

Chapter 7. Community Outreach and Collaborative Engagement

...while teaching is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement, family and neighborhood characteristics matter more. The research consensus has been clear and unchanging for more than a decade: at most, teaching accounts for about 15 percent of student achievement outcomes, while socioeconomic factors account for about 60 percent.... Acknowledging connections between the economy, poverty, health and brain function is not an attempt to 'excuse' failing school bureaucracies and classroom teachers; rather, it is a necessary prerequisite for authentic school reform... ..inequality does matter. ... In the face of this reality, educators put up a valiant fight, and some succeed. The deck is stacked against them.

Goldstein (2011)

Historically, schools serving impoverished families trapped in America's 'ghettos' have been resistant to community participation. Enhanced participation is critically needed, however, if long-term urban school-reform projects and efforts to develop more empowering, community-supporting forms of pedagogy are to succeed.

Schutz (2006)

While schools represent a key commodity in communities, too many are viewed as “islands” with no bridges to and from the mainland. This works against addressing barriers to learning and teaching – especially in poor neighborhoods.

Schools are more effective and caring places when they are an integral and positive part of the community. For schools to be seen as such, they must take steps to engage and collaborate with many community stakeholders to address barriers to learning and teaching and strengthen the fabric of family and community life.

Moreover, schools and the community in which they reside are dealing with multiple, interrelated concerns, such as poverty, child development, literacy, violence, crime, safety, substance abuse, housing, and employment. A potent approach requires multifaceted and collaborative efforts.

The goal is to maximize mutual benefits, including better student progress, positive socialization of the young, higher staff morale, improved use of resources, an enhanced sense of community, community development, and more. In the long run, the aims are to strengthen students, schools, families, and neighborhoods.

Currently, school outreach to the community has a highly limited focus. Policy and related funding initiatives mostly support efforts to link community social services and physical and mental health services to schools. After school programs also involve community providers. In addition, some schools recruit volunteers and solicit other forms of resource contributions, as well as encouraging positive votes for school-related ballot measures. The downside of such well-meaning outreach is that it narrows thinking about transforming student and learning supports and about the role and functions of school-community collaboration.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE IN THE COMMUNITY?

Researchers have mapped a wide range of community entities whose missions overlap that of the local schools (see Exhibit 7.1). Districts/schools need to consider outreach to the full range of resources that exist, especially in neighborhoods where poverty reigns.

Exhibit 7.1

Appreciating the Range of Community Resources for Outreach

County Agencies and Bodies

(e.g., Depts. of Health, Mental Health, Children & Family Services, Public Social Services, Probation, Sheriff, Office of Education, Fire, Service Planning Area Councils, Recreation & Parks, Library, courts, housing)

Municipal Agencies and Bodies

(e.g., parks & recreation, library, police, fire, courts, civic event units)

Physical and Mental Health & Psychosocial Concerns Facilities and Groups

(e.g., hospitals, clinics, guidance centers, Planned Parenthood, Aid to Victims, MADD, "Friends of" groups; family crisis and support centers, helplines, hotlines, shelters, mediation and dispute resolution centers)

Mutual Support/Self-Help Groups

(e.g., for almost every problem and many other activities)

Child Care/Preschool Centers

Post Secondary Education Institutions/Students

(e.g., community colleges, state universities, public and private colleges and universities, vocational colleges; specific schools within these such as Schools of Law, Education, Nursing, Dentistry)

Service Agencies

(e.g., PTA/PTSA, United Way, clothing and food pantry, Visiting Nurses Association, Cancer Society, Catholic Charities, Red Cross, Salvation Army, volunteer agencies, legal aid society)

Service Clubs and Philanthropic Organizations

(e.g., Lions Club, Rotary Club, Optimists, Assistance League, men's and women's clubs, League of Women Voters, veteran's groups, foundations)

Youth Agencies and Groups

(e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, Y's, scouts, 4-H, Woodcraft Rangers)

Sports/Health/Fitness/Outdoor Groups

(e.g., sports teams, athletic leagues, local gyms, conservation associations, Audubon Society)

Community Based Organizations

(e.g., neighborhood and homeowners' associations, Neighborhood Watch, block clubs, housing project associations, economic development groups, civic associations)

Faith Community Institutions

(e.g., congregations and subgroups, clergy associations, Interfaith Hunger Coalition)

Legal Assistance Groups

(e.g., Public Counsel, schools of law)

Ethnic Associations

(e.g., Committee for Armenian Students in Public Schools, Korean Youth Center, United Cambodian Community, African-American, Latino, Asian-Pacific, Native American Organizations)

Special Interest Associations and Clubs

(e.g., Future Scientists and Engineers of America, pet owner and other animal-oriented groups)

Artists and Cultural Institutions

(e.g., museums, art galleries, zoo, theater groups, motion picture studios, TV and radio stations, writers' organizations, instrumental/choral, drawing/painting, technology-based arts, literary clubs, collector's groups)

Businesses/Corporations/Unions

(e.g., neighborhood business associations, chambers of commerce, local shops, restaurants, banks, AAA, Teamsters, school employee unions)

Media

(e.g., newspapers, TV & radio, local assess cable)

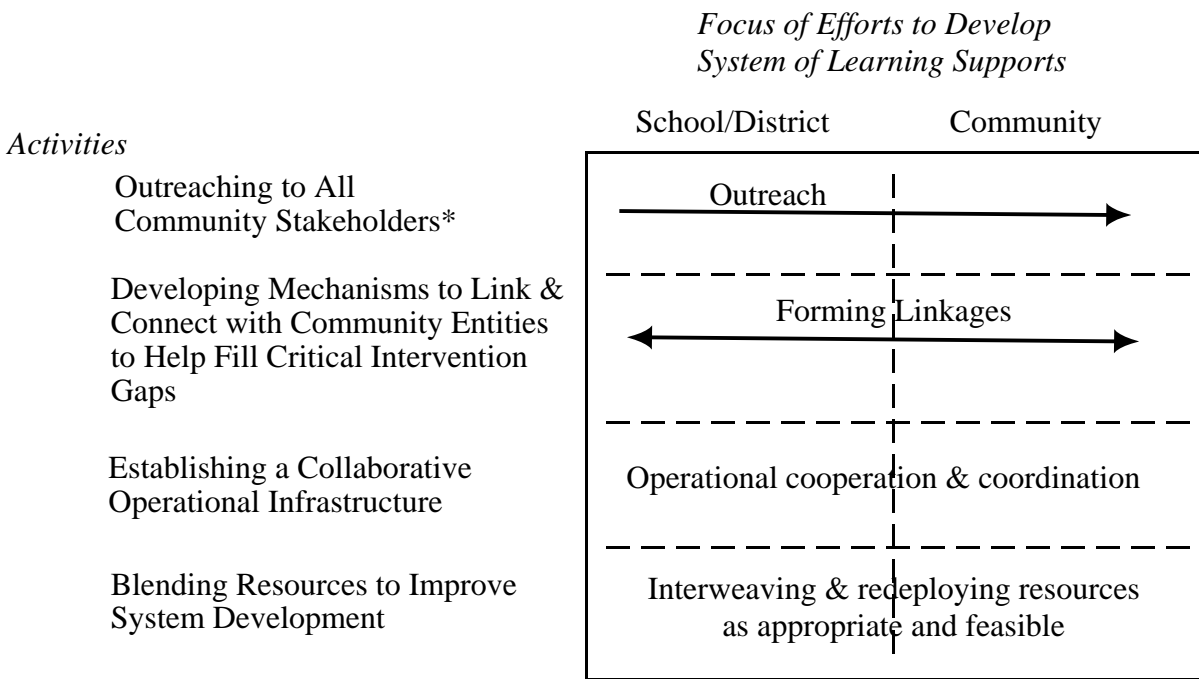
Family members, local residents, senior citizens groups

FRAMING AND DESIGNING INTERVENTIONS FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

School/district efforts to enhance community connections can encompass four types of activities: (1) outreaching to a broad range of community entities, (2) developing immediate links and connections with community resources that can help fill critical intervention gaps for addressing shared problems, (3) establishing an effective operational infrastructure for a school-community collaborative and (4) blending/weaving/redeploying school and community resources where feasible to help with system development (see Exhibit 7.2).

In practice, all four activities often are not pursued, especially when the focus is mainly on connecting a few community services to a school. However, all are vital in developing a unified and comprehensive system of student and learning supports.

Exhibit 7.2 Framework for Schools and Community Collaboration in Developing a Unified and Comprehensive System of Learning Supports



*Outreach is to all available community resources and decision makers (e.g., those associated with public and private agencies, colleges and universities, artists and cultural institutions, businesses and professional organizations, and service, volunteer, faith-based organizations).

Note: Because community resources in many neighborhoods are sparse, a school-by-school approach often leads to inequities (e.g., the first school to contact an agency might tie up all that a given agency can bring to a school). Therefore, district leadership needs to (a) help develop mechanisms that connect a “family” of schools (e.g., a high school feeder pattern, schools in the same neighborhood) and (b) play a role in outreaching and connecting community resources equitably to schools. A family of schools also provides a good nucleus for creating a school-community collaborative (see discussion later in this chapter and in Part III).

Below are examples of strategies related to pursuing the activities highlighted in Exhibit 7.2.

Outreach to the Community:

- a social marketing campaign to inform and invite participation of all community stakeholders with respect to
 - >district and school plans to work with the community to address barriers to student success and develop a cohesive and comprehensive system and
 - >the variety of opportunities for involvement at schools
- interventions to (re)engage students and families who don't interact with the school on a regular basis (e.g., the disengaged, truants, dropouts)
- outreach to specific stakeholder groups to recruit a steady increase in the number of volunteers available to the schools

Developing Mechanisms to Link and Connect with Community Entities:

- using school improvement planning to include a focus on analyzing and filling critical gaps in efforts to develop a unified and comprehensive system of learning supports
- establishing and training a multi-school workgroup to focus on recruiting and equitably integrating individuals and agencies who have resources that can help fill critical gaps

Establishing a Formal Collaborative and Building an Operational Infrastructure:

- identifying community stakeholders who are interested in establishing a school-community collaborative
- formulating aims, short-term goals, and immediate objectives
- organizing participants into an effective operational infrastructure and establishing formal working agreements (e.g., MOUs) about roles and responsibilities
- forming and training workgroups to accomplish immediate objectives
- monitoring and facilitating progress

Blending Resources to Improve System Development:

- mapping school and community resources used to address barriers to student success
- analyzing resource use to determine redundancies and inefficiencies
- identifying ways resources can be redeployed and interwoven to meet current priorities

WHAT ARE PRIORITIES IN ENHANCING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT?

Analyses related to school improvement can use the framework in Exhibit 7.2 and the self-study survey in Appendix C to identify next steps for enhancing school-community connections. Immediate priorities usually involve establishing policy and operational mechanisms for (a) a broad based social marketing outreach campaign aimed at connecting with a wide range of community entities and initiating work with those who indicate interest and (b) exploring the feasibility of building a school-community collaborative.

Social Marketing Outreach and Initiating Community Engagement

A social marketing campaign can begin simply with a press release, website and email announcements, and circulars distributed through local businesses and agencies. The initial focus is on informing the community about the positive work at the school and letting them know about the need and opportunities for community involvement.

Social marketing and outreach are ongoing processes. One facet involves prioritizing and strategically focusing on specific entities. Common priorities stress establishing ongoing working relationships with

- sources from which a multifaceted volunteer pool can be recruited (Review Exhibit 6.4 and see Exhibit 7.3 for the many ways volunteers can help at schools. Note: While home involvement can fill some volunteer roles and functions, adding the wider range of talents found throughout the community helps fill many gaps and broadens perspectives about community engagement.)
- community agencies that can fill critical gaps in supports for transitions (e.g., after school programs) and student and family special assistance (e.g., social services and physical and mental health)
- a wide range of community resources that can provide learning opportunities (It is a truism that learning is neither limited to what is formally taught nor to time spent in classrooms and at school; anyone in the community might be a contributing teacher and mentor who provides learning opportunities, such as service learning, internships, job-shadowing.)

Social marketing also can be directed at students and families who don't interact with the school on a regular basis, such as truants, dropouts, uninvolved families (See Chapter 9 for discussion of the type of special assistance and accommodations required to re-engage the disconnected.)

Multifaceted and authentic outreach to engage the community convey the message that schools are not islands. Opening up school sites as places where the community can engage in learning, recreation, enrichment, and connect with services they need can accelerate the impact of social marketing and outreach. Combining school and community resources heightens feasibility for opening up on-campus opportunities. Over time, the impact of these efforts can enhance school climate and lead to schools becoming the heart of the community.

Exhibit 7.3

The Many Roles for Volunteers in the Classroom and Throughout the School

- I. Welcoming and Social Support
 - A. In the Front Office
 - 1. Greeting and welcoming
 - 2. Providing information to those who come to the front desk
 - 3. Escorting guests, new students/families to destinations on the campus
 - 4. Orienting newcomers
 - B. Staffing a Welcoming Club
 - 1. Connecting newly arrived parents with peer buddies
 - 2. Helping develop orientation and other information resources for newcomers
 - 3. Helping establish newcomer support groups
- II. Working with Designated Students in the Classroom
 - A. Helping to orient new students
 - B. Engaging disinterested, distracted, and distracting students
 - C. Providing personal guidance and support for specific students in class to help them stay focused and engaged
- III. Providing Additional Opportunities and Support in Class and on the Campus as a Whole – including helping develop and staff additional
 - A. Recreational activity
 - B. Enrichment activity
 - C. Tutoring
 - D. Mentoring
- IV. Helping Enhance the Positive Climate Throughout the School – including Assisting with "Chores"
 - A. Assisting with Supervision in Class and Throughout the Campus
 - B. Contributing to Campus "Beautification"
 - C. Helping to Get Materials Ready

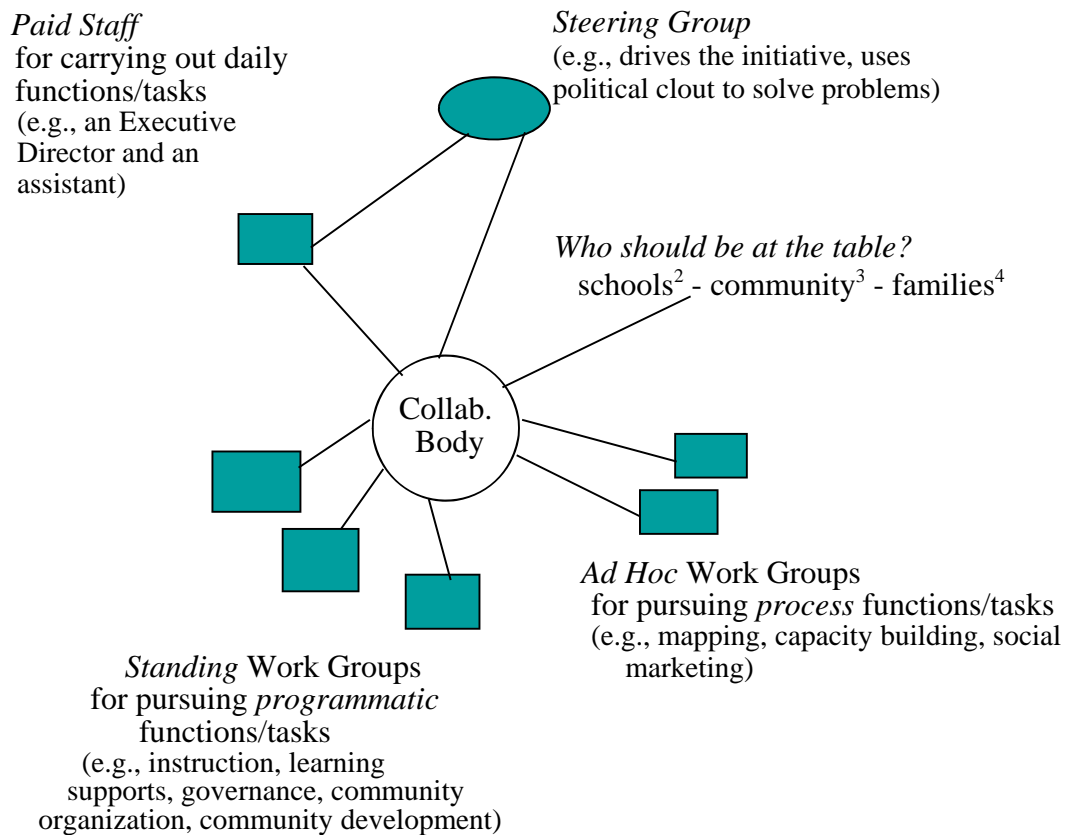
Toward Developing a School-Community Collaborative

With a view to establishing an effective school-community collaborative, the early priority is to create a workgroup charged with developing an operational infrastructure for the collaborative. As the prototype illustrated in Exhibit 7.4 indicates, mechanisms are needed to provide oversight, leadership, capacity building, and ongoing support as the collaborative plans and implements strategic actions. Establishing such an infrastructure requires translating policy into authentic agreements about shared mission, vision, decision making, priorities, goals, roles, functions, resource allocation, redeployment, and enhancement, strategic implementation, evaluation, and accountability.

A guidebook is available for establishing a productive collaborative (see *School-Community Partnerships: A Guide* – <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/guides/schoolcomm.pdf> .)

Exhibit 7.4

Prototype of a School-Community Collaborative Operational Infrastructure¹



¹Connecting the resources of schools, families, and a wide range of community entities through a formal collaborative facilitates developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning. Effectiveness, efficiencies, and economies of scale can be achieved by connecting a “family” (or complex) of schools (e.g., a high school and its feeder schools, schools in the same neighborhood). In a small community, the feeder pattern often is the school district.

²*Schools* = formal institutions responsible for formal education (e.g., pre-K, elementary, secondary, higher education entities). The intent is to interweave the resources of these institutions with community entities.

³*Community entities* = the many resources (public and private money, facilities, human and social capital) that can be brought to the table (e.g., health and social service agencies, businesses and unions, recreation, cultural, and youth development groups, libraries, juvenile justice and law enforcement, faith-based community institutions, service clubs, media). As the collaborative develops, additional steps must be taken to outreach to disenfranchised groups in the community.

⁴*Families* = representatives of all families in the community (not just representatives of organized family advocacy groups). The intent is to mobilize all the human and social capital represented by family members and other home caretakers of the young.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS FOR CHAPTER 7

Interest in connecting school and community resources is growing at an exponential rate. A temporary connection often is established in the wake of a crisis or to address a particular problem. In the long-run, however, school-community connections must be driven by a comprehensive vision about the shared role schools, communities, and families can play in strengthening youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods. Such a vision encompasses safe schools and neighborhoods, positive development and learning, personal, family, and economic well-being, and more.

While outreach to make informal linkages is relatively simple, establishing major long-term formal working relationships is not easy. Such connections require formal and institutionalized systemic changes to enable sharing of a wide spectrum of responsibilities and resources.

From the perspective of transforming student and learning supports, we caution against *limiting* school-community connections to co-locating a few service agencies on a few school sites. Such an approach tends to downplay what is needed to effectively address barriers to learning and teaching and undervalues the role of existing school resources and other human and social capital found in homes and communities. Remember that increasing access to a few more services is only one facet of developing a unified and comprehensive system for enhancing equity of opportunity.

For more specific examples of ways to enhance *Community Involvement and Engagement*, see the self-study survey in Appendix C. (Also accessible at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/toolsforpractice/communityoutreachsurvey.pdf>)

For Free and Easily Accessed Online Resources Related to *Community Involvement and Engagement*

See our Center's Quick Finds on

Community Outreach for Involvement and Support

><http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/commoutreach.htm>

Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency; community schools

>http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/p1201_01.htm

Also see related topics listed on the Quick Find menu

><http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/quicksearch.htm>

Can you define collaboration for me?

Sure! Collaboration is an unnatural act between nonconsenting adults.



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