COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: Evidence-Informed Practice Brief

WHAT DO WE MEAN?

*Community Involvement* refers to partnerships between school stakeholders and community groups and/or community-based organizations. Community groups and organizations can include, but are not limited to, local businesses, cultural and civic organizations, social service agencies, health clinics, colleges and universities, and faith-based organizations. Partnerships can take a wide variety of formats—such as service-learning opportunities for students (e.g., volunteering, community service activities) and resource sharing (e.g., space, services). Sharing of resources can be particularly helpful in extending supports provided by the school into the community and providing access to community-based supports that the school is unable to offer. All partnerships rely on communication to connect and coordinate information (e.g., upcoming events, opportunities for involvement) across school and community contexts.

Engaging community partnerships should be a priority in school systems. Federal initiatives, such as Title IV of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), require districts and schools to develop programming for school-community partnerships and to involve community members on district or school wellness committees. Recommendations for fostering community involvement have been developed based on successful partnerships in a variety of districts and schools. Schools can enhance community involvement by first developing plans for engagement, creating advisory groups, and allocating resources to prepare community members for involvement. For example, schools can prepare community partners by providing training and information on school systems and successful partnerships. Schools can then collaborate with community partners to conduct a needs assessment of the strengths and areas of concern regarding available supports (e.g., resources, services) in the school and community and create a shared vision and plan that includes partnership strategies and timelines. Schools and community partners can also work together to evaluate partnerships and sustain collaboration over time. In addition, schools can inform students and families of meaningful opportunities and supports available in the community.
WHY IS IT RELEVANT TO CHILD OUTCOMES?

Physical Health Outcomes

Community involvement has important connections to student physical health. For example, school-based programs targeting obesity prevention in early elementary students that incorporate a community involvement component are associated with greater decreases in the BMI of students compared to programs without community involvement. Further, coordination between schools and community partners has shown to enhance health outcomes for students, schools, and the community. School health programs that include community partners and utilize community supports demonstrate improved dietary intake and increased levels of physical activity among students. In addition, coordination of school and community health-related policies and interventions that address population-specific needs is related to significant improvements in the physical health of both children and families.

Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Health Outcomes

Community involvement can promote positive outcomes for student social, emotional, and behavioral health. For example, participation in activities at religious centers or places of worship is associated with positive mental health outcomes for adolescents. Further, involvement in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, clubs) and employment may serve as protective factors against adolescent mental health risk. In addition, youth who are actively involved in political, community, and helping activities report higher levels of self-esteem and optimism, along with perceived social supports. Further, adolescent involvement in the community is associated with higher quality of communication with family members, life satisfaction, and social self-esteem along with reduced feelings of loneliness. School-community partnerships can also indirectly benefit student social, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. For example, schools that collaborate with community mental health centers are more likely to implement targeted intervention programs for students at-risk of behavioral health disorders.

Academic Outcomes

School-community partnerships are associated with positive outcomes for student academic performance and overall school improvement. Specifically, these partnerships are associated with higher levels of student achievement and success, increased attendance and graduation rates, and continued success later in life. In particular, school attendance is related to student academic performance and achievement, especially among high school students. Partnerships between schools and community organizations are also associated with increased feelings of school connectedness among students, which is critical given that higher levels of connectedness are related to student ability to access academic content and academic success.
COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: EVIDENCE IN ACTION

The strategies provided here summarize a review of available evidence and best practice recommendations for Community Involvement.* Strategies are grouped by anticipated resource demand for implementation (e.g., funding, time, physical space, training, materials).

Level 1 Strategies: Low resource demand

Involve community members in existing prevention efforts
- Prevention programs that involve community members (e.g., an obesity prevention program that involves community members on the data team) are more effective than programs that do not incorporate community involvement.25
- Schools can modify existing prevention programs and initiatives (e.g., obesity prevention, drug and alcohol education, district or school wellness teams) to increase collaboration with community partners.25

Evaluate existing community involvement practices
- Strong family-school-community partnership programs are planned and implemented by a team of teachers, administrators, families, and community members who collaborate to engage families and the community through activities that map onto school goals and support student achievement.12,36
- A team of school administrators, school staff, family members, and community members can evaluate current community involvement programs14,37 to ensure that school programs are matched to the needs of the community.37

Level 2 Strategies: Moderate resource demand

Incorporate service learning into curricula
- Service learning that incorporates community involvement is associated with improved student academic performance, particularly when opportunities relate to student learning objectives.6,9 Service learning can also improve civic engagement, social skills, and student attitudes toward self, school, and learning.6
- Schools can use service learning (e.g., community service or volunteering experiences) to provide students with opportunities to acquire skills and socially responsive behavior3,37 and use the real-world expertise and experiences of community partners to supplement curricula.37

Establish shared-use agreements for school and community spaces
- Shared-use agreements outline the terms and conditions of shared or joint use of school grounds and facilities by the school and a city, town, or community entity26 and can increase use of programs that benefit student, family, and community health.5
- Districts and community partners can establish shared-use agreements to allow coordinated and collaborative use of indoor and outdoor spaces26 and increase use of school grounds and facilities,5 physical activity, and healthy eating among students, families, and community members.26

Level 3 Strategies: High resource demand

Implement a school-based mentoring or volunteer tutoring program
- Participation in school-based mentoring programs can reduce student absences and discipline referrals and can also benefit student emotional well-being and self-concept;16 volunteer tutoring programs can improve academic outcomes for students, particularly in reading.34
- Schools can implement mentoring and volunteer tutoring programs to build positive, caring connections between students and members of the community (e.g., retired adults, college students, older high school students) who can serve as role models and provide students with social and academic support.39

Establish after-school programs in collaboration with community partners
- After-school programs can offer diverse activities (e.g., tutoring, art and music, community service), are implemented by school employees or community members,24 and can improve student academic achievement, attitudes toward school and community, and school attendance.21,29
- Schools and community partners can establish effective after-school programs by ensuring that specific program elements target desired outcomes, assessing fidelity of implementation, monitoring student progress to ensure intervention effectiveness, and providing initial and ongoing training and supervision for program staff.24

*For more information about the systematic review process we used to identify evidence-based practices, please refer to our overview brief which can be found here.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Community Engagement
Coalition for Community
http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/communityengagement.aspx
This webpage provides a definition of community engagement and links to resources for establishing community partnerships, engaging community leaders, and examples of successful applications of community-school partnerships.

Effective Family and Community Engagement Strategies
Hanover Research
This 2014 report provides recommendations for building family and community partnerships, along with case studies of real school districts that demonstrate the link between family and community engagement and student outcomes.

Family-School-Community Partnerships
National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments
This webpage provides information about the benefits of family-school-community partnerships and resources for building partnerships.

Framework for Building Partnerships Among Schools, Families, and Communities
Ohio Department of Education
http://education.ohio.gov/Tiles/Other-Resources/Family-and-Community-Engagement/Getting-Parents-Involved/Framework-for-Building-Partnerships-Among-Schools
This webpage provides a framework that can help schools build effective partnerships with families and community members, along with resources for facilitating discussions within schools for strengthening partnerships.

Handbook on Family and Community Engagement
Center on Innovation & Improvement
This 2011 document provides ideas for implementing family and community engagement and linking community involvement to wellness initiatives.

K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice
National Youth Leadership Council
This 2008 document, updated in 2015, provides educators with standards for implementing an effective service-learning program or curriculum.

What is Service-Learning?
National Youth Leadership Council
https://www.nylc.org/page/WhatsService-Learning
This website provides service-learning resources for K-12 schools.

Online Professional Learning and Technical Assistance for 21st Century Community Learning Centers
You 4 Youth
https://y4y.ed.gov/
This website provides resources and professional development for building and strengthening community partnerships, afterschool programs, and civic learning and engagement.

Parent, Family, Community Involvement in Education
National Education Association (NEA)
https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/PB11_ParentInvolvement08.pdf
This 2008 information brief provides a background on the importance of parent, family, and community involvement, barriers to involvement, and steps to take to engage families and community partners.

YSN Knowledge Center
Youth Service America
https://ysa.org/resources/
This online resource center provides guides, toolkits, and other resources to aid in promoting service-learning, volunteering, and activism in the community for youth.


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