

Nine Elements of Effective School Community Partnerships to Address Student Mental Health, Physical Health, and Overall Wellness

In order to have the most positive impact on the academic and wellness outcomes of students, it is imperative that schools and communities work together through a collaborative and comprehensive approach. Community partners can help schools prepare students for college, career, and citizenship by offering additional opportunities, supports, and enrichment for young people. Strong school–community partnerships are essential for a world-class, 21st century education, and more and more communities across the country are creating such partnerships—from Oakland, CA, to Evansville, IN, to Hartford, CT. The Coalition for Community Schools and the National Association of School Psychologists outline nine key elements necessary for creating and sustaining effective partnerships to improve student mental health, physical health, and overall wellness.

- 1. A leadership team comprised of school and community stakeholders.** It is critical to engage the school principal, specialized instructional support personnel, parents, families, students, and community leaders in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of school–community partnerships.
- 2. Assets and needs assessment to address student health and wellness, and a framework for results.** Community partnerships should enhance existing school-based service delivery models and help fill in the resource and service gaps based on the needs of the school. Schools and community partners should then mutually establish a framework for results with specific short- and long-term goals based on the needs identified in the assessment.
- 3. A designated person located at the school to lead the coordination of school–community partnerships.** Coordinators help maintain partnerships with community agencies and facilitate effective communication and collaboration among the leadership team, specialized instructional support personnel, service providers, school personnel, parents, families, and members of the community.
- 4. Clear expectations and shared accountability for the school and community partners.** Delineation of roles and responsibilities for school personnel and community providers enhances efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery while ensuring that the needs of the school are being met.
- 5. High-quality health and wellness services that leverage school and community resources.** Specialized instructional support personnel and community service providers each have knowledge and skills critical to improving student and school outcomes. Leveraging the resources already available in the school and community settings improves effectiveness of school–community partnerships.
- 6. Ongoing comprehensive professional development for all school leaders, staff, and community partners.** Continuous, high-quality professional development is important to ensure effective partnerships. Regular meetings with all stakeholders participating (school staff and community partners) should occur to ensure that they continue to build relationships and trust, develop a common vocabulary, and learn the same content and best practices around school–community partnerships.

7. **A detailed plan for long-term sustainability.** Successful partnerships plan for sustainability from the beginning. Develop a plan to maintain your community partnerships across multiple school and fiscal years. Try to create a diversified funding stream to support service delivery work from multiple funders.
8. **Regular evaluation of effectiveness through a variety of measures.** Partners are chosen based on data that highlight their fit with the current needs of the school and community. It is equally important that appropriate data are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership.
9. **Communication plan to share progress and challenges.** It is important to share the successes and challenges of each school–community partnership to highlight what is working and ways to overcome challenges to educate others hoping to improve school community partnerships.

Foreword

As you reflect on this guide and share it with your peers, we hope that you will use these elements as a means to chart your course in developing strong school–community partnerships. Keep in mind, however, that every school and community is different, and you should adapt these recommendations and elements to the unique context of your students, families, and community. In this way, we hope that you will build upon the significant school and community assets you already possess and identify those gaps in health and wellness services that community partnerships can supplement or fill. As long as you meaningfully engage and include the relevant stakeholders we have outlined, you will find that you will have many people willing and ready to work together and help make your school–community partnerships a success.

Effective partnerships take dedication and teamwork, and the writing of this paper did as well. We should like to acknowledge Eric Rossen, Kathy Cowan, Barry Barbarasch, Laurie Klose, Martin Blank, and Shama Jamal for their valuable contributions to this document.

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INTRODUCTION

Young people come to school with more than a lunch box and a backpack. Many students, especially those living in poverty, experience daily stressors including exposure to violence, inadequate nutrition and medical care, or feeling unsafe in their school or community. These barriers to learning often impede a student's classroom engagement and motivation, leading to academic difficulties.

Students must have access to a range of supports and opportunities to enhance their learning and development, offered collaboratively through their school and community. Services to address student mental health, physical health, and overall wellness must be viewed as fundamental to academic success. Increasing access to specialized instructional support services and personnel, combined with effective partnerships with community agencies can help students reach their fullest potential (e.g., Bruns, Walrath, Glass-Siegel, & Weist, 2004; Durlak & Dupree, 2008; Rollison et. al, 2013).

Schools offer a range of prevention and intervention services to promote student health and wellness; however, there are often times when the needs of the students and community are greater than the schools' capacity to meet those needs. School–community partnerships can help increase the number of students who receive the comprehensive services they need, while improving the health of the community at large. However, schools and community partners must commit to work together in an intentional and strategic way, and their actions must complement and enhance the services already in place in the school building. *The challenge and opportunity is for schools and community agencies to work together strategically toward common outcomes. This guide offers a blueprint for these successful partnerships.*

Key Definitions

For the purposes of this paper, wellness is defined in the following way:

- *Physical wellness* is maintaining proper nutrition, hygiene, rest, and exercise habits, and learning how to maintain a healthy lifestyle.
- *Emotional/mental wellness* is being able to recognize, accept, and effectively cope with a variety of emotions in developmentally appropriate ways.
- *Social wellness* is the ability to relate to various individuals and groups and to maintain healthy relationships.

Community school—A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and community agencies to help provide students access to the full range of services and opportunities they need to thrive. The specific services offered and the model in which they are delivered vary based on the needs of the individual school and community. Many schools have effective school–community partnerships without calling themselves community schools.

Community school coordinator—This person organizes and manages the various community partnerships with the school. The coordinator works closely with the principal and others on the school leadership team to identify the needs of the students and families, and then recruits and maintains community partnerships aligned with those wants and needs. A resource coordinator can be an employee of the school system or of a community agency.

The role of professionals already employed by schools to address student health and wellness should be carefully considered when exploring potential community partners. These professionals, collectively referred to as *specialized instructional support personnel* (SISP) are key players in the integration and delivery of academic and wellness services. SISP provide and support school-based prevention and intervention services to address barriers to educational success, ensure positive conditions for learning, help all students achieve academically, and ultimately become productive citizens.

SISP work with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community partners to ensure that all students are successful in school. While SISP represent a large contingent of support personnel, this guide focuses specifically on school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors, and school nurses. These professionals have specialized training in meeting the mental health, physical health, and overall wellness needs of young people in school. It is imperative that any school–community partnerships created to address student wellness involve these professionals. Roles of specialized instructional support personnel in school–community partnerships could include:

- Consultation with teachers and staff identifying students in need of support
- Development and implementation of school-wide multitiered systems of support that include prevention, early identification/screening, progress monitoring, and follow-up
- Direct individual and group services to students in need of additional support
- Coordination with the lead agency to ensure that resources are maximized and targeted toward the students most in need and that students and families have access to the appropriate services
- Participation as a member of the leadership team facilitating the school–community partnership
- Consultation with administrators on integrating school and community systems

School–community partnerships can help meet the needs of students and their families. All students should be eligible to access services made available through school–community partnerships, with priority given to those most in need. In all cases, community partners should consult and collaborate with school staff to ensure that their services are appropriate and complementary to the academic, social–emotional, and developmental focus areas of the school. This is especially important when working with students with disabilities, to ensure these students receive services that are aligned with the goals and objectives outlined in their Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) or 504 plans, and not redundant with existing services provided.

NINE ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE SCHOOL–COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The school and the community environment each offer a wealth of opportunities and supports for students and families. Yet, when the school and community form a collaborative partnership, they can collectively provide a wider range of services than either could on their own. However, schools and community-based organizations often operate very differently; as more schools and communities are forming partnerships to meet the needs of students and families, a set of guiding elements is needed to help ensure that all partnerships are effective. The following list highlights essential elements of school–community partnerships. These elements can be helpful at any stage of a school–community partnership and can help guide your efforts if you are just launching a partnership, refining existing partnerships, or scaling up in a

community. Additional practical tools, resources, and tips to help you implement these elements are included in the appendix of this guide.

1. A Leadership Team Comprised of School and Community Stakeholders

A leadership team at the school level should include (but not be limited to) teachers (general and special education), the principal, the site coordinator, parents/families, students, specialized instructional support personnel (SISP), other school-employed staff, and community partners working with the school. The school-site leadership team guides the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the partnership(s) to maximize effectiveness and sustainability. By forming a leadership team, not only do you engage in best practices to ensure that partnerships will be truly collaborative endeavors between the school and community, but you are well-positioned to enhance, rather than duplicate, services already available at the school.

In districts where multiple community partners work with schools, a system-level leadership team is recommended to support the partnerships at the district level. Stakeholders on this team can include nonprofits and community-based organizations, school districts, unions, philanthropies and businesses, faith-based groups, institutions of higher education, and elected officials. This team supports school-site partnerships by setting the vision at the system level for student outcomes through these partnerships, advocating for and setting supportive policies, and guiding alignment of relevant system-level resources. See the Coalition’s graphic, “[A Collaborative Leadership Structure for Community Schools](#),” in the Appendix for a visual of these different structures.

2. Assets and Needs Assessment to Address Student Health and Wellness, and a Framework for Results

It is important for the leadership team to conduct an assets and needs assessment both in the beginning stages of forming a community–school partnership and throughout an existing partnership. This assessment examines what current resources—including people, equipment, and space—are available in the school to address student health and wellness, and where service delivery gaps exist. Data that could be useful to examine include: student achievement and test scores, graduation rates, attendance and chronic absenteeism, discipline referrals, parent and family engagement, school climate and safety, student engagement, bullying behaviors, suspensions and expulsions, community health indicators, and any significant disparities in these areas among subgroups of students. Examples of assets and needs assessments are located in the Appendix of this document. Results of this assessment identify areas of need that community partners could help address, and they can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of existing partnerships.

Boost! is a collaboration between the city of New Haven, CT, the school district, and United Way that draws on an extensive network of resources to meet the needs of the students and community. Each school has a Boost! Coordinator who guides a team of key stakeholders through the asset and needs assessment focusing on the following domains: Physical Health and Wellness; Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health; Student Engagement; and Family Engagement. Health and wellness data includes attendance records, emotional and behavioral health statistics, school climate survey responses, and data from the school nurse and physical education department. Boost! maintains a community-wide New Haven Youth Map, which allows parents, educators, and other stakeholders to search for youth services, programs, and opportunities across the city by location, type of service/activity, or ages eligible. New Haven is a great example of bringing asset-mapping to a community level, and something to explore as an expansion of school-level community partnerships.

Assessing Partner Fit

When first establishing a school–community partnership, it will be important to use the data from a needs assessment to assess the fit of potential community partners. Strong candidates for community partners should be able to clearly articulate how they can enhance existing services and contribute to the school improvement plan; additional, mutually agreed upon goals around health and wellness; and overall student success.

For example, if increased student engagement is an identified need, there may be a number of potential community partners that can help the school meet this goal. A school should only choose partners that are necessary and fit with the needs and desires of students. For those schools that already have community partnerships in place, the school and its partners should continuously assess their relationship and impact, since priorities of the school and/or community agency may change. Regularly assessing each community partnership facilitates a mutually beneficial relationship and helps ensure that the work of community partners contributes to the school’s goals in a meaningful way.

Developing a Framework for Results

Taking the time to conduct a comprehensive examination of current assets and needs helps to maximize current resources, while being responsive to the needs of the school and community. Then, the school leadership team, with input from relevant stakeholders, should develop a comprehensive framework with specific, mutually agreed upon results based on the assets and needs assessment. This framework should weave together existing school-based services and resources (including personnel), and resources needed from community partners. For example, if student obesity and exposure to trauma are identified as two critical areas to address, the school leadership team should develop short and long-term goals to measure expected progress. In all cases, it is important to take a comprehensive view of any area of need the school and community wish to address.

The Coalition for Community Schools offers a robust [Results Framework](#), which offers specific indicators around student learning and well-being that school and community partners could track. The framework also offers short- and long-term results that are essential for student success, and that could serve as goals for school–community partnerships regardless of the maturity of the partnerships:

Short Term Results

- Children are ready to enter school
- Students attend school consistently
- Students are actively involved in learning and in their community
- Families are increasingly involved in their children’s education
- Schools are engaged with families and communities

Long Term Results

- Students succeed academically
- Students are healthy—physically, socially, and emotionally
- Students live and learn in safe, supportive, and stable environments
- Communities are desirable places to live

[A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#) (Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen, and Pollitt, 2013) outlines a framework of best practices for improving school safety, school climate, and mental health outcomes for children and youth. These best practices include effective collaboration with community mental health partners, and have been endorsed by the Coalition for Community Schools:

- Fully integrate mental and behavioral health services with instruction and school management via multidisciplinary collaboration.
- Implement multitiered systems of support (MTSS) that encompass prevention, wellness promotion, interventions that increased based on student need, and close school–community collaboration.
- Improve access to school-based mental health supports and school employed mental health professionals who can help integrate community supports into existing school initiatives.
- Improve school climate by employing positive discipline strategies and building trusting relationships between the school staff, students, families, and the community.

Similarly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in collaboration with ASCD and other health, public health, and education experts, recently developed the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model to better align education with overall student wellness.

WSCC includes eight key components that can be addressed and enhanced by effective school community partnerships:

- health education;
- physical education;
- health services;
- nutrition services;
- counseling, psychological, and social services;
- healthy and safe school environments;
- health promotion for staff; and
- family/community involvement.

These elements contribute to a student’s overall physical/emotional/mental wellness, and academic achievement.

Things to Consider When Choosing a Coordinator:

- Critical areas of need
- Current responsibilities of school staff/community partner(s)
- Capacity of school to manage partnership(s)
- Complexity of resources needed
- Logistical barriers associated with non-school employed personnel delivering services in a school setting (e.g., background checks, other district policy)

3. A Person Located at the School to Lead the Coordination of School and Community Partnerships

It is important for schools, in collaboration with community partners, to designate someone to coordinate the school–community partnerships. In many cases, teachers, SISPs, and principals simply do not have the time to manage these partnerships while fulfilling their responsibilities to students, families, and staff. Coordinators recruit and maintain community partnerships; facilitate communication among the leadership team, community partners, school personnel, families and other stakeholders; and integrate partners into the culture of the school. Effective coordinators ensure that all stakeholders are collaborating on a regular basis and that information is readily shared.

Coordinators may be hired by the school or a community partner to begin work at the school, or they can be selected from existing staff within the school to transition to the role full-time. Coordinators have a variety of backgrounds and often have experience working with community-based organizations and/or schools.

Assigning a coordinator increases efficiency, quality, and alignment of school–community partnerships. Studies point to the cost-effectiveness of a coordinator, citing that districts earn back three or more dollars through partnership resources for every one dollar invested in a coordinator’s salary (from the [Coalition for Community Schools Financing Guide, located in the Appendix](#)).

In choosing a coordinator either from within the school or from a community partner, there are factors to consider for either of these options: A coordinator chosen from within the school knows the school, students, and staff well, and is already at the school full-time, but may not be able to devote sufficient time to the coordinating role on top of his/her existing responsibilities. Similarly, he/she may not have experience working with community partners and may not be aware of available community resources.

A coordinator employed by a community partner may be able to work full-time at the school, have community agency experience and knowledge of community resources. However, he/she will have to learn about the students, staff, and culture of the school and best practices in school-based service delivery systems, and will need to invest time in forging strong relationships with school staff. The decision regarding the most appropriate resource coordinator should be based on the unique context of the school, results of the needs assessment, and consideration of available human and financial resources. In either case, significant training, orientation, relationship-building, and ongoing collaborative professional development is required to ensure the school has the most effective coordinator possible.

It is important to know that schools and communities operate under different privacy laws. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) provides parents with some rights over their child’s educational records as well as some control over the disclosure of information in those records. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) privacy rule regulates the use and disclosure of “Private Health Information” which includes almost any part of a person’s medical record. It is extremely important to maintain privacy of student records, but these two laws have often been cited as a barrier to information sharing among school professionals providing mental and behavioral health services with professionals employed by community agencies who may also be working with the same students and families. It is best to consult with your school or district’s attorney for legal advice regarding the role of FERPA and HIPAA in your school community partnership. However, joint guidance on the use of FERPA and HIPAA from the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education can be found [here](#).

4. Clear Expectations and Shared Accountability for the School and Community Partners

Clear expectations must be set regarding the roles and responsibilities for school and community partners. It is important to examine existing caseloads of school employed staff to make sound decisions on whether school-employed staff need assistance from community partners. School staff and community partners should learn one another's various roles and responsibilities so that they can communicate effectively about their services and any students they may share.

The leadership of the principal is critical in helping forge collaborative relationships among all partners and holding them accountable to the goals of the school. It is important to remember, and the principal must reinforce, that the role of the community partner is to expand students' access to necessary opportunities and supports and not to supplant or replace school employed staff or services. The community partner should enhance existing services and help the school better meet the diverse needs of students, families, and the community. Likewise, school staff must commit to communicate regularly with community partners so that both parties share the same knowledge and information about the students they are serving.

Equally important is a shared accountability system among the school and community partners that is grounded in a shared set of results. One way to ensure this is to incorporate relevant goals of the school improvement plan into the objectives of each community partnership. For example, if two of the school's goals around school climate are to improve attendance and reduce discipline rates, the community partners whose programming relates to school climate should articulate how their programs will contribute to these objectives and which of their goals are in line with those of the school. Progress towards these goals should be evaluated periodically and considered when evaluating the effectiveness of the partnership and whether it should be continued.

In Washington State, a school created a "cultural ambassador program." Facilitated by the principal, both school-employed and community-employed mental health providers received training regarding each other's confidentiality and reporting requirements. Additionally, community mental health providers received coaching from the school staff to help them learn to navigate the school system. As a result, these professionals better understood each other's systems and were able to work together more effectively to serve students and families.

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) in Multnomah County, OR operates more than 70 community schools and has [extensive resources](#) on partnerships agreements and memoranda of understanding. Their collaboration agreement, for example, requires the principal to agree to "champion and provide significant leadership" in:

- Creating a community school that is a true collaboration, comprised of quality partnerships between the school and community resources
- Using SUN community school strategies to support school-day academics
- Integrating SUN community schools into the school vision and school improvement (or other) plan; and "Schedule time at an early staff meeting for the SUN community school site manager to introduce themselves, their programs, and the referral process. It is recommended that SUN community school site managers attend staff meetings on a regular basis" (among other agreements).

These provisions help to ensure strong commitment from all parties for meaningful school–community partnerships.

5. Leverage School and Community Resources to Ensure Consistent Access to High-Quality Health and Wellness Services

There are experts both in schools and in the community on health and wellness that you should consult on a regular basis for the best resources. SISP are the experts in school-based mental, wellness, and physical health service delivery. SISP have extensive knowledge of the school system, laws that govern privacy, and effective service delivery systems within the context of learning. These professionals can work with the coordinator to reach out to potential community partners to assess which organizations would be an effective partner with the school, and they can serve as mentors to the community partners to help them navigate the complex system of the school.

Similarly, schools should consider existing community organizations that focus on young people's health and wellness that could provide additional high-quality resources and services to the school. MindPeace in Cincinnati, OH, is a nonprofit that provides and advocates for access to high-quality mental health care for all children. MindPeace partners with 47 schools in Cincinnati to increase access to mental health services for Cincinnati students. MindPeace and Cincinnati Public Schools developed a collaborative model of school-based mental health service delivery that includes community providers and school mental health professionals to ensure consistent practice among schools. They also provide an annual community health profile that includes physical and mental health indicators to inform the school and community partners of the dynamics in the school neighborhood.

Ideally, every school would offer consistent access to school-employed specialized instructional support personnel; however, many schools share a nurse, school psychologist, or school social worker with several schools, or even the entire district. If a school does not have consistent access to these professionals, the district office can consult and coordinate with available district-employed health staff on the development of the school–community partnership. Consulting with these professionals can help ensure that there is no duplication of service delivery so that more students and families have access to the services they need.

Equally important is ensuring that service delivery is aligned with best practices and school district policy. To ensure high-quality service delivery across community and school-employed providers, Boston Public Schools (BPS) developed a Standards of Practice guide. All persons delivering mental and behavioral health services in the schools received district-led training on these standards that included understanding of BPS policies and procedures for crisis intervention, mental health services, and key differences between working as a mental health provider in a school versus in the community. This improved consistency of service delivery, and it helped to enhance the relationships among all stakeholders in the partnership.

6. A Detailed Plan for Long-Term Sustainability

Sustainability for school–community partnerships focuses on both partnership quality and dedicated funding. In planning for financial sustainability, though one grant or funder may help begin partnerships, it is recommended that sustained funding be secured from a variety of sources that leverage a combination of federal, state, and local dollars—both public and private—to maintain the partnerships. Creating a diverse funding stream can improve collaboration across various stakeholders as all work toward the same shared goal. In Cincinnati, coordinators are funded through a combination of funds from the district, Title I federal funds, the local United Way, and a community foundation. In this way, funding for coordinators is not an untenable drain on any one funder. See the Appendix for more resources and examples of how schools and districts have funded school–community partnerships.

Equally important to financial sustainability is human capital and partner sustainability. In many districts across the country, there is a shortage of specialized instructional support personnel and community mental health and wellness providers. In other places, there are qualified people available, but no financial

resources available to create new positions. It is critically important that schools and districts ensure they are using SISP in the most effective manner. Equally important is a commitment, from both the school district and funding partners, toward improving the ratios of SISP working in the schools in conjunction with scaling up school–community partnerships. Some districts, due to tight budgets, have moved to a service delivery model that completely outsources mental and physical wellness services to community agencies with the belief that it will save money. This is not advised, as it can undermine the long-term sustainability and availability of mental health and wellness services to *all* students who need them. Improving ratios of SISP in tandem with funding community providers allows *all* students to access appropriate services, including prevention and early intervention, while also ensuring that students with the most significant needs have access to the intensive services they require.

7. Ongoing Comprehensive Professional Development That Is Aligned for All School Leaders, Staff, and Community Partners

Continuous, high-quality professional development is important to ensure effective school–community partnerships. Professional development should be aligned with the school improvement plan and provided to school staff (including the principal, teachers, and SISP) and to community partners. Regular professional development sessions with all stakeholders participating (school staff and community partners) should occur to ensure that they continue to build relationships and trust, and that they learn the same content, best practices, and data-sharing mechanisms around school–community partnerships.

Topics specifically around student health and wellness could include:

- An understanding of the community’s health indicators, existing organizations that address health and wellness, and the unique services and contributions of each of the health-related community partners.
- An understanding of the differences between school-based and community health laws, and agreement on a common framework between the school and community partners to solve any discrepancies between the two.
- A common language for health and wellness terms, as well as procedures and structures between school staff and community partners.
- Use of data to track the health and mental health indicators and robust discussions to plan for data-sharing, as well as an understanding of HIPPA and FERPA laws.
- How to effectively engage and involve families and community residents in health and wellness issues, as well as offer them services when available.
- Common evaluation framework to measure progress on health and wellness indicators.
- The mutual benefits for school and community that are realized through these partnerships, and how to share best practices for partnerships with other schools and community partners.

The coordinator and SISP should also educate school staff and families on the process for connecting students and families to health services and opportunities offered during and after the school day and during the summer (e.g., clubs, sports teams, summer camps, mentoring) It is important that all stakeholders understand how students and families can be connected to the various resources available to promote student wellness. There should be a school-wide procedure for this process publicly endorsed and upheld by the principal to ensure that everyone understands and follows the procedure.

The Family League of Baltimore (MD) provides funding for community school coordinators working in schools. The funding is a combination of Family League funds and those from the state, city, district, and a community foundation. In this way, the Family League serves as the intermediary organization to Baltimore's 46 community schools. They also offer free and frequent professional development to school staff, resource coordinators, and community partners. This professional development includes workshops, lectures, and on-site coaching. They have also created a performance rubric for coordinators to help them assess their progress and tailor specific professional development accordingly.

8. Regularly Review Effectiveness Through a Variety of Measures

Partnerships are chosen based on data that highlight the current needs of the school and community. It is equally important that appropriate data is used to evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership as indicated in the shared accountability plan or memorandum of understanding agreed upon by the school and community partner(s). There are a number of ways to evaluate the effectiveness of a partnership.

Student/Parent/Teacher/Community/Satisfaction Surveys

It is important that all stakeholders perceive a partnership to be contributing to the overall improvement of the school and community. By periodically surveying the school and community, stakeholders can report in which areas the partnership demonstrates it is successful and in which areas it can improve.

In one school, a midyear survey revealed dissatisfaction with the low level of communication to parents about the various services available at the school and how to access them. Although the students who were receiving services were making progress, the school realized they were not reaching many students and families who could benefit from increased support. These survey results prompted the school to increase communications and engagement with parents about the services available, which then led to extending some services to parents in the evenings and on weekends after learning that many parents were interested in activities at the school, like CPR training and cooking classes. As a result, parents are more involved in the school as they now feel more invested and included.

School-Based Data Systems

Schools keep all kinds of data on students, including attendance, discipline incidents, test scores, and visits to the school nurse, psychologist, and other SISP. However, this data is often reviewed in a standalone manner instead of collectively to better identify the key issues students face. For example, a student may be chronically absent from school (missing 10% or more of the school year) because he experienced a traumatic event in his home life and is not emotionally ready to come to school. Or another student may receive many discipline referrals because she is far below reading level and acts out to hide this challenge. Only by reviewing this data all together for each student can school and community partners deeply understand the supports and opportunities that each student needs and craves.

A school district in Virginia began tracking positive student behavior, student referrals, and service trends after it initiated a partnership to improve student behavior and overall mental health. After a period of 1 year, data showed that the number of students who received mental health services increased by 250%, the number of referrals for aggressive or angry behaviors decreased by 11%, and fewer students reported being involved in physical fights.

Progress Toward Goals of the School Improvement Plan

Community partners should be selected based on specific needs of the school, which are often specified in the school improvement plan. Schools have various ways of assessing progress towards these goals, and contributions of community partners should be included. For example, a goal of one school was to decrease the number of students who met the medical definition of *overweight*. The school increased the number of minutes of physical education provided to students across the district, and it partnered with a local agency that provided nutrition and cooking classes to students and parents. At the end of the year, there was a 10% reduction in the number of students who were overweight as well as an increase in student engagement. Assessment data indicated that it was the combination of increased physical activity and healthier eating that contributed to this progress, reflecting the effect of the school and community partners working together.

9. Share Progress and Challenges

It is incredibly important to take time to celebrate successes, share challenges, and consider ways to improve. Focusing so intensively on improving the lives of the children and families can make these actions seem like low-priority activities. However, these discussions and reflection activities are key to ensuring a cycle of continuous improvement in school–community partnerships. Additionally, it is critical to share success stories with district leadership who have vested interest in improved student outcomes, as well as with current and potential funders who want to know they are investing in something that really works. In sharing progress, it is also helpful to note the work that can only grow with more funding, so that current and potential funders know where they might invest. Sharing challenges is not an act of airing dirty laundry, but rather means taking an opportunity to share potential areas for more collaboration (whether it is in the form of funding, time, or public support) from other stakeholders. Sharing your challenges can provide other districts facing similar difficulties with guidance about what works and what doesn't. All partners can benefit from learning of the successes and the challenges that others have faced in creating effective partnerships. The United Way of the Bay Area in California has published key documents that demonstrate the irrefutable positive impact of school–community partnerships, from an [infographic](#) to a longer [report](#) that combines statistics with case studies of students and families who benefit from school–community partnerships. A [report](#) on Baltimore's community schools initiative similarly found significant gains in family engagement compared to non community schools, as well as improved attendance and reduced chronic absence in schools operating as community schools for 5 years.

MOVING FORWARD

Creating effective school–community partnerships takes time, commitment, willingness, and trust to share both successes and challenges along the way. Critical to this mission is strong advocacy for the components of effective school–community partnerships in local, state, and federal policy and the funding required to sustain them. Whether seeking to begin a partnership or sustain and grow effective ones, strong advocacy is essential, including:

- Educating stakeholders on the important relationship between mental and physical wellness and student achievement,
- Highlighting how effective school–community partnerships that utilize SISP improve outcomes for all students,
- Highlighting the return on investment to schools and districts in hiring a coordinator to manage school–community partnerships, and
- Educating stakeholders on the core resources needed in schools—including SISP—on which to build strong school–community partnerships to enhance the effects of these resources.

APPENDIX

Supportive Models and Frameworks for Health Partnerships

[A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#) (From the National Association of School Psychologists, American School Counselor Association, School Social Work Association of America, National Association of School Resource Officers, NAESP, NASSP)

ASCD: [Whole School, Whole Child, Whole Community](#)

The Community School Strategy:

- [What is a community school?](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions About Community Schools](#)
- Coalition for Community Schools: Rationale and Results Framework

Community School Models Across the Country

Below are links to two model community schools.

Cincinnati Community Learning Centers

From the [Cincinnati Public Schools website](#):

Cincinnati Public Schools has created campuses that strengthen this link between schools and communities. These schools, known as Community Learning Centers (CLC), serve as hubs for community services, providing a system of integrated partnerships that promote academic excellence and offer recreational, educational, social, health, civic, and cultural opportunities for students, families and the community. Over the past 10 years, this model has drawn national attention for successfully engaging community partnerships in school buildings.

CLCs offer health services, counseling, after-school programs, nutrition classes, parent and family engagement programs, early childhood education, career and college access services, youth development activities, mentoring, and arts programming.

A CPS Board of Education policy states that all district school buildings will serve as Community Learning Centers. The board also developed written guidelines for the establishment of partnerships.

[Coalition for Community Schools' Case Study on Cincinnati, OH, Community Learning Centers](#)

[Coalition for Community Schools Awards Profile of Cincinnati, OH, Community Learning Centers \(2013\)](#)

New Haven, CT: Boost!

Boost! is a partnership between United Way of Greater New Haven, New Haven Public Schools, and the City of New Haven. The initiative currently serves 7,234 Boost! students in 16 schools. Boost! resources include:

Coalition for Community Schools blog: [New Haven: Boosting Afterschool with Partners and Data to Get Results](#)

[Boost! Request for Information Process from Community Organizations and Groups](#)

Tools and Resources

[School Based Mental Health Services and School Psychologists](#)

[School Psychologists: Partners in Healthcare](#)

School Nurses: Supporting Education, Advancing Student Health

Note: Many of the following resources come from the Coalition for Community Schools' [How to Start a Community School toolkit](#). For those of you looking to scale up school–community partnerships, please see the [Coalition's Scaling Up Guide](#).

Examples of Assets/Needs Assessments

- [Coalition for Community Schools Capacity and Needs Assessments](#) This offers a number of sample assessments.
- [Community Needs Assessment: Overview](#) This resource, from the Federation for Community Schools, includes student, teacher, and parent assessments and ideas for conducting a community needs assessment.
- [Strengthening Partnerships: Community School Checklist](#) This tool contains a series of checklists to assist school and community leaders in creating and/or strengthening community–school partnerships.
- [Guidelines for Needs Assessment Interview](#). Fairfax County Public Schools (VA) created a set of guidelines to facilitate examination and education about the mental health services available by school psychologists, school counselors, and school social workers.
- [ASCD School Improvement Tool \(online\)](#). This online needs assessment survey allows various stakeholders take the survey, and the website will generate a report. This tool requires development of a free login and profile.
- [Resource Mapping and Management to Address Barriers to Learning: An Intervention for Systemic Change](#). The UCLA Center for Mental Health in the Schools developed this comprehensive overview of resource mapping.

Building a School Site Leadership Team and Hiring a Coordinator

- [Building a Leadership Team](#)
- [Organizing your advisory committee](#) (from SUN Schools, Multnomah County, OR)
- [Working with an advisory committee](#) (from SUN Schools, Multnomah County, OR)
- [A Collaborative Leadership Structure for Community Schools](#)
- Hiring a Coordinator: Sample Job Descriptions
 - [Job Description: San Francisco, CA](#)
 - [Job Description: Chicago, IL](#)
 - [Coordinators Evaluation Form: Redmond, WA](#)

Research and Evaluation for Continuous Improvement

The [Community Schools Evaluation Toolkit](#) is designed to help community schools evaluate their efforts so that they learn from their successes, identify current challenges, and plan future efforts accordingly. It provides a step-by-step process for planning and conducting an evaluation at your community school site(s).

Evaluating the Operations of Your Community School

The tools that helped you assess the readiness of your school to become a community school can help you assess the progress of the operations of your community school.

- [Evaluate Operations of Your Community School Toolkit](#)
- [Partnership Compliance Checklist](#) (Portland, OR)

Tracking Impact on Students, Families, and Community

- [Results and Corresponding Indicators](#). This chart helps explain how processes of community schools fit together for results for children, families, and communities and the short and long term indicators to measure those results.
- [Data Collection Plan for Demo School](#)

Data Collection Surveys

For each of the short and long term indicators you set, use the surveys to evaluate your progress.

- [Surveys for Short Term Results](#)
- [Surveys for Long Term Results](#)

For examples, see [Hartford Community Schools Evaluation \(2009–2011\)](#) and [Evidence of Progress Chart](#) (Hartford, CT), and see [Templates for Reports and Annual Plans](#) (Portland, OR).

Funding Opportunities and Planning for Sustainability

- [Coalition for Community Schools Financing Guide](#)
- [Making the Case: Supporting, Expanding, and Promoting Access to Student Health Services Through Innovative Health Financing Models](#)

Financing your School–Community Partnerships: Management of Funding

- Use the [Funding Matrix Data Collection Tool](#) to keep track of the source of money for each program in your school.
- Use this information to fill out the [Funding Matrix Strengths and Areas of Growth](#) to analyze which program areas need to be addressed.

Federal Funding Opportunities

On December 10, President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced No Child Left Behind as our main federal education law. The law will take effect in the 2017–2018 school year. While some federal funding structures remain the same, it consolidated several supportive programs for student health and wellness in Title IV into a large block grant, offering districts

the opportunity to rethink how they allocate these funds for student health and wellness. Below are descriptions of various federal programs that can be used to support student health and wellness, including the new Title IV block grant, Student Success and Academic Enrichment grant.

Title I, Elementary and Secondary Education Act. As the largest source of federal funding for K–12 students authorized at about \$15 billion and provided by formula, Title I can be used to support the work of a community–school partnership. Title I funds can be used to fund a coordinator, conduct a needs assessment, coordinate and integrate services, provide professional development, and implement school-wide programs that improve conditions for learning.

Title IV, Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grant. This grant, authorized at \$1.6 billion, comes from Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act and is titled “21st Century Schools.” This funding can be used to hire or designate a coordinator. States and districts receive this as formula funding. Any district that receives at least \$30,000 must designate at least 20% of the funds toward supporting well-rounded students and another 20% toward supporting safe and healthy students. The community school coordinator is explicitly referenced as an allowable use of funds in the bucket of supporting safe and healthy students.

21st Century Community Learning Centers. This \$1 billion federal grant commonly goes to after-school and now extended learning opportunities programming and supports the community school strategy. Many places use these funds to support community schools funding. This funding can be used to support community partners who focus on student health and wellness.

Full Service Community Schools. Districts, institutions of higher education, and community-based organizations can apply to this competitive grant to implement community schools. The grant awards approximately \$500,000 per year over 5 years. The new Every Student Succeeds Act calls on Congress to award at least 10 grants each year. This is included in Title IV under the program “Community Support for School Success.”

Children’s Health Insurance Program. In some states, school-based or school-linked health centers are allowed to bill Medicaid/Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) for reimbursement of medical services provided to eligible students.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The CDC is dedicated to protecting health and promoting quality of life through the control and prevention of injuries, disease, and disabilities. CDC provides competitive funding for:

- State health and education departments so they can work together to help build the capacity of school districts to implement a coordinated approach to school health. All states and territories that meet certain criteria can apply for funding from CDC every 5 years.
- National nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to build the capacity of schools to address specified health-risk behaviors and conditions. All NGOs that meet certain criteria can apply for funding from CDC every 5 years.

Food and Nutrition Service for “After School Snacks.” Many current 21st CCLC programs are eligible to receive funds through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service for “After-School Snacks” and in some cases to provide supper to young children.

Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. This act supports the coordination of the education of homeless children and youth in each state and the gathering of data regarding barriers they must overcome to attend school.

In addition to these federal funding opportunities, you should check state and local funding options, as well as corporate and philanthropic opportunities.

Leveraging Private and Public Funding

- [Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success](#). This report from the Coalition for Community Schools examines how community schools finance their work.
- [Improving Access to Children’s Mental Health Care: Lesson From a Study of 11 States](#).

Examples of leveraging public and private funding:

- Cincinnati Community Learning Centers got the nation’s first school-based vision clinic in Oyer K–12 School thanks to a nonprofit called OneSight that is reimbursed partially through Medicaid for its expenses, and it operates at no cost to the school.
- In the Kent School Services Network of schools in Grand Rapids, MI, the community school coordinator is funded by the city’s department of human services, not education. In this way, education funds are not diverted to pay for this important position to help coordinate school–community partnerships.
- Cincinnati has the first in-school dental clinic in the state of Ohio. The self-sustaining facility, operated by the Cincinnati Health Department and the Cincinnati Dental Society’s Oral Health Foundation, operates with three dental chairs and is scaling up to serve 1,300 children from Oyer School and the surrounding community.
- School and community partners can also come together to create helpful resources for the school and community for high-quality health and wellness services. For example, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS), MindPeace (a Cincinnati nonprofit provider focused on mental health), the Hamilton County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board, and community mental health providers that are members of a school-based mental health network came together to produce tools posted on the MindPeace website, including “[Community Resources for school based mental health teams](#)” and “[CPS School based mental health model](#).”
- Hartford, CT, community schools offer a good case study of diverse funding at a system level. On average, each school is funded by the following percentages: 34% Hartford Foundation, 18% district funds, 14% state funds, 10% the United Way of central and northeastern CT, and the rest a combination of other sources.

For other examples, please reference the Coalition’s [Financing Guide](#).

Research Supporting Strong School–Community Partnerships and Community Schools

- [Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers](#). This paper summarizes the results of a comprehensive examination by Child Trends of the research and evidence base for integrated student supports, as well as its potential to help a range of disadvantaged, marginalized, or struggling students.
- [Coalition for Community Schools Research Brief, 2014](#)
- Coalition for Community Schools: [Examples of community school systems and national models of community schools that are achieving results for students, families, and communities](#).

Sharing Your Successes and Challenges

These documents are examples of ways that communities have highlighted the achievements and challenges of school–community partnerships.

United Way of the Bay Area: This [infographic](#) from a longer [report](#) combines statistics with case studies of students and families who benefit from school–community partnerships.

Family League of Baltimore: A [report](#) on Baltimore’s community schools initiative found significant gains in family engagement compared to noncommunity schools, as well as improved attendance and reduced chronic absence in schools operating as community schools for 5 years. The Family League has also created a colorful [infographic](#) that illustrates their vision for community schools. [Oakland Unified School District](#) and the [United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley](#) have done the same.