

Study Analysis of School and Community Collaboration Bridging Leadership Communication Gaps in Urban School Enrichment Programs Through Qualitative Case Study

Paula Monroe^{1, *} and Ashraf Esmail²

¹Founder and Executive Director, P.A.M. Media Outreach, Inc., San Antonio, Texas, USA

²Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

Abstract: Effective leadership communication plays a critical role in the success of urban school enrichment programs, particularly those serving underserved communities. Despite the recognized importance of collaboration between school administrators and community organizational leaders, persistent communication barriers continue to hinder program implementation and sustainability. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how leadership communication practices influence collaboration in urban school enrichment programs.

Data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups with school administrators and community organizational leaders. Using thematic analysis, key patterns in communication and collaboration were identified (Braun and Clarke 2006). Findings revealed that communication barriers stemmed from misaligned reinforcement, inconsistent engagement, and systemic constraints that limited effective coordination. These barriers contributed to inefficiencies in program delivery and reduced access for students who needed enrichment opportunities.

The study concludes that structured communication protocols, leadership-focused professional development, and strengthened partnerships are essential to improving collaboration. The findings provide practical implications for educational leaders and community organizations seeking to enhance program accessibility and effectiveness in underserved urban communities.

Keywords: Leadership communication; Urban education; Community partnerships; Enrichment programs; Qualitative research; Collaboration; Underserved communities.

INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership communication is central to the success of collaborative efforts between school administrators and community organizational leaders in urban school enrichment programs. In environments where multiple stakeholders are responsible for program implementation, communication serves as the primary mechanism for aligning expectations, coordinating responsibilities, and achieving outcomes. When communication is inconsistent or unclear, the effectiveness of these programs is compromised, often resulting in fragmented service delivery and reduced student participation.

Urban communities, particularly those affected by systemic inequities, rely heavily on enrichment programs to offer opportunities beyond traditional classroom instruction. These programs offer academic support, mentorship,

and leadership development opportunities that are essential for student growth. However, access to these programs is not equally distributed.

Research has demonstrated that students from underserved communities frequently experience reduced access to enrichment opportunities due to structural and institutional barriers (Baldrige 2019; Lareau 2011).

A critical factor contributing to these disparities is leadership communication. While research has examined school-community partnerships broadly, limited attention has been given to how communication practices influence collaboration. Ineffective communication can lead to misaligned expectations, duplication of efforts, and inefficient use of resources, ultimately limiting program impact.

This study examines leadership communication as a central component of collaboration in urban school enrichment programs, providing insight into how

*Address correspondence to this author at Founder and Executive Director, P.A.M. Media Outreach, Inc., San Antonio, Texas, USA, Email: paula@pammediaconsultants.com

communication practices can be strengthened to improve outcomes.

Problem Statement

Urban school enrichment programs depend on effective collaboration between school administrators and community organizational leaders; however, persistent communication gaps continue to undermine program effectiveness. These gaps contribute to fragmented program implementation, misaligned expectations, and reduced access to enrichment opportunities for underserved students.

Although research has identified disparities in access to educational opportunities (Lareau 2011), limited attention has been given to how leadership communication contributes to these disparities. Without structured communication systems, organizations may operate independently rather than collaboratively, leading to inefficiencies that undermine program effectiveness.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how leadership communication practices influence collaboration between school administrators and community organizational leaders in urban school enrichment programs.

Research Questions

RQ1: What leadership communication practices influence collaboration between school administrators and community organizational leaders?

RQ2: What barriers impact effective leadership communication in urban enrichment programs?

RQ3: How can communication structures improve collaboration and program implementation?

Literature Review

Collaboration between schools and community organizations is essential to addressing disparities in educational access and outcomes. Community-based enrichment programs provide students with opportunities for academic support, mentorship, and leadership development (Cappella and Godfrey 2019).

These programs are particularly important in urban settings, where systemic inequalities often limit access to resources.

Research has demonstrated that access to enrichment opportunities is influenced by structural inequalities. Lareau (2011) found that socioeconomic factors significantly impact access to opportunities, contributing to disparities in student outcomes. These disparities are further exacerbated when organizations fail to effectively collaborate.

Leadership communication plays a critical role in shaping collaboration. Baldrige (2019) emphasized the importance of community-based leadership and the role of relationships in fostering effective programs. Communication facilitates the development of shared goals and coordinated efforts among stakeholders.

School-community partnerships have been widely recognized as a critical strategy for improving student outcomes. Epstein (2011) highlighted the importance of integrating schools, families, and community organizations to support student success, emphasizing that structured collaboration enhances both academic and social development. Similarly, Sanders (2006) demonstrated that strong partnerships between schools and community organizations improve student engagement and create more cohesive support systems.

Organizational research highlights communication as a key factor in sustainability. Ceptureanu *et al.* (2018) identified communication and coordination as essential components of successful partnerships. Without structured communication, organizations may struggle to maintain alignment and accountability.

Research on school improvement further supports the importance of organizational alignment and communication. Bryk *et al.* (2010) emphasized that relational trust, communication, and organizational coherence are critical components of successful school reform efforts. These findings reinforce the importance of leadership communication in facilitating collaboration.

Qualitative research provides valuable insight into communication dynamics. Austin and Sutton (2014) emphasized the importance of

understanding participant perspectives, while Braun and Clarke (2006) demonstrated the effectiveness of thematic analysis.

Despite these findings, there remains a need for research that specifically examines leadership communication in urban enrichment programs. This study addresses this gap.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated conceptual framework that draws upon theories of social inequality, community-based leadership, and qualitative inquiry. These theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding how leadership communication influences collaboration within urban school enrichment programs and how these dynamics affect access to opportunities for underserved students.

Lareau's (2011) work on social inequality provides a critical lens for examining disparities in access to enrichment opportunities. Her research shows that factors such as socioeconomic status and institutional practices shape the resources and opportunities available to young people. In this study, leadership communication is conceptualized as a mechanism that can either reinforce or mitigate these inequalities. When communication between school administrators and community organizational leaders is inconsistent or ineffective, programs may fail to reach students who are most in need, thereby reinforcing existing disparities. Conversely, effective communication can facilitate alignment and coordination, increasing access to enrichment opportunities.

Baldrige (2019) offers a complementary perspective, emphasizing the role of community-based leadership in fostering equitable opportunities for youth. His work highlights the importance of relationships, trust, and engagement in building effective programs. Leadership communication is central to these processes, as it enables stakeholders to develop shared goals, coordinate efforts, and sustain partnerships. In this study, communication is viewed as a key mechanism for forming and maintaining relationships, directly influencing the effectiveness of collaboration between schools and community organizations.

Collins and Stockton (2018) further inform this study by emphasizing the importance of theory in qualitative research. They argue that theoretical frameworks are essential for guiding data interpretation and situating findings within broader scholarly conversations. In this study, integrating theories of social inequality and community-based leadership provides a foundation for analyzing how communication practices influence collaboration and program outcomes.

Together, these theoretical perspectives position leadership communication as a critical factor that connects structural conditions, organizational relationships, and collaborative processes. By integrating these frameworks, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how communication practices shape collaboration within urban school enrichment programs and influence access to opportunities for underserved communities.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine leadership communication practices within urban school enrichment programs. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social processes, particularly those involving communication and collaboration within real-world contexts (Austin and Sutton 2014).

The case study design was appropriate for this research because it enabled the investigation of leadership communication within its natural setting, where multiple stakeholders interact and influence program implementation. This approach is particularly useful for understanding context-dependent phenomena and capturing the perspectives of individuals directly involved in the process being studied.

By focusing on a specific program context, this study sought to provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of how leadership communication practices shape collaboration between school administrators and community organizational leaders. The qualitative case study design enabled the identification of patterns and themes that reflect participants' lived experiences and the organizational dynamics that influence communication.

Research Design

A qualitative case study design was employed to examine leadership communication practices within urban school enrichment programs. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social processes, particularly those involving communication and collaboration in real-world contexts (Austin and Sutton 2014).

The case study design was appropriate for this research because it enabled the examination of leadership communication within its natural setting, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how communication practices influence collaboration between school administrators and community organizational leaders. This approach is particularly useful for studying context-dependent organizational dynamics influenced by multiple interacting factors.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants included school administrators and community organization leaders who were actively involved in planning, coordinating, or implementing urban school enrichment programs. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure they had direct experience with leadership communication and collaboration within the program context.

The selection criteria focused on individuals who held leadership or decision-making roles, as these participants were most likely to provide insight into communication processes and challenges. This sampling strategy allowed for the collection of rich, relevant data aligned with the purpose of the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected using multiple qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups. The use of multiple data sources allowed for triangulation, strengthening the credibility of the findings.

Semi-structured interviews provided participants with the opportunity to share detailed insights into their experiences with leadership communication. Questionnaires were used to capture additional perspectives and identify patterns across participants. Focus groups

facilitated discussion among participants, allowing for the exploration of shared experiences and collective perspectives on communication and collaboration.

Together, these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of leadership communication practices within the program.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Charmaz (2016). The analysis process involved multiple stages, including data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation.

During the coding process, data were systematically reviewed to identify recurring patterns related to leadership communication and collaboration. Codes were then grouped into broader themes that reflected the study's key findings. This iterative process enabled the identification of meaningful patterns in the data while maintaining alignment with the research questions.

The use of thematic analysis enabled the researcher to capture the complexity of participant experiences and provide a detailed interpretation of communication dynamics within urban school enrichment programs.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the study's trustworthiness, several strategies were employed, including triangulation, member checking, and maintaining an audit trail. Triangulation involved comparing data from interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups to identify consistent patterns.

Member checking was used to validate findings by allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of interpretations. An audit trail was maintained to document the research process, ensuring transparency and consistency throughout the study.

These strategies enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings.

RESULTS

The findings are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Participant.

Overview Category	Description
Participants	School administrators and community organizational leaders
Sampling Strategy	Purposive sampling
Data Collection Methods	Interviews, questionnaires, focus groups
Setting	Urban enrichment programs

Table 2: Thematic Findings from Data Analysis.

Theme	Description	Impact
Misaligned Reinforcement	Inconsistent expectations	Fragmented implementation
Inconsistent Engagement	Lack of structured	communication Reduced collaboration
Systemic Constraints	Institutional barriers	Limited program effectiveness

Key Findings

The analysis of data revealed three primary themes that characterize leadership communication challenges within urban school enrichment programs: misaligned reinforcement, inconsistent engagement, and systemic constraints. These themes reflect patterns across participant responses and highlight the key areas where communication breakdowns occur.

Misaligned Reinforcement

Participants reported inconsistent expectations between school administrators and community organizational leaders, leading to confusion and inefficiencies in program implementation. These inconsistencies reflected a lack of shared understanding regarding roles, responsibilities, and program objectives. As a result, stakeholders often operated with differing assumptions, limiting their ability to coordinate efforts effectively.

This finding aligns with research emphasizing the importance of alignment and shared vision in collaborative partnerships. Baldrige (2019) highlighted that community-based programs require consistent communication to ensure that stakeholders maintain a unified approach to implementation. Similarly, Epstein (2011) emphasized that structured communication is

essential for aligning school and community efforts to support student outcomes. The absence of such alignment in this study suggests that leadership communication practices are insufficiently developed to support cohesive program delivery.

Inconsistent Engagement

Participants identified a lack of structured communication practices as a significant barrier to collaboration. Communication between stakeholders was often irregular and reactive rather than proactive and sustained. This inconsistency limited opportunities for meaningful engagement, reduced accountability, and weakened the partnership's overall effectiveness.

These findings are consistent with the existing literature on organizational collaboration, which highlights the importance of continuous, structured communication. Ceptureanu *et al.* (2018) found that consistent communication is critical for sustaining partnerships and ensuring alignment among stakeholders. Additionally, Sanders (2006) emphasized that ongoing engagement between schools and community organizations strengthens collaboration and enhances program outcomes. The lack of structured engagement identified in this study underscores the need for formal communication systems that facilitate regular interaction and coordination.

Systemic Constraints

Participants identified systemic constraints as significant barriers to effective leadership communication and collaboration. These constraints included scheduling conflicts, policy limitations, and resource restrictions that limited opportunities for consistent interaction between school administrators and community organizational leaders. Unlike interpersonal communication challenges, these barriers were embedded within institutional structures, making them more difficult to address through individual leadership efforts alone.

The presence of systemic constraints highlights the influence of organizational and institutional factors on communication practices. Participants noted that competing priorities and rigid scheduling structures often prevented regular communication, resulting in fragmented

coordination and delayed decision-making. These limitations reduced the effectiveness of enrichment programs by hindering timely collaboration and responsiveness to student needs.

This finding aligns with research on organizational effectiveness and school improvement, which emphasizes the importance of structural support for collaboration. Bryk *et al.* (2010) identified organizational coherence and relational trust as key components of successful school reform, noting that institutional structures must support communication and coordination among stakeholders. When these structures are absent or ineffective, collaboration becomes inconsistent and unsustainable.

Additionally, Ceptureanu *et al.* (2018) highlighted that organizational sustainability depends on communication systems supported by institutional resources and policies. Without such support, even well-intentioned partnerships may struggle to maintain alignment and effectiveness. The findings of this study extend this research by demonstrating how systemic constraints specifically impact leadership communication within urban enrichment programs.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-level approach that includes organizational changes, policy adjustments, and resource allocation. Leaders must advocate for structures that support consistent communication, such as dedicated collaboration time, shared communication platforms, and flexible scheduling. Without addressing these systemic barriers, efforts to improve leadership communication may remain limited in their impact.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive examination of how leadership communication influences collaboration within urban school enrichment programs. The identification of misaligned reinforcement, inconsistent engagement, and systemic constraints highlights the complexity of communication dynamics within multi-organizational environments. These findings not only confirm existing research but also extend

current understanding by demonstrating how communication practices directly affect program accessibility, effectiveness, and sustainability in underserved communities.

These findings further align with research on school-community partnerships, which emphasizes the importance of structured collaboration in improving student outcomes. Epstein (2011) argued that effective partnerships require intentional communication systems that connect schools, families, and community organizations. Similarly, Sanders (2006) found that strong communication practices enhance coordination and support student engagement. The absence of such structures in this study highlights a critical gap in leadership communication practices. Leadership Communication as a Structural Mechanism

One of the most significant contributions of this study is identifying leadership communication as a structural mechanism that shapes collaboration. While previous research has emphasized the importance of partnerships between schools and community organizations, this study demonstrates that communication is not merely a supportive function but a foundational element that determines the success or failure of collaborative efforts.

The findings suggest that leadership communication operates at multiple levels, including interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels. At the interpersonal level, communication influences relationships between stakeholders, affecting trust, clarity, and mutual understanding. At the organizational level, communication determines how information is shared, how decisions are made, and how responsibilities are coordinated. At the systemic level, communication interacts with institutional policies and structures, shaping the broader environment in which collaboration occurs.

This multi-level understanding of communication extends the work of Baldrige (2019), who emphasized the importance of relationships in community-based leadership. While Baldrige focused on relational dynamics, this study highlights how communication serves as the mechanism through which these relationships are developed, maintained, and operationalized.

Misaligned Reinforcement and the Absence of Shared Vision

The theme of misaligned reinforcement reflects a lack of shared understanding among stakeholders regarding program goals, expectations, and implementation strategies. Participants reported inconsistencies in how programs were communicated, supported, and executed across different organizational contexts. These inconsistencies resulted in confusion, inefficiencies, and reduced program effectiveness.

This finding aligns with existing research on organizational collaboration, which emphasizes the importance of shared vision and alignment in achieving collective goals. Baldrige (2019) noted that successful community-based programs require strong alignment between stakeholders, supported by consistent communication and mutual understanding. The absence of such alignment in this study suggests that leadership communication practices are insufficiently structured to support cohesive program implementation.

Furthermore, misaligned reinforcement can be understood within the context of Lareau's (2011) framework on social inequality. When communication practices are inconsistent, programs may fail to effectively reach and support underserved students, thereby reinforcing existing disparities. In this sense, communication is not neutral; it actively shapes access to opportunities.

Inconsistent Engagement and the Lack of Communication Infrastructure

The theme of inconsistent engagement highlights the absence of structured communication systems within urban enrichment programs. Participants described communication as sporadic, reactive, and dependent on individual initiative rather than institutionalized processes. This lack of consistency limited opportunities for collaboration, problem-solving, and continuous improvement.

This finding supports the work of Ceptureanu *et al.* (2018), who identified communication as a critical factor in the sustainability of community-based programs. Their research suggests that organizations must establish formal communication structures to ensure alignment

and accountability. The absence of such structures in this study indicates a significant gap in organizational practice.

Inconsistent engagement also reflects broader challenges related to organizational capacity and resource allocation. Without dedicated systems for communication, stakeholders may struggle to maintain regular interaction, particularly in environments characterized by competing priorities and limited resources. This issue is particularly pronounced in urban settings, where schools and community organizations often operate under significant constraints.

From a theoretical perspective, inconsistent engagement highlights the importance of communication as an organizational process rather than an individual behavior. Effective collaboration requires not only skilled communicators but also systems that support consistent and meaningful interaction among stakeholders.

Systemic Constraints and Institutional Barriers

The identification of systemic constraints underscores the influence of institutional factors on leadership communication. Participants reported that barriers such as scheduling conflicts, policy limitations, and resource constraints significantly hindered effective communication and collaboration. These challenges extend beyond individual leadership practices, indicating the need for systemic solutions.

This finding contributes to the literature by highlighting the interaction between communication and institutional structures. While previous research has acknowledged the role of organizational factors in collaboration, this study demonstrates how they specifically affect communication processes. For example, rigid scheduling structures may limit opportunities for stakeholder interaction, while policy constraints may restrict the flexibility needed to coordinate efforts across organizations.

Systemic constraints also have implications for equity. When institutional barriers limit communication, they can disproportionately affect underserved communities by reducing the effectiveness of programs designed to support

them. Addressing these constraints requires a comprehensive approach that includes policy reform, resource allocation, and organizational change.

Extending the Literature on Leadership Communication

This study extends existing research by positioning leadership communication as a central determinant of collaboration and program effectiveness. While previous studies have examined collaboration broadly, this research provides a more focused analysis of communication practices and their impact on organizational relationships.

The integration of qualitative data provides valuable insight into participants' lived experiences, revealing how communication challenges manifest in real-world settings. This approach aligns with the work of Austin and Sutton (2014), who emphasized the importance of qualitative methods in understanding complex social processes.

Additionally, the use of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) enabled the identification of patterns that may not be evident in quantitative approaches. By capturing the nuances of communication dynamics, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of collaboration in urban enrichment programs.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for practice. First, organizations should prioritize the development of structured communication systems that support regular interaction among stakeholders. These systems may include scheduled meetings, shared communication platforms, and clear protocols for information sharing.

Second, leadership training should emphasize communication as a critical skill for collaboration. Training programs should focus on strategies to align expectations, facilitate dialogue, and address communication barriers.

Third, policymakers and organizational leaders should address systemic constraints that hinder communication. This may involve revising policies, reallocating resources, and creating

opportunities for cross-organizational collaboration.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The use of a qualitative case study design limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research should consider using mixed methods approaches to further explore the relationship between leadership communication and collaboration.

Additionally, future studies should examine how communication practices evolve over time and how they influence long-term program outcomes. Exploring these dynamics across different contexts may provide a more comprehensive understanding of effective communication strategies.

Community Relevance

This study has direct implications for underserved communities by demonstrating how leadership communication practices influence access to enrichment opportunities. Urban school enrichment programs often serve as critical support systems for students who face systemic barriers to educational resources. When communication between school administrators and community organizational leaders is inconsistent or unstructured, these programs may fail to effectively reach and support the students who need them most.

The findings of this study suggest that improving leadership communication can enhance program coordination, increase accessibility, and strengthen the overall impact of enrichment initiatives. By implementing structured communication systems, stakeholders can better align their efforts, ensuring that programs are delivered consistently and effectively.

Additionally, this study highlights the importance of addressing systemic barriers that limit communication and collaboration. For underserved communities, where resources are often constrained, effective communication is essential to maximizing impact. Strengthening communication practices not only improves program delivery but also contributes to more equitable access to opportunities for students.

CONCLUSION

Leadership communication is a critical factor in the success of urban school enrichment programs. This study demonstrated that communication practices directly influence collaboration between school administrators and community organizational leaders, ultimately affecting program effectiveness and accessibility. The identification of misaligned reinforcement, inconsistent engagement, and systemic constraints provides a comprehensive understanding of the communication challenges that exist within these programs.

The findings suggest that strengthening leadership communication requires intentional strategies, including developing structured communication systems, aligning stakeholder expectations, and removing institutional barriers that hinder collaboration. By addressing these challenges, organizations can improve coordination, enhance program implementation, and increase access to enrichment opportunities for underserved students.

This study contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing communication as a central mechanism in collaborative partnerships. While previous research has highlighted the importance of school-community partnerships, this study provides a deeper understanding of how communication practices shape these relationships.

Future research should continue to explore leadership communication within different contexts and examine how communication strategies evolve over time. Expanding this line of inquiry can provide further insight into how collaborative efforts can be strengthened to support student success.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no financial or personal conflicts of interest

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Ashraf Esmail contributed as the methodologist and reviewer of the study.

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Received on 25-03-2026

Accepted on 01-06-2026

Published on 17-06-2026

<https://doi.org/10.65879/3070-6335.2026.02.03>

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