

CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
		<p>The school consistently engages in strategies, policies, and procedures for partnering with local businesses, community organizations, and other agencies to meet the needs of the school. (5191)</p>

Explanation: Research shows that school-community partnerships can positively impact student learning, behavior, and social outcomes, and provide connections to services and resources that the school alone could not otherwise provide. School-community partnerships require careful consideration of needs and goals of students and families, identification and selection of appropriate community contacts who can meet these needs and who may also benefit from the partnership, identification of shared goals and collaborative activities to reach those goals, and deciding if goals are being met, making modifications as necessary.

Questions: *Has your school developed community partnerships, and if so, what are success stories/failures? What are the needs in your school and how could they be addressed through partnerships outside the school? What are characteristics of the surrounding community, and which organizations or agencies may be primed to help address student needs in your school? Are there examples of successful school-community partnerships in the surrounding area that can be adapted for your school's needs? Is a team in place to help develop community partnerships at your school? What professional learning experiences are available that can help staff develop effective school-community partnership initiatives?*

School-community partnerships are collaborative efforts that can foster the achievement of strategic initiatives and lead to improved outcomes for students and school communities (Hauseman, Pollock, & Wang, 2017). Trusting school-community partnerships have been shown to contribute to improved student learning, achievement, behavior, and attendance (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Durlak, Weissburg, & Pachan, 2010; Epstein, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002); educator efficacy (Haines, McCart, & Turnbull, 2013; Lawson, 2003); and enhanced connections among community members (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Examples of school-community partnerships include breakfast and after-school programs, and youth mental health organizations providing schools with counseling support; universities, churches, local businesses and other entities often connect with schools to provide these types of programs (Durlak et al., 2010; Hands, 2015).

School-community partnerships can foster connections to supplementary education services that the school cannot provide, can increase student learning, garner much needed financial and material resources, and offer opportunities for students to build social capital through access to community



individuals and their resources (Auerbach, 2010; Hands, 2015). These opportunities for developing social capital are especially crucial for students with lower-income or ethnic minority backgrounds, who may not otherwise have this access through their family or personal relationships (Hands, 2014). While educational researchers have described the benefits of these partnerships for many years (e.g., Auerbach, 2010), increasingly principals are *expected* to build these partnerships as part of their instructional leadership portfolio (Hauseman et al., 2017). The remainder of this brief will describe the issues schools and their leaders should consider as they establish relationships with community organizations, businesses, and agencies to meet school needs.

What issues should be considered when developing school-community partnerships?

Hands (2015) suggests that educators address four key questions as they create and cultivate relationships with community members and organizations:

1. **What are our goals for school-community collaboration?** Schools must first determine the needs of students and reach out to parents and community members outside the school to initiate collaborative activities that can potentially also meet the needs of the community. Creating *action teams*, or steering committees for planning the collaboration that include teachers, administrators, parents, students and community members can be an effective strategy. These representative teams can identify student, family, and community needs and develop collaborative goals targeted towards providing student and family supports, school improvement, and community development. This creation of authentic partnerships, in which all members share knowledge and decision-making with educational issues, can foster the development of respect and trust that is essential for effective collaboration (Auerbach, 2010).
2. **How do we connect with potential partners?** Schools and action teams must next determine who in the community would share the school's goals; potential partners include faith-based organizations, businesses, universities and other schools, cultural/recreational centers, and individuals who are interested in working with teachers and students. Schools should consider the citizens and types of organizations that are nearby; opportunities to meet face-to-face are usually essential and organizations that are close to the school typically make the best partners. Once goals and potential partners have been identified, calls or emails can be initiated. The most effective strategy is to initiate calls or emails to potential contacts within a team member's personal or professional network, as a level of trust is already in place, making it easier to develop a collaborative initiative. Initial contacts should describe the goals and potential benefits to the school, but also stress the benefits for the potential partner to enhance the chances of collaboration.
3. **How do we visualize educators, students, community members, and support staff working together?** Initial meetings with community partners should provide for a two-way discussion of potential goals for collaborative activities and identification of shared goals, keeping open the possibility of later modification. Once shared goals have been developed, partners develop



specific activities to address stated goals, and determine how long the activities will last. Some activities may be relatively short (e.g., service learning opportunities at a local hospital within a semester), while others may have longer duration (e.g., ongoing recruiting to increase the number of students annually that take college courses in high school).

4. **How do we know we are reaching our goals?** Monitoring and assessment of collaborative activities is essential. School-community partnerships should establish an agreed-upon status checkpoint to ensure the relationship is working and that shared goals are being met. If participants' needs are not being met, then partners should seek to renegotiate the partnership's terms. Goals and strategies for reaching goals may need to change if circumstances change for stakeholders involved with the project. If goals are being met and all are benefiting, then successes should be celebrated and the collaboration can continue if desired.

Many schools may have multiple competing needs; it is important to prioritize these needs before seeking out potential partnerships (Hands, 2005). School principals also need to “share the load,” and may require school-level support with identifying and establishing these partnerships to avoid further intensification of an already intense workload (Hauseman et al., 2017).

Educators can seek out ideas for collaboration through professional learning experiences and networking at regional workshops and conferences. There is ample evidence that school-community partnerships pay off, and can “provide the human, material and financial resources to enrich the programming offered in schools...[and] have the potential to promote civic-minded individuals who contribute positively to their communities” (Hands, 2015, p. 13).

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