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Community Collaboration on Education Reform

Say Yes Syracuse

January 2014

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Executive Summary

Theory about community-integrated education initiatives (e.g., community schools, Harlem Children’s Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, Strive Partnership) suggests that community school partnerships can increase community engagement with a school, make more efficient and effective use of limited and sometimes overlapping resources, and ultimately lead to improved student outcomes (Decker, 1999; Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005; Hunt, 1968; Melaville, 2002; Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). Further, comprehensive school reform theory and research suggest that coordinating efforts (i.e., teachers, counselors, and social workers) within schools contributes to reform implementation and that coordination needs to include larger systems, such as the district, city, and county (Bodilly, S. J., Keltner, B., Purnell, S., Reichardt, R., & Schuyler, G., 1998; Stringfield et al., 1997).

Say Yes to Education (SYTE) foundation¹ has developed an education improvement model that incorporates curriculum, instruction, socioemotional, and health supports into a coherent approach, and SYTE has been engaged in scaling implementation to the community level. The SYTE initiative in Syracuse, New York (Say Yes Syracuse), is a unique venture in the degree to which community stakeholders have rallied around a single initiative, refocusing their resources to support Say Yes Syracuse’s reform strategies, reflected in a set of shared goals. Relative to education reforms of the recent past (e.g., the Effective Schools Movement, Chicago School Reform Act, Title I schoolwide programs), the Say Yes Syracuse approach establishes a structure for and oversight of the integration and coordination of a multitude of services and supports, including active and sustained partnerships with community institutions. Although the Say Yes Syracuse model sets out a framework for the partnerships, the individual partners are responsible for monitoring the quality of implementation of the interventions.

Primary local partners in the Say Yes Syracuse initiative include the following: Syracuse City School District (SCSD), Syracuse University (SU), the City of Syracuse mayor’s office, Onondaga County (as represented by the County Executive), local foundations, and community-based organizations. Before beginning this venture with Say Yes Syracuse, three core partners—SCSD, SYTE, and SU—signed an agreement of *nonnegotiables* (now referred to as Core Principles), which governs their respective responsibilities and reflects priorities for Say Yes Syracuse. A central element of the Core Principles—and the vision for Say Yes Syracuse—is the collaboration among partners on Say Yes Syracuse.

Say Yes Syracuse Core Principles

Say Yes Syracuse Core Principles	Focus on Collaboration
Postsecondary Completion Goal: This criterion requires community willingness to set the goal of postsecondary completion as the standard (along with improvement in test scores) upon which progress will be measured. Accomplishing this goal requires commitment by the entire city, including the teachers’ and administrators’ unions, to forming an organized coalition and engaging in a collaborative process.	Partners’ commitment to a common goal: postsecondary completion

¹ Throughout this paper, we refer to the Say Yes to Education foundation—a single, central partner—as SYTE; and we refer to the collaborative reform initiative, which involves multiple partners, as Say Yes Syracuse.

Say Yes Syracuse Core Principles	Focus on Collaboration
<p>Partnership With Higher Education: This criterion requires school district, school board, and union willingness to partner with higher education in the city to provide the supports and interventions needed to ensure student success. Such supports include a comprehensive <i>Postsecondary Student Assessment and Monitoring System</i>; a school-by-school ongoing assessment and improvement process; and a collaborative planning and implementation procedure to dramatically improve academic, enrichment, and comprehensive service delivery within schools and citywide. To support these partnership activities, Say Yes serves as the “honest broker” for fostering transparency and accountability for effective change.</p>	<p>District-higher education partnership to monitor and improve services Honest broker to mediate conversations</p>
<p>Transparent Accountability: This criterion requires school district willingness to engage in a public dialogue, with third-party validated data, about what is working and not working, with the goal of developing and implementing comprehensive programming that, over time, effectively meets the evolving needs of all youth within the system. These data are the foundation for ongoing continuous improvement processes utilized by the entire community. The school district also must be willing to implement teacher evaluation systems that include the use of student performance data.</p>	<p>Transparent accountability for results</p>
<p>Transparent and Sustainable Fiscal Management: This criterion requires citywide willingness to commit to a long-term fiscal pro forma that results (by Year 6 of the program) in full funding of a comprehensive set of new programs (e.g., school day, afterschool, summer camp, tutoring, mentoring, health and legal services, as well as college access and family counseling supports) through the core operating budgets of the school system, city, and county.</p>	<p>Transparent and sustainable fiscal management</p>
<p>Cross-Government and Sector Collaborative Governance Model: This criterion requires school, district, government, and private sector acknowledgement that because they independently cannot meet the intense needs of urban youth, they are willing to (a) build the collaborative governance structures (e.g., Community Advisory Group, Operating Group, and Task Forces) required to scale and (b) sustain the social-emotional, health, legal, family counseling, and academic services needed.</p>	<p>Cross-government and sector collaborative governance</p>

In this paper, we describe the design, implementation, challenges, and lessons learned regarding collaboration under Say Yes Syracuse, organized in accordance with the Say Yes Syracuse Core Principles. We describe changes in the public conversation about education in Syracuse, based on an analysis of public media. Finally, we summarize lessons learned and implications for similar cross-sector education improvement initiatives.

To characterize collaborative efforts in Say Yes Syracuse, we drew on existing research, including the first and second Say Yes Syracuse implementation reports and related documents. We also reanalyzed data from source documents that contributed to these reports. The primary analysis of these extant reports and data involved coding events and documented conversations that address collaboration and identifying patterns across the data.

To explore whether Say Yes Syracuse has instigated a common vision for education in the community, we commissioned a media analysis firm, Commetric, to conduct analyses of messages in the public media regarding education. This media analysis summarizes the focus and key players in public discourse related to education, over time and in comparison to statewide patterns. The analysis spans the period from May 2007 through April 2012 and includes public newspapers in Syracuse and across New York. The first period, May 2007 through summer 2008, provides baseline data about the nature of education conversations prior to Say Yes implementation in Syracuse.

Collaboration Regarding Say Yes in Syracuse

Core Principle 1: Postsecondary Completion Goal. All partners strongly endorsed the primary Say Yes Syracuse goals of creating opportunities for all students to succeed in SCSD, enroll in postsecondary education, and become productive citizens. SCSD and the community also supported the underlying Say Yes Syracuse theory of change. However, critical partners (e.g., the mayor, community based foundations, unaffiliated families) were not invited to sign the agreement and so did not make an initial commitment to the common goal. Further, there were numerous different visions for what the goals meant and how to reach them. SCSD did not demonstrate complete buy-in to the approach used by Say Yes Syracuse, and Say Yes Syracuse tended to move activities forward without involving partners. Partners, moreover, often worked in isolation from one another.

Part of this core principal is public communication around goals and approaches. Although messaging was strong and mainly consistent due to the communication skills of the SYTE leaders, it soon became evident that there was not a coherent plan guiding communication across all partners and the community, which led to disparate understandings of Say Yes Syracuse goals and approach. From the view of the community members, at the beginning of the initiative implementation, communication seemed to focus on sharing and getting commitment to a common vision but did not provide concrete details for action. This factor made it difficult for many community members to understand the full Say Yes Syracuse initiative, and, consequently, the community members tended to describe the initiative as “a scholarship program.” In Year 2, Say Yes Syracuse revised its communication plan, and partners agreed that significant progress had been made.

Core Principle 2: Partnership with Higher Education. The SU Chancellor, supported by SU staff, served as community liaison. For day-to-day negotiating, SYTE served as an “honest broker” by organizing and facilitating partner meetings. Regardless of the organization leading this role, the role itself was central to the reform effort.

SU also organized and led some of the Say Yes Syracuse programs, such as afterschool, summer enrichment, and tutoring programs. Initially, SU sought to staff these programs itself, but struggled with capacity and aggressive timelines. In Year 2, SU moved to a model in which community-based organizations provided the afterschool services and had responsibility for identifying the staff; SU was responsible for training of staff and oversight of the program. This approach better capitalized on community resources, but the initial management model and subsequent changes caused some inefficiencies and some tension with community-based organizations.

Finally, SU led collaboration on the *Higher Education Compact*, an agreement among public and private institutions of higher education to provide scholarships for SCSD graduates who were accepted to their programs. In the context of this role, SU led extended training over several months to teach students and their families to complete financial aid forms.

Core Principle 3: Transparent Accountability. Say Yes Syracuse accomplished some, but not all, of the plans to collect and summarize data to inform improvement and to be held accountable for progress. School profiles were developed for three years, but the mechanism for sharing the profiles

with school leadership was not consistent. As a result, the student monitoring system was never fully implemented. Data availability and quality issues undermined efforts to share progress on outcomes. Despite these challenges, Say Yes Syracuse did institute mechanisms to communicate publicly about data, such as task forces and committees to discuss and manage program components, and public meetings to share findings.

Core Principle 4: Transparent and Sustainable Fiscal Management. To commit to Say Yes Syracuse, SCSD also had to develop a six-year plan to transition fiscal responsibility from SYTE to local and district funding. The partners also committed to transparency about funding, including SYTE's role in SCSD funding and full disclosure of SCSD's resource allocation. Key partners agreed that Say Yes Syracuse and the community were very successful in raising financial and in-kind support.

SCSD committed to a financial audit of almost all functions. The audit was designed to identify ways in which district spending, within current budget parameters, could be more effective; and information was shared with the Community Advisory Group (CAG) in order to promote community commitment to some very difficult budget decisions. It then became the responsibility of SCSD to use this information to reduce the district budget to meet available resources.

Core Principle 5. Cross-Government and Sector Collaborative Governance Model. Say Yes Syracuse maintained a cross-partner management structure through the Operating Committee (OC), the CAG, and seven task forces (Community-Based Organization Due Diligence and Partnerships, Corporate Collaborations and Economic Development, Health and Wellness, Extended Learning Time, Legal, Postsecondary Access and Retention, and Secondary School Redesign). The OC included high-level district administrators; it helped inform partners about critical aspects of the initiative, such as the budget, summer programming, and partner involvement, and involve the partners in timely decisions about Say Yes Syracuse. The CAG included a larger group of community leaders, and provided a forum for sharing Say Yes Syracuse progress and data. The task forces helped to build connections with the community around the seven specified support structures. For each of these groups, Say Yes Syracuse made efforts to be inclusive in composition, while maintaining a group size that was conducive to discussion.

Moving the cross-management structures to full implementation in Year 2 was a major accomplishment. There also was progress in clarifying roles (e.g., job descriptions for Say Yes Syracuse school-based staff). Although some progress was evident and partners were seen as working well together, the specific partner responsibilities remained unclear for many.

Changes in the Conversation

A critically important indicator of the outcomes of Say Yes Syracuse is the degree to which the initiative has changed the public conversation about education in the community. The media analysis found the following:

- The intensity of media interest increased over time, and its tone was more positive than negative.

- Sixty-six percent of the relevant articles mentioned key Say Yes Syracuse goals, and the goals mentioned in the media were consistently those that were the highest priority for the initiative (e.g., to increase college readiness, attendance, and completion).
- Press coverage regarding critical education topics was similar in Syracuse and across the state. However, there was a slight trend toward more discussion of specific education programs that were widely implemented under Say Yes Syracuse (e.g., afterschool programs) in Syracuse as well as somewhat more discussion of financial aid in Syracuse and more discussion of broader education topics (e.g., college readiness, college graduation and dropout rates) in New York.
- Syracuse did not experience a greater increase in the number of articles on key topics over time compared with the state. This analysis does not support the hypothesis that Say Yes Syracuse would drive greater conversation about key education topics in Syracuse as the reform model matured.
- At least one third of the articles on Say Yes Syracuse mentioned SU or the district superintendent. However, other partners, such as foundations, were mentioned less frequently.
- Overall, the media conversation regarding Say Yes Syracuse was active and dialogical, as indicated by the relatively high presence of commentators throughout the entire study period. The top commentators were local Syracuse education and government leaders and SYTE representatives, suggesting involvement across the Say Yes Syracuse partners.

Conclusion

Say Yes Syracuse is an ambitious effort, building on smaller scale SYTE efforts and the community school approach, to take communitywide collaboration about education to scale. Through the use of organizational structures, such as a memo of understanding and task forces, as well as the active engagement of an honest broker to instigate and mediate conversations among partners, Say Yes Syracuse brought about an unprecedented level of communication and collaboration among community leaders previously in silos. There were a number of challenges, such as the lack of role clarity and disagreements about strategies to reach common goals, which necessitated revising approaches. However, the Say Yes Syracuse partners addressed those initial challenges to improve collaboration throughout the first four years of the initiative. Strategies used by Say Yes Syracuse to overcome these challenges—redistributing responsibilities, explicitly working to overcome historically troubled relationships, and reformulating community meetings to maximize participation—may provide useful guidance to those launching similar initiatives in the future.

Generally, Say Yes Syracuse was successful in improving communication across partners and in engaging partners in collaborative and concrete activities to provide needed services to students. It is not clear, however, that Say Yes Syracuse was successful in fully engaging the public or changing the public conversation about education. It may be that change at that diffuse level requires more time to emerge or different strategies.

Despite the challenges, the goal (postsecondary success for all youth) and the approach (collaboration across sectors) remain important, and the strategies continue to be viable. Other communities considering similar ambitious reforms may build on the following lessons learned in Syracuse:

- Develop a clear, shared understanding of the goal of the initiative and of the strategies needed to reach that goal; use a formal document, such as a memo of understanding, to commit all partners to this agreement.
- Establish early a solid communication plan to reach all community members—including both organizational leaders and unaffiliated individuals such as parents—to communicate about the initiative; and in packaging the message, be careful to communicate the full scope of the initiative along with the catchy shorter summary.
- Continue to communicate and collaborate as the plans evolve.
- Consider the history and context when assigning roles to partners; be sensitive to past relationships.
- Assign roles to partners that build on their strengths rather than attempt to provide those services directly; for example, the local university could facilitate the engagement of local community-based organizations in providing services.
- Identify an honest broker to proactively negotiate difficult conversations across partners; consider the interpersonal and communication skills of the individual as well as his or her existing relationships in the community and perceived neutrality. Recognize that this is a time-consuming but essential role, and plan accordingly.
- Use data at the student, school, and community levels to guide programming; and evaluate the quality and accessibility of the required data, and address issues early.
- Communicate progress toward goals using data in public venues.
- Communicate financial commitments publicly. Use third-party audits to identify ways to maintain investment in the initiative.
- Establish organizational structures to support the work, and communicate across the community. Consider issues of committee membership, especially finding the best balance between a group that is small enough for substantive discussion and large enough to include key stakeholders; consider also having leaders at the table with reach across the community.

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Introduction

Despite decades of policies aimed at reforming the education system, some schools persistently fail to raise student achievement (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; O'Day & Bitter, 2003). Although research does not identify a clear and consistently effective solution, several promising strategies, such as the following, arise repeatedly:

- To improve student academic learning, improvements must touch the students directly through curriculum and instruction (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010).
- Socioemotional and health issues can affect students' abilities to benefit from educational experiences (Wilson, Gottfredson, & Najaka, 2001; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007).
- Effective school reforms that are successfully implemented tend to be coherent initiatives that are designed to work together toward a common goal (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Herman et al., 2008; Stringfield et al., 1997).
- Schools are embedded in larger systems (e.g., districts, cities), and coordination between the school and these larger systems affects the quality of implementation and results (Aladjem & Le Floch, 2006; Bodilly, Keltner, Purnell, Reichardt, & Schuyler, 1998; Calkins Guenther, Belfiore, & Lash, 2007; Childress, Elmore, Grossman, & Johnson, 2007; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 2001; Miles & Frank, 2008; Sykes, O'Day, & Ford, 2009).

Although all of these conditions may contribute to successful education reform initiatives, it is the fourth strategy—the coordination and supports across contexts and partners—that can remove barriers to implementing the previous three strategies, provide support for sustaining effective strategies, and therefore be an enabling condition for large-scale, lasting education reform.

Say Yes to Education (SYTE) foundation² has developed an education improvement model that incorporates curriculum, instruction, socioemotional, and health supports into a coherent approach, and SYTE has been engaged in scaling implementation to the community level. The SYTE initiative in Syracuse, New York (Say Yes Syracuse) is a unique venture in the degree to which community stakeholders have rallied around a single initiative, refocusing their resources to support Say Yes Syracuse's reform strategies, reflected in a set of shared goals. This paper discusses the development of cross-sector, communitywide collaboration for Say Yes Syracuse and addresses the following questions:

- Has Say Yes Syracuse facilitated an increase in collaboration and coordination toward the improvement of educational outcomes for students in Syracuse? Has the collaboration increased service delivery efficiencies and effectiveness?

² Throughout this paper, we refer to the Say Yes to Education foundation—a single, central partner—as SYTE; and we refer to the collaborative reform initiative, which involves multiple partners, as Say Yes Syracuse.

- What implementation challenges occurred related to coordination (e.g., challenges in combining resources or personnel, time commitments, ownership of initiatives), and how were the challenges resolved?
- Have key institutions refocused their commitment to increasing student outcomes, and how is that commitment evident?
- Has the public conversation related to education in Syracuse changed, in ways that reflect greater collaboration and commitment to the goals of Say Yes Syracuse?
- What lessons and tools of Say Yes Syracuse can be applied to other communities and foundations that are initiating communitywide education reform?

Say Yes Syracuse

Say Yes Syracuse is a systemic education reform initiative aiming to increase high school and college graduation rates for inner-city youth. For students who graduate from high school and are accepted to college, Say Yes Syracuse provides a guarantee of college tuition as well as a set of coordinated supports from kindergarten through high school to help the students reach their goals. The Say Yes Syracuse theory of change focuses on removing academic, socioemotional, health, and financial barriers facing students and families. This goal is achieved by engaging the city, community, school district, and other stakeholders in collaborative efforts to identify, monitor, and address the needs of each student. Broader interventions guide and facilitate the continuous improvement of schools and community-based organizations so that the services provided to children and families are high quality, coordinated, and relevant to present needs. Relative to education reforms of the recent past (e.g., the Effective Schools Movement, Chicago School Reform Act, Title I schoolwide programs), the Say Yes Syracuse approach establishes a structure for and oversight of the integration and coordination of a multitude of services and supports, including active and sustained partnerships with community institutions. Although the Say Yes Syracuse model sets out a framework for the partnerships, the individual partners are responsible for monitoring the quality of implementation of the interventions.

SYTE began working with the Syracuse City School District (SCSD) in 2008–09 and finished its fourth year of Say Yes Syracuse implementation in 2011–12. American Institutes for Research (AIR)³ has been involved in the process throughout—in the reform development, implementation, formative evaluation, and outcomes research.⁴ AIR committed to internally funding this work, with approval of the AIR Board, due to the alignment of the work with AIR’s mission.

³ AIR is an independent, not-for-profit corporation specializing in research, evaluation, and policy analysis in the behavioral and social sciences.

⁴ To avoid the appearance of conflict of interest, AIR established a firewall between staff supporting development and implementation and those involved in outcomes evaluation for the first three years of AIR’s engagement. In the fourth year, AIR reformulated its involvement to be “research and development,” with the outcomes information used to inform implementation, and the firewall was removed. Consequently, AIR no longer is considered an independent outcome evaluator of the initiatives but is instead a partner in research and development.

Primary local partners in the Say Yes Syracuse initiative include the following: Syracuse University (SU), the Syracuse mayor’s office, Onondaga County (as represented by the County Executive), local foundations, and community-based organizations. Before beginning this venture with Say Yes Syracuse, three core partners—SCSD, SYTE, and SU—signed an agreement of *nonnegotiables* (now referred to as Core Principles), which governs their respective responsibilities and reflects priorities for Say Yes Syracuse. The commitment to the Core Principles (see Table 1) was required for SCSD to be eligible to partner with SYTE. Although only three partners signed the agreement, the Core Principles reflect a vision for all partners. A core element of the Core Principles—and the vision for Say Yes Syracuse—is the collaboration among partners on Say Yes Syracuse. This paper explores aspects of collaboration, as organized by the Core Principles.

Table 1. Say Yes Syracuse Core Principles

Say Yes Syracuse Core Principles	Focus on Collaboration
Postsecondary Completion Goal: This criterion requires community willingness to set the goal of postsecondary completion as the standard (along with improvement in test scores) upon which progress will be measured. Accomplishing this goal requires commitment by the entire city, including the teachers’ and administrators’ unions, to forming an organized coalition and engaging in a collaborative process.	Partners’ commitment to a common goal: postsecondary completion
Partnership With Higher Education: This criterion requires school district, school board, and union willingness to partner with higher education in the city to provide the supports and interventions needed to ensure student success. Such supports include a comprehensive <i>Postsecondary Student Assessment and Monitoring System</i> ; a school-by-school ongoing assessment and improvement process; and a collaborative planning and implementation procedure to dramatically improve academic, enrichment, and comprehensive service delivery within schools and citywide. To support these partnership activities, Say Yes serves as the “honest broker” for fostering transparency and accountability for effective change.	District-higher education partnership to monitor and improve services Honest broker to mediate conversations
Transparent Accountability: This criterion requires school district willingness to engage in a public dialogue, with third-party validated data, about what is working and not working, with the goal of developing and implementing comprehensive programming that, over time, effectively meets the evolving needs of all youth within the system. These data are the foundation for ongoing continuous improvement processes utilized by the entire community. The school district also must be willing to implement teacher evaluation systems that include the use of student performance data.	Transparent accountability for results
Transparent and Sustainable Fiscal Management: This criterion requires citywide willingness to commit to a long-term fiscal pro forma that results (by Year 6 of the program) in full funding of a comprehensive set of new programs (e.g., school day, afterschool, summer camp, tutoring, mentoring, health and legal services, as well as college access and family counseling supports) through the core operating budgets of the school system, city, and county.	Transparent and sustainable fiscal management
Cross-Government and Sector Collaborative Governance Model: This criterion requires school, district, government, and private sector acknowledgement that because they independently cannot meet the intense needs of urban youth, they are willing to (a) build the collaborative governance structures (e.g., Community Advisory Group, Operating Group, and Task Forces) required to scale and (b) sustain the social-emotional, health, legal, family counseling, and academic services needed.	Cross-government and sector collaborative governance

At the heart of the city selection process, and for each of these Core Principles that are the foundation for Say Yes Syracuse, collaboration is a priority.

In this paper, we provide a brief summary of the literature on cross-sector collaboration in education reform. We then describe the design, implementation, challenges, and lessons learned regarding collaboration under Say Yes Syracuse, organized by the Say Yes Syracuse Core Principles. We describe changes in the public conversation about education in Syracuse, based on an analysis of public media. Finally, we summarize lessons learned and implications for similar cross-sector education improvement initiatives.

Review of the Literature

Theory about community-integrated education initiatives (e.g., community schools, Harlem Children’s Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, Strive Partnership) suggests that community school partnerships can increase community engagement with a school, make more efficient and effective use of limited and sometimes overlapping resources, and ultimately lead to improved student outcomes (Decker, 1999; Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005; Hunt, 1968; Melaville, 2002; Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). Further, comprehensive school reform theory and research suggest that coordinating efforts (i.e., teachers, counselors, and social workers) within schools contributes to reform implementation and that coordination needs to include larger systems, such as the district, city, and county (Bodilly et al., 1998; Stringfield et al., 1997).

There is little rigorous research on communitywide education reform initiatives; in part, this is due to the complexity of the initiatives (Flay, Biglan, Komro, & Wagenaar, n.d.). However, much of what we know about community schools, although at a smaller scale, can inform thinking about the larger initiatives. According to the Coalition for Community Schools, a community school is “both a place and a set of partnerships” that works to integrate academics, services, and supports for community members (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003). As a set of partnerships, those involved may include educators, families, volunteers, health and social service agencies, family support groups, youth development organizations, universities and other postsecondary institutions, community organizations, businesses, and civic and faith-based groups (Blank et al., 2003).

Some community schools have formed the types of partnerships that characterize Say Yes Syracuse. For example, The Children’s Aid Society network of community schools in New York City forged a partnership with the New York City Board of Education to form community schools to better coordinate services and provide for the community’s needs (Dryfoos et al., 2005). The core components of the Children’s Aid community schools are: a three-way partnership between The Children’s Aid Society, the board of education, and parents; full services (one-stop shopping); full year, week, and day operations; an integrated and aligned curriculum; expansion and diversification of funding; and “a durable commitment to the gradual transformation of the school into a community school” (Dryfoos et al., 2005). An evaluation of Children’s Aid community schools showed that, compared to similar noncommunity schools, parents of students in Children’s Aid schools were more involved, and children had more positive attitudes toward school. There were no differences in test scores (Blank et al., 2003).

Although differing slightly from the traditional community school model, Harlem Children’s Zone shares many of the same goals and approaches of community schools. President Barack Obama has

lauded Harlem Children's Zone as a mechanism to combat poverty, and his Promise Neighborhoods initiative is intended to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone in 20 other communities (Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). As the name implies, Harlem Children's Zone operates outside of the confines of a school building. Harlem Children's Zone is a system of schools and social services for low-income families in a 100-block area in Harlem and operates under the theory that students living in poverty need not only excellent schools to be academically successful, but they also need a strong network of educational, social, and medical services (Whitehurst & Croft, 2010). Further, Geoffrey Canada, the founder of Harlem Children's Zone, believes that, when these services flood the community, a "safety net [is] woven so tightly that children in the neighborhood just can't slip through" (Tough, 2008).

Similarly, Strive Partnership, which operates in Cincinnati, Covington, and Newport, works to bring together stakeholders across sectors to support learning from preparing to enter school through postsecondary education to careers, "from cradle to career" (Strive Partnership, 2012). Anecdotal reports suggest that Strive Partnership is related to improved achievement.

To date, no studies of the impacts of community schools and similar neighborhood-based initiatives, such as Harlem Children's Zone, have been published in peer-reviewed journals. Instead, our knowledge about community school impacts is based on evaluations commissioned by the schools themselves or by their funding agencies. Emerging challenges of community schools have included low levels of student participation and difficulty in translating success at one school to scalable approaches. Say Yes Syracuse addresses some of these challenges by providing scholarship guarantees as incentive to participate and by working with the district and other partners to bring the model to scale across all schools in the district. Although surprisingly little research exists regarding community schools, much can be learned from research and theory about how schools develop and sustain successful partnerships. Despite the diversity of community school models, community schools are linked by their shared purpose of forming partnerships between school staff, families, and organizations across the community. The partners may vary across communities, but all share a common vision with their partnering schools to improve the health, educational outcomes, and well-being of their community members. In community school partnerships, governance is shared among members, meaning that all groups share a common vision and mission and equal power in decision making, and members work toward accomplishing goals (University of California Los Angeles, 2011). Typically, a communitywide leadership team consisting of representatives from all partnering groups is formed to develop a shared vision and policy framework and align resources (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012). In addition, a lead partner, who works to establish and maintain these relationships, usually emerges. Often, this partnering group will provide an on-site staff person who is responsible for day-to-day communications between the school and its partners (Blank et al., 2012).

Partnerships with formally structured organizations, such as the local government, businesses, foundations, institutions of higher education, or community-based organizations or religious organizations that operate under a larger network, are important to a community school's success. These organizations may provide financial support; direct academic, health, or social services to students and families; research or consulting; training to school staff; or opportunities for students to become involved in or serve the community. Through partnering with these organizations, students receive access to services in the community that they would not receive otherwise, and their outcomes

are reported to improve (Sanders, 2001). Based on a survey of 443 schools, the most common type of school partnership is with businesses (Sanders, 2001). Important features of these partnerships are that they are developed through shared goals, a commitment from both parties, and the desire not only to benefit the students but also to aid in community development (Warden, 1986).

After businesses, universities are the second most prevalent partner with schools (Sanders, 2001). Universities may provide student teachers or assistants through the school of education, classes and workshops for teachers, research or consulting, or volunteer mentors or tutors. As with business partnerships, research emphasizes that partnerships with universities must provide benefits to both parties.

In addition to partnering with structured organizations, such as businesses and universities, schools also can partner with families. This can be more challenging because there is no formalized structure encompassing families beyond the often minimally representative parent-teacher-student associations. It is not enough for the principal to meet with a few designated parent leaders (e.g., the president of the parent-teacher-student association) and assume that those parents represent all parents in the school. Instead, all families should have access to and communication with the school. Research suggests that parents, teachers, students, and schools all want to be partners but do not know how to achieve this (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jarsorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002). School reforms are more likely to be effective when the community, including parents, is involved in reform and acts as a change agent (Arriaza, 2004; Wagner, 1996).

The Say Yes Syracuse initiative shares much in common with community schools and their emphasis in establishing partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations. Say Yes Syracuse is a partnership between a school district, a university, the business community, the city, the county, several research institutions, and many community-based organizations. The partners were brought together to commit to common goals and measurable outcomes from which each would benefit. For example, the business community has made a financial commitment to the initiative, while at the same time, expects that Say Yes Syracuse will lead to community revitalization and future business development in Syracuse. Further, like community schools, the Say Yes Syracuse initiative is designed to create schools that provide social and health services for students and families that will lead to improved educational outcomes. In the elementary schools, Say Yes Syracuse has provided each school with a site director, who is responsible for connecting the school with community organizations and families, and social workers, who support students' and families' socioemotional needs. Like community schools, Say Yes Syracuse has worked to lengthen the school day and school year through afterschool and summer programs.

The Center for Strategic Community Innovation (CSCI) has established five foundational elements of community school initiatives. At a cursory level, it seems that Say Yes Syracuse has implemented the elements with diligence (see Table 2).

Table 2. CSCI Elements of Community School Initiatives and Say Yes Syracuse Strategy

CSCI Elements	Say Yes Syracuse Strategy
“A clear vision that is developed by and embraced by all stakeholder groups”	Memo of Understanding
“Guiding principles agreed to by all major partners”	
“A common agenda, which operationalizes the vision and principles into shared priorities”	Core Principles
“Needs assessments that guide and justify programming, partnering and resource decisions”	Series of audits: financial, curricular, human resource, etc.
“Asset maps with an eye towards aligning existing resources and maximizing public, private and non-profit capacity”	Due diligence reviews of community-based organizations, asset map of community-based organization services

Source: <http://cscinnovation.org/community-schools-project/what-are-the-components-of-community-schools/>

At the same time, Say Yes Syracuse deviates from these models. The program is implemented at the district level, which calls for different solutions to unique challenges. Say Yes Syracuse must balance having a cohesive model while recognizing the needs of individual schools. Another difference is the level of resources the foundation, SYTE, brings to the initiative, both in terms of financial support and expertise in critical areas such as high school restructuring, socioemotional learning, and financial assistance. Finally, SYTE engages in the process by serving as an honest broker to initiate and maintain conversations among partners toward achieving common goals.

By assuming the roles of both key investor and honest broker, SYTE has facilitated a collaborative model for change in Syracuse that, different from the Harlem Children’s Zone model, starts with a vision of citywide change, initiates that vision as an outside entity, offers a substantial financial investment throughout a five-year period, and builds an impressive permanent scholarship fund. These unique features likely serve as the glue that keeps local partners actively engaged in the collaboration. Beyond a local commitment to change, Syracuse (all of the key stakeholders and partners, and the entire city) has much to lose if the initiative cannot sustain its collaboration. A critical question, then, is whether the powerful external investor with a big vision for change and resources to support the vision will be enough to hold these partners together over time and to change the way in which the partners individually and collectively work toward the vision of change.

Methods

To characterize collaborative efforts in Say Yes Syracuse, we drew on existing research, including the first and second Say Yes Syracuse implementation reports and related documents (e.g., annual district reports). We also reanalyzed data from source documents that contributed to these reports (e.g., meeting notes from the task forces, Community Advisory Group, and Operating Committee). These materials were collected as part of school and community-level implementation research conducted by AIR, as a partner in Say Yes Syracuse. The primary analysis of these extant reports and data involved coding events and documented conversations that address collaboration and identifying patterns across the data (see Appendix A for more detailed information about the data). Findings are organized by the Core Principles that shape the Say Yes Syracuse initiative.

To explore whether Say Yes Syracuse has instigated a common vision for education in the community, we commissioned a media analysis firm, Commetric, to conduct analyses of messages in the public media regarding education. This media analysis summarizes the focus and key players in public discourse related to education, over time and in comparison to statewide patterns. The analysis spans the period from May 2007 through April 2012 and includes public newspapers in Syracuse and across the state of New York. The first period, May 2007 through summer 2008, provides baseline data about the nature of education conversations prior to Say Yes implementation in Syracuse. The state data provide a comparison to better differentiate Say Yes Syracuse's unique contributions from other reform initiatives occurring in the state. For example, the state of New York received funds from Race to the Top and School Improvement Grants (SIG) during the period of Say Yes Syracuse implementation. To ensure the media analysis does not attribute Race to the Top and SIG motivated changes to Say Yes Syracuse, we compare the patterns in Syracuse with those of the state (see Appendix B for more detailed information about methods).

Collaboration Regarding Say Yes in Syracuse

We begin by exploring the collaborative efforts as they were conceptualized—and actually implemented—under each Core Principle.

Core Principle 1: Postsecondary Completion Goal

This criterion requires community willingness to set the goal of postsecondary completion as the standard (along with improvement in test scores) upon which progress will be measured. Accomplishing this goal requires commitment by the entire city, including the teachers' and administrators' unions, to forming an organized coalition and engaging in a collaborative process.

Strategy. SCSD, SU, and SYTE signed a memo of understanding before launching Say Yes Syracuse. The Core Principles noted in this paper were the heart of that agreement. Signing that memo of understanding symbolized a commitment to the common goal of postsecondary completion but did not require an understanding of what that common goal entailed.

Implementation. Despite the commitment in the memo of understanding, some differences about goals emerged during the first four years of implementation. In Year 1 (2008–09), all partners indicated in interviews that they strongly endorsed the primary Say Yes Syracuse goals of creating opportunities for all students to succeed in SCSD, enroll in postsecondary education, and become productive citizens, regardless of background or socioeconomic status. SCSD and the community also supported the underlying Say Yes Syracuse theory of change that focuses on the removal of barriers related to academics, socioemotional development, mental and physical health, and financial support. Say Yes Syracuse planned to have partner organizations deliver pieces of the model rather than have SYTE staff bear the responsibility for providing services in each core area. That was an important part of the Say Yes Syracuse plan for building local capacity to run the program. To reach these goals, partners acknowledged that they needed to implement programs and initiatives and meet about these activities on a regular basis to discuss progress and future plans.

However, two challenges emerged. First, only three of the partners—SCSD, SU, and SYTE—signed the memo of understanding. Other critical partners, such as the mayor, Common Council (the local term for the city council), local foundations, and community-based organizations, were not invited to sign the agreement and so did not make the initial commitment to the common goal. Further, a sector conceptualized as participating—families and community members who were not part of formal organizations—were not engaged at all. The tools for engagement targeted organizations with clearly identifiable leaders.

Second, although there was agreement among core partners to the goal in the abstract, there were numerous different visions for what that goal meant and how to reach it. From the beginning, SCSD did not commit to making changes to improve the quality of the core curriculum or to implementing socioemotional learning programs, despite the centrality of both programs in the Say Yes Syracuse model. In May 2009, there was a two-day leadership retreat where the issue of Say Yes Syracuse and SCSD communications emerged. Negotiating strategies to operationalize the memo of understanding with the district was difficult, and differences in vision began to emerge. For example, SYTE received pushback from SCSD administration regarding the selection of socioemotional programs; this was not the priority for the district that it was for the foundation. As another example, in implementation interviews, it became evident that the district did not accept SYTE’s idea that Say Yes Syracuse needed to be “embedded” in core district operations.

Another critical difference in vision emerged during the first few years of implementation. Although Say Yes Syracuse was designed to become embedded in SCSD operations, in actuality both the SCSD and SYTE staff reported they often worked in isolation from each other. For example, Say Yes Syracuse did not involve school principals in hiring school-based staff to manage Say Yes Syracuse activities in their buildings. SCSD staff suggested in interviews that it would have been better for SYTE to emphasize “collaborating” over “consulting” with SCSD to avoid the message that “they [SYTE] are here to fix us.” SCSD leaders and stakeholders recognized and appreciated the value-added benefits that Say Yes Syracuse brought but wanted to be recognized for their prior efforts, accomplishments, expertise, and ultimate responsibility for making success happen.

The initial challenges to meeting the goal of postsecondary education for all students was lack of collaboration on programs that would help students reach that goal. The district did not demonstrate complete buy-in to the approach used by Say Yes Syracuse, and Say Yes Syracuse tended to move activities forward without involving partners. Several interviewees from different partner groups cited the summer and afterschool programs as cases in which decisions sometimes were made hurriedly without sufficient collaborative planning regarding goals, materials, staffing, training, or duration. In Year 1, there was no systematic study of existing afterschool programs or effort to integrate them with new programming. Say Yes Syracuse used the approach of hiring staff to run these programs so that they could better control the quality of programming. In following years, Say Yes Syracuse changed its approach to better incorporate community partners by placing community-based organizations in the role of running the afterschool programs, under the oversight of SYTE school-based staff.

Community members indicated that the district allowed SYTE to take the lead in the reform, although many noted that SYTE’s presence in SCSD made the district realize the need for grassroots community team building. Community members stated that Say Yes Syracuse caused SCSD to share

information more openly. Community members also reported that the presence of SYTE could bring reform sustainability.

Broad public communication in Year 1 was mostly led by partners, such as the SCSD superintendent, SU staff, and SYTE leaders. Although messaging was strong and mainly consistent due to the communication skills of the SYTE leaders, it soon became evident that there was not a coherent plan guiding communication across all partners and the community, which led to disparate understandings of Say Yes Syracuse goals and approach. For example, the SCSD superintendent made a public statement about student achievement that was inconsistent with concurrent statements from SYTE. Further, some stakeholders, such as parents, were not getting sufficient direct communication about the initiative.

From the view of the community members, at the beginning of the initiative implementation, communication seemed to focus on sharing and getting commitment to a common vision but did not provide concrete details for action. This factor made it difficult for many community members to understand the full Say Yes Syracuse initiative, and, consequently, the community members tended to describe the initiative as “a scholarship program.”

Community members commented that, in the beginning, they did not really understand how Say Yes Syracuse was designed to roll out. They said that Say Yes Syracuse needed to communicate its goals, strategies, and accomplishments more effectively to the larger community because these were not known. In addition, one participant mentioned that Say Yes Syracuse had not been framed originally in terms of a partnership. Some members raised concerns that vehicles for communication (e.g., billboards) oversimplified the Say Yes message and felt that Say Yes Syracuse commercials needed to address more than just the scholarships or risk misinforming families and the communities about the initiative’s larger purpose and supports. Several members suggested laying out a community-developed logic model that would illustrate how all the pieces integrate and support each other.

Community members also raised concerns about ensuring that communication reached the full community, through appropriate vehicles. These respondents emphasized the importance of communicating the vision more effectively to different audiences (e.g., families from diverse parts of the community) and with more sensitivity (e.g., not communicating about staff layoffs in the same message that expressed SCSD support for new initiatives under Say Yes Syracuse). Many community members shared that they would like Say Yes Syracuse to build on its communication-related progress to date to further improve and address current communication gaps, such as by developing and disseminating an e-newsletter or monthly e-mail blast.

In Year 2, Say Yes Syracuse began implementation of a strategic communications plan the foundation developed with *Communications Works* and then, based on concerns with the effectiveness of the plan raised by community members, brought on a new communication consultant, Clear Channel Communication. SYTE believes it has overcome a false start in communicating with teachers and the community. The revised communication plan includes an environmental scan and strategies to address communication challenges with educators, parents, and community members. The plan also addresses national outreach through highly publicized events, media activities, Web-based communication, and social media. In the case of Say Yes

Syracuse, communication encompasses many different constituencies, including the major partners, community organizations and leaders, school leaders and staff, parents, and students. Say Yes Syracuse has continued to invest in proactive marketing (e.g., television commercials and billboards), communication, and community mobilization.

At the end of the second year of implementation, partners agree that significant progress has been made in the areas of communications, collaboration, partner role definitions, and mutual respect since Year 1. Securing a union contract was described by the earlier SCSD superintendent as “groundbreaking.”

Lessons Learned. Although having a clear memo of understanding before beginning a major initiative such as this is essential, it is also important to develop a shared understanding of what the commitment entails before launching the initiative. A shared understanding involves agreement not only on the overall goal but also on the core components required to reach that goal. Further, deliberate efforts to communicate with and secure the commitment of all partners—not only core partners—early in the process can help promote later consensus regarding a common goal.

A solid communication plan and experienced communication professionals in place at the onset might have averted some of the early misunderstandings about the goals and strategies of Say Yes Syracuse. A more comprehensive communication plan also could have fostered more involvement from the community in the implementation of the program.

Despite the best laid plans, reforms evolve during implementation. In addition to agreement at the outset, partners should collaborate on changes to the plan to ensure continued commitment moving forward and to avert power struggles over the direction of the reform.

Core Principle 2: Partnership With Higher Education

This criterion requires school district, school board, and union willingness to partner with higher education in the city to provide the supports and interventions needed to ensure student success. Such supports include a comprehensive *Postsecondary Student Assessment and Monitoring System*, a school-by-school ongoing assessment and improvement process, and a collaborative planning and implementation procedure to dramatically improve academic, enrichment, and comprehensive service delivery within schools and citywide. To support these partnership activities, Say Yes serves as the honest broker for fostering transparency, quality, and accountability for effective change.

Strategy. This Core Principle focuses on the willingness of the school district, school board, and teachers union to partner with a higher education institution and Say Yes Syracuse. The collaboration between Say Yes Syracuse and SU began when Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, president of SYTE, and Nancy Cantor, chancellor of SU, discovered that they shared a vision of equity in education and that their efforts were currently focused in New York state. SYTE was considering expansion to districts in New York state, and Syracuse University was already working on social projects in Syracuse, such as Scholarship in Action. The district and SU needed to make a commitment to work together. Partners say that the piece that was fundamental to collaboration in Syracuse was the district commitment:

then Superintendent Daniel Lowengard came to the district as new leadership ready for reform, and the teachers union was prepared to collaborate on the initiative.

This Core Principle, in addition to requiring a commitment to collaborate with SU, also describes the role allocated to SU. SU's role in collaboration was multifaceted. SU was tasked with the following:

- Function as a community liaison
- Offer multiple educational programs for SCSD students, including providing resources such as staff management, preservice and inservice training events for SCSD teachers, and student and faculty assistance on afterschool programs
- Manage the scholarship fund and financial aid support
- Contribute to research

SU leaders indicated that they felt they could be leaders in this effort, especially in the roles described previously, and the relationship could be mutually beneficial. SU wanted Say Yes Syracuse to draw on the university's areas of expertise, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and arts in education.

One role that was the primary responsibility of SYTE but that SU filled, in part, was to serve as an honest broker among partners. SYTE leaders described this role as engaging partners, individually and collectively, in conversations designed to focus all partners on a common goal and remove barriers to collaboration, including historic separation of authority and programs.

Implementation. In this section, we describe, in turn, the implementation of each of the activities SU led. In Year 1 (2008–09), one of the ways SU served as a *community liaison* was by making the chancellor a Say Yes Syracuse spokesperson, responsible for communicating Say Yes Syracuse's message to Syracuse families, school staff, businesses, and foundations. This role fell to the chancellor under the premise that community members would be more receptive to the Say Yes Syracuse message if it came from a prominent member of the Syracuse community. The chancellor was supported in this outreach by an SU staff member, who also separately reached out to individuals and organizations in the community to engage them in the initiative.

As the community liaison, SU was challenged with building a better relationship with the community. Although SU has been active in the community for many years and had established many community support initiatives, some leaders of community-based organizations felt that the goals of SU and local community-based organizations were not well aligned historically. However, SU leaders worked to overcome this history, holding frequent individual and group meetings to build better connections.

In addition to communication and outreach, SU had responsibilities for *organizing and running some of the Say Yes Syracuse programs*, including providing some resources, such as personnel for these programs. An SU staff member worked directly with community-based organizations to partner on Say Yes Syracuse initiatives and manage SU-directed programs in the schools (e.g., afterschool programs, summer enrichment camp, and tutoring).

SU was challenged with building the program infrastructure to support Say Yes Syracuse in Syracuse schools. For example, in Year 1 (2008–09) SU was responsible for developing and staffing the afterschool programs in the first quadrant of schools implementing Say Yes Syracuse. SU struggled to identify enough qualified staff and provide sufficient training, prior to starting the afterschool program. In Year 2 (2009–10), with the intervention of SYTE, SU moved to a model in which community-based organizations provided the afterschool services and had responsibility for identifying the staff; SU was responsible for training of staff and oversight of the program. This approach better capitalized on community resources, but the initial management model and subsequent change caused some inefficiencies and some tension with community-based organizations. Further, there were some shifts in responsibilities for programming during the past few years. Responsibility for coordinating school-based programs and outreach to community-based organizations ultimately moved to staff outside of SU.

SU also had a role in building collaboration for the *higher education compact* that undergirds the Say Yes Syracuse scholarship fund. The higher education compact is an agreement of public and private institutions of higher education (community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities) to provide resources to support SCSD graduates who are accepted to their programs. The commitment to funding higher education is the genesis of Say Yes Syracuse and the motivator for student, staff, and organizational commitment to the reform; SU's role in developing a sustainable scholarship fund was essential to the success of the reform.

As part of the role of managing the higher education compact, SU was responsible for supporting students and their families in seeking financial aid for college. In the first year (2008–09), this consisted of an SU-led workshop for high school students to help them complete their financial aid applications. Based on a perceived greater need, after the first year, SU staff developed a deeper process, in which students and their families were taught to collect the necessary data and complete applications on their own, enabling them to replicate the process each year the student was in college. Each family was paired with a financial counselor from a school in the higher education compact, to guide them during the course of several months.

SU contributed its own resources to the Say Yes Syracuse effort but not to the extent originally planned. For example, starting in Year 1, Say Yes Syracuse school-based staff were employed by SU and managed by an SU employee but were using SYTE funds. SU also participated in fundraising by organizing some large-scale fundraisers, such as an SU basketball game, and by being involved in the Corporate Collaborations and Economic Development Task Force. As mentioned previously, SU met its commitment to being a community liaison as well. However, activities such as preparing preservice and developing inservice training events for SCSD teachers, offering multiple educational programs for SCSD students, and developing the Postsecondary Student Assessment and Monitoring System were not fully implemented.

SU's *research* role was divided between partners, with AIR taking on many of the core research activities central to operationalizing the model and both AIR and SU conducting outcomes studies. The "school-by-school ongoing assessment," although originally conceptualized as the responsibility

of SU, was carried out by AIR as part of its role as a research partner.⁵ AIR designed and conducted a school review process, which culminated in school profiles and briefings. SU continued to lead some research initiatives, such as a study of the economic impact (e.g., housing) of Say Yes Syracuse.

Although SU provided the chancellor to serve as a community spokesperson, for day-to-day negotiating, SYTE served as an honest broker (a term used by SYTE leadership) by organizing and facilitating partner meetings. Regardless of the organization leading this role, the role was central to the reform effort. Community members indicated, in interviews, that Say Yes Syracuse brought together groups that were not previously collaborating (see quote in the Bringing Together the Players box). In some cases, community members indicated their distrust of various key partners and noted that they began to trust and work with these partners on Say Yes Syracuse only because they were encouraged, convinced, and pushed into working together.

Bringing Together the Players

Say Yes Syracuse has brought together “a lot of the players who need to be at the table to implement the theory of action...the city and county politicians, the university, the community organizations, the elected leadership of the community along with the community leadership, including pastors...to work effectively in accomplishing the goals. This is a tremendous accomplishment in this town. Historically there has been an unwillingness to collaborate [in Syracuse]. Breaking down these silos has been monumental. We could never break down these silos on our own. We can really attribute this to Say Yes. This shift has definitely occurred during the past year.”

Although SYTE leadership attempted to assume the role of honest broker and, according to interviews, often excelled in this role, there were some challenges with this arrangement. It was difficult for SYTE to play this role because the time commitment exceeded that originally planned for SYTE leadership and because having SYTE leaders in such a prominent role precluded local ownership of the initiative. Further, some interview respondents perceived SYTE as having an agenda to forward rather than maintaining objectivity. However, there also were advantages in SYTE leaders playing this role. SYTE was perceived initially as being “objective” and not tied to local allegiances or agendas, enabling the program to have credibility in setting and maintaining a common vision. More pragmatically, SYTE was able to cover the costs of the honest broker time and expenses and commit additional resources, as needed, to facilitate communication across partners.

SYTE recognizes that the honest broker role should not always be filled by SYTE leadership. The organization believes the locally based honest broker should be someone who is focused on the goals of Say Yes Syracuse rather than on a personal agenda and who is highly skilled at communicating across diverse partners to coordinate efforts. This person also should be employed by SYTE to avoid apparent (or actual) partiality toward his or her employer over the other Say Yes Syracuse partners and to ensure that SYTE has some responsibility for the quality of the local leader’s work.

During the third year (2010–11), a local Say Yes Syracuse director was hired to manage and coordinate the Say Yes Syracuse programs and to work closely with SU staff and other leaders in the

⁵ This work is discussed in greater detail under Nonnegotiable 3.

community. To some degree, the local Say Yes Syracuse director position was designed to transition responsibility for coordinating partners from SYTE to a local leader; this position was designed to provide additional capacity to the local staff. However, the role was more of a manager of implementation than of an honest broker as of fall 2012.

Lessons Learned. Experiences in the first four years of implementing Say Yes Syracuse show that the history and context matter in assigning partners to roles in community education initiatives. Although the local university may have tremendous resources, in terms of staff, expertise, and community credibility, the university also may have a history and reputation in the community that should be explicitly considered and addressed as part of shaping the university's role. Further, asking a university to develop and coordinate programs at the scale of Say Yes Syracuse can tax capacity; as discovered in Syracuse, it might be more feasible to take an approach in which the university, rather than taking on the service delivery role, helps coordinate local organizations to deliver services.

The experience of Say Yes Syracuse also highlights the importance of a neutral professional facilitator—the honest broker role—in bringing partners together and raises questions about choosing the best person for this role. The individual's affiliation matters, as well as his or her communication and negotiation skills.

From SU's perspective, the key to making district and other collaborative projects work is for the university to engage enough faculty change agents and advocates and to be prepared to weather resistance from those within and beyond the university community who are not fully engaged. SU leaders believe they should build rewards for participation in the collaboration into the tenure reward system so that faculty and their students are motivated to participate. This change in the system is a challenge for most universities, because the change confronts traditional approaches to evaluating faculty scholarship. Say Yes Syracuse offers a broader definition of what it takes to be a good scholar working with the community.

Core Principle 3: Transparent Accountability

This criterion requires school district willingness to engage in a public dialogue, with third-party validated data, about what is working and not working, with the goal of developing and implementing comprehensive programming that, over time, effectively meets the evolving needs of all youth within the system. These data are the foundation for ongoing continuous improvement processes utilized by the entire community. The school district also must be willing to implement teacher evaluation systems that include the use of student performance data.

Strategy. Early in Say Yes Syracuse implementation, the focus for this Core Principle was primarily on obtaining data that could be used in a continuous improvement process at all levels (community, district, school, and student). At the student level, Say Yes Syracuse designed a student monitoring system, intended to identify for each student his or her academic, socioemotional, and health strengths and needs in order to better target services. At the school level, Say Yes Syracuse developed a school review process designed to identify the strengths and needs of each school in the areas of

academic, socioemotional, and health supports. At the community level, Say Yes Syracuse led an effort to establish a community dashboard of community and education data indicators. All of these initiatives were designed to collect new data and draw on extant data in order to present a complete picture to shape programming.

The other aspect of this Core Principle, engaging in public dialogue about the data and findings, was not fully developed until the second year.

Implementation. Say Yes Syracuse achieved success with some, but not all, of the plans to collect and summarize data to inform improvement and to be held accountable for progress. As planned, AIR conducted the school reviews for each school in three consecutive years. The reviews involved site visits, analysis of extant data, and delivery of a final school profile designed to engage schools in their annual school improvement planning process. However, the profiles were not always distributed within schools and used for planning purposes. For example, the first round of feedback involved meetings with only the principal from each school. Although the principals reported finding these meetings useful, the profiles and findings sometimes were not shared with staff or incorporated into the school improvement plans. The following year, AIR worked with the school district to develop a new briefing process, which engaged full school improvement teams in an activity of pulling out key findings from the profiles and using these findings to co-construct school improvement goals. These improvements were not continued into the third year, because the school district did not schedule a time for the principals or school improvement teams to meet with AIR to review the data.

The student monitoring system, although successfully developed and implemented on a smaller scale in other cities, was never fully implemented in Syracuse, in part because of the burden on teachers and in part because the data office, which would manage the initiative, was not invested in the process. Therefore, critical data on services needed by each student were not systematically available. The student monitoring system was at the heart of the Say Yes Syracuse model, as the vehicle for ensuring all students successfully overcame the academic, socioemotional, and health barriers to postsecondary success.

There were numerous issues with obtaining high-quality data that are not uncommon in school districts and would be meaningful to the school staff. For example, the time period covered by the school profile data differed, depending on the source; extant data reflected the previous school year, while the site visit data reflected the same school year, creating a challenge for interpreting and using these data. Further, the district's data office was oriented toward producing a focused set of data for accountability purposes and was not prepared to provide richer data for improvement purposes. Say Yes Syracuse partners have reported difficulty getting accurate data from the district, including meeting to discuss the data, challenges in obtaining the data, and concerns about data consistency and quality. Some Say Yes Syracuse accountability efforts, such as the effectiveness study and student monitoring system, have been delayed or compromised because of the difficulty of getting accurate data. Partners have seen inconsistency in the district data results versus the Say Yes Syracuse data results. In the fourth year of Say Yes Syracuse implementation, the district moved toward converting its data office to a research office, designed to better manage and use data for continuous improvement. These and other issues with the data are explored in greater detail in a companion paper on use of data in community reforms.

In addition to collecting and analyzing data, this Core Principle sets the expectation that the district—and, by extension, its partners—will engage in public dialogue about the findings. This public dialogue took two forms in Syracuse: (1) organization and use of committees and teams to listen to and act on findings and (2) public communication regarding progress. Beginning in Year 1 (2008–09), Say Yes Syracuse used the Community Advisory Group and task forces as a way to disseminate information about Say Yes Syracuse to the community and provide venues for input from the community (see Core Principle 5).

Lessons Learned. Several lessons about public, data-based dialogue regarding improvement emerged from the Say Yes Syracuse experience. First, the quality and timeliness of the data and analysis is essential to establish credibility. This requires addressing challenges such as discontinuities in data collection, competing priorities of those who maintain the extant data, and identifying and addressing issues in data quality.

Second, structures such as task forces and community representative meetings can be effective vehicles for communicating and acting upon data; careful consideration should go into ensuring full membership and participation of partners, regularity of meetings, and opportunities to react to the data in the meetings. Finally, it is not enough to have good data and to share it. There must also be a commitment to use those data in ways that improve students' educational lives.

Core Principle 4: Transparent and Sustainable Fiscal Management

This criterion requires citywide willingness to commit to a long-term fiscal pro forma that results (by Year 6 of the program) in full funding of a comprehensive set of new programs (e.g., school day, afterschool, summer camp, tutoring, mentoring, health and legal services, as well as college access and family counseling supports) through the core operating budgets of the school system, city, and county.

Strategy. Before implementation started, SYTE and SCSD agreed that SYTE would provide substantial financial support early in implementation but would gradually phase out these contributions over five years, as SCSD increased the percentage of core operating budget funding of new programs. By the sixth year, Say Yes Syracuse was expected to be fully funded locally. When the Say Yes Syracuse local scholarship endowment is funded to \$20 million, it will pay for scholarships in perpetuity.

Implementation. This Core Principle involves initial agreement for SYTE to fully fund Say Yes Syracuse and progress toward full district funding; it also involves transparency about funding, including SYTE's role in SCSD funding and full disclosure about SCSD resource allocation.

To commit to Say Yes Syracuse, SCSD also had to commit to a six-year plan to transition fiscal responsibility from SYTE to local and district funding. SYTE actively sought and secured a long-term funding commitment from SCSD, with an agreement that SCSD would institutionalize program funding in the core budget. In addition to SYTE committing to funding Say Yes Syracuse at annually decreasing levels, SYTE and SU committed to developing a college compact that would cover college costs. Further, Say Yes Syracuse sought and obtained foundation and local support. Say Yes Syracuse established a partnership with the Central New York Community Foundation, which agreed

to match donations to the local Say Yes Syracuse endowment. Other funding sources came from large and small organizations. For example, Welsh Allyn contributed equipment for health clinics and the Office of the Onodaga County Executive contributed \$2 million to support alignment of county-funded services with Say Yes Syracuse services at the school level. United Way opened up its donor lists for Say Yes Syracuse.

According to implementation interviews, key partners, including community members, agreed that Say Yes Syracuse and the community have been very successful in raising financial and in-kind support. Reflecting this attitude is the statement by a local business leader: “[Say Yes Syracuse offers] a lot of hope; business contributions have been huge; there have been huge wins in the first year.” Say Yes Syracuse was expecting funding from the state of New York that has not been provided as of fall 2012, however, and that has slowed progress.

Although SYTE and SCSD were explicit about costs in their negotiations, it is not clear that other partners—including the public—were aware of the full costs. A community leader stated during data collection that no “price tag” for the initiative was made public at the beginning. Community partners indicated that they did not know how much corporate and philanthropic support the community needed to raise.

According to implementation interviews, some school and district leaders indicated concerns about being able to fund existing school programs and SCSD staff and questioned whether program support would come at the expense of personnel layoffs. Community partners were not aware of the financial goals, and school staff were concerned that Say Yes Syracuse was taking money away from district job funding. Communication about the financial plan of the collaboration was not clear to the community. Consequently, although these concerns were based on a misconception about SCSD and SYTE funding streams, they were widespread and persistent.

As part of transparent and sustainable fiscal management, SCSD committed to a financial audit of all functions (except back office functions). Education Resource Strategies conducted an audit of district spending, beginning in Year 1 of Say Yes Syracuse. The audit was designed to identify ways in which district spending, within current budget parameters, could be more effective; and information was shared with the Community Advisory Group, with the purpose of building community commitment to some very hard budget decisions. It was then the responsibility of SCSD to use this information to reduce the district budget to meet available resources.

Lessons Learned. Although SCSD and SYTE had a common understanding of the fiscal arrangement, this was not clear to other partners and the larger community. Clearly communicating financial arrangements—and the anticipated “price tag” to the larger community can help deter misinterpretations about spending that might contribute to divisiveness. Tools such as a collaborative audit, especially if led by a third party, can help shape the plan for reallocating resources in a sustainable way.

Core Principle 5: Cross-Government and Sector Collaborative Governance Model

This criterion requires school, district, government, and private sector acknowledgement that because they independently cannot meet the intense needs of urban youth, they are willing to (1) build the collaborative governance structures (e.g., Community Advisory Group, Operating Group, and Task Forces) required to scale and (2) sustain the social-emotional, health, legal, family counseling, and academic services needed.

Strategy. The task forces, Community Advisory Group, and Operating Committee were established to facilitate collaboration among different groups. The task forces were conceptualized as a venue for community leaders to share intellectual resources and build connections with the community regarding specific supports. The Community Advisory Group was developed to disseminate information to the general community so that community members could be informed and provide feedback. The Operating Committee was brought together so that Say Yes Syracuse partners could develop plans for the different initiatives and problem solve implementation issues.

Implementation. Say Yes Syracuse maintained a cross-partner management structure through the Operating Committee, Community Advisory Group, and seven task forces (Community-Based Organization Due Diligence and Partnerships, Corporate Collaborations and Economic Development, Health and Wellness, Extended Learning Time, Legal, Postsecondary Access and Retention, and Secondary School Redesign).

The Operating Committee included the SCSD superintendent and other high-level district administrators, such as the SU dean; Syracuse Teachers Association president; mayor's representative, Onondaga deputy county executive; SYTE president, senior vice president, and directors; and AIR staff. The Operating Committee met every two weeks. This structure helped inform partners about critical aspects of the initiative, such as the budget, summer programming, and partner involvement, and involve the partners in timely decisions about Say Yes Syracuse.

The Community Advisory Group, which began during the first year of implementation, included members of the Operating Committee as well as local political and organizational leaders, such as the school board, a New York State Assembly member, and representatives from community-based organizations. The Community Advisory Group provided a forum for greater involvement by the Syracuse community. Analyses of Say Yes Syracuse, as a whole and of specific initiatives within Say Yes Syracuse, were shared in this venue. Initially, the meetings were planned to include the presentation of a major data report; however, this was not always possible. The meetings were on a regular schedule but had to be rescheduled periodically to accommodate the schedules of various community leaders and the release of various reports. Finally, although the meetings were intended to be venues for discussion related to data, most of the time was often taken by presentations, leaving little discussion time. Thus, information was shared publicly with community leaders, but regular interactive discussion related to data was not fully established.

Community members commented that the Community Advisory Group has been helpful for keeping partners informed, but the information has not trickled down into the community. One member commented that "the Community Advisory Group is not community members. It's not grassroots."

Some community partners indicated that the Community Advisory Group gave them an opportunity to raise issues and ideas to improve implementation. One participant described it as “an excellent example of bringing people around the table to discuss initiatives and new initiatives. If they participate, they should know what is going on. We haven’t had this type of community engagement at the school district level.” Though some participants did see the usefulness, there also were concerns about the tension between being inclusive and being effective. Several implementation study participants shared concerns about the size of the group, being “too large for meaningful decision making to take place.” Some participants felt the group is “too much stand and deliver.” Another participant reported that the group was helpful and good for sharing updates but not effective in addressing governance issues. Efforts were made to address the large size of the Community Advisory Group meetings (e.g., using small work groups within the meetings to brainstorm solutions).

The first year was characterized by ambiguity about partner roles and some tension about ownership and turf. For example, some partners reported that key individuals often played overlapping roles. Some partners felt that the lead driver in the district should be the superintendent. There was some concern among partners about branding of the reform initiative and specific programs. Especially at first, community members shared that Say Yes Syracuse needed to ensure that it consistently provided proper credit to partners (e.g., the school board). There also were concerns that the partnerships had not included the community and parents.

The task force structure was created, in part, to address tensions and confusion that arose in the first year. The task forces helped to build connections with the community around the seven specified support structures. Task force members stated in implementation interviews that the task forces brought together talented people who could contribute to the goals set forth. The task forces kept the members engaged, but inconsistent follow-through led to a loss of momentum. Many stated that this initiative was not their primary job responsibility, and there was a need for a structure to maintain momentum and build on decisions. Meetings were more focused on updates rather than on tasks and outcomes. SYTE staff were not seen as being involved in the task forces.

Community members are now actively engaged on the Community Advisory Group and seven task forces, which were implemented to bring greater cohesion and efficiency to a large number of community-based organizations whose services were not historically coordinated.

Moving the cross-management structures to full implementation in Year 2 was a major accomplishment. There also was progress in clarifying roles (e.g., job descriptions for Say Yes Syracuse school-based staff). Although some progress was evident and partners were seen as working well together, the specific partner responsibilities remained unclear for many.

Some of the challenges may stem from the scale of the effort. Prior to working on Say Yes Syracuse, when they were working with school cohorts, SYTE did not have the authority to do large-scale private and public partnerships. Working with an entire city created opportunities. SYTE reported that this was a major shift—learning which resources were citywide; how county systems were structured to do this work; and how to design more effective delivery systems that could use city, county, and private dollars. Say Yes Syracuse is investing much more time and effort into development of large-scale private and public partnerships, which is demonstrated by its work building mental health supports.

Say Yes Syracuse staff reported that the part of the program that is not yet fully established is coordination across health and wellness. This is a nontraditional support, which requires Say Yes Syracuse to go to schools to find out how to tap into resources (e.g., federal programs, county services, local providers, and others) and connect the provision of services for each child or family across funding sources, to address socioemotional, health, family counseling, and other needs. Some aspects are in place, such as SCSD and county coordination to place health clinics in schools and an intensive initiative to enroll all uninsured students on insurance to facilitate access to health care. Say Yes Syracuse established a partnership with the Hillside work-scholarship program to double the number of students receiving mentoring. Partners believe that the model of cross-sector, public-private collaboration could potentially be very important in this area.

A few community participants suggested that Say Yes Syracuse collaborate with small local agencies already doing good work, especially work related to family outreach and expanded school day; this suggestion involves mapping the local assets (e.g., existing agencies already doing this work well), and then tapping into those assets. The participants noted that smaller organizations (e.g., 100 Black Men, National Action Network) and the faith-based community can expand capacity to communicate with families about the initiative.

Lessons Learned. Communitywide initiatives require different organizing structures than smaller scale efforts. Structures such as task forces or committees are effective tools for encouraging collaboration. However, the ways in which the structures are implemented matter. Careful thought should go into mission and membership of each group, as well as the intended flow and objectives for meetings. For example, the structure should balance the competing priorities of having a manageable size for the group, to facilitate discussion, with being inclusive. As another example, key decision makers (e.g., the district superintendent, the school board president, the mayor, the union leader) need to be at the table, so at least one organizational structure should have these leaders engaged regularly enough to make informed, timely decisions. However, small meetings of community leaders, although essential for decision making, do not meet the need for transparent accountability and communication with the larger public. Multiple complementary groups may be an effective strategy to keep the size and tasks manageable yet involve key partners.

Changes in the Conversation

This paper focuses on whether and how Say Yes Syracuse increased collaboration across a community toward a common goal of improving educational and life outcomes for youth. One indicator of the outcomes of this effort is the degree to which the disparate partners in the initiative have been able to coordinate resources and programs to create more efficient, common service delivery structures, as discussed in the previous section regarding collaboration on the Core Principles. A somewhat more elusive but critically important indicator of the outcomes of this initiative is the degree to which Say Yes Syracuse has changed the public conversation about education in the community. In this section, we address the following question:

Has the public conversation about education in Syracuse changed in association with Say Yes Syracuse, in ways that reflect greater collaboration and commitment to the goals of Say Yes Syracuse?

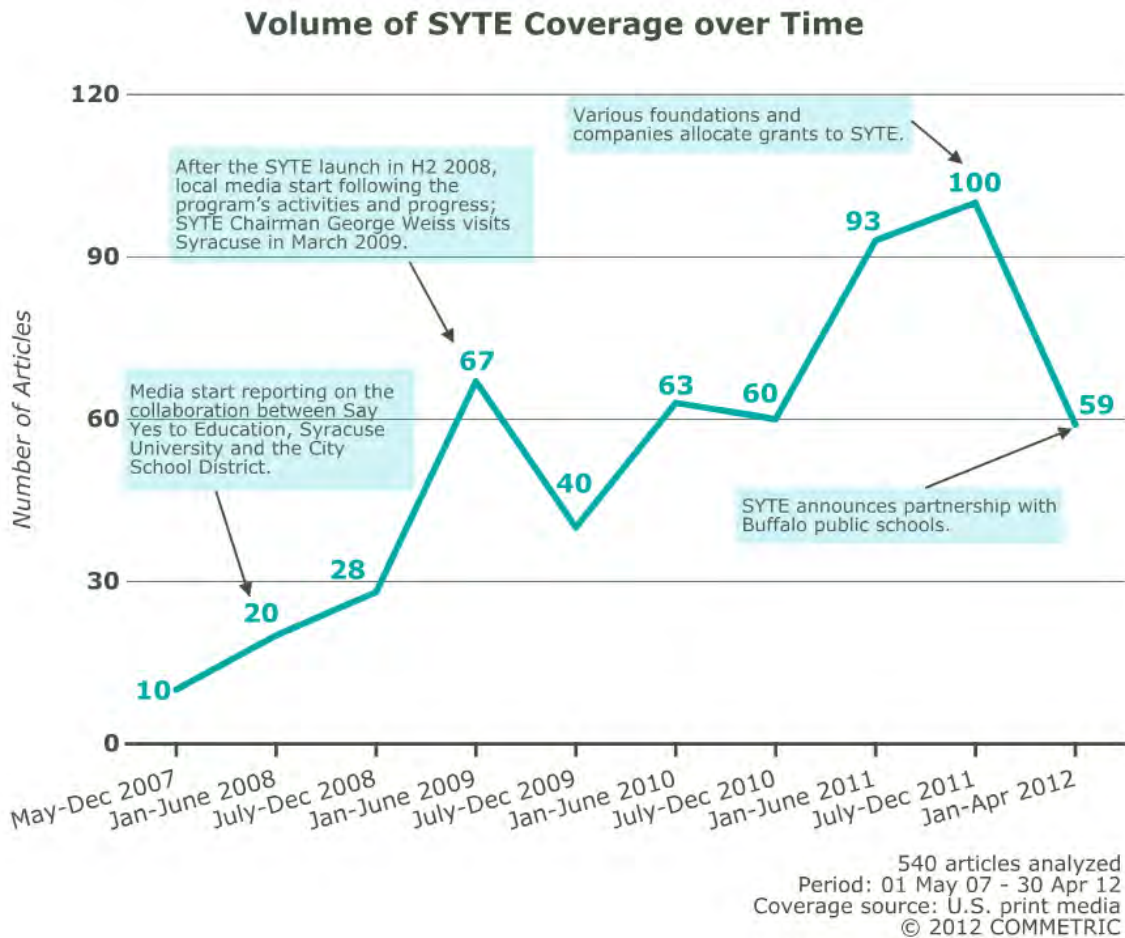
To explore this question, we conducted a media analysis that summarizes the focus and key players in public discourse related to education, over time and in comparison to statewide patterns. Specifically, we consider the following:

- **Volume and tone of the coverage:** Is there more press coverage about education and, specifically, discussion of topics related to Say Yes Syracuse goals? We look at the volume and tone of the coverage to consider whether Core Principle 1 has been accomplished.
- **Content focus of the coverage:** What topics are the focus of the education press coverage? Again, this helps us understand whether there is greater public focus on the primary goals and components of Say Yes Syracuse.
- **Engagement of partners:** The degree to which the partners in Say Yes Syracuse are publicly speaking about the initiative is an indicator of their engagement, as suggested in Core Principle 2.

Volume and Tone of the Coverage

In the period May 1, 2007, through April 30, 2012 (which includes the preimplementation period of May 1, 2007, to August 2008), there were 540 articles related to Say Yes Syracuse (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Trend Analysis



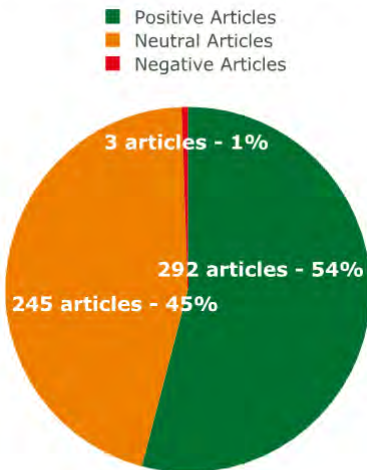
The intensity of the media interest built up over time. The highest volumes of coverage occurred in the calendar year 2011 (the end of the third and beginning of the fourth year of implementation). During that period, the SCSD superintendent, Dan Lowengard, retired; many of the articles referenced his role as “being the guy who said yes to Say Yes to Education” (The Post-Standard, July 2, 2011). Also during that time (December 2011 to January 2012), SYTE announced that the next districtwide program implementation would be in Buffalo, New York.

In general, the tone was more positive than negative (see Figure 2). Positive coverage accounted for 54 percent and included reports on the Say Yes Syracuse launch, on the program’s activities and progress, and on its benefits for students and the community. Say Yes Syracuse was mentioned in balanced tone in 45 percent of the coverage. Most of the neutral articles referred to Say Yes Syracuse in passing, without noting the benefits or importance of the program. Negative articles amounted to less than 1 percent (3 articles). They included news about colleges limiting the number of full Say Yes Syracuse scholarships or withdrawing from the program as well as criticism of the program’s goal to send high school students to college instead of focusing the students on careers.

Figure 2. Favorability Analysis

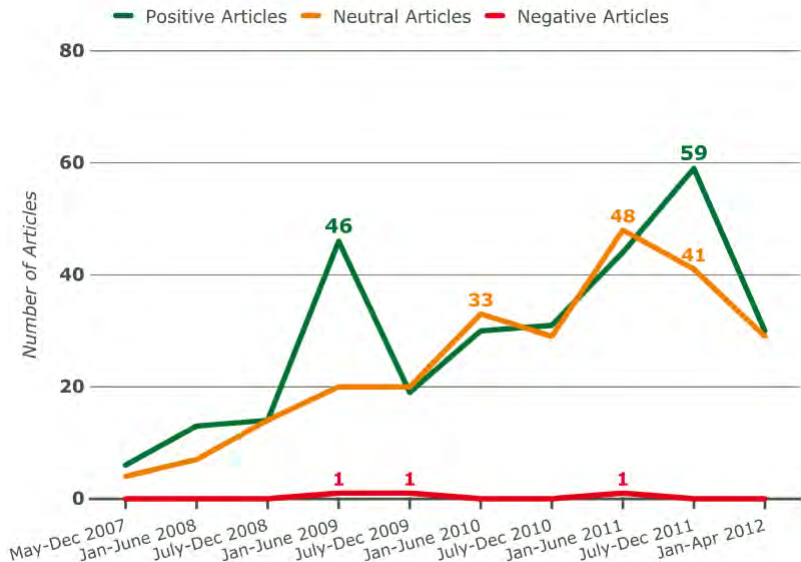
Favorability was assigned toward Say Yes Syracuse, its programs and initiatives, specifically if the article indicated that education, students, or the community benefit from the program. An article was considered positive when a favorable tone is conveyed, or when the favorable facts included in it outweigh the rest.

Favorability of SYTE Coverage



540 articles analyzed
 Period: 01 May 07 - 30 Apr 12
 Coverage source: U.S. print media
 © 2012 COMMETRIC

Favorability of SYTE Coverage over Time



540 articles analyzed
 Period: 01 May 07 - 30 Apr 12
 Coverage source: U.S. print media
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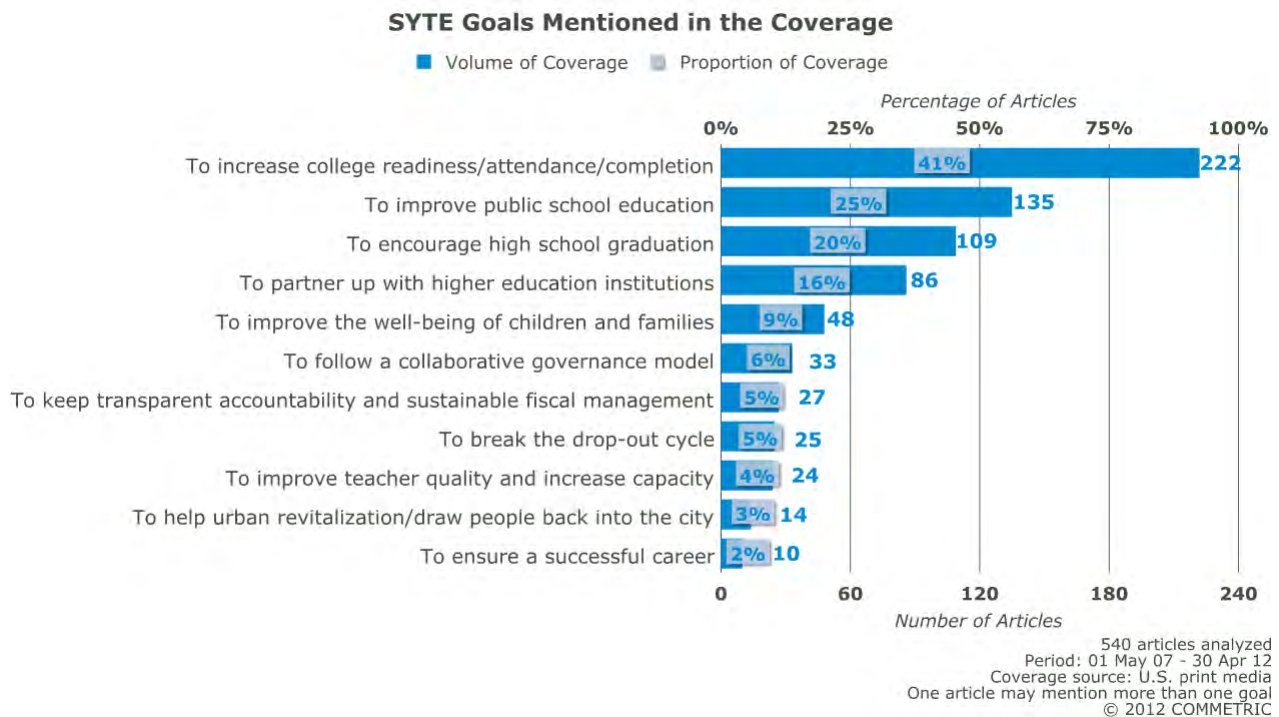
Content Focus of the Coverage

Sixty-six percent of the articles ($n = 359$) mentioned key Say Yes Syracuse goals. The goals mentioned in the media were consistently those that are the highest priority for the initiative (see Figure 3).

- *To increase college readiness, attendance, and completion* was the most actively communicated Say Yes Syracuse goal in the coverage (41 percent of all articles, 222 articles). In an article in *The Post-Standard*, written by four of the key people in the Say Yes Syracuse partnership—SU Chancellor Nancy Cantor, SYTE President Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney and Mayor Stephanie Miner, the authors emphasized that they were striving “to create a college-ready, college-going culture for generations to come.” (Jan 22, 2011)
- *To improve public school education* (25 percent, 135 articles) was often mentioned as a broad Say Yes Syracuse goal, which incorporated other goals, such as improving student achievements or even teacher quality.

- *To encourage high school graduation* (20 percent, 109 articles) also was commonly noted as one of Say Yes Syracuse’s key goals. However, toward the end of the analysis period, Syracuse publications noted that despite the Say Yes Syracuse initiative, graduation rates have not increased. “*State test results released earlier this month—three years after Say Yes set up shop here—show Syracuse with the lowest elementary and middle school test scores of any of the state’s five big-city districts. Graduation rates have remained flat.*” (*The Post-Standard*, Aug 30, 2011)
- Say Yes Syracuse representatives commonly highlighted that the goals are long term, and fast results could hardly be expected. Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey emphasized that “*it takes three to five years to successfully implement new learning programs and embed a new culture.*” (*The Post-Standard*, Jan 20, 2010)
- *To partner up with higher education institutions* (16 percent, 86 articles) was another goal attributed to Say Yes Syracuse in the coverage, primarily due to news about the collaboration with SU.
- *To follow a collaborative governance model* was mentioned less often (6 percent, 33 articles) but was one of the most positively interpreted Say Yes Syracuse goals. According to Buffalo News, “*Say Yes to Education has a history of bridging the differences between school administrators and employee unions.*” (Jan 11, 2012)

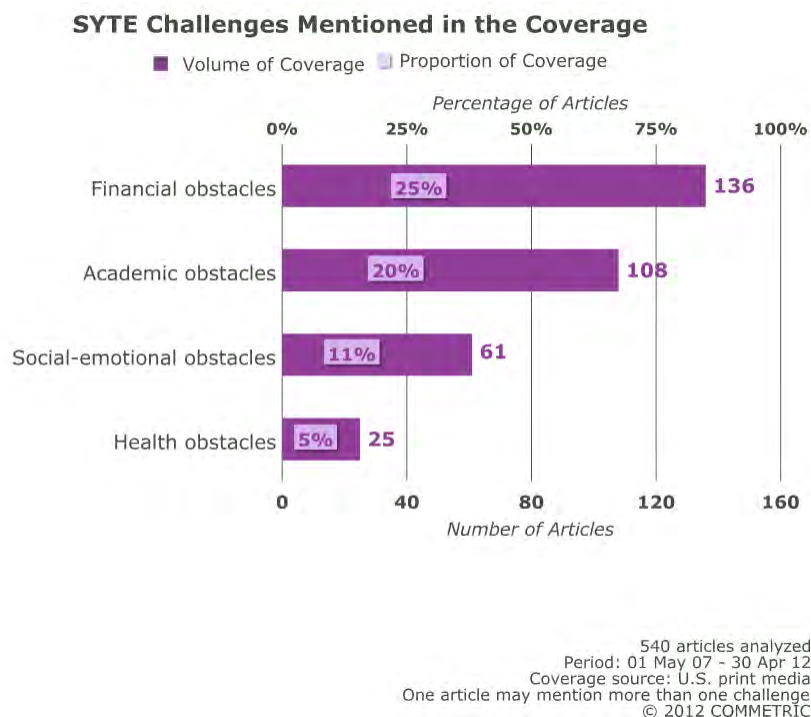
Figure 3. SYTE Goals Analysis



We also examined the challenges facing students in Syracuse, as reported in the media (see Figure 4). These data provide a sense of whether the conversation focuses equally on all four priorities of the Say Yes Syracuse model: financial, academic, socioemotional, and health obstacles to success.

Results suggest that financial and academic obstacles were at the center of the conversation, and socioemotional and health obstacles received less attention. This is inconsistent with the Say Yes Syracuse theory of action and somewhat inconsistent with the nature of the collaborative programming. For example, Onondaga County, the City of Syracuse, and SCSD collaborated on several health and socioemotional ventures, such as school-based health clinics and placement of social workers in the school. Yet the media focused less on these initiatives and more on academics, which involved little collaborative progress in this time period.

Figure 4. Analysis of Challenges Addressed by Say Yes Syracuse



To better understand whether the conversation regarding education was different in Syracuse than across the state—which would lend credence to the hypothesis that Say Yes Syracuse was driving greater attention to education issues—we compared press coverage of education-related terms associated with Say Yes Syracuse (see Figure 5). In general, we found that press coverage regarding critical education topics was similar in Syracuse and across the state. However, there was a small trend toward more discussion of specific education programs that were widely implemented under Say Yes Syracuse (e.g., afterschool programs, summer camp, tutoring) in Syracuse as well as somewhat more discussion of financial aid in Syracuse and more discussion of broader education topics (e.g., college readiness, college graduation and dropout rates) in the state of New York.

We also looked at the volume of press coverage for key topics—college readiness and high school graduation and dropout rates—over time, for Syracuse compared to the state of New York (see Figures 6 and 7). We found that there were no increases in the number of articles about these topics in Syracuse that did not also occur in New York state, over time. This analysis does not support the hypothesis that Say Yes Syracuse would drive greater conversation about key education topics in Syracuse as the reform model matured.

Figure 5. Key Terms in New York State Versus Syracuse Coverage

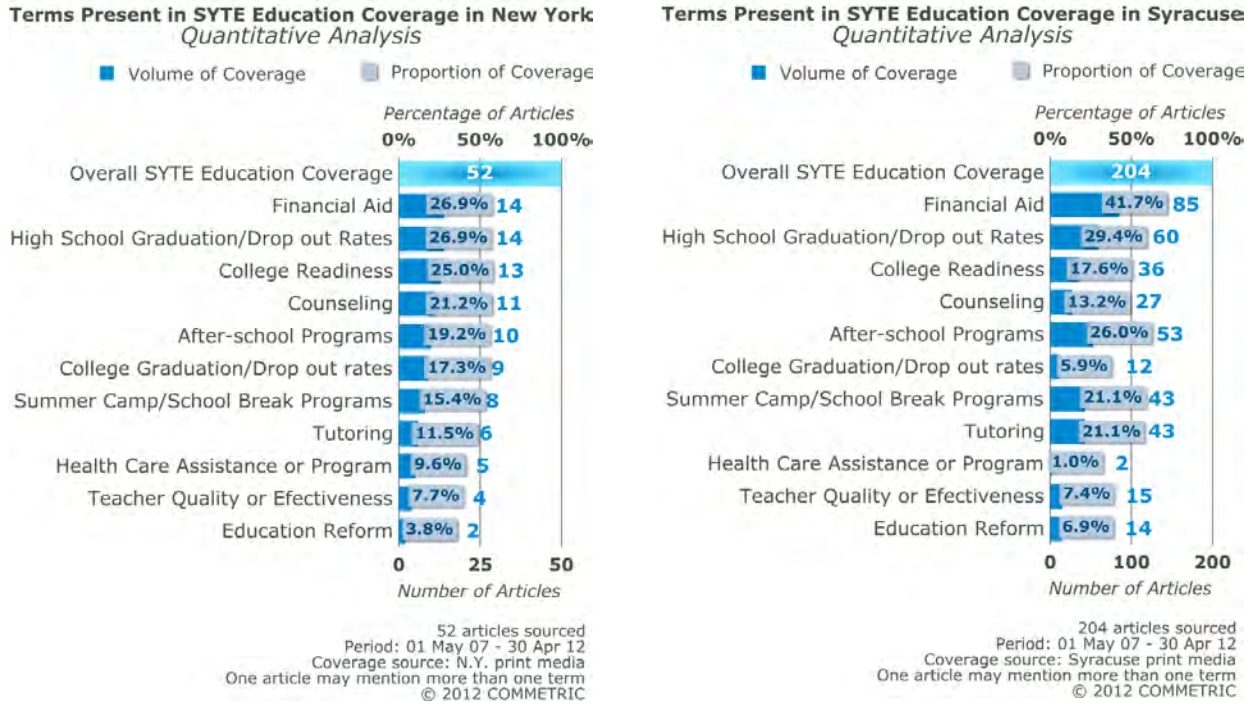


Figure 6. Volume of College Readiness Coverage Over Time

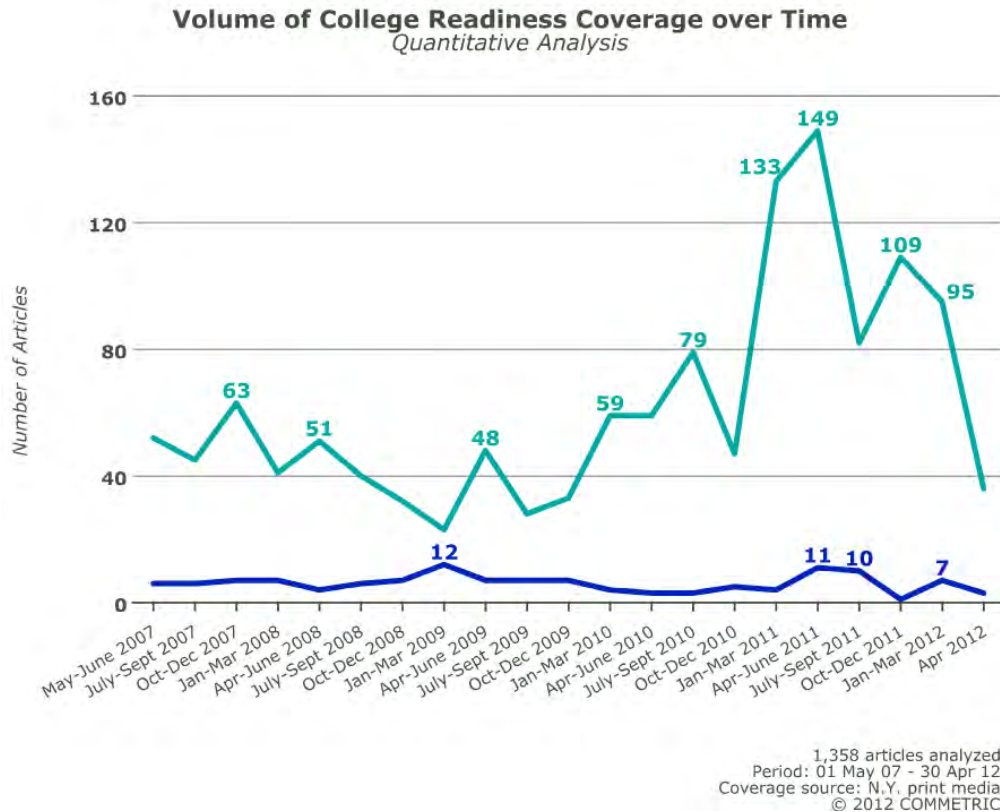
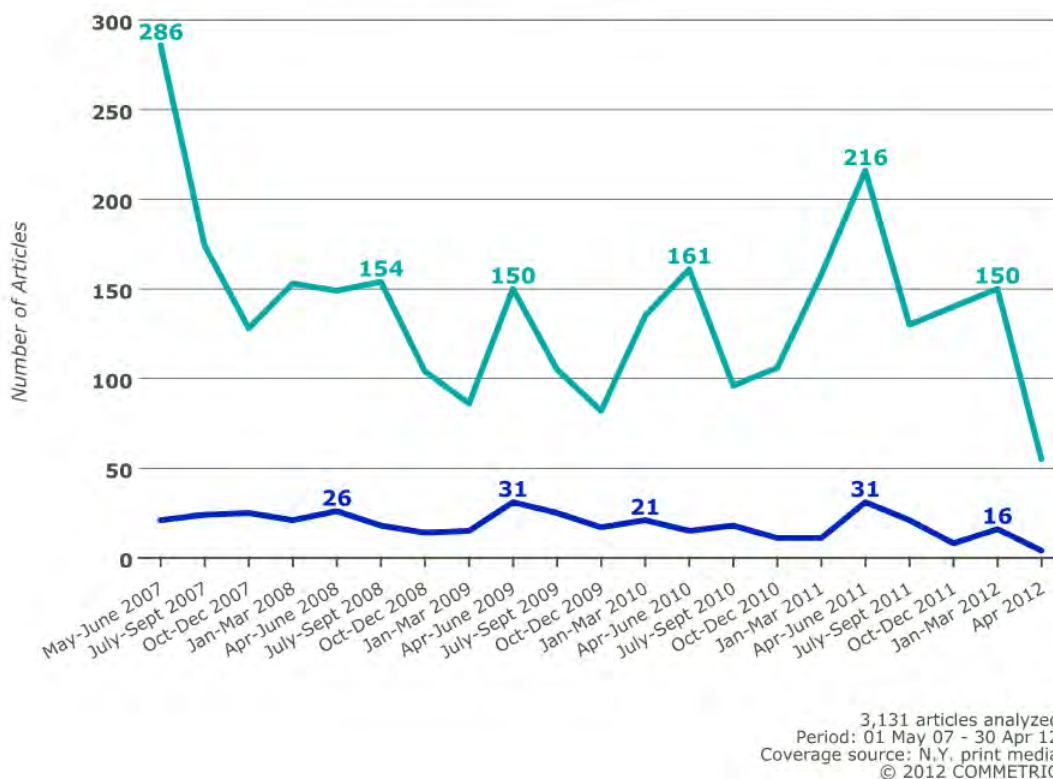


Figure 7. Volume of High School Graduation and Dropout Rates Over Time

Volume of High School Graduation/Drop out Rates Coverage over Time
Quantitative Analysis

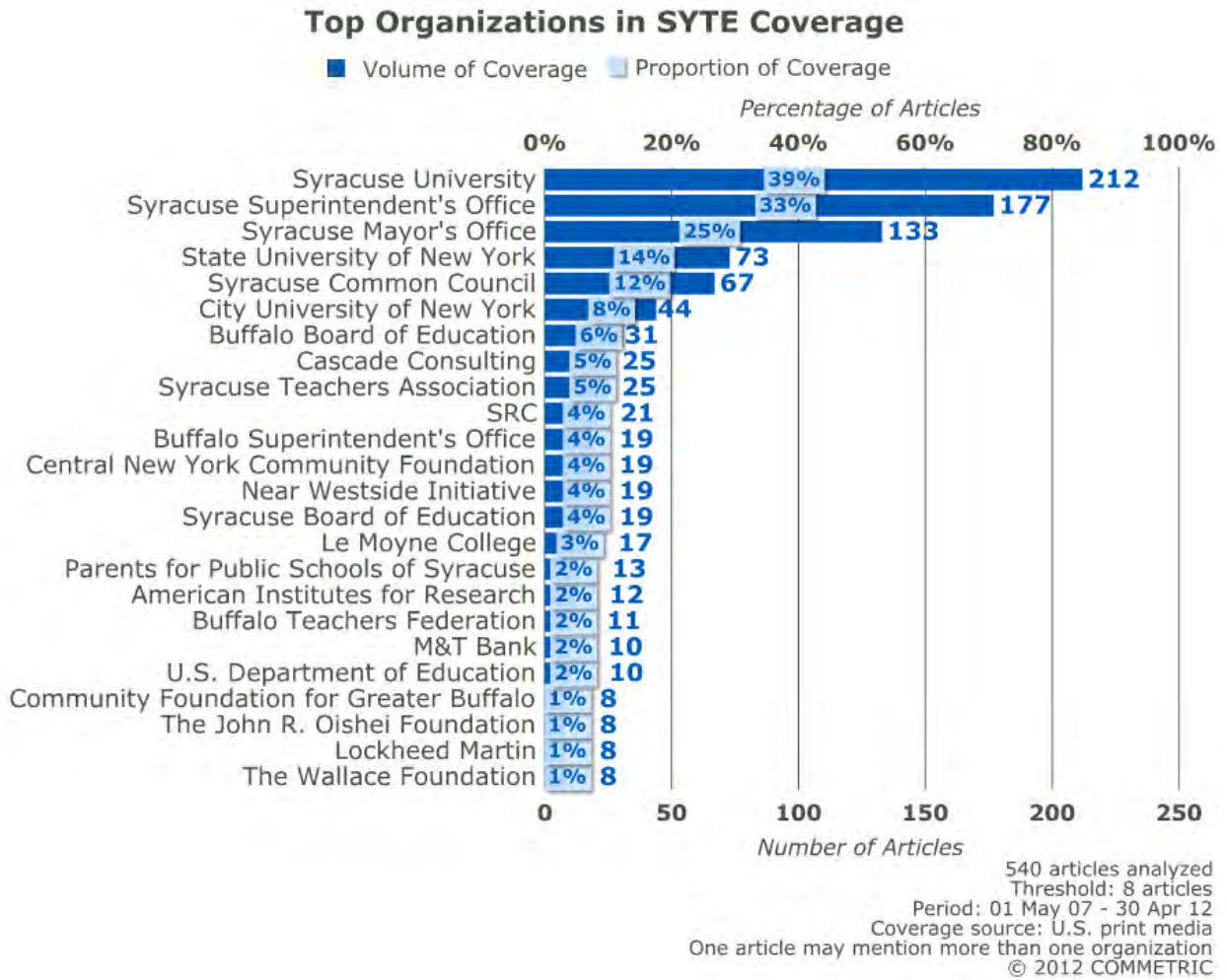


Engagement of Partners

One sign of the engagement of community partners is the extent to which the various partners are mentioned in conjunction with Say Yes Syracuse (see Figure 8).⁶ Thirty-nine percent of the articles mentioning Say Yes Syracuse also mentioned SU. The SCSD superintendent’s office was also mentioned frequently (33 percent) as was the Syracuse mayor’s office (25 percent). Several partners, however, were not frequently associated with Say Yes Syracuse in the press. Foundations that were engaged with the Say Yes Syracuse work were mentioned rarely; for example, the Central New York Community Foundation, which funded several aspects of the initiative, appeared in only 4 percent of the articles. Many partners (e.g., local community-based organizations) may not appear in this analysis because they were mentioned individually infrequently, although collectively (i.e., looking across all community-based organizations) they may have been more visible.

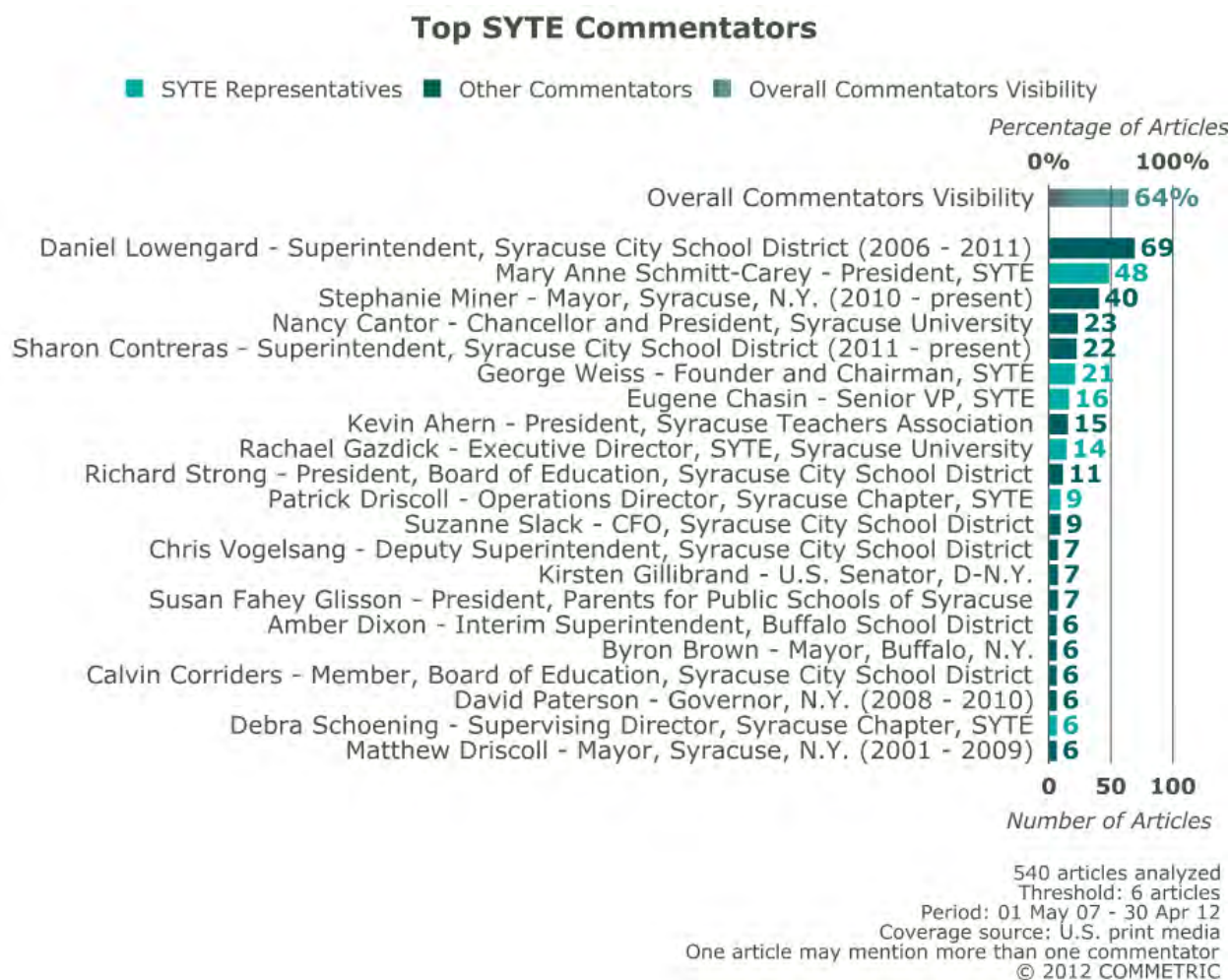
⁶ All 504 articles mention Say Yes or some configuration of that name because that term was part of the search string. Therefore, Say Yes is not listed on this chart.

Figure 8. Top Organizations in SYTE Coverage



Overall, the media conversation regarding Say Yes Syracuse was active and dialogical, as indicated by the relatively high presence of commentators throughout the whole study period: an average of 64 percent of the articles featured at least one statement by a commentator (see Figure 9). The top commentators were local Syracuse education and government leaders and SYTE representatives, suggesting involvement across the Say Yes Syracuse partners.

Figure 9. Top SYTE Commentators



Lessons Learned and Implications for Similar Initiatives

Say Yes Syracuse is an ambitious effort, building on smaller scale SYTE efforts and the community school approach, to take communitywide collaboration about education to scale. Through the use of organizational structures, such as a memo of understanding and task forces, as well as the active engagement of an honest broker to instigate and mediate conversations among partners, Say Yes Syracuse brought about an unprecedented level of communication and collaboration among community leaders previously in silos. There were a number of challenges, such as the lack of role clarity and disagreements about strategies to reach common goals, which necessitated revising approaches. However, the Say Yes Syracuse partners addressed those initial challenges to improve collaboration throughout the first four years of the initiative. Strategies used by Say Yes Syracuse to overcome these challenges—redistributing responsibilities, explicitly working to overcome historically troubled relationships, and reformulating community meetings to maximize participation—may provide useful guidance to those launching similar initiatives.

Generally, Say Yes Syracuse was successful in improving communication across partners and in engaging partners in collaborative and concrete activities to provide needed services to students. It is not clear, however, that Say Yes Syracuse was successful in fully engaging the public or changing the public conversation about education. It may be that change at that diffuse level requires more time to emerge or different strategies.

Despite the challenges, the goal (postsecondary success for all youth) and the approach (collaboration across sectors) remain important and the strategies viable. Other communities considering similar ambitious reforms may build on the following lessons learned in Syracuse:

- Develop a clear shared understanding of the goal of the initiative and the strategies to reach that goal; use a formal document, such as a memo of understanding, to commit all partners to this agreement.
- Establish early a solid communication plan to reach all community members—including both organizational leaders and unaffiliated individuals such as parents—to communicate about the initiative; in packaging the message, be careful to communicate the full scope of the initiative along with the catchy shorter summary.
- Continue to communicate and collaborate as the plans evolve.
- Consider the history and context when assigning roles to partners; be sensitive to past relationships.
- Assign roles to partners that build on their strengths rather than attempt to provide those services directly; for example, the local university could facilitate the engagement of local community-based organizations in providing services.
- Identify an honest broker to proactively negotiate difficult conversations across partners; consider the interpersonal and communication skills of the individual as well as his or her existing relationships in the community and perceived neutrality. Recognize that this is a time-consuming but essential role, and plan accordingly.
- Use data at the student, school, and community levels to guide programming; evaluate the quality and accessibility of the required data, and address issues early.
- Communicate progress toward goals using data in public venues.
- Communicate financial commitments publicly. Use third-party audits to identify ways to maintain the investment in the initiative.
- Establish organizational structures to support the work, and communicate across the community. Consider issues of committee membership, especially finding the best balance between a group that is small enough for substantive discussion and large enough to include key stakeholders; consider also having leaders at the table with reach across the community.

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Appendix A. Extant Data Sources

We used multiple data sources to answer questions about the collaboration between Say Yes Syracuse and partners in Syracuse. We drew on the Year 1 and Year 2 Say Yes to Education Syracuse Implementation Studies; as appropriate, we reanalyzed the focus group and interview data collected for these studies. We identified themes that emerged from multiple respondents. The Year 1 report covers the first 18 months of the Say Yes Implementation in Syracuse (2008–09). The Year 2 report covers fall 2009–December 2010.

In Year 1, data sources consisted of: (1) 23 interviews and additional focus group representing the partners—SYTE leadership, SCSD, SU, and the community and (2) corroborated observations of the evaluation team at key implementation events. Primary data collection occurred fall 2008 through fall 2009, with some supplemental data collection through December 2009.

The SYTE leadership included: Mary Anne Schmitt-Cary, President, and Gene Chasin, Chief Operating Officer.

SCSD participants included: Dan Lowengard, Superintendent; Chris Vogelsang, Deputy Superintendent; Deborah Schoening, Supervising Director of School Improvement; Steve Gramet, Director of Pupil Services; Mike Robbins, Director, Advanced Placement Instruction.

SU participants included: Nancy Cantor, Chancellor; Doug Biklen, Dean, School of Education; and Rachael Gazdick, Executive Director of the Say Yes Chapter in Syracuse.

Community members included the following: Bethaidai (Bea) Gonzalez, President, Community Council; Kim Rohadfox-Ceaser, Commissioner of Education; Walt Dixie, Founder—the Alliance Network, President—Syracuse Action Network; Peter Dunn, President and Chief Executive Officer, Central New York Community Foundation; Paul Kronenberg, President and Chief Executive Officer, Crouse Hospital; Bob Long, Commissioner of Mental Health; Joanie Mahoney, County Executive; Sarah Merrick, Social Services Program Coordinator, County of Onondaga Department of Social Services; Cynthia Morrow, Commissioner of Physical Health; Bob Roberts, President and Chief Executive Officer, Syracuse Research Corporation; Robert (Bob) Simpson, President and Chief Executive Officer, Metropolitan Development Association; David Sutkowy, Commissioner of Social Services.

In Year 2, these sources consisted of responses from: (1) 58 interviews and additional focus groups and (2) corroborated observations of the evaluation team at key implementation events. Primary data collection occurred fall 2010 through fall 2011. The persons interviewed were the same as Year 1 except in the instances listed below:

SCSD participants included the following: Michelle Abdul-Sabor, Parent Advocate, Parent Partnership Network; Pat Body, Commissioner, Board of Education; Calvin Corridors, Commissioner, Board of Education; Ned Deuel, Commissioner, Board of Education; Nancy McCarty, Commissioner, Board of Education; Laurie Menkin, Commissioner, Board of Education; Anita Murphy, Deputy Superintendent

for Information Technology; Brian Nolan, Director of High Schools and Career Education; Richard Strong, President, Board of Education.

SU participants included the following: Susan Feightner, Director of Marketing and Communications, Say Yes Syracuse; Monique Fletcher, Say Yes Syracuse; Christopher Walsh, Director of Higher Education Initiative, Say Yes Syracuse; Ginny Donohue, Executive Director, On Point for College; Duane Kinnon, President and Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club; Frank Lazarski, President, United Way of Central New York; Pat Leone, Executive Director, Contact Community Services, Inc.; Peggy Liuzzi, Executive Director, Child Care Solutions; Anthony Marshall, Esq., Harris Beach, Coordinator of the Say Yes Syracuse Legal Services Task Force; Mike Melara, Executive Director, Catholic Charities; David Pasinski, Executive Director, Huntington Family Center; Frank Ridzi, Program Officer for Community Initiatives, Central New York Community Foundation.

Appendix B. Media Analysis Methods

Commetric employed a media analysis methodology to deliver a detailed analysis of the coverage on the SYTE program in the U.S. media during a set period of time. This report covers the yearly news cycle and includes pieces in English from the U.S. print media. Metrics and measures include volume and favorability, predefined and discovered issues, messages and coverage drivers, commentators, publications, and reporters. Two sets of analyses were conducted. The first, Say Yes Syracuse Analysis, describes the volume, nature, and content of media explicitly related to Say Yes Syracuse. The second, State Comparison, examines the content focus of education coverage in Syracuse versus the state of New York.

Say Yes Syracuse Analysis

A total of 874 articles were qualitatively analyzed for SYTE. Of these, 540 articles were considered relevant⁷ to the needs of this report. Coverage was sourced from the U.S. print media for the period from May 1, 2007, to April 30, 2012.

Coverage was extracted using complex Boolean search strings. The articles had to meet at least one of the following criteria to be included in the sample:

- Mention Say Yes to Education.
- Mention Say Yes or SYTE in the same article as Schoolhouse Partners or OASAS or Promise Zone
- Mention Say Yes or SYTE within 10 words of: school or its derivatives, education or its derivatives, afterschool, summer camp(s), school-based clinic(s), health insurance, health workout, tutor(s), tutoring, budget workout

State Comparison

The statewide analysis was not restricted to articles that mentioned Say Yes or some variant.

For the purpose of this analysis, Commetric prepared a baseline Boolean search string, focusing on the overall debate of education in elementary, middle, and high schools. This string returned a total of 81,675 articles published in print media from the state of New York in the monitored period (May 1, 2007, to April 30, 2012).

In addition, to determine the discussion related to each of the key terms identified from the media analysis, Commetric created a separate search string for each term, ensuring that it was broad enough to capture variations of the term and narrow enough to avoid too many false positives. This

⁷ Irrelevant coverage referred to other programs, initiatives, or campaigns that contained Say Yes in their names, such as *Say Yes to the Dress*, *Say YES to Yellow—Sometimes Warm. Sometimes Hot*, *Project Say Yes*, or simply to the use of the phrase in a different context. These references were intentionally not excluded at the initial sampling stage, in order to make sure Commetric captured each mention of Say Yes to Education in the U.S. media.

search string was combined with the baseline string on education to ensure that only articles from the original pool of 81,675 were captured.

Commetric replicated this analysis, focusing only on Syracuse media. The sample for the replicated, Syracuse-only analysis was 13,603 articles between May 1, 2007, and April 30, 2012.

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