



**Children's Aid**  
Every step of the way



# Leading with Purpose and Passion:

## A Guide for Community School Directors



**National Center**  
for  
**COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**



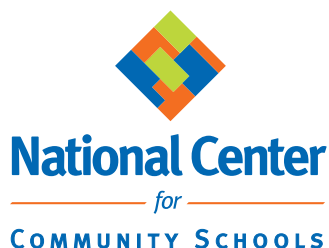
CHARLES STEWART  
MOTT FOUNDATION

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# Leading with Purpose and Passion:

## A Guide for Community School Directors





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# Foreword

## An Effort Well Worth Undertaking

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When Children’s Aid launched its first Community School in March of 1992, there were no models for the role of the Community School Director—no job descriptions, no training courses, and no colleagues to shadow or consult. What did exist was a powerful concept and some willing pioneers, including a principal (Mark Kavarsky) who embraced the idea of partnering with a competent and comprehensive human services agency, a social worker (Richard Negrón) who wanted to expand the definition of his profession’s role in schools, and organizational leaders (Phil Coltoff and Pete Moses) who were willing to invest time, talent, and treasure in building a new model of educational and social service reform.

As Richard Negrón explained in “*Community Schools from a Lead Agency Administrator’s Perspective*” in *Community Schools in Action: Lessons from a Decade of Practice*, “I first heard of the concept of Community Schools in 1987 while attending a briefing on a community assessment of the Washington Heights/Inwood neighborhood. At this presentation, I was immediately struck by the idea of working in a deep partnership with a public school to improve outcomes for children and their families; this concept of Community Schools seemed so simple, so fundamental, yet at the same time so powerful that I thought, how could anyone be against this? Armed with this belief, I arrived at Intermediate School (IS) 218 in the summer of 1992 as the Community School Director of Children’s Aid’s first Community School. Little did I know that my first full year as director would prove to be the most difficult, overwhelming, and at times downright humbling experience of my career.”<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately for contemporary Community School Directors (CSDs), there is now a strong body of experience and knowledge to learn from. There are more than 7,500 Community Schools in the United States and thousands more in countries around the world. Although the job’s title may vary—Community School Director, Community School Coordinator, Resource Coordinator, or Site Coordinator—the role, functions, and underlying skill sets are similar. This guide provides useful information and tools to innovative professionals, regardless of their job titles or the structure of their initiatives. Some Community School Directors work for lead agencies. Others are employed directly by school districts or citywide intermediary organizations. Despite these differences in nomenclature and organizational structures, commonalities abound.

This role and its inherent responsibilities require a wide range of complex skills—skills that draw on and combine strong leadership and management abilities. Children Aid’s former CEO, C. Warren (Pete) Moses, said the role of the Community School Director is “the most difficult job in our organization.” This guide is designed to clarify and elevate the role and to provide practical advice and strategies about how to implement the role with intelligence, energy, purpose, and passion.

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<sup>1</sup> Dryfoos, Joy G., Jane Quinn, and Carol Barkin (editors). *Community Schools in Action: Lessons From a Decade of Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

# Introduction

## Why Community Schools?

Imagine a place where everyone loves to learn and feels safe, connected, respected, and valued. In this place, adults and young people, teachers and families, and the school and community are partners in decision-making and promoting change. A **Community School** is all of this, a dynamic and vibrant place. A Community School is described by Patricia Harvey, former superintendent of the St. Paul, Minnesota Public Schools, as “a strategy for organizing school and community resources around student success.” As both **a place** and **a set of partnerships**, a Community School represents a holistic or whole child approach to tackling barriers to and promoting opportunities for student learning and growth. The Community School’s **integrated focus** on academics, services, supports, and opportunities leads to **improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities**.<sup>2</sup>

At the core of this strategy is the partnership between the school, families, and other community resources. Community Schools offer a way to create an environment that mobilizes and organizes all available resources—schools, families, youth-serving agencies, and other institutions—around the goal of student success. A solid base of research and current practice-based knowledge about child development, school improvement, family engagement, and child health anchors the strategy. Published and anecdotal evidence demonstrates that Community Schools yield positive results for children, families, and the community. These results include school readiness, consistent attendance, academic success, and family stability.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Coalition for Community Schools, <http://www.communityschools.org/>

<sup>3</sup> Children’s Aid Society and National Center for Community Schools, *Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action*, <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/4473432/Building%20Community%20Schools.pdf>, 2011.



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“It would be foolish to deny that this is hard work. . . . All of this labor produces exciting and innovative schools that are open most of the time, full of stimulated students and involved families who can access needed support. Neighborhoods improve. Teachers are happier because they have help overcoming barriers to learning. I believe Community School people would advise you that this is an effort well worth undertaking.”

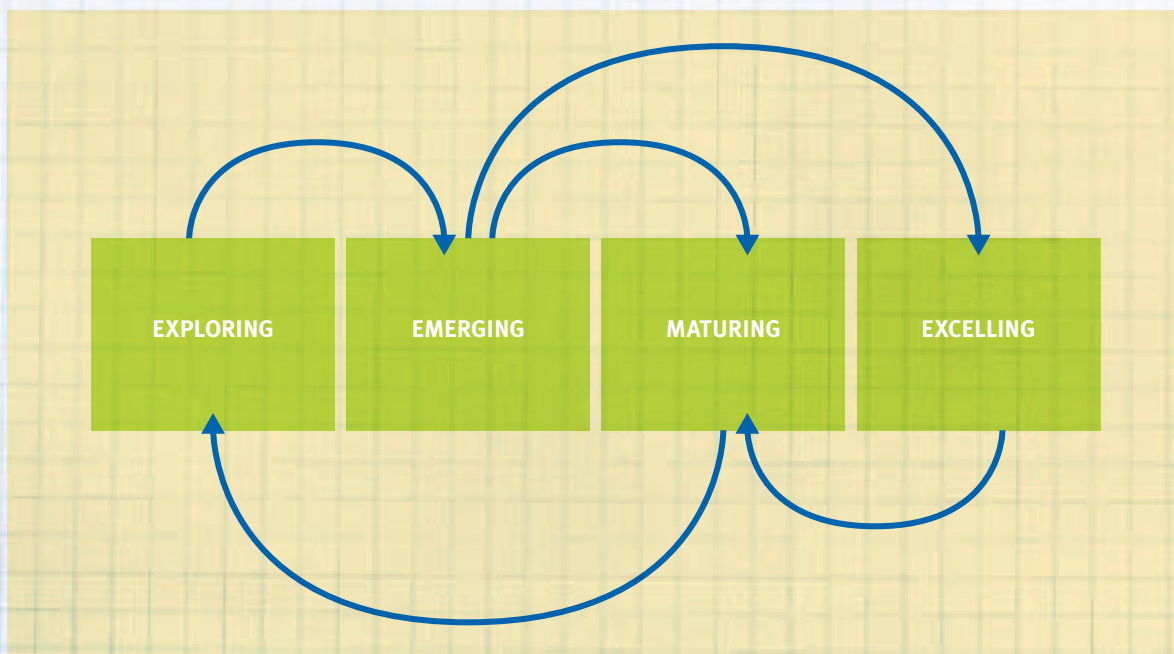
**Joy Dryfoos**, *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth and Families*. San Francisco, California: Jossey Bass, 1994.

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With over 25 years of experience in the development of Community Schools, the National Center for Community Schools has promoted the use of **Stages of Development** to help practitioners, leaders, and policy-makers understand where they are on the continuum of Community School implementation and what they must do to move forward. A community school’s development is non-linear and is constantly moving back and forth depending on changes in funding, leadership capacity, needs, and opportunities. The strategy should reflect the needs, assets, character, and culture style of its school community. As the work evolves, each initiative and site must develop a set of core capacities: Collaboration, Coherence, Commitment, and Comprehensiveness (these core capacities are defined in more detail in **The Director’s Toolbox for Success**).



## The Stages of Development of a Community School





## Summary of the Community School Developmental Stages

STAGE 1: EXPLORING	STAGE 2: EMERGING	STAGE 3: MATURING	STAGE 4: EXCELLING
Expansive thinking, unbounded optimism, and magical thinking that “if only” X were in place, things would be significantly different mark this stage. From the collective dreams and desires, the shared Community School’s vision emerges.	This stage involves a commitment to jump in and do something! A decision is made to introduce some services, secure some funding, and begin to develop partnerships. Programs are designed in a strength-based paradigm and based on data from a formal or an informal needs assessment. To succeed in this stage, commitment to the shared vision, clear goals and communication processes, clarity of roles and responsibilities, responsiveness to the needs, and regular celebration are all necessary.	This stage is marked by steady, intentional progress and the realization that the work requires a lot of effort. The vision of the Community School becomes clearer to all, and there is likely to be broader support. Service utilization increases as interventions become timelier, more relevant, and of higher quality. Relationships between the lead agency partner and school are deepened, administrative and programmatic integration becomes more natural, and community-based organizations and school jointly fund some programs. To succeed in this stage, you must keep the vision and programs fresh, tend the relationships, increase partnerships, show added value, and focus on sustainability.	At this stage, you are implementing quality programs that are fully integrated into the fabric of the school. You have influenced the school culture with a focus on addressing the needs of the whole child, increased parent involvement, and empowered parents and school staff to be advocates for quality education. You have established strong relationships within the school, surrounding community, and school district. You are valued by the school as a committed partner and leader. To succeed in this stage, you must take smart risks in innovative programming; develop youth leadership; and empower staff, parents, and students to teach others to do this work.

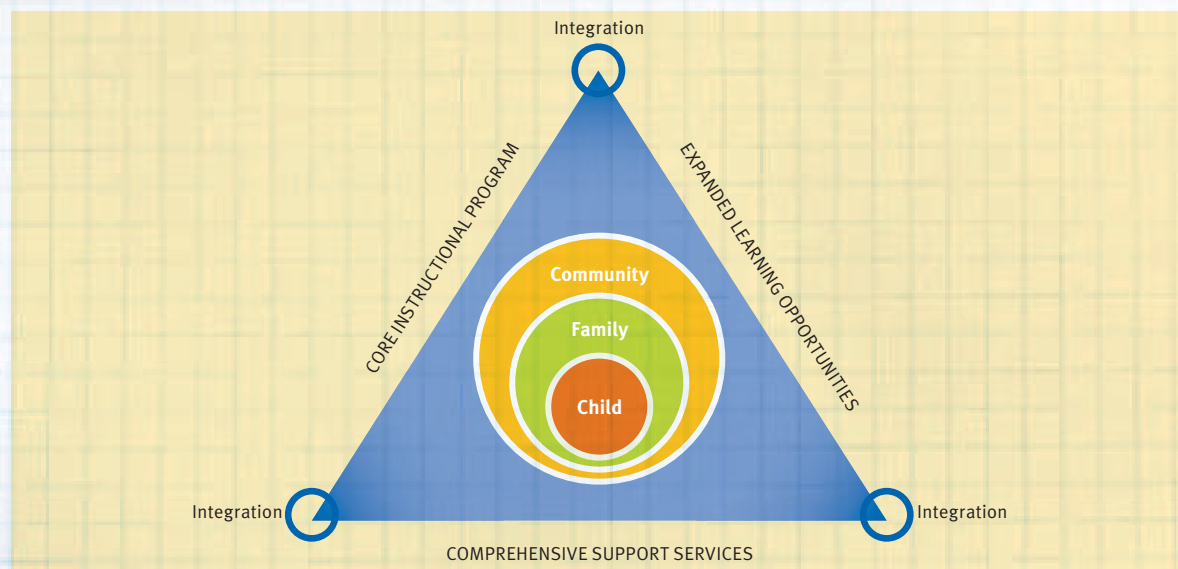


### REFLECTION CORNER

Use the **stages of readiness self-assessment** located in The Director’s Toolbox for Success to determine your initiative’s stage of development within each capacity.

Conceptualized as a developmental triangle, the Community School strategy calls for a strong instructional program, an array of expanded learning opportunities and curriculum enrichment, and support services designed to remove barriers to students’ learning and healthy development so they can thrive academically and socially.

## Children's Aid Developmental Triangle



The three sides of the developmental triangle are based on research about what is needed to ensure all children reach productive and healthy adulthood. However, these key ingredients must be integrated for optimal effectiveness. Lacking this critical coordination function, a school may create a haphazard collection of programs and partners who are working in silos rather than develop the deep intentional ties between school, family, and community that enable young people to thrive. The Community School Director is responsible for the implementation, integration, alignment, and coordination of the strategy represented by the developmental triangle.



### BEST PRACTICE TIPS

#### Core Elements of a Successful Community School Include:

- ▶ The **Community School Director** is the key connector in the developmental triangle between home, school, and community. The CSD ensures that programs, services, and supports are aligned, coordinated, and integrated with the core instructional program in order to avoid duplication or fragmentation of services and supports.
- ▶ **Integrated Governance and Management** of a Community School necessitates site-based planning driven by collaboration between the principal, lead agency, school staff, families, and other community-based partners.

- ▶ **Current and Continuous Assessment** of assets and needs of students and families is conducted through an extensive, systematic, and collaborative process. Families and the community are important stakeholders in design and delivery at the Community School level. Reliable data drives decision-making about priority-setting and partner recruitment.
- ▶ **Family and Community Development and Engagement** depend on a high level of trust between families and Community School staff. When families feel informed about their school, welcomed, valued, and connected to other families and staff, they are more willing to participate and are empowered to become assets and supporters of your work.
- ▶ **Partnerships:** A variety of partnerships are required for the development of a Community School. Select partners whose contributions are aligned with the assets and needs of students, families, the school, and the community.
- ▶ **Results Orientation and Shared Accountability for Results:** In a Community School, partners maintain a shared understanding of the results they seek to achieve and regularly review data together to make course corrections.

## Why a Guide for Community School Directors?

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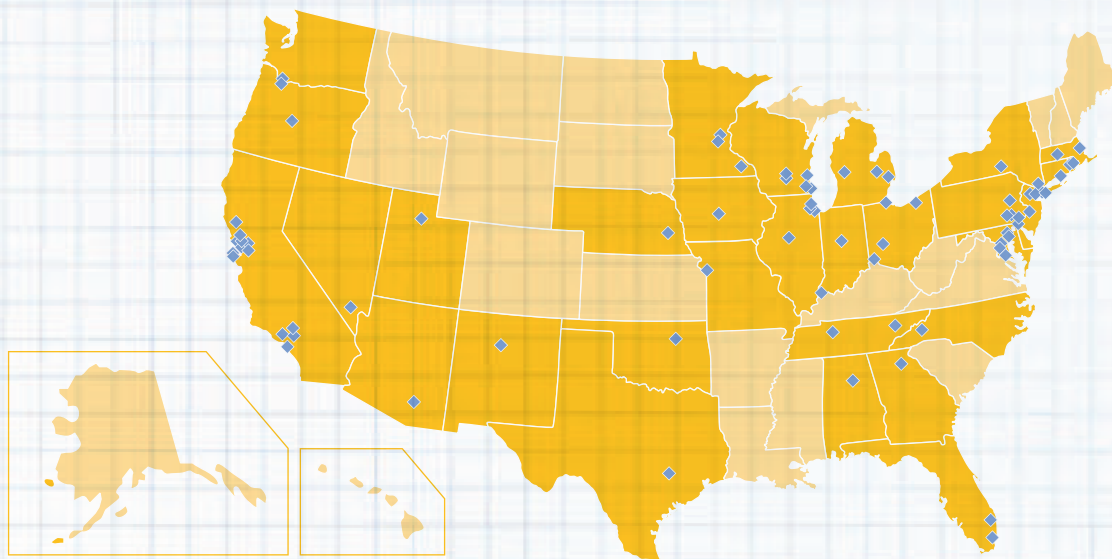
Over the past 25 years, the Community School movement has experienced exponential growth as it has moved toward a comprehensive, results-orientated approach and a strong advocacy agenda led by the Coalition for Community Schools. As more cities embrace the strategy as a viable and responsive approach to education reform, an opportunity arises for harnessing the field's best practices, best thinking, and evidence around what it takes to inspire and transform communities.

Between 2007 and 2014, the number of cities and districts that scaled up systems of Community Schools almost tripled. The Community School Initiatives Map represents the multi-site initiatives across the country that are part of the Coalition for Community Schools Leadership Network (as of October 2017) and, while not intended to be comprehensive, it provides a useful illustration of the growth of community schools implementation in recent years.

Community School Directors must prepare the school and its stakeholders for change. The Community School Director's work focuses on inspiring, motivating, and aligning people around the Community School's vision of success and results. The vision must serve the interests of all stakeholders and must make clear how those interests translate into a realistic plan of action.



## Community School Initiatives



ABC Community Schools Partnership

Achievement Plus

Austin ISD Community Schools Initiative

Boost! United Way

Boston Public Schools

Brooklyn Center Community Schools

Broome County Promise Zone

Champaign Unit #4 Schools

Chicago Public Schools Community Schools Initiative

Children and Families First

Children's Aid Community Schools

Cincinnati Community Learning Centers

Cleveland Community Wrap Around Strategy Initiative

Community Achieves

Cranston Family Center/COZ

Des Moines Public Schools

Detroit Public Schools

Duluth Community School Collaborative

Elev8 Baltimore

Evanston Community Schools Initiative

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation

Family League of Baltimore

Flint Community Education Initiative

Flowing Wells Extension Program

Gainesville City Schools

Great Schools Partnership: Community Schools Initiative

Hartford Partnerships for Student Success

Hayward Unified School District

Holyoke Public Schools

Indiana Community Schools Network

Kent School Services Network

Lincoln Community Learning Centers

Link and Inspire for Tomorrow (LIFT)

Linkages to Learning

Local Investment Commission (LINC)

Long Beach Unified School District

Los Angeles Education Partnership

Madison Metropolitan School District Community Schools

Milwaukee Community Schools Partnership

Neighborhood Schools Centers

New York City Community Schools

Newark Trust for Education

Norwood Resource Center

Oakland Unified School District

Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Ontario Montclair School District

Orange Community Schools, Montclair State University

Palm Beach Full Service Community Schools

Pasadena Unified School District

Peoria Full Service Community School Initiative

Philadelphia Community Schools

Promise Partnerships—United Way of Salt Lake

Redmond School District Community Learning Centers

Redwood City School District's Community School Partnerships

ReInvent Schools Las Vegas

Rochester Public Schools

Rockland 21st Century Collaborative for Children and Youth

San Francisco Beacon Initiative

San Francisco Unified School District

San Pablo Beacon Community Schools Initiative

Santa Rosa City Schools

School as Community Hubs Toledo

School District of Lancaster

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Community Schools

Sun Prairie Community Schools

The Education Effect—Florida International University

Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative

Trenton Community School Initiative

Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TASCI)

United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County

United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley

University of Pennsylvania, Netter Center for Community Partnerships

Vallejo City Unified School District

Vancouver Public Schools Family Resource Centers

West Chicago District 33, WeGo Together for Kids

West Contra Costa Unified School District



As a transformational leader, the Community School Director must be flexible and ready to adapt to the dynamic environment of the community including political, economic, social, and demographic changes.

Often, the Community School Director works for a lead agency partner organization that hires and supervises the CSD's work. In other models, the Community School Director works for the school district. Regardless of the model, the CSD plays an essential role—one that is distinct from, and complementary to, the role of the school social worker or guidance counselor. In the Children's Aid lead agency model, the Community School Director's role involves three critical functions:

**1. Plan, coordinate, and manage activities, programs, and services in the school.**

- ▶ At the building level, the Community School Director convenes monthly meetings of all partner agency service directors in the building (afterschool, medical, mental health, parent engagement, adult education, early childhood).
- ▶ At the departmental level, the Community Schools Division holds monthly meetings for people in the similar roles including Community School Directors, Program Directors, and Family Coordinators.
- ▶ At the organizational level, Division Directors meet monthly to coordinate services across divisions (Community Schools, health, and early childhood may operate in separate divisions within the organization) and to share resources across the organization.
- ▶ Written protocols support this coordination, including an Operations Manual that describes basic procedures for working in a Community School and a Personnel Manual that covers staff hiring, orientation, and supervision.

**2. Broker and manage partnerships with other service providers.**

- ▶ At the building level, the Community School Director, in consultation with the principal and School Leadership Team, enlists the services of other providers in accordance with the school's comprehensive education plan and the school community strengths and identified needs.
- ▶ At the departmental level, the Community School Division brokers relationships with external partners, including arts organizations (for example, Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre, American Ballet Theatre, Studio in a School) and other enrichment resources (for example, "Trout in the Classroom" Science Enrichment; College Board, Princeton Review and Kaplan academic support; Every Person Influences Children).
- ▶ The Community School Director schedules and oversees the partners.

**3. Ensure that sponsored and brokered efforts are fully integrated into the life of the school through joint planning and assessment with the principal and other school staff. For the partnership to be effective, the Community School Director must become part of the school governance structure. This is the most important function of the Community School Director.**

- ▶ The Community School Director serves on the School Leadership Team, usually as a voting member and often as chair or co-chair. (In New York City, the School Leadership Team is a mandated governance structure responsible for developing, implementing, and assessing the school’s Comprehensive Education Plan.)
- ▶ The Community School Director or designee participates in and often chairs the Pupil Personnel Team that assesses and plans for the needs of individual children and the School Safety Committee that addresses issues of security, discipline, and school climate.
- ▶ The Community School Director and other agency staff work not just during the regular school day, but often during extended hours (after school, summers, school holidays, weekends). Many partner agency services are offered during regular and extended hours, and agency staff members are available throughout the day to partner with Department of Education (DOE) colleagues.
- ▶ The Community School Director works with school staff to coordinate and schedule all afterschool and Saturday activities, regardless of sponsorship. The Director develops and disseminates a master schedule that includes facility usage.
- ▶ Family engagement efforts are integrated in several ways. In some cases, Children’s Aid supervises the DOE Parent Coordinator through a program sponsored by the DOE. Staff from the partner agency work closely with the school’s Parent Teacher Association and often share office space and co-sponsor events. The partner agency helps recruit parents for school-sponsored family events such as parent-teacher conferences.

This guide is designed to provide both seasoned and new Community School Directors with practical tools, lessons learned, resources, and Children’s Aid case studies that illustrate the implementation of the strategy. We hope *Leading with Purpose and Passion* will provide insights into the joys, challenges, complexities, and opportunities involved in leading a Community School. In addition, we hope the guide will inspire you to reflect on your current practices and identify opportunities for growth.

## SYMBOLS USED THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE



Invites you to take a **deeper dive**



Introduces questions for **reflection**



Identifies **new strategies or practices**

## HOW THE GUIDE IS ORGANIZED

This guide is organized in four sections:

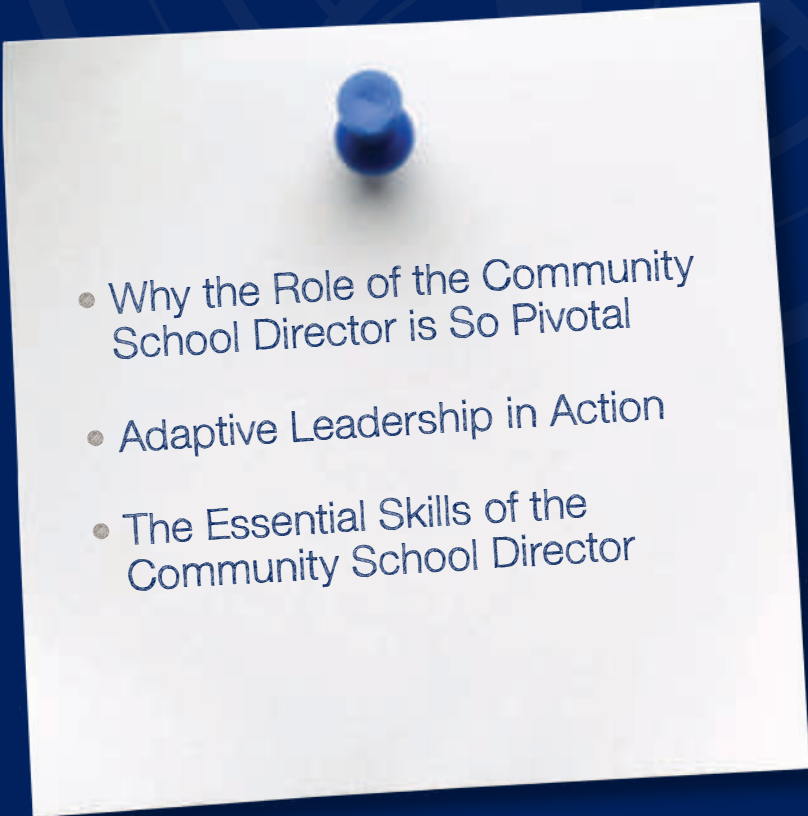
- ▶ **Section One:** Behind the Scenes: What It Takes to Lead a Community School
- ▶ **Section Two:** Community School Strategy in Action
- ▶ **Section Three:** Sustaining Community Schools
- ▶ **Section Four:** The Director’s Toolbox for Success

## HOW TO USE THE GUIDE

In addition, this guide includes a toolbox to help you gain a better understanding of the beliefs, values, and practices required for leading a Community School. As a resource for new and experienced Community School Directors, the guide provides insight from the field, strategies, tools, and opportunities for reflection on practice. Each Community School is unique and has its own energy, climate, and culture. Review the guide at your own pace and reflect before implementing new strategies and ideas. Engage your partners in strategic conversations and planning. Most importantly, bring passion to your work, and keep the word yes written in your heart.



# Behind the Scenes: What It Takes to Lead a Community School

- 
- Why the Role of the Community School Director is So Pivotal
  - Adaptive Leadership in Action
  - The Essential Skills of the Community School Director

This chapter describes the Community School Director's role and the core competencies needed to:

- Navigate the contextual realities within the operating environment of a Community School.
- Inspire and mobilize the community to tackle challenges.
- Thrive while keeping track of organizational and programmatic outcomes.

# Why the Role of the Community School Director is So Pivotal

## A Leader and A Catalyst for Change

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Strong leadership drives the work of the Community School strategy's multiple partners as they help maximize and remove obstacles to student learning. All Community School Directors are driven by the strength of their belief that the Community School strategy is not an add-on to what a school should do, but rather the norm for how schools promote student success. Leading a Community School requires bold direction, persistence, focus on the root cause of problems, and strategic response to environmental shifts.

As a leader of a Community School, you promote and facilitate strategic conversations among a diverse group of stakeholders and serve as a catalyst for change within the school and in the community at large. The role of a Community School Director goes beyond coordinating resources and partnerships. It includes conducting strategic planning and action, navigating complex relationships, building trust, and responding proactively to a dynamic political, economic, and social environment.

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"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but those who are most adaptable."

Charles Darwin

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## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

### Effective Leadership Practice

- ▶ Encourage your team to do what's best for everyone and to feel good about their work.
- ▶ Ask for input. When others are involved in the process, they feel more committed to the work.
- ▶ Ask others to evaluate your efforts either informally or in writing. Not only does this help you improve your skills, but it allows your team to provide recommendations.
- ▶ Show appreciation for the work of others. Let your team know you care about the work they do. Encourage them to continue to make that extra investment.
- ▶ Before making decisions, consider the input you received from others. This helps the team understand that they are also responsible for the well-being of the Community School.
- ▶ Recognize the importance of your own professional development, thereby serving as a role model to your team.
- ▶ Address individual needs and team frustrations immediately. This helps to de-escalate potential conflicts and creates an environment that is valued by everyone.
- ▶ Solve problems instead of complaining about the obstacles you and your team encounter.
- ▶ Connect with as many team members as possible each day. Ask how team members are doing.
- ▶ Look forward to your work. If you are happy with the work that you do, you will probably radiate a positive attitude.<sup>4</sup>

The work of a CSD requires strong day-to-day collaboration with the principal. Earning the respect and trust of the principal is crucial to the success of the Community School. Creating a common language that transcends professional jargon and communicates with clarity and force is also important.

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Connor, Nelia, A., *If You Don't Feed the Teachers, They Eat the Students: Guide to Success for Administrators and Teachers*. Chicago: World Book/Incentive Publications, 2013.



### Leadership in Action

In **Primal Leadership**, the author, Daniel Goleman, analyzes six leadership styles. He points out that the leadership styles are not mutually exclusive and that any one leader can exhibit a combination. As a leader, you must develop a solid understanding of these various leadership styles and their implications until you reach the point where choosing the right style for any particular situation becomes second nature to you. Following is a summary of the six styles.<sup>5</sup>

#### **COERCIVE:**

**“Do What I Tell You.”**

Decisions are made from the top down. Staff is not permitted to act on their own initiative.

#### **AUTHORITATIVE:**

**“Come with Me.”**

Overall goals are clear. Staff is empowered to choose how the vision is achieved.

#### **AFFILIATIVE:**

**“People Come First.”**

Focuses on praise. Individuals and their emotions are valued more than tasks and goals.

#### **DEMOCRATIC:**

**“What Do You Think?”**

Focuses on consensus through participation.

#### **PACESETTING:**

**“Do as I Do, NOW.”**

The leader sets high performance standards and models them.

#### **COACHING:**

**“Try This.”**

Focuses more on the personal development of staff than on immediate tasks.

Now, use the following guiding questions to take a deep dive into your own leadership style. As you reflect, write notes about the scenarios, aha moments, surprises, or insights that come to mind as you reflect on each leadership style. The goal is to develop an increased awareness of who you are as a leader, to identify opportunities for growth, and to improve the level of your practice.

- ▶ What is your dominant leadership style?
- ▶ When does a particular leadership style work best for you?
- ▶ When does that leadership style not work best?
- ▶ How can you shift to a different leadership style with ease?
- ▶ How can your leadership style complement the leadership styles of your partners?
- ▶ What leadership style is needed to advance your Community School?

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<sup>5</sup> Goleman, Daniel, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee. *Primal Leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2013.

Notes:

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“It’s all about relationships. As a leader, you must create a space where no idea is rubbish.”

**Gordon Higgins**, *Community School Colleague, Scotland*

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# Adaptive Leadership in Action

## Preserve, Discard, and Innovate

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One key difference between a Community School and a traditional school is the shared vision and shared leadership. Even if you, as a Community School Director, think you have discovered solutions for challenges you have identified, you must be adaptive in learning how to create change at your school. Defining the challenge is only one part of the process. Deploying innovative solutions is another. This work requires you to become an **Adaptive Leader** as you mobilize your team to tackle problems and collaborate on the diagnostic and creative problem-solving work necessary to achieve progress.<sup>6</sup>

Adaptive leadership focuses on three elements:

- ▶ **Preserve** what is working
- ▶ **Discard** what is not working
- ▶ **Create** new solutions

To facilitate this process as an adaptive leader, you must:

- ▶ **Observe** events and patterns around you
- ▶ **Interpret** what you and others observe and develop multiple hypotheses about what is really going on
- ▶ **Design interventions** based on the observations and interpretations

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<sup>6</sup> *Becoming an Adaptive Leader: Based on the Work of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky*. Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith, Spring 2011. [http://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/becoming\\_anadaptive\\_leader.pdf](http://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/becoming_anadaptive_leader.pdf)

This is an ongoing process. Every Community School Director must identify various **Technical Problems** and **Adaptive Challenges**. These can be defined as:

- ▶ **Technical** problems can be resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the organization's current structures and procedures.
- ▶ **Adaptive** challenges can be addressed only when a person adjusts their priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties.<sup>7</sup>

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“Great leaders facilitate the creation of an ambitious, meaningful vision of success, and then put the right people around them to exceed expectations, all the while creating joy on a daily basis.”

Loretta Trapani, *YMCA of Greater New York*

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The following case study should help you differentiate between Technical Problems and Adaptive Challenges.<sup>8</sup>



## DEEPER DIVE

### A Closer Look at Adaptive Leadership

You have just started working as a Community School Director in a new Community School partnership. You have been asked to address attendance issues at the school. During the first attendance meeting you participate in, you realize the current focus is on average daily attendance figures and on “Long-Term Absentee” students. There is no discussion of students who are in the 70-90% attendance cohort. Evidence tells us we can assist these students through a tiered intervention strategy, employing specific interventions targeted to their needs as an at-risk group.

You must educate stakeholders about the problem, work with stakeholders to better understand the problem, and decide how to identify potential solutions. Who needs to be engaged? Families? Faculty? Staff? Students?

*Each initiative partner must give up some elements of their own cultural DNA, their dearly held habits, jobs, and values, in order to create a single approach and enable the new arrangement to survive and thrive. . . .The adaptive process is both conservative and progressive in that it enables the living system to take the best of its traditions, identity, and history into the future.*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



Notes:

# The Essential Skills and Competencies of the Community School Director

## Thinking Strategically, Leading Consistently

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In the beginning of its Community School work, Children's Aid made a conscious decision to elevate the role of what we initially called the Community School Coordinator. We hired only master's-level professionals in the areas of social work or related fields and required a minimum of five to seven years of experience. Then, we changed the title from Coordinator to Director. This agency policy changed the way our partner principals viewed and engaged with the Community School Directors. They began to see Community School Directors as seasoned strategic partners who could be left in charge of the building during the principal's absence and who could align their work with the school's mission and outcomes.

In order to serve as a catalyst for change, a Community School Director must have passion for the work and a diverse set of abilities in such areas as communication, community organizing, negotiating, and networking. A high level of emotional intelligence and a thorough understanding of youth development and education are also required.

Perhaps the most important skill a Community School Director needs is the ability to think strategically. Leading a Community School is about looking ahead and working with partners to achieve that vision. In addition, organizing and action planning are both essential for delivery of the Community School vision and strategy.

As a leader and change agent in the school building, the Community School Director helps to influence the community's understanding of what needs to be done and creates

a platform for their voices to be heard and engages them as partners in getting the work done. This requires facilitating a process where individual and collective efforts are working towards shared vision and objectives.

A Community School Director is not a jack-of-all-trades but rather a problem-solving leader with a clear sense of effective and intentional use of self. This role requires a wide range of leadership and management skills to successfully implement and lead a whole school strategy. NCCS has identified the following skills and competencies as necessary for leading a whole school strategy:



## DEEPER DIVE

### Community School Director Skillset

The Community School Director's skills are organized around the core strategic functions of a community school. These skills are critical to developing responsive and results-oriented supports and services for students and their families.

**Leadership and Capacity**—the CSD has the ability to:

- ▶ Co-create, hold, and articulate the community school's shared vision
- ▶ Facilitate the development of trusting relationships across the school (including with community partners)
- ▶ Share leadership with the school's principal and leadership team
- ▶ Identify and build support for new opportunities
- ▶ Identify and negotiate solutions to challenges
- ▶ Respond and adapt to changing conditions

**Data-Driven Decision-Making**—the CSD has the ability to:

- ▶ Identify and access key data sources
- ▶ Lead the school's annual needs and assets assessment
- ▶ Use data to respond to identified strengths and needs
- ▶ Use data to focus on results and continuous improvement

**Advocacy and Policy Change**—the CSD has the ability to:

- ▶ Identify and engage key champions, including elected officials
- ▶ Communicate and demonstrate the value of the community schools strategy

**Communications**—the CSD has the ability to:

- ▶ Represent the community school in multiple forums
- ▶ Listen and respond actively to key constituencies

**Resource Development and Coordination**—the CSD has the ability to:

- ▶ Identify needs and opportunities
- ▶ Leverage, organize, and align school and community resources
- ▶ Manage and align partners around agreed-upon results
- ▶ Develop, and control expenses within, a site-based budget

**Community Engagement and Coordination**—the CSD has the ability to:

- ▶ Identify and build strong working relationships with needed community resources
- ▶ Organize community resources around student success

*A **sample job description** for the position of Community School Director is located in The Director's Toolbox for Success.*



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

- ▶ **Be visible.** Don't stay in your office. Stand outside the school during students' arrival and dismissal. Walk through the cafeteria at mealtimes. Walk the halls when students are changing classes. Introduce yourself to students, staff, and families. Learn people's names, and greet them when you see them.
- ▶ **Listen.** As you get to know school staff, students, and families, actively listen to what they tell you about themselves and their experience in and outside of school.
- ▶ **Demonstrate Value.** When you are asked to help with something at the school, try to say yes. Schools are dynamic places that require an all-hands-on-deck approach. Of course, there is a fine line between saying yes to everything and finding yourself pulled away from your primary duties. If you can demonstrate flexibility when the principal and school staff need you, it will help build positive relationships.

# Community School Strategy in Action: Identifying the Strengths and Needs of School, Family, and Community

- A Comprehensive Assets and Needs Assessment Process
- Brokering and Sustaining Partnerships
- Partnerships in Action
  - School Leadership Team
  - Families as Learning Partners
  - Youth Leadership
  - Community Engagement

This chapter focuses on how a Community School Director facilitates and manages an inclusive assessment process that captures the strengths and needs of students, families, and community; synchronizes objectives; and develops a strategy that best supports students and families. This section explores how to broker and align partnerships around the strategy as well as how to best measure results and impact.

# Comprehensive Assets and Needs Assessment Process

## Leading, Managing, and Facilitating

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The Community School Director is responsible for facilitating a process that engages multiple stakeholders in gathering a wide range of data to inform and drive decisions about the Community School's programming and operations. Before developing your Community School's work plan, recognize what is working and not working. This is integral to the process and ensures the right partners are working with the right people at the right time. The assessment process should be ongoing and must be revisited regularly by all partners so you build on the strengths of the community and meet documented needs.

While Community School Directors can help lead this process, they cannot do it alone. The Community School Director (CSD) partners with the school's principal to analyze school data and to combine data sources to give stakeholders a more complete picture of what the Community School is accomplishing. It is critical that the Community School Director utilize Adaptive Leadership skills, such as the ability to *Get on the Balcony*<sup>10</sup>—a strategy that allows you to gain a broad perspective.

- ▶ **Observe what is going on around you.** Who is doing what and why?
- ▶ **Develop more than one interpretation,** ask for feedback and observe interactions
- ▶ **Watch for patterns.** Learn how individuals interact with each other, common breakdowns in communication, strong communication, etc.
- ▶ **Debrief with partners to assess and think through next steps**

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<sup>10</sup> Get on the Balcony: Why Leaders Need to Step Back to Get Perspective. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2014. [http://orientationtraining.weekly.com/uploads/4/9/7/6/49767227/get\\_on\\_the\\_balcony\\_heifetz\\_linsky.pdf](http://orientationtraining.weekly.com/uploads/4/9/7/6/49767227/get_on_the_balcony_heifetz_linsky.pdf)



## REFLECTION CORNER

What Technical Problems do you see at first glance? What are some Adaptive Challenges in your school?



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

It is important to work together with school and community partners to ensure that your process is comprehensive and inclusive. One effective strategy is to convene an advisory board (or work through an existing group, such as the School Leadership Team) to design and implement the assets and needs assessment process. The Community School Director plays an important role in facilitating the eight steps of conducting needs and assets assessments. The steps include **Getting Started, Archival Data Review, Initial Analysis, Surveys, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Groups, Final Analysis, and Reporting.**

# Eight Steps of a Comprehensive Assets and Needs Assessment Process

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## STEP 1: GETTING STARTED

The first step in creating a Community School is to identify and convene an advisory board or council. There are many different names for this group. The Community School Director spearheads this process and ensures that a variety of stakeholders are represented. The CSD should honor existing relationships in the school and community while building new ones.

Conducting an assets and needs assessment should be a core function of the Community School's advisory board. This is an opportunity to re-engage stakeholders in your school and neighborhood and to activate or reactivate your advisory board. Get to know the resources available in the neighborhood surrounding the school. Remember that your school staff as well as students and their families who may live in the neighborhood can be good sources of information.

As the Community School progresses through its developmental stages, the advisory board should work to ensure proper representation and expertise. The Board should keep track of the overall process and keep team members involved and accountable. The chair can be the CSD or another person designated by the group. This person must keep up the momentum of the group and ensure that its members stay focused and on track.





## REFLECTION CORNER

Have you taken stock of the diversity of experiences, skills, and perspectives available in the community as you identify potential advisory members?

### STEP 2: ARCHIVAL DATA REVIEW

A recent trend in Community School partnerships is to provide Community School Directors confidential access to school data. This allows them to understand and respond to individual student needs and to assess the results of specific interventions.

Gather and record key information from existing data sources (such as school suspension rates, average daily attendance and chronic absenteeism rates, afterschool attendance, community health statistics, test scores, grades, credit accumulation, demographic information, free and reduced lunch population, etc.). Some data sources will need to be reconfigured in order to deepen your understanding. Determining the chronic absence rates of English Learners and other subgroups, for example, may require reworking of existing data sets. Schools tend to look at average daily attendance across subgroups rather than levels of chronic absence. As you collect and record data, new questions will come up, including questions about the accuracy of the information. Record those questions, concerns, and other thoughts. Work with multiple data sources to ensure you have the information you need to fully understand your community and school.

Part of this work must also focus on your current assets. A Resource Inventory and a Needs Gap Analysis are a key part of this process. For a more detailed description of these tasks, refer to the Detroit Public Schools **case study** in the Director's Toolbox for Success. The Community School Director also facilitates this process. Understanding the resources and opportunities available not only ensures that the needs of the school, families, and community are met, it also allows the Community School Director to build and deepen relationships in the school and community and demonstrates the strengths/assets of those relationships.

### STEP 3: INITIAL ANALYSIS

Convene the advisory board to review the archival data. Identify the top five needs that emerge from the review and how the needs are or are not being addressed. Brainstorm possible survey questions, key informant interviews, and focus groups. Identify the key informants to be interviewed in **Step 5**. In preparation for guiding the conversation, the CSD should become familiar with the data before the meeting and note any questions.

## Attendance Heat Map—School Year 2017-2018

The following chart shows one example of data from the New Visions for Public Schools Student Data Sorter screenshot, a resource currently being used in the New York City Community Schools initiative for developing targeted interventions to address chronic absenteeism. For **sample assessment and planning tools**, refer to the Director's Toolbox for Success.

	STUDENT ID	STUDENT NAME	OFFICIAL CLASS	CLASS OF OR GRADE	DOE RISK GROUP	SCHOOL RISK GROUP
1	836416315	Student A	999	8	4: Severely Chronically Absent	
2	838067073	Student B	999	8	1: Not at Risk	
3	843266610	Student C	999	8	1: Not at Risk	
4	843791872	Student D	999	7	1: Not at Risk	
5	844350465	Student E	999	6	1: Not at Risk	
6	844404922	Student F	999	7	1: Not at Risk	
7	844468407	Student G	999	6	1: Not at Risk	
8	849234002	Student H	999	7	1: Not at Risk	
9	849323515	Student I	999	8	1: Not at Risk	
10	849490831	Student J	999	8	4: Severely Chronically Absent	
11	849490971	Student K	999	8	4: Severely Chronically Absent	
12	849554779	Student L	999	8	1: Not at Risk	
13	849992482	Student M	999	7	3: Chronically Absent	
14	850169163	Student N	999	7	1: Not at Risk	
15	850307896	Student O	999	8	1: Not at Risk	
16	850352026	Student P	999	8	4: Severely Chronically Absent	

## Target Students: Interventions—Success Mentor, David

STUDENT ID	STUDENT NAME	OFFICIAL CLASS	CLASS OF OR GRADE	HOUSING STATUS	POINT PERSON	DOE RISK GROUP	SCHOOL RISK GROUP
849480971	Student A	999	8			4: Severely Chron. Absent	
850352026	Student B	999	8		Mentor A	4: Severely Chron. Absent	
850561171	Student C	999	8		Mentor B	1: Not At Risk	
850886536	Student D	999	8		Mentor C	3: Chronically Absent	
851715157	Student E	999	8		Mentor D	3: Chronically Absent	
853327281	Student F	999	8		Mentor E	1: Not At Risk	
853374932	Student G	999	8		Mentor F	1: Not At Risk	
853389056	Student H	999	8		Mentor G	3: Chronically Absent	

POINT PERSON	ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION LIST	ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION 1	ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION 2	ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION 3
Mentor A	Success Mentor—Rotating	Success Mentor		
Mentor B				
Mentor C				
	Success Mentor—Rotating	Success Mentor		
	Success Mentor—Rotating	Success Mentor		
	Success Mentor—Rotating	Success Mentor		
	Success Mentor—Rotating	Success Mentor		
Mentor D	Success Mentor—Rotating	Success Mentor		

ATTD YTD	ATTD LAST 20 DAYS	ATTD LAST 20 DAYS VS YTD	ABSENCES LAST 5 DAYS	ABSENCES YTD	LATENESS LAST 5 DAYS	LATENESS YTD	ATTENDANCE INTERVENTION LIST
70%	75%	-4%	1	3	1	4	Success Mentor—David
80%	50%	-32%	2	2	3	5	Success Mentor—David
100%	55%	-26%	0	0	2	3	Success Mentor—David
90%	70%	-11%	1	1	1	3	Success Mentor—David
90%	75%	-11%	1	1	0	1	Success Mentor—David
100%	85%	0%	0	0	0	0	Success Mentor—David
100%	69%	-20%	0	0	0	0	Success Mentor—David
90%	70%	-12%	1	1	1	2	Success Mentor—David



## REFLECTION CORNER

As a Community School Director, you know all the partners, what they do, and how they do it. As you analyze your data, consider the following:

1. Who are your current partners, and what do they do?
2. Are your partners meeting current identified needs?
3. Are your partners serving the right population?
4. Do your partners have the capacity to do more?
5. What is the funding stream for each partner, and how stable and adequate is it?
6. Are the services and activities the partners provide developmentally appropriate?
7. What results are your partners producing? How aligned are these results with your school's goals?
8. Are school staff/teachers aware of the resources available?
9. How do teachers/staff make referrals, and is this process made easy for them?
10. Are there Technical Problems or Adaptive Challenges that need to be addressed?



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS: ANALYSIS

Remember, this is an initial analysis. You are not expected to have findings at this point. The purpose is to collectively identify patterns, see connections between need indicators, and begin to narrow the focus of your needs and asset assessment. You can then deepen your understanding of the data through surveys, key informant interviews, and focus groups.

### STEP 4: SURVEYS

While Community School Directors are often responsible for administering surveys, the advisory board and other stakeholders should also have input into their design. The Community School Director should collect and conduct an initial analysis of the data.



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS: SURVEYS

- ▶ Questions should be mostly bounded (multiple choice, true/false, Likert Scales, etc.) rather than open-ended and should be limited in number. Interviews and focus groups will allow for more qualitative data.
- ▶ Should surveys be paper vs. online? Each has its advantages and disadvantages, but web-based surveys are especially convenient because they tally and graphically present responses automatically. Since some families we work with may not have computer access at home, it is ideal to provide a combination of methods.
- ▶ Use vocabulary and language that are appropriate for each audience. In all cases, avoid using technical language and terminology.
- ▶ Particularly for youth surveys, consider offering incentives.
- ▶ Time the administration of surveys to coincide with faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, or afterschool special events in order to increase the number of responses.
- ▶ Some Community School initiatives may use neutral outside facilitators for surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups. This may help elicit more honest feedback. In this case, the outside facilitators work with the Community School Leadership Team to formulate guiding questions and provide a summary report.

### STEP 5: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Conduct key informant interviews with participants whose views are not captured in the focus groups, yet are still important stakeholders (including the school nurse, custodian, specialty teacher who is at the school only a few times a week, bus driver, security guard, crossing guard, volunteers, and cafeteria staff). The CSD and other members of the advisory board or lead agency partner staff can conduct these interviews, as can an outside facilitator.

### STEP 6: FOCUS GROUPS

Conduct focus groups that include students, families, and teachers, and feel free to involve other stakeholders. Summarize your findings. As with the stakeholder interviews, a variety of people can conduct focus groups. The CSD works to ensure that a variety of stakeholders participate, that the data are collected consistently and analyzed thoroughly, and that feedback is provided to all participants.



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS: INTERVIEWS

- ▶ Keep interviews to 30-45 minutes.
- ▶ Decide whether you want the same person to conduct all interviews for the sake of consistency.
- ▶ Frame questions in a way that elicits the key informants' interpretation of the data. Consider making suggestions for addressing needs.
- ▶ Avoid making the informant feel defensive. Keep the conversation focused on the ways students may require supports and opportunities and away from what the informants have or have not done to address those needs.



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS: FOCUS GROUPS

- ▶ Focus groups are generally lively and effective when they include between 6-12 people. This allows for a variety of viewpoints and sufficient time for all group members to be active participants.
- ▶ Focus groups should last 45-60 minutes.
- ▶ Consider your audience when scheduling the focus groups. Evenings and weekends may be better for working parents. During-school hours may work best for teachers.
- ▶ Assign someone to facilitate and take notes. Do not combine these roles, as it is difficult to do both simultaneously.
- ▶ Prepare a scripted introduction and 8-12 questions. Questions for focus groups should be open-ended and should encourage participants to elaborate on their ideas, opinions, and feedback. Avoid yes/no questions. If you will have non-English speaking participants, have bi-lingual staff or a translator available.
- ▶ Ask participants to follow up on and react to each other's responses.

### STEP 7: FINAL ANALYSIS

You have now collected a large amount of data about your Community School. It is the role of the Community School Director to pull together and deeply understand that data in order to make it actionable. After you conduct this review, you should prepare summaries of the surveys, interviews, and focus groups and submit them to the advisory board. The



board should determine three priority need areas for the next 12 months. The team should review current assets using the **resource inventory and needs gap analysis tool found in The Director's Toolbox for Success**, review identified needs, and brainstorm additional recommendations about how to address them.



### BEST PRACTICE TIPS: ANALYSIS

- ▶ Before the final analysis convening, advisory board members should receive summaries of the survey, interview and focus group results, and the resource inventory and needs gap analysis.
- ▶ Schedule enough time for thorough reflection and discussion.
- ▶ If needed, schedule a second session to ensure completion.

## STEP 8: REPORTING

It is time to prepare a concise, informative report focusing on strategic next steps. This document should illuminate both quantitative and qualitative data that tell the story of your Community School, where you are, where you want to go, and how you plan to get there.



### BEST PRACTICE TIPS: REPORTING

- ▶ Resist the urge to over-think, over-format, or over-produce this report.
- ▶ Bulleted lists are more readable and therefore more actionable than narrative descriptions.
- ▶ Include samples of completed worksheets you used in your analysis, such as data collection forms, surveys, etc.
- ▶ The report should focus on your identified findings, priorities, and recommendations.

At this point, you should know what your needs and assets are, and you should have identified and justified the key performance indicators that need to be met. Now, work together with your Community School team to focus on whole-school climate and culture, and to strategize, design, and deliver programs and services that will have a positive impact on student attendance, achievement, behavior and well-being. It is not enough to

simply identify specific strategic outcomes. You must ensure that the whole community understands why these are the outcomes you wish to achieve. Developing the indicators necessary to measure your results is integral to this process. While the menu of services will look somewhat different at each school, the types of services commonly provided by Community Schools around the country include:

- ▶ Extended Learning Opportunities such as afterschool and summer enrichment
- ▶ Family Engagement and Leadership Development
- ▶ Adult Education
- ▶ Medical, Dental, Mental Health, and Social Services
- ▶ Early Childhood Programs
- ▶ Community and Economic Development

Notes:



# Brokering and Sustaining Effective Partnerships

## Shared Vision, Leadership, and Accountability

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Community Schools are planned, implemented, and maintained by the members of active, coordinated partnerships dedicated to improving student achievement, health, and well-being. Each partnership establishes a shared vision for its work on jointly agreed-upon goals and shared decision-making. In the lead-partner model of Community Schools developed and advanced by Children's Aid, a single community organization is recognized by school administrators and other partners as the agency that deals directly and daily with school leadership. The lead partner maintains a full-time presence in the school and provides and brokers programs and services that respond to the identified needs and assets.

When launching a Community School initiative, finding the right partners is sometimes a complicated process. Before you commit to collaborating with another organization, meet to discuss your school's goals, culture, and vision. Share your assumptions about the partnership and how you will manage communication and joint decision-making.



## DEEPER DIVE

There are many other models beside the lead agency partner operating across the United States, as well as many initiatives that include characteristics of more than one model. **For information on these models, visit the Coalition for Community Schools: [http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/national\\_models.aspx](http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/national_models.aspx).**



## REFLECTION CORNER

### School Leadership Team<sup>11</sup>

Use the following questions to assess your school's readiness to partner with a lead agency partner.

- ▶ Do prospective partners understand what a Community School strategy is and the role of the Lead Agency?
- ▶ What are the school's priorities for next year?
- ▶ What are the existing strengths?
- ▶ Where are the gaps?
- ▶ What partners are already in the school?
- ▶ Does any current partner have the interest and capacity to become the lead partner and coordinate the Community School's core elements?
- ▶ What are your assumptions about the role a partner should play in the school?
- ▶ How can you communicate these assumptions to potential partners?
- ▶ What are your must-haves in a partner?
- ▶ What do you need your partners to be able to do?
- ▶ What can the school offer to make sure the partnership is a good one (for example, expertise, professional development, space, equipment, time, data analysis)?

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<sup>11</sup> Adapted from The After-School Corporation. "Tips for Finding the Right Partner: A TASC Resource Guide." New York: The After-School Corporation, 2014. <http://expandedschools.org/sites/default/files/Tips%20for%20Finding%20the%20Right%20Partner%20-%20Resource%20Guide.pdf>



### Community-Based Organization

Use the following questions to assess your organization's readiness to partner with a school.

- ▶ Do you understand what the Community School strategy is and the role of the Lead Agency?
- ▶ Is your organization's leadership informed about current trends in public education in your community?
- ▶ Does your organization have informal working relationships with key school leaders in your community?
- ▶ Where are you flexible as an organization?
- ▶ Where are you committed to your model/framework? What are your "non-negotiables?"
- ▶ What are your organization's strengths? How are they relevant to working in this environment and in this community?
- ▶ Does your organization have formal working relationships with key school leaders in the community (for example, memoranda of understanding, written contracts, or partnership agreements)?
- ▶ Has your organization's leadership examined the advantages and disadvantages of partnering with schools?
- ▶ Does your organization have a policy about working to enhance education and/or partnering with public schools?
- ▶ Has your organization's leadership assessed the structural and cultural differences between schools and community-based organizations?
- ▶ Has your organization's leadership considered how its community programs might need to be adapted for use in school settings?
- ▶ How will the organization's programming be integrated with, and add value to, the school's core instructional program?

# Partnerships in Action

## Collaboration at its Best

Community Schools have developed innovative practices around partnerships that go beyond accessing community organizations as service providers. Here are a few examples.



### BEST PRACTICE TIPS

- ▶ One school learned that students who were consistently late to school had been hanging out at the local deli in the morning. After the Community School Director reached out to the deli owner to discuss the problem, he agreed to close 15 minutes before the opening bell and to encourage students to go to school.
- ▶ In a school with high rates of childhood obesity and diabetes where students were often absent for health reasons, students got local restaurants and bodegas to allow students to put “healthy choice” stickers on menus and shelves to highlight nutritious options.
- ▶ In a school where gang violence was a challenge, the CSD and community partner met with local community leaders, businesses, police, and gang leaders to create safe havens in and around the school.



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

- ▶ **Managing Partnerships:** As a Community School Director and lead coordinator in the school building, you should meet regularly with your partners, not just to keep them informed of strategic updates, but to ensure they are contributing to the process. Bringing together partners who are not employees of the lead agency is one skill a CSD must possess. In leading this process, you must combine a sense of hospitality with the ability to drive the overall Community School strategy.
- ▶ **Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs)** should be developed for all external partners and should include mutual expectations as well as agreements on space usage and funding. An example of a Community School Partnership **MOU** is located in The Director's Toolbox for Success.
- ▶ **Orientation to the Community School Strategy:** The CSD should ensure that all external partners receive an orientation to the school that includes an overview of the Community School strategy as well as the school's particular vision, model, and improvement plan. A **sample orientation agenda** is located in The Director's Toolbox for Success.
- ▶ **Partner Meetings:** One of the most valuable roles a CSD can play is to help the school's principal manage the many partners and service providers. In many Community Schools, the Community School Director organizes and facilitates a regular meeting of service providers, including program updates and problem solving. These meetings typically happen monthly, though in some schools they occur quarterly. A **sample partner meeting agenda** is located in The Director's Toolbox for Success.
- ▶ **Ongoing Assessment:** A needs and assets assessment is not a process to be conducted only when starting out. In order to focus on continuous improvement, you must regularly collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data and stay connected to the needs of your community.

The Community School Director is responsible for ensuring that partners deliver high quality programs aligned with the vision and goals of the Community School strategy. National Standards from the Coalition for Community Schools seek to increase the effectiveness of Community School initiatives and provide consistent language and planning frameworks. The components of the standards are the following:

- ▶ Collaborative Leadership
- ▶ Planning
- ▶ Coordinating Infrastructure
- ▶ Student Centered Data

- ▶ Continuous Improvement
- ▶ Sustainability
- ▶ Powerful Learning
- ▶ Integrated Health and Social Supports
- ▶ Authentic Family Engagement
- ▶ Authentic Community Engagement



## DEEPER DIVE

The standards include a self-assessment tool intended to help initiatives reflect on their development, assess progress, and plot a course for continuous improvement. To learn more about the standards and how to use the self-assessment tool, visit **Coalition for Community Schools National Standards**: [http://www.communityschools.org/resources/community\\_schools\\_standards\\_.aspx](http://www.communityschools.org/resources/community_schools_standards_.aspx)



## REFLECTION CORNER

In addition to facilitating regular partner meetings, Community School Directors can use the **partnership readiness questions** on pages 22-23 to assess the strength of the partnerships and to address any issues that are uncovered. The Coalition for Community Schools' publication **Strengthening Partnerships: Community School Assessment Checklist**<sup>12</sup> includes sample checklists for this purpose. Remember, the needs of a Community School change over time. Partnerships and programs must also change if they are to stay relevant and responsive to the needs of students and families served by the school.

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<sup>12</sup> Coalition for Community Schools and The Finance Project, "Strengthening Partnerships: Community School Assessment Checklist." Washington, DC, 2000.



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

### Creating Strong Community School Teams

- ▶ Help connect the school with the community
- ▶ Engage community members' expertise in decision-making
- ▶ Serve as a sounding board
- ▶ Review and comment on the improvement plan
- ▶ Eliminate barriers
- ▶ Sponsor and support school events
- ▶ Advocate for the Community School

### Recruiting The Right People

- ▶ Identify the stakeholders you want your team to represent
- ▶ Identify the skills and characteristics you need on your team
- ▶ Identify the gaps

### Keep Partners Informed

- ▶ Do partners speak accurately about the Community School strategy and its programs and services?
- ▶ Are there systems in place to ensure that accomplishments and concerns are shared with the team?

### Leadership Development

- ▶ Are roles clear (facilitator, timekeeper, recorder, etc.)?
- ▶ What training is needed?
- ▶ Do new members go through an orientation process?

### Joint Planning

- ▶ Is the team actively involved in planning activities?
- ▶ Do members track the team's progress in achieving identified goals and priorities?
- ▶ Do you hold monthly meetings during which all partners strategize together?

### Evaluation

- ▶ Do members provide feedback on the team's operation?

### Recognition and Celebration

- ▶ Are members thanked regularly for their participation?
- ▶ Are members publicly recognized in school publications and displays?

## School Leadership Team

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The School Leadership Team (SLT) plays a significant role in creating a structure for school-based decision-making and promoting a collaborative school climate. SLTs must use consensus-based decision-making to ensure all participants contribute to and help shape the final decision. This approach sets the stage for greater cooperation and mutual respect.

### The School Leadership Team:

- ▶ Develops school policies and manages the resources needed to implement those policies
- ▶ Develops the school's annual Comprehensive Education Plan and ensures its vision and mission are aligned with the school-based budget
- ▶ Assists in evaluating the school's educational programs

The Community School Director serves as an active decision-making member of the School Leadership Team. By participating on the SLT, the CSD becomes familiar with the school's educational goals and programs, provides information about programs and services, and is part of the stakeholder decision-making team at the school. A presence at the table where school goals, programs, and policies are being discussed is critical if the CSD is to ensure alignment between student and family support services. Refer to The Director's Toolbox for Success for a **sample SLT meeting agenda**.

## Families as Learning Partners

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Families and guardians are key stakeholders in Community Schools. Their voices, participation, and perspective are critical tools in helping students along their journey. Efforts to attract families, establish a welcoming climate for them, and help them learn how to be involved in and supportive of their children's education are fundamental to the Community School concept.<sup>13</sup>

Fifty years of research support the many ways in which family engagement can contribute to higher student achievement. Yet, family involvement has too often been defined as a simple headcount of parent attendance at school events. Current research focuses on the wider range of activities that have a positive impact on a child's education, including school/parent dialogue, volunteering, and advocacy efforts. Researcher Joyce Epstein has identified multiple levels of parent involvement—in the home, school, and community:<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Children's Aid Society and National Center for Community Schools, *Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action*. New York: Children's Aid Society and National Center for Community Schools, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Epstein, Joyce L., "Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Involvement," Baltimore: Center for the Social Organization of Schools.



- ▶ **Parenting:** Families provide supportive home environments
- ▶ **Communication:** School and home exchange information about children
- ▶ **Volunteering:** Families are recruited and help at schools
- ▶ **Learning at Home:** Schools provide guidance and learning materials to help involve families in their children’s education
- ▶ **Decision-Making:** Families are represented and involved in school decisions
- ▶ **Collaborating with the Community:** Schools identify community-based resources and services that improve student learning

The key to authentic family engagement in schools is the promotion of trusting relationships and an atmosphere in which families feel welcome and respected. As described in the U.S. Department of Education’s 2014 publication *Partners in Education: A Dual Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*,<sup>15</sup> trusting relationships develop when school staff and families acquire key skills and capacities such as cultural competence, a joint understanding of student learning and the workings of the school system, and knowledge and appreciation of the assets and resources available in the surrounding community. According to the framework, when families and schools are true partners, families engage in roles including:

- ▶ **Supporters** of their children’s learning and development
- ▶ **Encouragers** of an achievement identity, a positive self-image, and a “can do” spirit in their children
- ▶ **Monitors** of their children’s time, behavior, boundaries, and resources
- ▶ **Models** of lifelong learning and enthusiasm for education
- ▶ **Advocates/Activists** for improved learning opportunities for their children and at their schools
- ▶ **Decision-Makers/Choosers** of educational options for their children, the school, and their community
- ▶ **Collaborators** with school staff and other community members on issues of school improvement and reform

As partners in student learning and development, families must be engaged in ways that are meaningful and authentic. We must recognize family members’ needs and challenges but also value the assets and resources they bring to both children’s development and learning.

Community School Directors and their teams often serve as a bridge between families and other key school personnel. They provide a crucial layer of support to family members as they assess which services their children need. At times, members of the Community School team may bridge a generational gap between families and their children, particularly when students are navigating cultural adjustment to an educational experience that differs from that of their families. Families will not only collaborate regarding the educational needs of their children, they will also offer support and invest time and resources to strengthen the overall school community.

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<sup>15</sup> SEDL in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, “Partners in Education: A Dual-Capacity Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships.” Washington, DC: SEDL and U.S. Department of Education, 2013.



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

Community Schools are uniquely positioned to support authentic family engagement. Community School Directors and their agency partners can assist schools with this critical work in the following ways:

- ▶ Build relationships of trust with families and the community
- ▶ Leverage existing positive relationships to better connect families with teachers and school administrators
- ▶ Help school staff understand and value the assets of families and the community
- ▶ Elicit parent input in the assets and needs assessment process
- ▶ Connect families with appropriate programs and services
- ▶ Provide families the tools and resources they need to advocate for their children's education and their children's school and to assume leadership roles in the school



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

How does this approach get implemented on the ground?

- ▶ CSD works with the school to create a vision and plan for how families will be engaged as authentic partners in learning
- ▶ CSD works with the school to create a family resource room where families can come for help, get needed information, network with each other, and participate in workshops and classes
- ▶ At parent-teacher conferences, teachers work with families to develop family goals to support learning at home. Community partners offer follow-up workshops to provide families the tools they need to implement these strategies and to practice them with other families
- ▶ Community partners, together with school staff, develop Family Learning Institutes (offering instruction on such topics as child development, understanding your child's test scores, and the high school/college application process)
- ▶ CSD organizes English Language Learner and adult education classes so families can better understand and assist their children with school assignments while modeling for their children the value of lifelong education

Families should be invited to the table as partners, decision makers, and advisors whenever possible. Community School teams should also invite families to celebrate student achievement or progress, just as schools invite families in to address student needs or concerns. Often, family engagement is treated as a one-way process, emphasizing parent and family deficits rather than assets. Approaching families as partners who hold insights into the lives and development of their children shifts this narrative and allows parent voices to add value. This shift also helps families recognize their own power in guiding the lives of their children.

## Youth Partnerships

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Young people must have meaningful roles in order to feel motivated and engaged. When you are committed to sharing power and leadership with young people, you accept that they have opinions, ideas, actions, and wisdom to share with you. The school community should be prepared to let young people take the lead.

Youth need opportunities to learn about and practice leadership in meaningful and authentic situations. Here are some ways your Community School can provide such opportunities.

### **PATHWAYS TO YOUTH LEADERSHIP**

**Youth-led social action/service learning projects** foster critical thinking, positive attitudes toward school, and increased civic engagement. The efforts:

- ▶ Should be youth-driven
- ▶ Require clear goals and objectives
- ▶ Require project planning
- ▶ Require ongoing reflection

**Youth councils** cultivate decision-making skills, promote motivation, and engage young people as agents of social change. Youth councils engage in activities and projects that:

- ▶ Foster civic engagement and/or community-building skills
- ▶ Encourage effective youth/adult relationships
- ▶ Enhance the development of life skills
- ▶ Build collaboration and decision-making skills

**Youth organizing** helps young people address the root causes of systematic problems in their neighborhoods through the development of community organizing and advocacy skills. Elements of youth organizing include:

- ▶ Reliance on the power and leadership abilities of youth
- ▶ Building a membership base and campaign vehicle
- ▶ Inclusion of youth as core staff and in governance roles



## BEST PRACTICE TIPS

### Benefits of Youth Leadership

**Sharing the power with young people is sometimes a challenging concept for adults, but the benefits of youth leadership are more than worth the effort. This approach:**

- ▶ Contributes to the positive development of young people and their communities
- ▶ Develops leadership skills in areas such as goal setting, problem solving, and decision-making
- ▶ Increases self-esteem and results in improved high school completion rates
- ▶ Fosters stronger connections to adults
- ▶ Promotes teamwork and respect
- ▶ Develops public speaking and writing skills
- ▶ Promotes awareness of the need for self-improvement and for personal responsibility
- ▶ Develops project management skills including setting goals, developing action steps, facilitation, reflection, and distinguishing between personal interests and the wider community's need
- ▶ Develops professionalism as young people demonstrate tactfulness and understand protocols and the importance of dressing appropriately, delivering quality work, and presenting themselves positively to others



## REFLECTION CORNER

### Reflection Questions:

- ▶ How is youth leadership reflected in the kind of physical and social/emotional environment you seek to create in your Community School?
- ▶ How is youth leadership reflected in the kinds of relationships you seek to nurture in your Community School (staff/staff, staff/youth, youth/youth, youth/families, and staff/families)?
- ▶ How is youth leadership reflected in the learning and engagement opportunities you provide in your Community School (academics, enrichment, and socialization)?

# Community Engagement

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At their best, Community Schools are the vibrant, pulsing heart of a community. The role of a Community School Director is largely rooted in an ability to build a shared vision around student success. In addition to coordinating resources that support the academic, health, social-emotional, enrichment, and family support needs of students, CSDs also cultivate and strengthen relationships with community partners with a similar vision and mission.

Community partners bring a broad range of social capital to the school community, including content expertise and connections to other key community stakeholders. Community partners may include other nonprofit or non-governmental organizations, local businesses and entrepreneurs across a range of industries, elected officials, and individuals who want to share their talents and skills with the school community.



## RESEARCH TO EXPLORE

A good resource for school-family-community partnerships is the Harvard Family Research Project's Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE). It features a free e-newsletter that regularly reports on the latest research and best practices for family engagement. **To learn more about FINE, visit <http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators>.**

Partnerships require a deep mutual commitment to shared goals. Here are some guiding principles to ensure that your partnerships run smoothly:<sup>16</sup>

- ▶ Plan together from the start
- ▶ Clarify the vision
- ▶ Take time to get to know each other
- ▶ Set ground rules
- ▶ Start small and build gradually
- ▶ Involve families in your efforts
- ▶ Clarify roles and responsibilities
- ▶ Share decision making
- ▶ Prepare team members to work together
- ▶ Stay flexible
- ▶ Keep tending to the relationship
- ▶ Be strategic

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<sup>16</sup> Children's Aid NCCS, *Principles of Effective Partnerships*.

## PLAN TOGETHER FROM THE START

Often partnerships get started because one party writes a grant proposal, or gets a support letter from one or more collaborators, and the partners don't really begin working together until "the check is in the mail." A much more effective approach is to get the leadership of the partner organizations together at the outset in order to conduct joint planning, visioning, and problem solving. Make sure you draw on needs assessment data from both sides of the partnership—for example, use school data (such as grades, test scores, attendance rates including rates of chronic absence, and suspension figures) as well as community data (such as information about the number and location of children who are unsupervised after school) as you conduct your joint planning.

## CLARIFY THE VISION

The only reason to work in a partnership is to accomplish goals you can't accomplish separately. The most effective partnerships develop and own a shared sense of purpose. Most partnerships have found it useful to create a written vision statement that guides all of their subsequent work. Such a vision statement can outline specific goals but should also communicate the partnership's overarching purpose, philosophy, and long-term aspirations.

## TAKE TIME TO GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

In the press of daily business, partners might be tempted to ignore this step, thinking of it as a luxury. Experience reveals that taking the time to get to know one another is a cost-effective step that can prevent later misunderstandings. Think of this step as an *investment* rather than a cost. The community partner should spend time on-site in the school, during the regular school day; and school leaders and staff should visit the community partner during its busy times. This way both sides of the partnership can learn about one another's core competencies and on-the-ground challenges.

## SET GROUND RULES

Jointly develop ground rules for who will lead meetings, how decisions will be made, how problems will be addressed, how grievances will be handled, etc. You won't be able to anticipate every challenge, but clear guidelines and procedures can help your partnership avoid unnecessary pitfalls—and having these discussions early can help the partners learn about one another's working styles.

## START SMALL AND BUILD GRADUALLY

You don't have to initiate a full-scale partnership in the first year. You might consider starting with a small after-school program in the first year, then adding components and participants the second year, then identifying some school-day activities that the school needs and the community partner is competent to provide (for example, supervising the playground program during recess and lunch breaks, or running after-school sports leagues). It's important to identify some "quick wins" that will allow the partnership to get off to a strong start. Quick wins are usually those that address critical needs and that build on the core competencies of the partner.

## **INVOLVE FAMILIES AS PARTNERS**

The sooner you involve families from the community, the easier it will be to spread the word of your new supports/services and mobilize community support. With their unique perspectives on the strengths and needs of their community, families and other residents will have a great deal of valuable information to share, especially when the key elements of the partnership are still on the drawing board.

## **CLARIFY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Effective partnerships rely on clear communication and a shared understanding of who will be responsible for what. Given that there are usually multiple players involved on both sides of the partnership, it's best to get written agreements and protocols that outline the basic elements of the partnership. These written documents should be jointly developed by the partners.

## **SHARE DECISION-MAKING**

Throughout the implementation of the partnership, from design and planning to daily operation, those people who will be depended upon to make the partnership work should be consulted and given ample opportunities to provide input and feedback. Shared decision-making and strong leadership are not contradictory. At various times, depending on the issue, one partner can and should become the group's natural leader.

## **PREPARE TEAM MEMBERS TO WORK TOGETHER**

Another cost of doing business in a partnership model is training. Make sure you arrange for joint orientation and cross-training opportunities for school and partner organization staff to enable all the partners to develop the skills they will need to make their collaboration work. Small, interactive workshops should focus on team building, shared decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution skills.

## **STAY FLEXIBLE**

Effective school-community partnerships require willingness for all involved to be flexible. Do not expect everything to go exactly as planned, and do not expect to be able to continue working just as you always have. Remember that the center of the word “collaboration” is labor! Also, remember that the context on both sides of the partnership keeps changing. Schools will get new mandates, community partners will gain and lose funding streams, and schools and partners will experience board and staff leadership changes. All of these inevitable occurrences will affect—but not derail—your partnership, if you are prepared and can stay flexible.

## **KEEP TENDING THE RELATIONSHIP**

Team building is not a one-time event. It needs continued examination and daily effort. And this is true at all levels of the partnership—from the superintendent-CEO relationship to the on-site interactions between teachers and youth workers, medical providers, social workers, and other partners.

## BE STRATEGIC

In meetings with school partners, community partners should listen carefully to what's on their minds, and think about ways they can respond to schools' needs. With higher standards and increased accountability, schools are under increasing pressure. But with these pressures have come new opportunities. Community partners should constantly assess what they are bringing to the partnership (including program, staffing, and financial resources)—and be proactive in offering to make these resources available to their schools and school district. Strategic opportunity resides in the intersection of need and capacity. Both sides of the partnership should actively look for a win-win.

Notes:



# The Essentials of Sustaining Community Schools

- Sustainability Essentials
- Measuring Results
- Advocacy and Partnering with Elected Officials

This chapter draws on the Finance Project's comprehensive sustainability framework to illustrate how leaders can sustain Community Schools, given the complexity of funding formulas and partnerships. It also explores the key role of marketing and communication in planning for sustainability.

# Sustainability Essentials

## Beyond Fundraising

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Funding and fundraising, while essential elements of sustainability, are only part of what is required for success. According to the Finance Project, there are eight elements of a comprehensive sustainability framework:

1. **Vision**
2. **Results Orientation**
3. **Strategic Financing Orientation**
4. **Adaptability to Changing Conditions**
5. **Broad Base of Community Support**
6. **Key Champions**
7. **Strong Internal Systems**
8. **Sustainability Plan**

**Vision** means the initiative's leaders know what they want to sustain. They know the scope, scale, and timeline of the work, and they understand how their initiative fits into the larger community. The Community School Director helps other staff understand and carry out the vision, supports them to stay inspired by the vision, and contributes to the evolution of the vision as it is implemented in the Community School. The CSD also conveys the school's resource needs to other members of the sustainability team. CSDs are often in a strong position to know the timing of important grants.

**Results orientation** means the Community School Director and other initiative leaders are clear about the results they want to achieve for children, families, the school, and the

community. Leaders use indicators to track the status of children and families in the school and across the community, and use performance measures to track work and to improve performance.

Having a **strategic financing orientation** implies that the CSD is aware of the fiscal needs at the school, makes best use of existing resources, and has a broad understanding of how finances are generated, including maximizing available sources of public revenue, creating greater flexibility in categorical funding, creating public-private partnerships, and exploring new state and local revenue sources. While you may not become involved in these overarching strategies, you should be aware of the contribution of each to your Community School budget. Savvy leaders stay aware of changes in the fiscal climate.

A related element of sustainability is **adaptability to changing conditions**. Community School Directors monitor announcements about funding, know how to frame their work to interest different funders, and understand how to participate in collaborative advocacy to improve the policy climate for Community Schools.

Community Schools need a **broad base of community support**. The CSD is in a strong position to nurture a community presence, communicate the school's identified needs and accomplishments, and build partnerships that foster collaboration rather than competition. CSDs must understand their role in organizing families, students, and other community residents and mobilizing these groups when needed, such as at funding rallies or advocacy events.

Community School Directors also play a key role in nurturing relationships with **key champions** including elected officials and business leaders. Many CSDs reach out to their area's elected officials, offering to host site visits so government officials can see the Community School's work firsthand and meet constituents, including families and students. Some CSDs organize annual community-wide celebrations at their schools and engage key officials who generally are eager to meet and interact with voters.

**Strong internal systems** ensure that Community Schools deliver on their promises and show positive return on investment.<sup>17</sup> CSDs actively work with supervisors at the lead agency or district to organize human and financial resources and develop strong fiscal management, accounting, information, and personnel systems that allow the Community School to carry out its mission. CSDs manage a site budget, control expenses, and report regularly to funders.

Finally, the Community School Director contributes to the **sustainability plan**, the sponsoring organization's comprehensive plan that describes short- and long-term needs. CSDs communicate their schools' needs on a timely basis and actively respond to requests for information or data that supports the plan.

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<sup>17</sup> Martinez, Laura, Cheryl D. Hayes, and Torey Silloway. *Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools: A Practical Guide*, Washington, DC, 2013.

# Measuring Results

## Removing Barriers to Learning

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The CSD's role in measuring results is closely linked to his or her role in sustainability. Experienced CSDs are clear about the results their Community School and larger initiatives seek to achieve. They know how to use data to drive decision-making from the outset, using needs assessment data, and using data on an ongoing basis to foster continuous improvement. Many CSDs also partner with third-party evaluators or with the quality assurance department of their own organization or district.

**Learn a results framework:** Many Community School Directors bring or develop knowledge about the basics of a logic model approach. They start by defining results (this is what we want to happen), then work backward (therefore, this is what we will do or these are the programs, supports, services, and opportunities we will offer). Most logic model frameworks share common components and guide practitioners through similar steps in formulating their plans.

Certain results frameworks have specific relevance to Community Schools and can be particularly useful for initiative leaders. For example, the Coalition for Community Schools developed a results framework that has been used and adapted by many initiatives across the country. A results framework can be used in combination with the basic logic model outlined previously.

As a strategy for organizing school and community resources around student success, Community Schools respond to the documented strengths and needs of children and their families. All Children's Aid Community Schools fulfill core strategic functions and offer responsive, results-oriented supports and services in four key domains: education, social emotional, health, and family and home. The strategy aims to effect whole-school change (attendance, wellness, and climate/culture) as well as to improve individual student and family outcomes.

**Clarify your initiative's desired results.** A key challenge in moving from a broad results framework to an evaluation plan is setting priorities among the many plausible and desirable results. One way to begin this winnowing process is to examine your school's Comprehensive Education Plan. This analysis will ensure alignment between your work and the work of the principal and other school leaders. Many Community School initiatives across the country have done a good job of selecting measurable and plausible results at both the student and school levels. For example, New York City Department of Education, Office of Community Schools results framework focuses on a "whole child, whole school" approach and has identified the following set of student and school outcomes to drive its work in 227 Community Schools:

**Student level outcomes include:**

- ▶ Increased attendance and student engagement
- ▶ Greater connectedness to adults and classmates in their school
- ▶ The development of social and emotional skills necessary for success
- ▶ Improved academic performance

**School level outcomes include:**

- ▶ Improved school culture and climate
- ▶ Families that are more actively engaged in children's education
- ▶ Seamless service delivery through increased collaboration between schools and partners

Ensure that **partners' work is aligned with results**. One of a CSD's key roles is to identify, recruit, orient, and coordinate the work of partners based on priorities established during the needs assessment process. If the alignment process is working well, partners working in the school will understand and be able to demonstrate how their work is contributing to the school's Comprehensive Education Plan and the Community School's articulated results. Using the New York City example, each partner should be able to demonstrate how its work is contributing to at least one of the seven results. Another example comes from Community Schools work in Oakland, CA, where each potential partner is asked by the Oakland Unified School District to respond to four questions:

- ▶ How does your organization's work contribute to **improving attendance**?
- ▶ How does your organization's work contribute to **improving achievement**?
- ▶ How does your organization's work contribute to **improving student engagement**?
- ▶ How does your organization's work contribute to **improving graduation rates**?

Community partners that cannot respond affirmatively to at least one question at the outset are not granted permission to work in Oakland's Community Schools. The role of the CSD in ensuring alignment between the work of partners and the Community School's stated results applies both to the work of other partners and to the work of the lead agency. Lead agencies often play the dual role of provider and broker of supports and services. If the CSD is employed by a lead agency, part of his or her role is to ensure the organization's programs (as well as those of other partners) are producing the desired results.

## COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING: A KEY STRATEGY IN SUSTAINABILITY

The role of marketing and communication is often overlooked when partners are planning and implementing a Community School strategy. However, both are critical to the growth and sustainability of the initiative. Thus, Community School Directors must be aware of the importance of communicating and marketing the vision, process, and results to all stakeholders within the school, the community, and beyond; and to funders, legislators, the press, and business groups. Refer to The Director's Toolbox for Success for **Children's Aid Communication Practice Case Study**.

Strong communication skills and a keen ability to listen are at the top when identifying skills and competencies necessary to do the job of a CSD. Directors must be mindful of how the many layers of communication apply to the different elements of the Community School.

- ▶ Remember, communication is the act of sending and receiving information, whether consciously or unconsciously.
- ▶ People communicate in various ways and often combine methods. However, there are two main communication types:
  - ▶ **Verbal:** face-to-face conversations, presentations, telephone, radio, television, other media
  - ▶ **Non-verbal:** through body language, facial expressions, sign language, touch, music, clothing, actions, sense of smell, the physical space, signs, etc.; and through written communication including letters, memos, books, magazines, newspapers, e-mails, social media, graphs, charts, illustrations, posters, logos, and other visuals
- ▶ Know your audience. For your partnership to prosper and endure, you have to reach stakeholders, whoever and wherever they are, with targeted, timely, clear, relevant, and interactive communication as frequently as possible.
- ▶ Frequent communication among partners keeps everyone informed, motivated, and involved. Meetings, phone calls, memos, flyers, e-mails, and newsletters all work to keep team members up to date. The intranet, extranet, websites, and social media also facilitate communication and information sharing,
- ▶ Marketing and branding your initiative is essential (you, your staff, and your space are marketing elements).

- ▶ As Community School Directors, you have the opportunity to speak out on important issues. Thorough preparation will enable you to present your initiative in a positive light and prevent its being misrepresented.
- ▶ Messages must be clear, simple, relevant, and timely. Choose and train a few messengers carefully, but make sure everyone on your staff is prepared to answer programmatic questions as needed.



## REFLECTION CORNER

As you craft your community school initiative message, you must communicate the vision with clarity and provide an overview of your work and impact quickly and succinctly. The goal is to capture and hold your stakeholders' attention at the crucial start of your pitch. The following guiding questions can help you get started with your pitch:

- ▶ To whom is the pitch being made? Why?
- ▶ Who should be making the pitch? Why?
- ▶ What are the desired outcomes?
- ▶ What are the significant trends in your school/district?
- ▶ What can your stakeholders offer to address trends?
- ▶ What are the key points?
- ▶ What questions might I/we be asked?



# Advocacy and Partnering with Elected Officials

## Building Public Support

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“All politics is local” is certainly true for Community Schools today. The increased interest and investments in Community Schools at the local and state level are unparalleled. That is why it is critical to build relationships and engage elected officials in your Community School. Invite local and state representatives for a site visit or a community event. Share your Community School stories with the political champions who can help sustain your work for years to come. Advocacy is a year-round strategy. CSDs should always be looking for ways to connect elected officials to their constituents through their Community School, showcase the investments and policy in practice, and tie the story to what works for children, families, and the larger community. CSDs are the drivers of a successful advocacy strategy.

- ▶ **Host site visits.** Together with the lead community partner, Community School Directors should host site visits for elected officials throughout the school year.
- ▶ **Communicate events.** Community School Directors should share all events, activities, and forums hosted by the Community School with their organization and/or lead agency. Invite your elected officials to attend and/or to speak at special Community School events. Enlist new advocates by inviting local politicians to give opening remarks and perhaps actively engage with children and families.

- **Remain transparent about programming and funding issues.** Community School Directors must disclose any critical programming and/or funding gaps they anticipate may occur. The advocacy strategy, whether spearheaded by the lead agency or a coalition of community organizations, must always reflect the Community School's needs. All budget and legislative priorities communicated by the organization's leadership to elected officials must align with the issues related to the children and families of the communities they represent.

Notes:

# Conclusion

## Making It Your Own

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In the introduction, we described a place where everyone loves to learn and feels safe, connected, respected, and valued. In this place, adults and young people, teachers and families, and the school and community are partners in decision-making and promoting change. How is your Community School like this dynamic and vibrant place? What are the skills that make you the perfect leader for your Community School?

Throughout this guide, you received tips, tools, and strategies to help you learn and grow in your role as Community School Director. You learned the importance of your role and the critical leadership and other essential skills you may need to develop or hone. You learned ideas for assessing needs and creating and managing partnerships with school leaders, families, youth, and the community. You also read about the importance of communication and marketing in sustaining your Community School financially. Now, you can go back to your Community School with a new toolbox ready for use in the important work of educating, assisting, and advocating for students and their families.

Notes:



# Appendix: The Director's Toolbox for Success

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- Tools
  - Case Studies
  - Bibliography

In this section, you will find a collection of tools, resources, and case studies to reinforce the strategies, practices, and principles introduced throughout the guide:

- Stages of Development Readiness Self-Assessment
- Sample CSD Job Description
- Assets & Needs Assessment Tools
  - ▶ Toolkit
  - ▶ Resource Inventory
  - ▶ Gap Analysis
  - ▶ Report Outline
  - ▶ Focus Groups Tips
- MOU sample
- Community School 101 Orientation Agenda Sample
- Partner Meeting Agenda Sample and Template
- Community School Site Visit Observation Tool
- Case Studies

## Readiness Self-Assessment

Designate the Stage of Development of your community school for each of the four listed Capacities (Collaboration, Coherence, Commitment, and Comprehensiveness). Work individually first, then compare your selections with your team members. Pay special attention to where your assessment differs from your colleagues' and work toward consensus.

	EXPLORING	EMERGING	MATURING	EXCELLING
COLLABORATION	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by interest in CS strategy as way to engage others in removing barriers and improving conditions for learning. Open to sharing leadership. Interested in increasing parental and community engagement.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by increased efforts to engage parents and community in planning, implementation and oversight of academic and non-academic programs. Beginning to involve partners and parents in decision-making.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by the regular involvement of and shared leadership with wide range of stakeholders. Transparent agreements and mutual accountability underpin the ongoing development of partnerships.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by permanent engagement across community, collaborative mode of community and program development, and policymaking.
COHERENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by a recognition that effective management of needed programs and services exceeds capacity of existing staffing and structures. Recognized need for program integration. Planning process engages all stakeholders.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by efforts to develop effective coordination and system of monitoring and accountability for programs and services. Development of new resources for staffing, communication patterns, management.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by the integration of CS structure/ processes/programs into "normal" operations of schools. CSD role is clearly understood and leadership is reliably shared. Effective, consistent management is a hallmark of this stage.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by policy shifts that make CS a permanent approach to school reform, service delivery, community-based education, and civic engagement.
COMMITMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by an interest in building the CS for the long term, with policy changes, systems, resources and engagement geared towards permanency.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by systematic, multi-year efforts to collect data, build focus on results, seek resources and build support.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by growing realization that CS can provide coordination and targeting for numerous child/family/community goals. Policy and funding decisions begin to reflect site successes.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by permanent political commitment, designated funding, private and community support, alignment of related initiatives, using CS as coordinating strategy.
COMPREHENSIVENESS	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by recognition that children and families have multiple needs that impact school climate and inhibit learning, and that schools cannot address them alone. Focus on how to get services and programs for children and families, both non-academic and academic enrichment.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by initial steps towards building relationship with a Lead Partner and other willing providers. School open extended hours for partners to provide services, as well as inviting programming and support services during the school day.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by opening school to multiple partner services and programs that respond to identified needs of students, school, families and community and that improve the overall conditions for learning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Characterized by a shift in role of schools as hubs of opportunity and civic engagement for students, families and neighborhoods residents. System in place for on-going comprehensiveness in response to need and demand.

## Readiness Needs

For each Capacity, identify what **would need to happen or change** to move your community school to the next stage. Be honest and gentle in your delivery as you discuss each capacity with your team members.

### COLLABORATION

To get to the next stage...

### COHERENCE

To get to the next stage...

### COMMITMENT

To get to the next stage...

### COMPREHENSIVENESS

To get to the next stage...



## Sample Community School Director Job Description

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The Community School Director is the school leadership team member responsible for the design, implementation, and supervision of a set of programmatic preventions, interventions, and enrichment activities designed to support the holistic development of students. The Community School Director works under the daily guidance of the Principal, but direct supervision comes from the lead agency to co-design, develop, and supervise all community school programming in the school including:

- ▶ Attendance support and interventions
- ▶ Family support services
- ▶ Family engagement and community-building
- ▶ Health and wellness services
- ▶ Enrichment activities including those that occur during the school day, after school, and summer

The Community School Director is a leader who empowers, builds, creates, and develops relationships with school leaders, stakeholders, and community organizations in order to implement a community school strategy guided by a community school plan. The Community School Director bridges the relationships among all stakeholders to improve connectedness and surround the whole child with support—academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

### SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

The Community School Director is responsible for working specifically with the Principal and other members of the school Leadership Team to ensure that the barriers to learning that may exist for each individual student are eliminated and/or significantly reduced. The Community School Director is directly responsible to the lead agency supervisor.

Community School Directors will be expected to do the following:

- ▶ Hire and supervise all staff responsible for the delivery of out-of-school time programming and other specialty services and projects as needed.
- ▶ Assure the high-quality functioning of other community school programming including: (health, dental, mental health, family support services).
- ▶ Assure above is carried out within the context of partnership and collaboration.
- ▶ Collaborate with the Principal to effectively execute and maintain partnerships.
- ▶ Support school culture-building as a leadership team member and member of the school community under the direction of the Principal in partnership with the School Leadership Team, families, young people, and community stakeholders.
- ▶ Form partnerships with agencies in the community that enrich the school environment and will provide services for children and families: mental health, afterschool, summer camps, arts, sports, health/dental, adult programs, mentoring, etc.

- ▶ Create, develop, and maintain relationships with community partners, key stakeholders, and other important members of the school community.
- ▶ Facilitates the communication between the principal and other leaders and ensures that these relationships are positive.
- ▶ Increase and strengthen family engagement initiatives. Supervise and develop family and community development coordinator.
- ▶ Develop systems to track programming progress and evaluate effectiveness of activities.
- ▶ Represent the school in community meetings and events including but not limited to diversity, social-emotional initiatives, homelessness, community school improvement meetings, etc.
- ▶ Support attendance initiatives.
- ▶ Use the tools and resources provided to track student progress around the school's goals.
- ▶ Work with the Principal, leadership team, and teachers to identify and coordinate academic, socio-emotional, and health resources for students and their families.
- ▶ Develop a clear and data-driven yearlong plan for the coordination and delivery of services and supports to students that is built in collaboration with the stakeholders described above.
- ▶ Foster positive and healthy relationships with each member of the school community.
- ▶ Participate in on-going training and professional development.
- ▶ Maintain regular communication with students' parents/caregivers in order to support the school's parent engagement initiatives.
- ▶ Use the resources available to meet the needs of students on a daily basis.

## QUALIFICATIONS

- ▶ 5-7 years of experience working with young people (in-school and/or out-of-school settings)
- ▶ Bachelor's Degree or Master's Degree in Social Work, Education or related field
- ▶ Exceptional leadership skills and communication skills
- ▶ Excellent organizational and time management skills
- ▶ Significant supervisory experience
- ▶ Commitment to professional development
- ▶ A demonstrated goal orientation and focus on outcomes and results
- ▶ A demonstrated ability to effectively work with students who have been traditionally under-served including English Language Learners, children with special needs, children who have been or are

currently involved in the child welfare system, children living below self-sufficiency, and children from single parent households

- ▶ Ability to work independently and handle multiple tasks with exceptional attention to detail
- ▶ Ability to work cooperatively with his/her school colleagues
- ▶ Ability and willingness to work collaboratively with colleagues
- ▶ A thorough understanding of youth development principles and practice
- ▶ A history of service to under-resourced communities
- ▶ Professionalism, sound judgment, foresight, and maturity
- ▶ An entrepreneurial spirit that embraces creativity and hard work inherent in a start-up
- ▶ Bilingual Spanish/English Skills a plus

**NOTES:**

# Assets & Needs Assessment Tools

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## WHY A NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

A needs assessment is a systematic process used to understand and create a profile of a community school's needs. Without a current and comprehensive needs assessment, a community school is less likely to provide offerings or foster partnerships that effectively address risks and promote opportunities for all of its students and families. The purpose of the needs assessment is NOT to rigorously or scientifically evaluate the impact of individual programs, strategies and curricula, but instead to gather a wide range of information that will inform and drive decisions about the community school's programming and operations.

## HOW WAS THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT DEVELOPED?

This Toolkit was developed by Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools in partnership with the leadership and staff of the Chicago Public Schools Community School Initiative (CSI), an advisory group comprised of representatives from key CSI Lead Agencies and the New York-based research firm ActKnowledge. The Toolkit builds on the collective strengths and experiences of all of the aforementioned and includes adaptations of the Plus 50 Needs Assessment Toolkit developed by the American Association of Community Colleges.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED IN THE TOOLKIT?

The Toolkit was designed to be user-friendly and as brief as possible. It is organized around the key steps of the needs assessment process, which are listed below and best completed in sequence:

1. Getting Started
2. Archival Data Review
3. Initial Analysis
4. Surveys
5. Key Informant Interviews
6. Focus Groups
7. Final Analysis
8. Reporting

Depending on your community school's practice, you may already have some of the above steps in place, in which case it is entirely appropriate to include those existing resources into this process. Each step is described in the same format. You will see the following under each:

**Tasks:** Key activities or strategies that should be taken

**Tips:** Best practice suggestions to consider and pitfalls to avoid

**Tools:** Worksheets or sample instruments that can be used to support the process

## Step 1: Getting Started

<b>TASKS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Convene the Advisory Council</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Revisit the Advisory Council's mission/purpose and consider whether to add members</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Conduct a Readiness Self-Assessment</li></ul>
<b>TIPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ You should not need to create a new team to take on the data gathering and analysis responsibilities. Conducting needs assessments should be one of the core functions of the community school's Advisory Council. The process described in this Toolkit may serve as an opportunity to reengage key stakeholders in your school and neighborhood and activate your Advisory Council.</li><li>▶ Consider the existing diversity of experience, skills and perspectives of the Advisory Council to help you identify which potential new members you need.</li><li>▶ One person should act as the project manager to keep track of the overall process and keep team members accountable.</li></ul>
<b>TOOLS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Building Your Team Worksheet</li><li>▶ Readiness Self-Assessment Worksheet</li></ul>

## Step 2: Archival Data Review

<b>TASKS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Gather and record key information from existing data sources (such as school suspension rates, after-school attendance, community health statistics, etc.)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Manipulate existing data sources to deepen your understanding (determining the chronic absence rates of English Language Learners, for example, will require some reworking of existing data sets)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Complete the Archival Data Collection Worksheet</li></ul>
<b>TIPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Make full use of the School Profile and Early Warning Indicator reports provided by Chicago Public Schools</li><li>▶ As you collect and record each datum, new questions will likely come to mind, as might concerns about the accuracy of the data. Record those questions, concerns and other thoughts on the Worksheet.</li><li>▶ Add Need Indicators to the worksheet as needed and appropriate. Blank rows have been inserted for this purpose.</li></ul>
<b>TOOLS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Archival Data Collection Worksheet</li></ul>

## Step 3: Initial Analysis

### TASKS

- ☐ Convene Advisory Council to review the Archival Data
- ☐ Identify the top five high priority needs that emerge from the review
- ☐ Brainstorm particular questions that should be considered for the survey, interview and focus group steps
- ☐ Identify the key informants to be interviewed in Step 5

### TIPS

- ▶ Remember that this is an *initial* analysis and that you are not expected to have findings at this point. The purpose, instead, is to collectively identify patterns, see connections between the need indicators and begin to narrow the focus of your needs assessment.

### TOOLS

- ▶ Archival Data Collection Worksheet

## Step 4: Surveys

### TASKS

- ☐ Develop surveys for key constituent groups. Surveys of students, parents and teachers are required, but others may be added.
- ☐ Administer the surveys
- ☐ Compile survey results

### TIPS

- ▶ Questions should be mostly closed-ended (multiple choice, true/false, Likert Scales, etc.) and limited in number.
- ▶ Paper vs. Online (using the method or combination of methods most likely to ensure a high response rate)
- ▶ Use vocabulary and language that is appropriate for each audience. In all cases, avoid using technical language and terminology.
- ▶ Particularly for youth surveys, you might consider offerings incentives.
- ▶ Decide whether to use a paper-based or web-based survey (or both). Each has its advantages and disadvantages, but web-based surveys are especially convenient because they can tally up and graphically present responses automatically. There are free and low- cost solutions out there. When using paper, it may make sense to record the responses on an electronic spreadsheet.
- ▶ Timing the administration of surveys to coincide with, for example, faculty meetings, parent-teacher conferences, after-school special events may increase the yield of responses

### TOOLS

- ▶ Archival Data Collection Worksheet (completed, from Step 3)
- Sample Surveys



## Step 5: Key Informant Interviews

<b>TASKS</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct Key Informant Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Summarize findings
<b>TIPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Keep interviews to 30-45 minutes long</li> <li>▶ Decide whether you want the same person conducting all of the interviews for the sake of consistency.</li> <li>▶ Do your best to frame questions in a way that elicits the key informants' interpretation of the data and perhaps some suggestions for addressing the needs</li> <li>▶ Avoid making the informant feel defensive; keep the conversation focused on the ways in which students may require supports and opportunities, and away from what they themselves have or have not done to address those needs</li> </ul>
<b>TOOLS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Key informant interview Worksheet</li> <li>▶ Sample Interview Questions</li> </ul>

## Step 6: Focus Groups

<b>TASKS</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Conduct Focus Groups. Groups including students, parents and teachers are required, but others may be added. <input type="checkbox"/> Summarize findings
<b>TIPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Focus groups are generally most lively and effective when composed of 6 to 12 people. They should last between 45 to 60 minutes. Consider your audience when scheduling the focus groups (i.e., evenings or weekends for working parents, in-school hours for teachers if possible)</li> <li>▶ You will need a facilitator and a note taker. Do not combine these roles as it is exceedingly difficult to do both simultaneously.</li> <li>▶ Prepare a scripted introduction and 8 to 12 questions in advance (samples are provided for you). Unlike with the surveys, questions in focus groups should be open-ended and should encourage participants to elaborate. Ask participants to follow up on and react to each other's responses. Stay away from yes/no questions.</li> </ul>
<b>TOOLS</b>	Sample Focus Group scripts and questions



## Step 7: Final Analysis

TASKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❑ Convene Advisory Council to review summaries of surveys, interviews and focus groups</li><li>❑ Determine three priority need areas for the next 12 months</li><li>❑ Review and brainstorm additional recommendations for how to address the needs</li></ul>
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Advisory Council members should receive – in advance of the final analysis convening – summaries of the survey, interview and focus group results</li><li>▶ Schedule enough time to have a thorough reflection and discussion. If needed, schedule a second session to ensure completion.</li></ul>
TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Needs Assessment Analysis Worksheet</li></ul>

## Step 8: Reporting

TASKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❑ Write Need Assessment Report</li><li>❑ Disseminate Report</li></ul>
TIPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Resist the urge to over think, over format or over produce this report. Bulleted lists are more readable – and therefore more actionable – than narrative descriptions</li><li>▶ Include completed worksheets from the toolkit as supporting material in an appendix.</li><li>▶ The report itself should focus on your identified findings, priorities and recommendations.</li></ul>
TOOLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ Needs Assessment Analysis Worksheet (completed, from Step 7)</li><li>Needs Assessment Report Outline</li></ul>

## Resource Inventory

PROGRAMS PROVIDED	AGENCY/ TYPE OF PROGRAM	# YOUTH SERVED (# Families/Adults Served)
ACADEMIC SKILLS FOR YOUTH (e.g. tutoring, homework help)		
ENRICHMENT (e.g. photography, chess, etc.)		
RECREATION FOR YOUTH (e.g., sports)		
EARLY CHILDHOOD (e.g. childcare, parenting classes)		
PARENT /FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER		
COMMUNITY BUILDING (e.g. family/community empowerment)		
ADULT EDUCATION CLASSES (e.g. GED, ESL)		

## Resource Inventory

SERVICES PROVIDED		AGENCY/ TYPE OF PROGRAM	# YOUTH SERVED (# Families/Adults Served)
HEALTH SERVICES	Medical		
	Vision		
	Dental Services (Ortho, etc.)		
MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES SUBSTANCE/ALCOHOL ABUSE COUNSELING			
GENERAL SOCIAL SERVICES (e.g., access to health insurance, immigration, food pantry, etc.)			

## Gap Analysis Worksheet

		LIST PROGRAMS AND SERVICES PROVIDED FOR EACH DOMAIN	INDICATE THE ONES THAT ARE SUCCESSFUL
DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAIN	PHYSICAL		
	COGNITIVE		
	EMOTIONAL		
	SOCIAL		
	MORAL		



WHO'S NOT BEING SERVED?  
WHOSE NEEDS  
ARE NOT BEING MET?  
ID GAPS

WHO HAS CAPACITY  
TO MEET THE UNMET NEEDS?

WHAT CAN BE DONE  
TO ADDRESS THE GAPS?

NOTES:

# Report Outline

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## I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This section describes the purpose of the needs assessment and the specific questions and issues the assessment was designed to explore. Background information on the community school initiative should also be included here briefly.

## II. METHODS

This section describes all of the methods used to collect the data and information presented in the report as well as the key participants (or participant types) involved in the processes.

### a. Data Collection

Brief description of each data collection method used

- ▶ **Archival Data Review**—list all data sources that were consulted
- ▶ **Surveys**—include a description of the groups that received and submitted surveys, including how representative each sample was of their larger population
- ▶ **Focus Group**—include a description of the number and types of groups that participated
- ▶ **Interviews**—include a description of the individuals that were interviewed

### b. Strengths and Limitations

Description of the main strengths of the process (for example, a large number of archival data sources were available), as well as any considerations the audience should be aware of as they read and interpret the key findings (i.e., poor participant response rates on parent surveys)

### c. Key Participants

List of the primary participants who administered the process, including those who collected the data and the members of the committee who analyzed and interpreted the information presented in the report

## III. KEY FINDINGS

This section summarizes the **analyses** and **findings** from the process. A bulleted list is easier to read and act on over a lengthy narrative.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section describes the **implications** from the data and suggests next steps for your community school.

## V. APPENDICES

Included in this section should be the data collection instruments used, such as the survey and focus group questions, and the schedule of activities that contributed to the process.

# Focus Group Tips

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## I. THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN DECIDING ON A FACILITATOR(S):

- ▶ **One or more facilitators:** Ideally, two facilitators are helpful especially if you will not be recording the conversation.
- ▶ **Gender:** Just as you should consider the balance of gender of the focus group, think about the gender of the lead facilitator.
- ▶ **Peer:** This is something to consider when meeting with a group that may feel uneasy as to whether the facilitator can relate to them.
- ▶ **Language:** Find out if some focus group members speak another language; if so, it may be worthwhile to conduct a focus group in their language or with translators.
- ▶ **Knowledge/Involvement with topic:** It helps in the memorization of the instrument.

## II. GROUP FACILITATION SKILLS: THINGS TO CONSIDER IN BEING AN EFFECTIVE FACILITATOR

### a. Kind but firm

- ▶ Disciplined detachment with empathy (e.g., “was that difficult to handle...”).
- ▶ Permissive attitude with attention to agenda (e.g., “I want us to continue talking about this but in relation to [next topic here]...”).
- ▶ Encourage group leadership while maintaining leadership (e.g., “thank you [name of person] for providing us some detail, what do others think, do you agree...”).

### b. Permissiveness

- ▶ Be alert to group disintegration (e.g., side conversations).
- ▶ Pursue clues in flow of conversation (e.g., “I want to pause and consider something you all have raised...”).
- ▶ Be prepared to cope with unusual opinions and personality clashes (e.g., “thank you [name of person] for providing us some detail, what do others think, do you agree...”).
- ▶ Encourage expressions of differences of opinion.

### c. Involvement

- ▶ Immerse self completely in topics of discussion but not to the level of becoming part of the conversation.
- ▶ Encourage and stimulate intensive personal involvement (e.g., identify individuals by name).

### d. Encouragement

- ▶ Be aware of unresponsive members and body language.
- ▶ Try to break down reserve.
- ▶ Address over stimulation or changing directions.

### e. Flexibility

- ▶ Commit topic outline to memory.
- ▶ Be ready to connect topic outline to random conversations.



### III. THE BODY OF THE FOCUS GROUP: AN EFFECTIVE FOCUS GROUP STRUCTURE

#### a. Beginning the focus group

- ▶ Start out with chatting; give group time to relax and get oriented.
- ▶ Give welcome and make introductions.
- ▶ Set tone as relaxing, informal.
- ▶ Ask everyone to share about their commonality (e.g., school, community, family) [provides an opportunity to speak to each person at least on a well-known topic; can show interest in in-depth replies using probing questions].
- ▶ Give general overview of what you will be doing and the topic.
- ▶ Set ground rules (everyone will have a chance to speak).
- ▶ Encourage focus group participants to define community strengths, resources, challenges and concerns in terms that are as specific as possible.

#### b. Pacing

- ▶ Have fixed period of time; enough to build rapport (1-2 hours).
- ▶ Pace to finish on time.
- ▶ Give “weight” to questions to determine time allowed.
- ▶ Order questions from easy to hard; logical connection.
- ▶ Nonessential (nice-to-know) questions at end.
- ▶ Anticipate the flow of the discussion.

#### c. Responding to participant comments

- ▶ Encourage by questions or active listening to more in-depth answers.
- ▶ Watch body language and responses; don’t nod or make comments (“Uh huh,” “good,” etc.).
- ▶ Pause and Probe—these are two essential techniques in conducting focus groups.
- ▶ Pause for 5 seconds after a contribution to give others a chance to respond. The 5-second pause is most often used after a participant comment. This short pause often prompts additional points of view or agreement with the previously mentioned position.
- ▶ Probe when others “just agree.” In most group discussions there is a tendency for people to make vague comments that could have multiple meanings or to say “I agree.” When this occurs, the probe is an effective technique to elicit additional information.
  - ▶ **Suggested probes:**
    - Would you explain further?
    - Would you give me an example of what you mean?
  - ▶ **Would you say more?**
    - Is there anything else?
    - Please describe what you mean; I don’t understand.
- ▶ Be able to recognize beneficial topics of discussion as opposed to dead ends.
- ▶ Give license to expressing differing points of view: “Does anyone see it differently?”

#### d. Balancing participation

- ▶ Encourage less forward participants.
- ▶ Ask directly to comment.
- ▶ Call on those who “look” like they want to speak.

- ▶ Use Round Robin technique.
- ▶ Don't allow suppressing of others' contributions.
- ▶ Avoid eye contact with dominating pseudo-experts who intimidate others; be direct in asking them to let others express opinion.

**e. Notes and recordings**

- ▶ Write ideas on flip chart; put up on wall.
- ▶ Have an assistant write notes (more detailed quotes, etc., and impressions of body language, tone of voice, etc.).
- ▶ Audio-tape session; have good microphone and long tape.
- ▶ Type up flip chart and notes (leave space for notes, i.e., double spaced with wide margins).
- ▶ Listen to audio recording; make comments on typed notes reflecting further insights, feelings, etc.
- ▶ Goal: find out not only what they said but what they "meant."
- ▶ Have several persons review notes and come to a consensus (general orientation for each question , content, process).
- ▶ Use professional judgment in using data.

# MOU Sample

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## Memorandum of Understanding between Board of Education and CBO lead agency partner

### CBO lead agency partner and Board of Education Community School Initiative Guidelines

#### PHASE 1: JULY 2013–NOVEMBER 2013

In Phase 1 of this Community Schools Initiative, activities will be focused on exploring feasibility and planning.

#### **In Phase 1, CBO lead agency partner along with Strategic Community Partners will:**

- ▶ Secure the participation of National Center for Community Schools Consultants to co-facilitate the exploration process.
- ▶ Collect and disclose data relevant to and necessary for an informed decision-making process.
- ▶ Develop a results-based plan (deliverable), complete with best practice strategies aligned with the Board of Education's goals as communicated through the Office of Family and Community Partnership.
- ▶ Propose a funding and sustainability plan for ongoing support of Community Schools.
- ▶ Provide fiscal management of Community School revenue and expenses.
- ▶ Regularly convene a steering committee dedicated to the ongoing oversight of this process.

#### **In Phase 1, Board of Education will:**

- ▶ Provide support and assistance in identifying a school and supportive principal to serve as the pilot program.
- ▶ Make available data necessary for planning.
- ▶ Agree to permit at least one presentation to the Board of Education, in collaboration with key district staff members and CBO lead agency partner staff regarding implementation of the Community School initiative.
- ▶ Produce all School Improvement and Strategic Plans as requested by CBO lead agency partner for the purpose of developing Results-Based Plans for the Community School initiative in a timely manner.
- ▶ Actively promote Community School initiative including assessing needs and progress of school and community, participating in resource development, and developing a results-based plan.

## PHASE 2: DECEMBER 2013–NOVEMBER 2014

In Phase 2 of this Community Schools Initiative, activities will be focused on **implementation**.

**In Phase 2, CBO lead agency partner (as lead agency) along with Strategic Community Partners will:**

- ▶ Promote Community School model including assessing needs and progress of school and community, participating in resource development, and developing a results-based plan designed to improve the Community School Conditions for Learning (detailed below).
- ▶ Schedule, coordinate, and market Community School visits for the purpose of engaging potential funders and key stakeholders to provide support on behalf of the Community School initiative in the School District.
- ▶ Communicate to community and donors the needs, priorities, and changing conditions of the community and School District.
- ▶ Provide fiscal management of Community School revenue and expenses.
- ▶ Participate in development and implementation of a results-based plan, complete with best practice strategies aligned with Board of Education's goals as communicated through the Office of Family and Community Engagement.
- ▶ Hire and annually evaluate key personnel (for example, Community School Director) with participation of appropriate school staff (for example, Principal) and/or involvement of the Office of Family and Community Engagement.
- ▶ Regularly convene a steering committee dedicated to the ongoing oversight of this process.

**In Phase 2: Board of Education will:**

- ▶ Provide active leadership by the school Principal to strengthen relationships with Steering Committee, Community School Director, and any community leaders bringing program/strategies to the school.
- ▶ Recognize and support role of Community School Director.
- ▶ Permit and participate in at least two Community School tours/visits per year.
- ▶ Permit at least one presentation to the Board of Education in collaboration with key district staff members and CBO lead agency partner staff regarding implementation of the Community School initiative.
- ▶ Produce all School Improvement and Strategic Plans as requested by CBO lead agency partner for the purpose of developing Results-Based Plans for the Community School Initiative in a timely manner.
- ▶ Assist with annual data collection (student performance/academic data as appropriate and needed).
- ▶ Participate in annual performance review of Community School Director.

- ▶ Dedicate office space, desk, computer, phone, and related supports for the Community School Director.
- ▶ Assist in establishing a site-based Leadership Team (involving educators, parents, non-teaching school staff, and community members).
- ▶ Develop and implement a results-based Action Plan focused on the six Conditions for Learning of a Community School (developed once annually, reviewed and revised bi-annually).
- ▶ Provide support for the Leadership Team to communicate with each other, parents, and community (email, newsletters, district-wide announcements).
- ▶ Provide custodial support for use of building in non-school hours.
- ▶ Provide substitute teachers to allow teacher participation on teams.
- ▶ Support teachers in afterschool hours/events.
- ▶ Provide space, AV equipment, and hospitality for training sessions, as needed.
- ▶ Provide release time for principals, faculty, and staff to participate in training and regular meetings, as scheduled.
- ▶ Actively promote Community School initiative including assessing needs and progress of school and community, participating in resource development, and developing a results-based plan.

## COMMUNITY SCHOOL CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING

### Quality Education

- ▶ Strong leadership/clear vision
- ▶ Competent and prepared teachers
- ▶ Rich and challenging curriculum
- ▶ Effective instruction
- ▶ High standards and expectation for students
- ▶ Small schools
- ▶ Small classes

### Positive Youth Development and Motivation to Learn

- ▶ Opportunities for active and concrete learning
- ▶ Afterschool enrichment programs that enhance (vs. replicate) classroom work
- ▶ Use of community as a living textbook for learning
- ▶ Intentional opportunities for all youth to build developmental assets
- ▶ Effective supports for reshaping problematic behaviors

### Basic Physical, Mental, and Emotional Needs of Students and Families Met

- ▶ Connections to accessible and affordable physical health, mental health, and substance abuse assessments and interventions
- ▶ Nutrition education and modeling via lunches, snacks, etc.
- ▶ Opportunities/supports for physical exercise

**Mutual Respect and Effective Collaboration among Parents, Families, School Staff**

- ▶ Welcoming/inviting school environment and practices
- ▶ Multiple avenues for parent/family engagement (re: child's education and school improvement)
- ▶ Intentional emphasis on student and family strengths
- ▶ High attention to cultural, socioeconomic, and other family-specific characteristics/experiences
- ▶ Frequent, relevant, and user-friendly communications
- ▶ Regular seeking of parent input/feedback re: school environment, programs, practices, etc.

**Safe, Supportive, and Respectful School Environment**

- ▶ Intentional focus on building, reinforcing caring relationships (student to student, student to educator, educator to educator, etc.)
- ▶ Engagement of community advocates to help create safer, more positive school environment
- ▶ Attention to actual condition of school buildings in terms of image, safety, positive learning

**Early Childhood Development**

- ▶ High quality programs
- ▶ Academic linkages to kindergarten
- ▶ Parent transitioning to kindergarten

# Community School 101 Orientation Agenda Sample

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## The Nuts & Bolts of Community Schools

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As a result of this session, participants will be able to:

- ▶ Better understand the core components, principles and practices of a community school
- ▶ Identify the developmental state of their community school initiative
- ▶ Identify initial steps for how to move their community school strategy forward

### SAMPLE AGENDA

- ▶ **Welcome/Introductions:** 5 min
- ▶ **What is a Community School?:** 10 min
- ▶ **A Closer Look at a Full Service Community School in Action**  
(virtual tour <https://youtube/rKZlvUNPgog>): 15 min
- ▶ **Overview of National Community School Movement and Standards of Practice:** 15 min
- ▶ **Overview of Community School Stages of Development and Capacities:** 10 min
- ▶ **Wrap Up:** 5 min

# Partner Meeting Agenda Sample

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## COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: PARTNER MEETING

May 13, 2016

**Meeting Participants:**

**Time Keeper:**

**Minute Recorder:**

### I. WELCOME AND CHECK-IN (5 MINUTES)

- a. Penny Exercise

### II. PARTNER MEETING FOCUS (20 MINUTES)

- a. Discussed what has been working and ways to improve
  - i. Great way to share resources.
  - ii. Learn about service gaps and ways to intervene.
  - iii. Send updates out ahead of time to be reviewed before meetings.
  - iv. Distribute meeting minutes along with action items.
- b. Sharing Resources
  - i. Email list of partners with contact information to all partners.
  - ii. Looking for more collaboration across partners.
  - iii. Discussed the need for a central person to streamline communication.
    - ▶ Project Coordinator/AmeriCorps Vista
      - a. Yearly Calendar
      - b. Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- c. Partner Expansion
  - i. Partners would like to engage other District schools.
    - ▶ Family Liaison at Community School A
    - ▶ 21st CCLC Coordinators at Community School B and Community School C
  - ii. Need to have further discussion about who else needs to be at Partner Meetings.
- d. Addressing Community Affairs
  - i. How should we respond to traumatic events that take place in the community?
    - ▶ Will discuss further at future meeting

### III. SCHOOL PROFILE (20 MINUTES)

- a. Sample individual School Profile from Community School D was provided and sample for Community School E was created. The team discussed the purpose of the document and how it would be used.
  - i. Tabled discussion and will form a social media/advertising committee that will be supported by future AmeriCorps Vista member.



**b. Grant Goals**

- i. Project goals from the DOE grant were shared with all partners.
- ii. Partners should review grant goals and apply to planning for the upcoming 2016-2017 school year.

**c. Core Services**

- i. Send out Annual Performance Report (APR) to all partners.
- ii. Partners agreed to the following core service areas for: Academic Support, Youth Development, Family Engagement, and Health and Wellness.
  - ▶ These will be presented to and discussed with superintendent in next Leadership Team meeting to finalize.

**IV. UPCOMING EVENTS TO SUPPORT (10 MINUTES)**

- a. Block Party 6/11
- b. College Week 6/6-6/10
- c. Clothing Boutique 6/11

**V. HOUSE KEEPING (10 MINUTES)**

**a. Summer Needs**

- i. Please reach out to Project Coordinator for summer support (i.e. Interns)

## Partner Meeting Agenda Template

Date

Time

Attendees:

Meeting Called By:

Type of Meeting:

Facilitator:

Action Item Capturer:

Timekeeper:

Conference Line/Code:

Read:

Bring:

### DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ▶ Item 1
- ▶ Item 2
- ▶ Item 3
- ▶ Item 4

### AGENDA ITEMS

TOPIC	ISSUE/QUESTION	LEAD	TIME ALLOTTED

### ACTION ITEMS

- ▶ Item 1
- ▶ Item 2
- ▶ Item 3
- ▶ Item 4

## Community School Site Visit Observation Tool

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The National Center for Community Schools believes that for community schools to be effective, they must continually develop a set of four capacities: comprehensiveness, collaboration, coherence, and commitment.

This tool is designed to help *guide your observation, not direct* the experience. Actively listen, observe, and enjoy the experience. After your visit, take a moment to record your thoughts, reflect with team members, and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.

**Community School:**

**Lead Agency Partner:**

**Community School Director:**

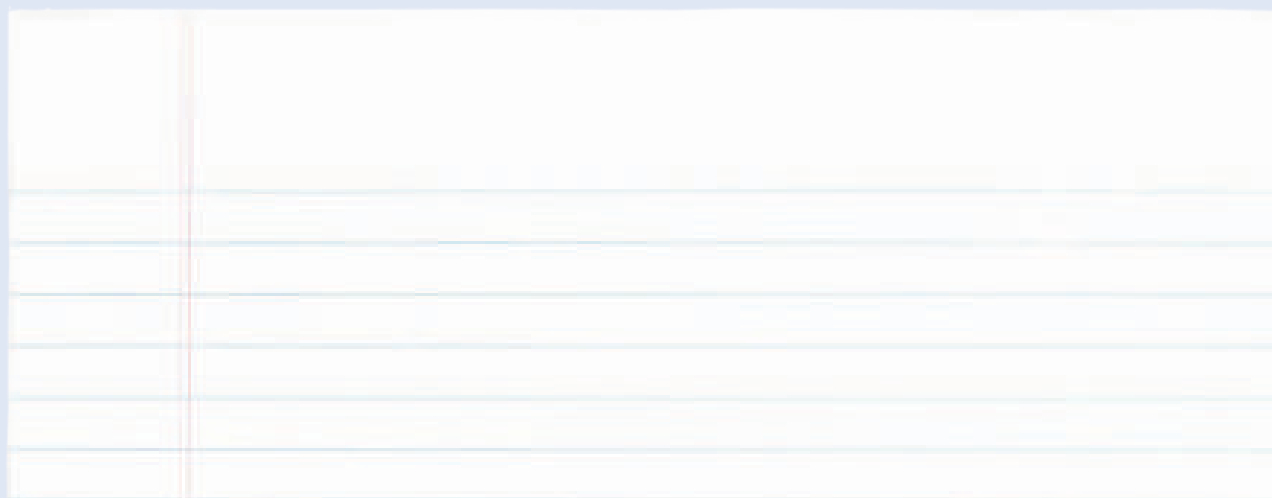
**Observer:**

**Date of Observation:**

### COMPREHENSIVENESS

**Comprehensiveness:** means that a wide range of supports, services and opportunities are available.

- ▶ Do you see evidence of comprehensiveness at this school? Are a wide range of supports, services and opportunities available for young people and their families? (Refer to the Children's Aid Developmental Triangle.)
- ▶ What kinds of programs/services are offered and do they reflect a "whole child" approach?
- ▶ Who has access to them: students only, students and their families, and/or other community members?
- ▶ What strategies are in place to ensure that the programs/services are of high quality?



- ▶ What evidence is there that the services, supports and opportunities respond to identified needs among students, families and the community?
- ▶ What strategies have been used to assess the community school's needs? Is this information current?
- ▶ How has the CS leveraged in-school resources and existing partners to meet the needs?
- ▶ How does school data and community indicators, inform the school improvement goals and plan?



- ▶ How does the physical environment support and reflect the school's comprehensiveness?
- ▶ Is work from both the core academic program as well as other programs/services (i.e., out-of-school time, early childhood, adult education) displayed throughout the school?
- ▶ Are resources like the library available to multiple programs and participants?



## COLLABORATION

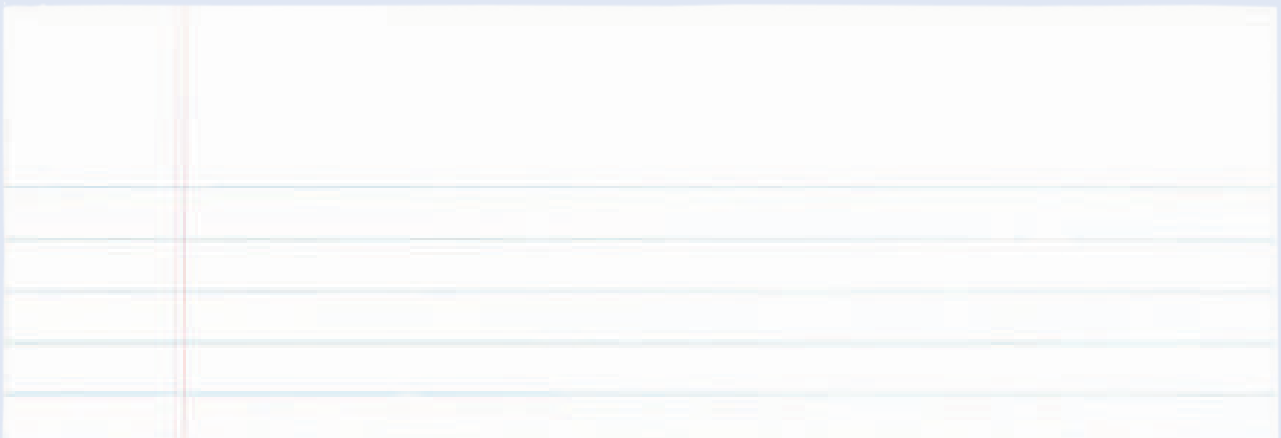
**Collaboration:** refers to the meaningful involvement of multiple stakeholders.

- ▶ What evidence is there of shared leadership in the community school? Are there formal coordinating and/or governance structures that include multiple stakeholders (service providers, parents, community members, teachers, etc.)?

- ▶ Is there a site-based team in the school? Is its membership reflective the diversity of the community school?
- ▶ How welcome is non-school staff into the culture and operations of the school?
- ▶ Do school governance bodies (child study team, school improvement team, parent-teacher association, etc.) include staff from partner organizations?
- ▶ Does the principal work with the CSD, partners and staff to actively integrate families and community partners into the life and work of the school?
- ▶ Is there any evidence that teachers and families have trusting and respectful relationships?
- ▶ Do families have equity of voice and power in the community school's leadership and decision-making structures?



- ▶ Are families empowered and supported to support learning at home?
- ▶ Are leadership development opportunities regularly available to families and community residents?
- ▶ Do families recognize the school as a hub of learning and community development?



## COHERENCE

**Coherence:** describes how the school's activities are coordinated and integrated with the core academic program.

- ▶ How are programs aligned and integrated with the core academic program to attain shared results?
- ▶ Are there agreed-upon results of which all partners are aware and with which programs/services are aligned? Can you share them?
- ▶ Is there any evidence that the school or the partners have changed their practices/approach to align with the shared results?
- ▶ How do partners share responsibility and accountability for student and school success?
- ▶ Are the academic and non-academic programs and services aligned and integrated in the school improvement plan?

- ▶ What did you learn or observe about the lead partner's role in coordinating the community school's many programs—what systems or structures did you observe?
- ▶ Is there a full-time director on site? What are the actual and perceived roles of that individual?
- ▶ How does the lead partner support the director (supervision, professional development, mediation, etc.)?

## COMMITMENT

**Commitment:** signifies that the partnership work is viewed from a long-term (as opposed to a time-limited project) perspective.

- ▶ Is there a strategy for continuously strengthening shared ownership for the community school among school personnel, families, and community partners?
- ▶ How long has this partnership been going on? What is the expectation—will the partnership last long-term or cease to exist when the current funding expires?
- ▶ Is there a plan and process for how the funding for the community school work and staffing will be sustained?
- ▶ To what extent are multiple funding streams, personnel and resources blended together to meet the needs of the community school?


- ▶ What did you learn or observe about how this community school builds broad community support? Has the partnership developed any key champions in the broader community to help advance its vision?
- ▶ How, if at all, is the community school philosophy marketed to the broader community within and outside the school?
- ▶ How do influential community members demonstrate their commitment to the community school?


**ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS:**



## P.S. X (A Children’s Aid Community School): Helpful Communication Practices During the Community School Startup Phase and Beyond

### BACKGROUND:

In 1999, Children’s Aid began partnering with P.S. X (not the real name), a kindergarten through sixth grade elementary school with 750 students (50% Latino, 50% African American, with 100% of students qualifying for free meals). P.S. X, located in New York City, was assessed as having 18 of 18 risk factors identified by the Center for New York City Affairs in *A Better Picture of Poverty*,<sup>1</sup> a study on how chronic absenteeism correlates with deep poverty and students’ poor academic performance.

Of the 700 schools studied, 130 were identified as having “persistent chronic absenteeism.” Of this cohort, only two presented all 18 risk factors. P.S. X was one of those schools: a promising school challenged by high rates of student homelessness, child abuse and neglect, parent unemployment, low levels of parental education, poor family engagement, physical/mental health issues, and high teacher turnover, among others.

There were and still are several homeless shelters in the area. On average, 37% of students at P.S. X lived in temporary housing. Although the Center for New York City Affairs study mentioned above was conducted from 2008 to 2012, P.S. X’s students faced these very same challenges in 1999 when the Children’s Aid partnership began. When trying to implement the Community School strategy, the biggest challenge was unstated but clear: **A profound sense of hopelessness permeated the school.** This phenomenon is well documented in the education literature, most notably in Charles M. Payne’s poignant sociological analysis entitled *So Much Reform, So Little Change: The Persistent Failure in Urban Schools* (Harvard Education Press, 2008).

Children’s Aid promised to bring a full-service school-based health clinic, year-round enriching opportunities during and after school, and a myriad of other enticing programs and services, hardly anyone believed anything could improve at P.S. X. There was a generalized “been there, done that” self-defeating attitude. During the initial needs and asset assessment process, all stakeholders (families, students, teachers, administrators, and other school staff) expressed that they were tired of broken promises.

Children’s Aid and our school partners needed a new strategy to break through the negativity permeating the individuals in this spacious yet unappealing building. The strategy we chose focused on communications as our first attitude-changing tool.

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<sup>1</sup> Nauer, Kim, Nicole Mader, Gail Robinson, and Tom Jacobs. *A Better Picture of Poverty: What Chronic Absenteeism and Risk Load Reveal About NYC’s Lowest-Income Elementary Schools*, <http://www.centrernyc.org/betterpictureofpoverty/>, 2014.

### WHAT WE DID:

Because programs would not start for a few months, we decided to use the planning/assessment process to create momentum and market the idea through as many communication forums as possible. Families, students, and educators were our most important audience. Therefore, our key message from the start was inclusive and reaffirming: **“We are here to do this along with you, for as long as it takes. Together we can change P.S. X. This is a new day!”**

1. A rising sun became the visual symbol. The message was broken into three straightforward, attention-getting phrases or slogans that were used verbally and visually, openly and subliminally, on and in everything from conversations, presentations, and events to flyers, posters, murals, and T-shirts:
  - ▶ A new day at P.S. X (This became the central campaign message.)
  - ▶ We are here to stay.
  - ▶ Together we can change P.S. X!
2. Based on the major barriers identified during the assessment process (very low levels of family engagement; high levels of parental and childhood depression and suicidal ideation; high rates of chronic asthma (with documented rates at 40%), obesity, lack of access to dental care; high suspensions and absenteeism; very low parental education level), for two weeks we monitored and evaluated the verbal and non-verbal communication between school-home-school to understand what worked and what could be improved, both short and long term. This included:
  - ▶ **Communication from school to home:** flyers and letters were often cluttered, hard to read, unappealing, not timely, mostly in English (or with extremely poor translations to Spanish, although about 50% of families spoke only that language); phone calls had a scolding tone; school staff demeanor toward families and students was often observed as judgmental and unfriendly.
  - ▶ **Principal’s office treatment of families:** In general, the principal was not welcoming. The principal’s office was unkempt, and the office staff was business-like and dismissive. On a more positive note, bilingual staff helped non-English speaking students and families.
  - ▶ **Principal:** The principal often used a hostile, antagonistic, or condescending tone toward families. The tension between families and the principal was noticeable, and a weak family-principal relationship was evident.
  - ▶ **Teachers’ treatment of families and children:** Treatment varied but our team observed a lot of loud scolding of children. We did not observe interaction between teachers and families, but many families reported a positive relationship with their children’s teachers.

- ▶ **Support staff treatment of families and children:** Two safety officers were welcoming with a lot of friendly greetings and some hugging. They kept their cool under pressure. Custodial staff was very nice as well. Both groups were enthusiastic about the Community School.
- ▶ **Staff's appearance:** Most teachers dressed appropriately. However, the PE teacher regularly wore high heels during PE class. Other teachers regularly wore pirate-like outfits. A few teachers dressed as if they were going to a party, and a few were somewhat disheveled.
- ▶ **Students' attitudes and appearance:** Most students were clean and properly dressed, and some were disheveled. Some students were hyperactive. There was some cursing and a lot of horseplay in hallways.
- ▶ **Families' attitudes and appearances:** Families came to the school mostly at arrival and dismissal time. Very few came throughout the day. Most family members seemed loving, clean, and properly dressed. A few looked disheveled. A few appeared intoxicated. A handful of family members were aggressive or loud with the children and staff, and some cursing was observed.
- ▶ **Building's appearance and atmosphere:** The building was designed in the early 1960s as a youth detention facility and located inside a housing complex. It was extremely depressing with dingy concrete block walls. Some student work was displayed, which helped to brighten the environment. There was generalized vermin infestation.
- ▶ **Classrooms:** Classrooms were very large and were divided in two by portable partitions, which allowed intrusive noise. Classrooms were mostly clean but included weather-beaten desks. Some classrooms showed personal touches with plants, art, rugs, and posters. Many classrooms were set up in traditional row configuration. Some had clusters of desks, and others had learning stations and reading corners. Some classrooms were extremely cluttered. In general, classrooms sent a message that caring teachers were trying to maximize their limited resources.
- ▶ The main office and the principal's office were cluttered and unclean, with roaches observed crawling freely.
- ▶ Other physical challenges included: a cafeteria that was not adequately clean and had tattered tables and faded posters; a small auditorium that was unkempt and separated from the cafeteria by a moving wall; student and staff bathrooms that were in poor condition; a well-located PTA room that was cluttered and unkempt; a spacious library that was used mainly for storage; and a spacious playground that was in a dangerous state of disrepair.



## RESPONSE TO OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS:

To do successful outreach and help bring dramatic improvement to the school, we had to overcome generalized stakeholder skepticism. Establishing quick positive visibility and sending a message of hope through an aggressive school-neighborhood marketing campaign were essential. Based on our observations, we implemented the following:

- ▶ **Responding to Identified Needs:** Because the major need identified early on was health (mental, physical, and dental), and also because we had secured funding to build a comprehensive school-based clinic, the anchor of the community school at P.S. X would be health. Children's Aid addressed the high rates of chronic absence not only through treatment at the health center but also through explicit asthma prevention interventions that included educating children and families about asthma management and instituting an Asthma Pals program
- ▶ **Quick Wins:** Capitalizing on and operationalizing this theme, we asked the Children's Aid dental mobile van to come to the school three times a week. This sent a powerful visual and programmatic message about our intention and capacity to respond to needs, helping visibility and credibility enormously. A part-time health educator also provided prevention tips and pep talks to students, teachers, and families.
- ▶ **Marketing and Communications:** After analyzing the poorly written material the school had been sending families, we designed colorful "New Day at P.S. X" flyers and posters in English and Spanish, inviting families to participate in a focus group. Because many families had very low reading levels, the design was as visual as possible. Flyers were sent home with the children and distributed to families at dismissal. The poster version was timely (over a week in advance), posted on the school's walls and entrance, in neighborhood bodegas, in the housing complex common areas, at churches, at the nearby hospital where many families worked or visited, and at shelters. We also advertised through free press releases in local newspapers. As a result of these targeted efforts, 45 families participated in initial focus groups (compared to four who responded to prior school efforts); and a change in time—from 9 AM to 7 PM—resulted in 75 families participating in a second set of focus groups.
- ▶ **Success Begets Success:** We publicized this result to the community and to school staff, and momentum began to build. Our outreach to teachers emphasized the theme "Together we can" and also utilized the "new day" visual of a rising sun. This flyer/poster included a testimonial by a teacher from another Children's Aid Community School in which she credited the strategy with helping her teach and even allowing her to present at the White House. The flyers were put in teachers' mailboxes and posted in the teachers' lounge and in bathrooms. One hundred percent of teachers participated in the focus group/breakfast. Several became long-term champions of the Community School.

- ▶ **Continuing to Respond to Needs:** To show families we were responding to a pressing need they had expressed during focus groups, we arranged for 30 children to attend a neighboring Children's Aid summer camp. Twenty additional children attended the Wagon Road Camp upstate, and a handful attended the Children's Aid/Alvin Ailey dance summer camp. We also offered to work with families of children who were attending summer school.
- ▶ **T-shirts:** We engaged the summer camp children in a group contest to design a T-shirt. We printed 500 T-shirts and distributed them to help brand our staff and volunteers (including families, teachers, staff, and students). Similar T-shirts were used for about two years by staff, volunteers, and students.
- ▶ **End of Summer Fair:** Held in the school's yard, the fair sent a clear message that something different was beginning to happen at P.S. X. Over 400 families, students, staff, the district superintendent, the principal, and other community residents, including teenagers, attended (even though the event wasn't advertised as an open community event). The children were delighted with the air castle, dunking booth, cotton candy machine, face painting, balloon hats, music, dancing, and prizes. The dental van was also available. Despite the rain that poured at one point, people stayed and enjoyed the fair. The school staff and the parent volunteers loved it and were extremely helpful.
- ▶ **Signature Events:** Children's Aid Community Schools believe in the power of frequent, regularly recurring events that help build community. To start the tradition at P.S. X, we opened the school year with a welcoming breakfast for teachers and closed the second week of school with a families/students/teachers dinner. The end-of-year celebrations began with a Thanksgiving dinner for about 500 students and their families. Close to December's holidays, we distributed over 500 turkey dinners and toys. Throughout these events, the "New Day at P.S. X" theme was a constant.
- ▶ **Strategic Beautification Clusters:** Given the building's dire condition, a priority action identified was cleaning, repairing, and beautifying the school. This was obviously a long-term project that would require all partners, including the New York City Department of Education Facilities, working together. We needed some quick wins and decided to choose "strategic-beautification clusters." Our objective was to get visible results with modest financial and time investment. An obvious starting place, given its programmatic importance and ideal location was transforming the PTA Room into a Family Room. The principal, superintendent, and PTA leaders agreed and gave full support. They authorized Children's Aid to make all final decisions regarding the room redesign and rebranding. A modest (\$7,500) budget covered the expenses of preparing a mural with the "New Day" theme in the front of the new Family Room, repairing and painting walls, removing vending machines, building a kitchenette, furnishing a loft-like space with a play area

for small children, computer space, a small library, a dining/work table, and living plants. Parallel to this, the Children's Aid clinic was being built two doors down. We also created a plan to redesign and refurnish the teachers' lounge.

### CONCLUSION:

Observing and then strengthening communication between home and school, and acting deliberately on the needs assessment findings paid off for all involved. When we discussed the findings with the principal and others, they were startled and some immediate corrections were implemented. An important and easy correction was de-cluttering and cleaning the main and principal's offices. This was completed over a weekend. We donated a few large plants that were placed inside and outside the offices. The effect was noticed and commended by everyone. The superintendent took a hands-on approach, and the communication from school-home improved drastically because of a little cleaning and changes in staff's attitudes. These and the previous examples played a key role in changing the demoralized climate that permeated the school.

The beautification work took about five years. Hundreds of volunteers helped paint the school spaces. Through the generosity of donors, the school library became an inviting/efficient learning space that children and adults loved. The Department of Education, an area hospital, and Children's Aid rebuilt the schoolyard. The initial principal retired after two years and, with new leadership and the right partners, the school began to improve. In 2007—eight years after the start of the partnership—P.S. X was selected by America's Promise to receive its first award to the best school-community partnership in the nation.

Communication can be an invaluable tool, the secret sauce. In our experience, a responsive theme—used consistently—can be a key component of school improvement and change management. Particularly in low-income urban schools where the adults can become overwhelmed by the very real needs of their students, a multi-faceted strategy is required that combines active listening, deliberate targeted action, and a strong marketing and communications approach designed to build hope that change is both possible and imminent.



### Detroit Public Schools: Community School Directors Share Needs Assessment Data To Take A Broader Look At Community Resources

The National Center for Community Schools asked the 21 Detroit Public Schools (DPS) implementing the Community School strategy to complete a resource inventory and needs gap analysis as part of their comprehensive needs and assets assessment process—a systematic approach that helps community school planners assess and respond to the documented needs of children and families. Through the resource inventory and gap analysis part of the needs and assets assessment, schools, community-based organizations, and school systems review their current partnerships through a variety of lenses, assess the strengths and limitations of these partnerships, identify service gaps, and purposefully and intentionally plan next steps in their evolution through the stages of development of a Community School.

These stages of development are based on the continuous development of four key capacities:

1. **Comprehensiveness:** Programs, services, and opportunities respond to a wide spectrum of identified needs by marshaling a full complement of partnership resources.
2. **Collaboration:** All stakeholders are involved in meaningful, permanent roles including educators, families, students, funders, community members, elected officials, providers, policy makers, etc.
3. **Coherence:** Programs, services, and opportunities are integrated and aligned to achieve outcomes beyond the reach of any one entity.
4. **Commitment:** All partners view the Community School as a long-term strategy, not as a program, and sustainability-planning activities are employed from the start.

#### I. METHODS

##### a. Data Collection

- ▶ This case study was prepared through a review of the **Resource Inventory and Needs Gap Analysis worksheets** that were completed by 21 Detroit Community Schools and provides an overview of the partnerships across the schools. NCCS provided technical assistance/training to DPS Community School Leaders throughout this process.

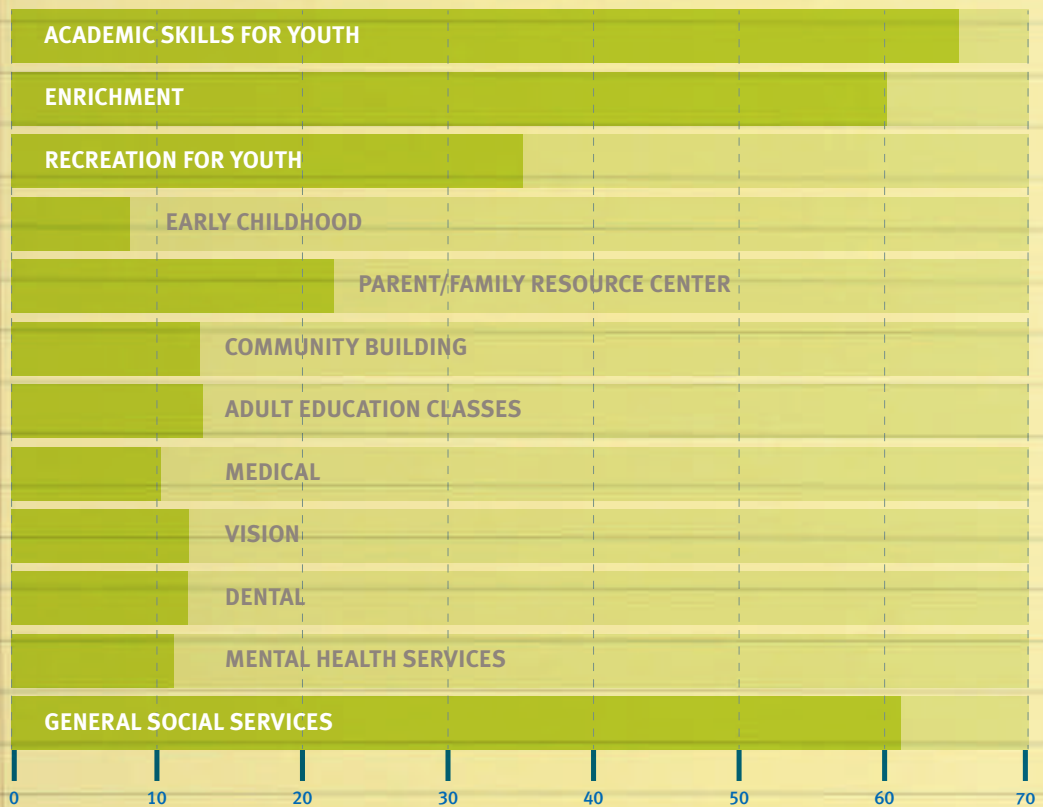
##### b. Key Participants

- ▶ DPS Community School Leaders participated in the completion of the **Resource Inventories and Needs Gap Analysis tools** with the support of their respective supervisors and staff.

### c. Strengths and Limitations

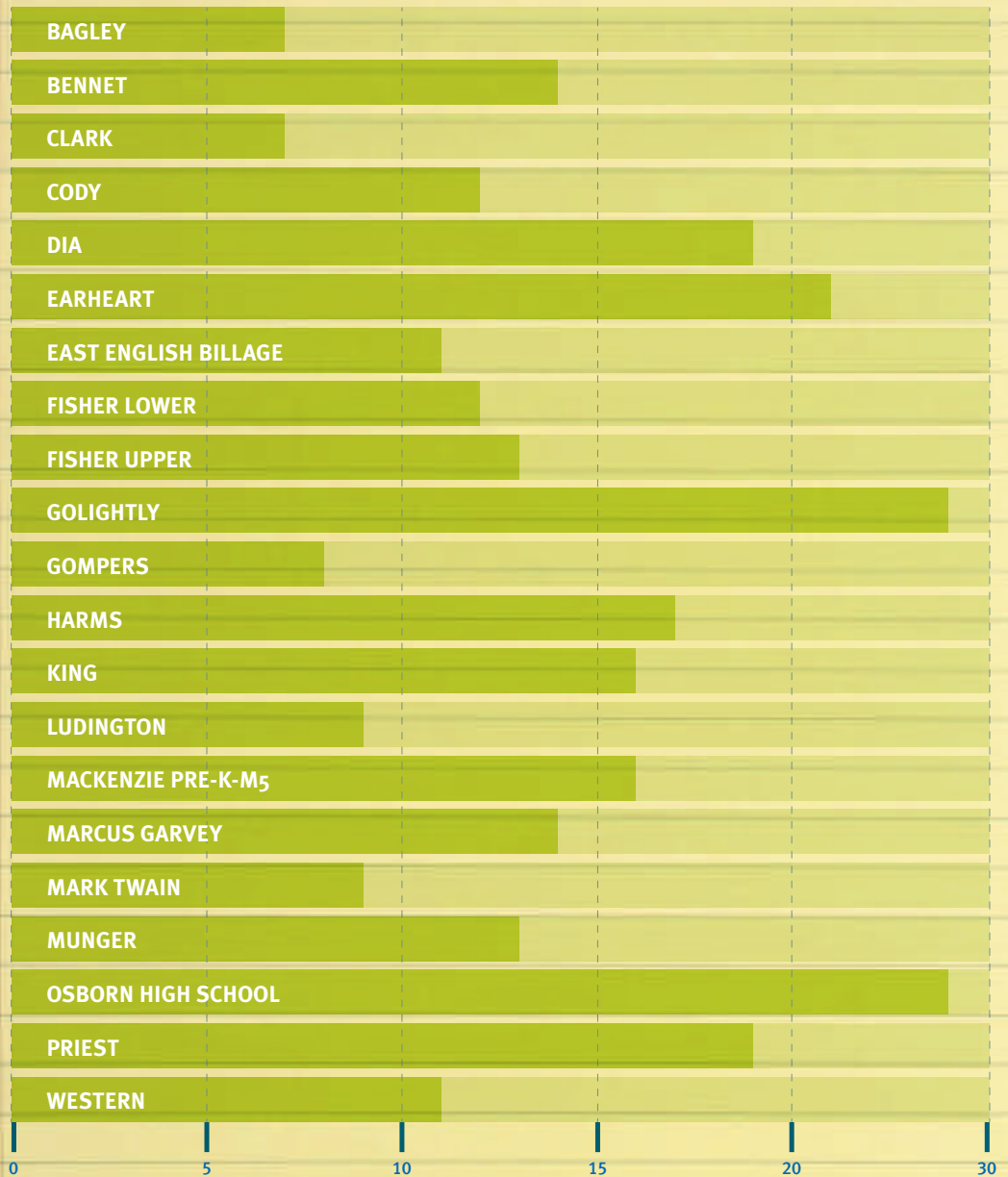
- ▶ Data received is accurate, informative, and well thought out.
- ▶ The data is relevant to all schools and partners in the DPS Community Schools.
- ▶ The data does not reveal how current partners match current or future needs in these and/or other schools.
- ▶ The data does not shed any light on the quality or capacity of existing partners.

### Partners Per Category

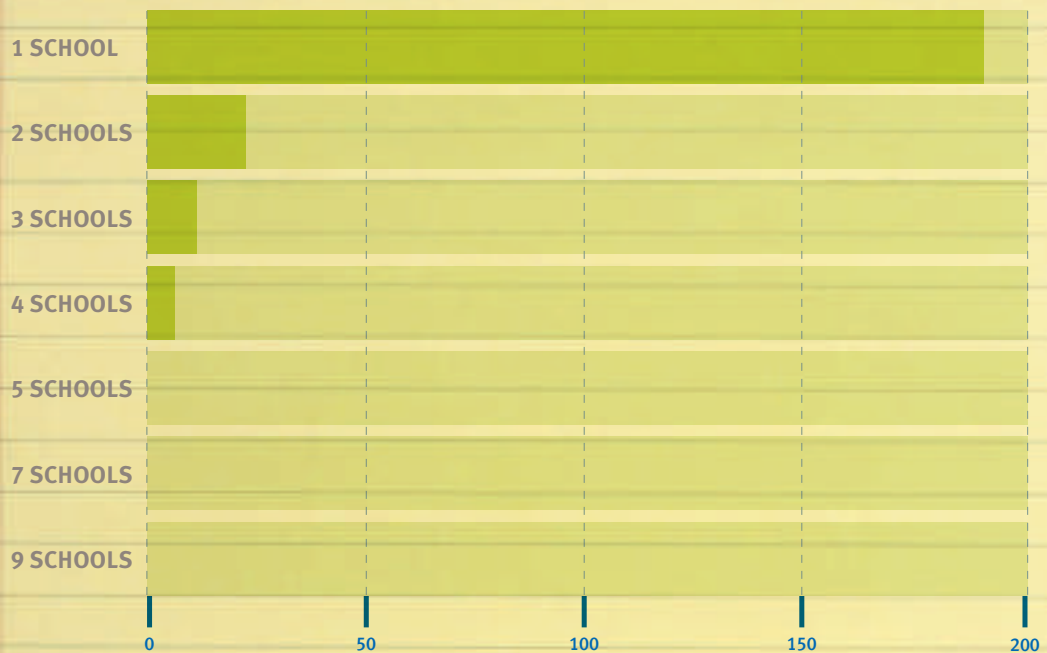




## Partners Per School



## Schools Served Per Partner



## II. KEY FINDINGS

The resource inventory identified a total of 229 partners/programs working throughout the 21 schools. This speaks to the promise of the Detroit Public Schools Community School strategy. The pool of potential partners is deep.

This data reveals a few key points:

- ▶ Detroit Public Schools have a wide array of partners who are meeting multiple documented needs of children, families, and communities.
- ▶ Academic assistance, enrichment, community building, and general social services are the areas that have generated the greatest number of partners.
- ▶ Most of these Community Schools have 10-20 partners.
- ▶ While there are many partners across the initiative, most serve only one school.
- ▶ Gleaners and THAW serve the most schools, partnering with 7 and 9 schools respectively.

The areas with the fewest partners are as follows (in ascending order):

- ▶ Early Childhood
- ▶ Medical
- ▶ Mental Health
- ▶ Dental
- ▶ Vision
- ▶ Adult Education

While this data reveals which areas have the most/fewest partners, it does not address or illuminate the need for partners in these areas. This information must be gleaned from other data sources. A thorough needs and assets assessment process will “triangulate” data from multiple sources, including quantitative school data such as rates of proficiency by grade and sub-group in the core academic subjects; rates of aggregate and chronic absence; behavioral data; and health data (e.g., percent of children without immunizations, without a medical home, with rates of chronic asthma). This quantitative data is often combined with survey data (of students, parents, teachers, administrators, community members) as well as with qualitative data gathered from focus group and individual interviews. This combination of data from multiple sources will reveal patterns of strength and need, and should serve as the basis for priority setting.

But matching competent partners with documented needs can be a complicated process, and that is where analyses such as this cross-site partnership assessment can be helpful. Since most identified partners served only one school, we wanted to learn which partners were doing the strongest work, and which have the capacity to grow and expand their reach. We also wanted to engage current partners in a broader discussion about their competencies and strategic direction. Often partners do more than we know. Building and strengthening partnerships depends on having them at the table, as appropriate, when discussing the needs of each individual school.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THIS ANALYSIS:

When focusing on partnership development, we can consider the potential of responsive school-community relationships at multiple levels:

- ▶ **School Level:** This analysis identified current partners at the individual school level—a solid base on which to build additional school-based partnerships and to expand relationships to additional schools.
- ▶ **Neighborhood Level:** There is also potential for cross-site partnerships at a neighborhood level where Community Schools that are located near each other share resources, even if the schools have different lead agencies.
- ▶ **Community Based Organization Level:** In Detroit, two Community Based Organizations were selected as lead partner agencies in the 21 community schools. When an identified need applies to numerous schools under the scope of a lead agency CBO, the lead agency is able to partner with providers that can serve more than one school.
- ▶ **District-Wide:** If the need is broad enough, a district-level partnership agreement may be appropriate. These arrangements can be described as “wholesale” partnerships, in which the district or system-level intermediary arranges negotiates the terms of service. For example, in New York City, the Department of Education’s Office of Community Schools arranged for Warby Parker to donate free eyeglasses across all the schools in the initiative.

In Detroit, partnerships at all levels have already started forming due to the creation of a professional learning community. Through monthly or bi-monthly professional development sessions, we bring everyone together, not only for the purpose of providing training but also to share best practices.

The partnership-building process is dependent on communication and sharing of data across the system of Community Schools. Continuing to build and strengthen this group in its development of a professional learning community is integral to this process.

**One additional note:** high school Community Schools can invite students to participate in the process. High school students could, for example, lead the community mapping exercise. Some schools turn these activities into credit bearing courses for high school students.

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# Acknowledgments

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