Capitalizing on **Small Worlds**: A Network Intervention to Narrow the Communication Gap Between **Researchers** and **Public School Educators**

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Research **Aims**

- Educators in Michigan often can’t access research. There is a **research-practice gap!**
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- Aim is to understand how brokers connect educators and researchers through social networks.

- Findings will be used to develop a network-based intervention to improve the research-practice gap.
Data Collection

We asked 600 principals & superintendents:

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Then we asked the brokers they named:

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We repeated that for up to 12 waves and talked to 382 administrators & 472 brokers.
Key Research Questions

- What do successful network chains look like? How long are they?
- What do unsuccessful network chains look like?
- What might a network-based intervention look like?
Superintendents
Principals
Brokers
Superintendents
Principals
Brokers

This is an education researcher.
He was reached by:
11 superintendents & 32 principals

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IN AN AVERAGE OF 5.4 STEPS

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Successful Chains
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- Some educators can reach researchers through just one broker
Successful Chains

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- But other educators can only reach researchers through multiple person and organizational brokers
Successful Chains

- Some brokers serve as funnels, channeling several educators toward sources of research

“Networking has a lot to do with that. Coming out of a doctoral program, I have lots of contacts on campus. I also attend professional development as often as I can. Connecting with our ISD, those are some of the important things”

– Superintendent
I belong to a professional association, they publish a journal. Then I attend meetings and **conferences** where research is shared and look online. That's kinda tricky because the most reliable research articles are not readily available.

— Intermediate School Dist. Staff
“When I am talking to folks from different districts around the state... [my role isn't] to necessarily endorse programs... but giving people places to go and look for their own to make those decisions”

– MI Dept. of Ed. Consultant
"If you said to me, what do I care about more than anything? It’s things geared toward practitioners”

– Professor
Superintendents
Principals
Brokers

Dead End

Echo Chamber
Unsuccessful Chains

Dead End

Some sources of information are dead ends.

“Nothing really jumps to mind when I think about research in education. I wasn’t able to find one place that, you know...it would be nice if there was a website or a place that you could go like hey these are effective programs” – Counselor
Unsuccessful Chains

Echo Chamber

- Some sources of information are *echo chambers*.

- “*We share* the information and the programs that we’re using at our own schools *with each other*...[we’re] not always connected to what’s really going on in the outside world” – *Counselor*

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Daly & Finnigan, 2014; Jabbar et al. (2014); Z. Neal et al (2015); Scott et al. (2014)
Summary of Results

Successful

36% successfully reach a researcher (Mean = 4.4 steps; Max = 10 steps)
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Dead End

15% eventually reach an information dead end
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No Source

30% have no source to inform their decisions
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No Source

- 30% have no source to inform their decisions

The majority of educators (64%) did not reach a researcher
So, how do we intervene?
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Strengthen educators’ networks

- Expand existing network
- Build new ties to key broker types
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**Strengthen educators’ networks**
- Expand existing network
- Build new ties to key broker types

**Search more efficiently**
- Increase awareness of existing sources
- Encourage seeking information from different sources
Thank you!

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Questions?
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