

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION:** The Nature and Extent of College and Career Readiness Partnerships in School Districts Serving Students in Rust Belt Areas

**STUDENT:** Michelle Reichart

**DEGREE:** Doctor of Philosophy

**COLLEGE:** Teachers College

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This study examined the nature and extent of partnerships between public high schools, higher education, and local industry in the geographic region known as the “Rust Belt” and how those partnerships served for the betterment of the local community and social mobility for students enrolled in College and Career Readiness (CCR) curricula. This study adds to a body of literature that indicates that partnerships are needed for community revitalization and for success of CCR curriculum (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, & Pittenger, 2014; Thomson, 2002 & 2005). The research design utilized was a mixed-methods exploratory design with qualitative interviews conducted, coded, and analyzed prior to creating quantitative research questions. A survey was emailed to 5,019 public high school principals and career center directors throughout the region known as the Rust Belt (Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York). After data cleaning, there were (n=435) valid responses for a response rate of 9.1%. Findings in the qualitative indicated that students, schools, and Rust Belt communities benefit from the partnerships but face several obstacles - financial resources and transportation creating the largest barriers. The quantitative portion of this study revealed that partnerships are occurring, barriers of transportation and a lack of financial resources for both students and schools are present throughout the region, communities are benefitting, and Neoliberal Educational Policies (NEP) are creating obstacles to partnering. This study concludes that Rust

Belt students, schools, communities, industry, and higher education benefit from partnerships; however, as reported by participants, the benefits due to barriers and NEP have created unequal partnerships in which higher education benefits the most while contributing the least in the Rust Belt.