization impact
- Place-based approach addressed root causes, not just symptoms

## Critical Success Factors

- Sustained investment in relationship infrastructure
- Community co-leadership from design phase
- Systematic attention to structural inequities
- Adaptation based on continuous community feedback

# 2025-26 Expansion Strategy

- **Geographic Scale:** Expanding The School Zone to South Dallas
- **Virtual Scale:** Partnering with Toyota to host virtual TSZ for WDSS replication sites
- **Integration:** Embedding partnerships into ongoing school operations
- **Fall 2025 Focus:** Data-driven decision-making workshops
- **Strategic Commitments:**
  - Maintain PBCE principles while scaling
  - Distribute power and resources equitably
  - Build long-term capacity, not dependency



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# Thank You

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**Questions & Discussion**