

# ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## DEFINING PARTNERSHIPS

Before cultivating or committing to a partnership with a community-based entity, **district and school leaders must first understand the nature of partnerships—as well as the different forms partnerships can take—relative to educational contexts.**<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, an educational partnership between a given district or school and a community-based entity (e.g., business, nonprofit organization, government agency) is when these two (or more) parties decide to collaborate to support students, staff, or families at the partnering educational institution. Essentially, partnerships between districts, schools, and community organizations involve a mutual commitment of resources, services, and collaborative efforts to support a predefined need or goal, usually to the benefit of all involved parties.<sup>2</sup>

In considering how they wish to work with community partners, district and school leaders will need to reflect on what gaps exist in their organizational operations (e.g., academic, mental health, social supports) that would be beneficial to fill for their students, families, and staff members.<sup>4</sup> District and school leaders should, therefore, consider how "[c]ommunity partners can help schools prepare students for college, career, and citizenship by offering additional opportunities, supports, and enrichment for young people."<sup>5</sup> Doing so will help them articulate the types of partnerships they seek with community-based organizations and gauge the specific benefits and services they seek to gain from and can provide to partnering organizations.<sup>6</sup> Unlike a philanthropical or commercial relationship, a successful partnership must consider mutual exchange of value.<sup>7</sup>

## Characteristics of Strong School-Community Partnerships

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
 <b>Focus on Students</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners approach their work with a commitment to putting students' needs first.
 <b>Alignment of Vision and Goals</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners agree upon common goals and establish shared expectations for the functioning of their partnership. Typically, these partnerships will aim to support a district's or school's work on previously outlined strategic priorities.
 <b>Leveraging of Strengths</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners identify their respective strengths and weaknesses, based on past experience and existing evidence, to provide a continuum of services and supports to students, staff, and families while minimizing duplicative efforts.
 <b>Leadership and Oversight</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners compose common memos of understanding and service agreements. They also outline a clear framework for overseeing their partnership, whether by designating individual personnel or forming a committee to guide the partnership.
 <b>Open Communication</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners build and maintain two-way communication channels and emphasize mutual trust, transparency, and a commitment to high-quality programs as key aspects of their collaboration.
 <b>Sustained Duration</b>	Districts, schools, and their partners commit to multi-year partnerships to support continuity of programming and guide sustained progress toward partnership goals.

Source: National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, Aspen Institute<sup>3</sup>

## Benefits of School-Community Partnerships



### STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Partnerships can benefit students and families by:

- Providing continuity of services across the day and year, easing school transitions and promoting improved attendance at school and in extracurricular programs;
- Facilitating access to a range of learning opportunities and developmental supports, providing opportunities for students and teachers alike to experiment with new approaches to teaching and learning;
- Facilitating information sharing about specific students to best support individual learning; and
- Providing family members with alternative entry points into the school day to support students' learning.



### DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

Partnerships can benefit districts and schools by:

- Complementing the academic curriculum with a wider range of services and activities, particularly enrichment and arts activities that may not typically be available during the school day;
- Supporting transitions across school years;
- Reinforcing concepts taught in school and exposing teachers to new pedagogies and resources;
- Improving school culture and community image through exhibitions and performances that help "shine the light" on students whose talents may not be apparent in the classroom; and
- Increasing access to personnel and resources to improve in-school learning and teaching practices.



### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Partnerships can benefit community partners by:

- Helping partners gain access to and recruit groups of students most in need of their support and services;
- Improving program quality and staff engagement, particularly when there is crossover between school and community organization staff;
- Fostering better alignment of school-based and community programming to support a shared vision for learning, one which aligns curriculum to support state and local standards; and
- Maximizing resource use such as facilities, staff, data, and curriculum.

Source: The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project<sup>8</sup>

## IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Districts and schools "cannot succeed as independent 'islands' within their communities," requiring them to seek support from students' families and community-based businesses, agencies, and organizations to help achieve outlined goals for student outcomes and educational operations.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, however, districts and schools need to select community partners and navigate partnerships in such a way that community partners supplement school-based operations rather than detract from the execution of effective academic, extracurricular, and student support programming. This demands that district and school leaders formulate an accurate picture of potentially beneficial partnerships and determine the existence of any barriers that could inhibit successful partnerships.<sup>10</sup>

### Questions to Consider for Partner Identification

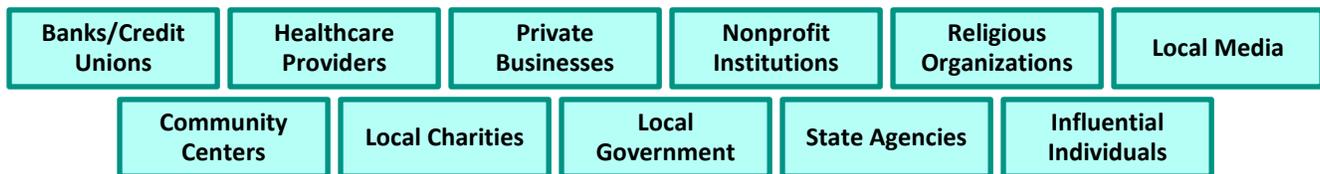
- 1. ? What partners has the district or school invited to participate in essential educational matters? Who is missing?
- 2. ? How does the district or school intend to support community partners as they commit their own support?
- 3. ? What non-traditional partners might the district or school reach out to about potential collaborations?
- 4. ? How does the district or school intend to use the energies, staff, and resources of partners?
- 5. ? Are partners being asked to perform tasks for which they are most effective?

Source: The Education Alliance, Brown University<sup>13</sup>

As a foundational consideration, districts and schools must understand their needs and wants as they relate to potential partnerships. Specifically, educational leaders need to weigh the relative likelihood that a given community partner can help their organization achieve their outlined vision and strategic goals.<sup>11</sup> In particular, community partners should have capacity and a willingness to support students' achievement, students' physical, mental, and emotional wellness, and families' ability to participate constructively in their child's educational experience.<sup>12</sup>

Any given school-community partnership can focus on a range of potential areas such as academic tutoring, work-based learning for students, mental health services, or the provision of basic necessities (e.g., meals, clothes) and school supplies.<sup>14</sup> As such, districts and schools must conduct self-guided research and broader outreach to the community to determine what organizations or individuals have the expertise and resource capacity to address defined areas of need and support attainment of clearly outlined end goals.<sup>15</sup> Even after finding a potential partner, a sincere and honest assessment of both the educational institution's and the community partner's vision of the partnership must occur to avoid any unforeseen divergence and clarify any challenges that will need to be navigated over the course of the partnership.<sup>16</sup> **Agreeing on core values and articulating the expectations of all parties involved in the partnership will reveal potential conflicts, provide a catalyst to negotiate those conflicts, and ultimately, facilitate all parties' ability to enter into a partnership uninhibited and completely informed.**<sup>17</sup>

### Potential Community Partners



Source: Oregon GEAR UP<sup>18</sup>

### WORKING EFFECTIVELY WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Once a district or school has identified a community organization and formalized a partnership, they must work actively to ensure that the assets gained via the partnership are used to achieve the goals and vision outlined by all participating entities.<sup>19</sup> As part of this, partners must establish firm mechanisms for governance of activities resulting from the partnership, as well as accountability structures for ensuring that activities are completed and meet established expectations.<sup>20</sup> To support such efforts, **partnerships should include "written descriptions of roles and responsibilities,**

**accountability measures[,] and guidelines for responsibilities of educators and [partner] employees” and representatives.<sup>21</sup>**

Likewise, districts and schools must regularly communicate with their partners—and vice versa—to maintain trust and confidence in one another and sustain an operable working relationship.<sup>22</sup> Consistent and collegial two-way communication is essential to keep all involved personnel updated on the status of the partnership activities and the outcomes of those activities.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, communications from the district or school should also reflect their gratitude for the partners' contributions, and their appreciation can be shown in several different formats (e.g., social media posts, annual partner appreciation events, "thank you" notes from students).<sup>24</sup>

**Evidence-Based Practices for Building School-Community Partnerships**

PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Equality Between School and Community Partners</b>	Educational entities will value community groups as stakeholders, involve community members in policy decisions, and tailor programs to meet the needs of the community.
<b>Diversity Among Community Partners</b>	Districts and schools seek both breadth and depth of partnerships that are representative of the larger community.
<b>Emphasis on Relationship Building</b>	Districts and schools focus volunteer efforts on mentoring, tutoring, and recreational events that work to expand a child's natural support systems.
<b>Utilization of Non-Monetary Support</b>	Districts and schools seek contributions beyond financial and material support, such as counseling and health services, program development, curriculum guidance, career consulting, and arts exposure.
<b>Opportunities for Two-Way Communication</b>	Broader collaboration is achieved when there is clear and open communication between partners.
<b>Alignment of School and Partner Goals</b>	Communities are helpful to districts and schools when they support the district's, school's, and family goals, but they can be a distraction when they criticize or contradict the institution's outlined mission.
<b>Practice of Reciprocity</b>	Service-learning opportunities provided by the district or school can build goodwill and lasting partnerships while improving student outcomes.
<b>Evaluation of Partnership Outcomes (Effectiveness)</b>	Formal performance measures of partnership activities are adopted and used to guide remedial action.
<b>Organizational Priority</b>	Change management principles are used to set new priorities, garner employee buy-in, and align personal and organizational goals of the district, school, and community partner.
<b>Use of Resources (Efficiency)</b>	Data-driven decisions are used by district and school leadership to economically manage school-community partnerships.
<b>Students Impacted (Equity)</b>	Resource distribution is monitored to ensure fairness and inclusivity of students receiving benefits.

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction<sup>25</sup>

## SPOTLIGHT ON UTAH PRACTICES: CANYONS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Canyons School District—a relatively new entity, having begun operations in July 2009—serves approximately 34,000 students in the southeastern Salt Lake Valley.<sup>26</sup> Notably, the district publicizes an explicit commitment to work with municipal agencies, nonprofit groups, individual community members, and families to support students, particularly in terms of their safety and welfare via its "Think Safe" initiative (see [here](#)).<sup>27</sup> The district even maintains a designated webpage to help constituents track and monitor government relations and legislative activity (located [here](#)).<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the district—via its Canyons Education Foundation—emphasizes a core mission to "facilitate business and community involvement in building an unparalleled support system for [its] students, faculty, and staff" under the oversight of a "governing board of community leaders and local volunteers[...]with assistance from dedicated district employees."<sup>29</sup> As such, the district solicits community input and seeks partnerships with businesses and other entities by asking them to serve as either "School Partners" or "Foundation Partners."<sup>30</sup> To function under either designation, potential partners must fill out and submit an application, including a description of how the partnership will operate and documentation related to proposed partnership activities (located [here](#)).<sup>31</sup>

### School and Foundation Partner Descriptions

#### SCHOOL PARTNERS

School Partners are businesses willing to give to a specific school through avenues such as:

- Spirit Nights during which a school brings attention and revenue to a business on a certain night or during a set time frame in exchange for a percentage of the profits;
- Donations or sponsorship of a school or school event; and
- Ongoing contributions (i.e., businesses allow a customer to sign-up as a supporter of a specific school and then send a percentage of purchases made by that customer to a school).

Source: Canyons Education Foundation<sup>32</sup>

#### FOUNDATION PARTNERS

Foundation Partners support Canyons School District and the Canyons Education Foundation by:

- Making a donation of money or goods to support an event or program such as Teacher of the Year, Canyons Foundation Gala, Canyons Foundation Golf Tournament, and/or Canyons Scholarships;
- Providing ongoing volunteers (e.g., allowing employees to volunteer once a week or once a month at a set time); and
- Providing support for career and technical education programs through job shadowing, career day presentations, and internships.

As a means of highlighting partnerships, Canyons School District publicizes both a list of its "School Partners" (located [here](#)) and its "Foundation Partners" (located [here](#)).<sup>33</sup>

## ADDITIONAL READING

The following reports and resources delve further into some of the topics discussed in this document and can provide additional context to support district and school leaders in forming and sustaining effective partnerships with community-based organizations.

RESOURCE	PUBLISHING ORGANIZATION	SHORTENED URL (with embedded hyperlink)	QR CODE
"A How-To Guide for School-Business Partnerships" <sup>34</sup>	Council for Corporate and School Partnerships	<a href="https://argo.page.link/aB1JW">https://argo.page.link/aB1JW</a>	
"Community Engagement"	Oregon GEAR UP	<a href="https://argo.page.link/h168z">https://argo.page.link/h168z</a>	
"Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning" <sup>35</sup>	National Education Association	<a href="https://argo.page.link/tcoHV">https://argo.page.link/tcoHV</a>	
"Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships" <sup>36</sup>	Council for Corporate and School Partnerships	<a href="https://argo.page.link/SRRkP">https://argo.page.link/SRRkP</a>	
"How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Improve Student Achievement and Influence School Reform: Literature Review" <sup>37</sup>	American Institutes for Research and Nellie Mae Education Foundation	<a href="https://argo.page.link/ywAu3">https://argo.page.link/ywAu3</a>	
"Partnerships by Design: Cultivating Effective and Meaningful School-Family-Community Partnerships" <sup>38</sup>	School-Family-Community Partnerships Team, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory	<a href="https://argo.page.link/N7zPz">https://argo.page.link/N7zPz</a>	

RESOURCE	PUBLISHING ORGANIZATION	SHORTENED URL (with embedded hyperlink)	QR CODE
<p><b>"School-Community Partnerships: A Guide"<sup>39</sup></b></p>	<p>Center for Mental Health in Schools, University of California- Los Angeles</p>	<p><a href="https://argo.page.link/Cb7cq">https://argo.page.link/Cb7cq</a></p>	

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> [1] Loria, R. "A How-to Guide for Building School-Community Partnerships." Education Week, March 25, 2018. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/03/23/a-how-to-guide-for-building-school-community-partnerships.html>
- [2] Epstein, J.L. and K.C. Salinas. "Partnering with Families and Communities - Educational Leadership." *Educational Leadership*, 61:8, May 2004. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may04/vol61/num08/Partnering-with-Families-and-Communities.aspx>
- [3] "Tips for Cultivating Community Partnerships." Corporation for National and Community Service. <https://www.nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/days-service/martin-luther-king-jr-day-service/toolkits/other-resources/tips>
- <sup>2</sup> "The Importance of Educational Partnerships." SAGE Publications. pp. 5, 7-9. 11. [https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/33868\\_Chapter1.pdf](https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/33868_Chapter1.pdf)
- <sup>3</sup> Figure adapted from: Olson, L.A. "School-Community Partnerships." National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, Aspen Institute, 2018. p. 5. [https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/04/Community-School-Partnerships-Case-Study.pdf?\\_ga=2.191770860.77727152.1563374829-192844306.1563374829](https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2018/04/Community-School-Partnerships-Case-Study.pdf?_ga=2.191770860.77727152.1563374829-192844306.1563374829)
- <sup>4</sup> "Family and Community Partnerships." Coalition of Essential Schools. <http://essentialschools.org/benchmarks/family-engagement-community-partnerships/>
- <sup>5</sup> Roche, M.K. and K.V. Strobach. "Nine Elements of Effective School Community Partnerships to Address Student Mental Health, Physical Health, and Overall Wellness." Institute for Educational Leadership, Coalition for Community Schools, and National Association of School Psychologists, January 2016. p. 1. <https://www.nasponline.org/community-schools-white-paper>
- <sup>6</sup> Vallie, L., A. Stefanski, and R. Jacobson. "School-Community Partnerships: A Typology for Guiding Systemic Educational Reform." Maryland Equity Project, University of Maryland, February 2014. pp. 2-7. <https://education.umd.edu/file/8597/download?token=mgLVHfag>
- <sup>7</sup> [1] "Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships." Council for Corporate and School Partnerships. p. 9. <https://cdn.ymaws.com/stem.sfaz.org/resource/resmgr/CCSPGuide.pdf>
- [2] Luecking, R. et al. "A Guide to Developing Collaborative School-Community-Business Partnerships." National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2015. p. 10. [http://www.parentcenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/repo\\_items/ntact-scb-partnerships-guide.pdf](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/repo_items/ntact-scb-partnerships-guide.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Little, P. "School-Community Learning Partnerships: Essential to Expanded Learning Success." The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. <https://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds/article/school-community-learning-partnerships-essential-expanded-learning-success>
- <sup>9</sup> "School, Family, and Community Partnerships." The Education Alliance, Brown University, November 24, 2008. pp. 4, 6. [https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/files/uploads/KLOOM\\_sfcpc\\_entire.pdf](https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/sites/brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/files/uploads/KLOOM_sfcpc_entire.pdf)
- <sup>10</sup> Ellis, D. and K. Hughes. "Partnerships by Design: Cultivating Effective and Meaningful School-Family-Community Partnerships." School-Family-Community Partnerships Team, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, October 2002. pp. 5, 14. <https://educationnorthwest.org/sites/default/files/pbd.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> "Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning: A Toolkit." The Colorado Education Initiative, Generation Schools Network, 2Revolutions, and Denver Afterschool Alliance, 2015. pp. 6-7. [http://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CEI\\_CommunityPartnershipToolkit.pdf](http://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CEI_CommunityPartnershipToolkit.pdf)
- <sup>12</sup> "Family-School-Community Partnerships." National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, U.S. Department of Education. <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/training-technical-assistance/education-level/early-learning/family-school-community-partnerships>
- <sup>13</sup> Figure adapted from: "School, Family, and Community Partnerships," Op. cit., p. 13.
- <sup>14</sup> Schargel, F. "School-Community Collaboration." SouthEast Education Network, March 21, 2011. <https://www.seenmagazine.us/Articles/Article-Detail/ArticleId/1298-School&#8212;Community-Collaboration>
- <sup>15</sup> "Designing Community Partnerships to Expand Student Learning: A Toolkit," Op. cit., p. 8.
- <sup>16</sup> "The Practice of Partnership: High-Impact Arts Education Partnerships with K-12 Schools." National Guild for Community Arts Education and MetLife Foundation. p. 8. <https://www.nationalguild.org/files/resources/public/the-practice-of-partnership-high-impact-arts-edu.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Henderson, A.T. et al. "Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning." National Education Association, 2011. p. 5. <http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Family-School-Community-Partnerships-2.0.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Figure adapted from: "Community Engagement." Oregon GEAR UP, 2016. p. 4. <https://oregongearup.org/sites/oregongearup.org/files/toolkits/communityengagementtoolkit.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> "Identifying Community Assets and Resources." Community Tool Box | University of Kansas. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/identify-community-assets/main>

<sup>20</sup> "A District Guide to ESSA and the Importance of Stakeholder Engagement: Participation, Preparation, and What Comes Next." Partners for Each and Every Child | Opportunity Institute. pp. 9, 11. [http://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/P4\\_District-Guide\\_12.11.16.pdf](http://partnersforeachandeverychild.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/P4_District-Guide_12.11.16.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> "Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships," Op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> "Community Engagement," Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> "A How-To Guide for School-Business Partnerships." Council for Corporate and School Partnerships. p. 14.

<sup>24</sup> [1] "Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships," Op. cit., p. 13. [2] "Community Engagement," Op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: Huffman, H. et al. "Evidence-Based Models: School-Community Partnerships." North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, August 2014. p. 3. <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/docs/intern-research/reports/evidence2014.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> [1] "Canyons District: Celebrating Educational Excellence." Canyons School District. <http://www.canyonsdistrict.org/about-us> [2] See "Fall Enrollment by Demographics: October 1, 2018-2019." "Reports: Enrollment/Membership." Utah State Board of Education, October 1, 2018. <https://www.schools.utah.gov/data/reports?mid=1424&tid=4>

<sup>27</sup> "Community Partnerships." Canyons School District. <http://www.canyonsdistrict.org/community-partnerships>

<sup>28</sup> "Government Relations." Canyons School District. <http://www.canyonsdistrict.org/governmentrelations>

<sup>29</sup> "Who We Are." Canyons Education Foundation. <https://foundation.canyonsdistrict.org/index.php/home>

<sup>30</sup> "Partnerships." Canyons Education Foundation. <https://foundation.canyonsdistrict.org/index.php/what-we-do/business-and-community-partnerships>

<sup>31</sup> "Partnership Application." Canyons Education Foundation. pp. 1-2. [https://foundation.canyonsdistrict.org/docs/Partner\\_Application\\_2018\\_9.pdf](https://foundation.canyonsdistrict.org/docs/Partner_Application_2018_9.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Figure text quoted verbatim, with minor adaptations, from: "Partnerships," Op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> [1] "School Partnerships." Canyons Education Foundation. <https://foundation.canyonsdistrict.org/index.php/canyons-gives-back/84-school-partnerships> [2] "Foundation Partnerships." Canyons Education Foundation. <https://foundation.canyonsdistrict.org/index.php/canyons-gives-back/134-school-partnerships>

<sup>34</sup> "A How-To Guide for School-Business Partnerships," Op. cit.

<sup>35</sup> Henderson et al., Op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> "Guiding Principles for Business and School Partnerships," Op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Wood, L. et al. "How Family, School, and Community Engagement Can Improve Student Achievement and Influence School Reform: Literature Review." American Institutes for Research and Nellie Mae Education Foundation, February 2017. <https://www.nmefoundation.org/getattachment/67f7c030-df45-4076-a23f-0d7f0596983f/Final-Report-Family-Engagement-AIR.pdf?lang=en-US&ext=.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Ellis and Hughes, Op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> "School-Community Partnerships: A Guide." Center for Mental Health in Schools, University of California-Los Angeles. <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/guides/schoolcomm.pdf>