

# Building Strategic Partnerships: Expanding Learning Opportunities in Connecticut

A REPORT TO THE  
HARTFORD FOUNDATION FOR PUBLIC GIVING

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in partnership with the Connecticut Center for School Change



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## About

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for Hartford and 28 surrounding communities. In 2015, the Foundation celebrated ninety years of grantmaking in the Greater Hartford region, made possible by the gifts of generous individuals, families and organizations. It has awarded grants of more than \$680 million since its founding in 1925.

## Section I: Introduction and Background

### *Introduction:*

In 2016, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving contracted with The Children’s Aid Society’s National Center for Community Schools to partner with the Connecticut Center for School Change to build the capacity of seven Connecticut school districts as each developed new policies and practices to strengthen family, school, and community partnerships (FSCP) focused on supporting student learning and student success. Through its initiative strategically designed to complement and enhance the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Alliance District Grant Program, the Hartford Foundation has provided extensive capacity-building grants and facilitated the development of a thriving FSCP learning community in Connecticut, incorporating convenings, technical support and training, leadership coaching, and other resources, all furthering district systemic change.

The purpose of this paper is to document the strategies used by the National Center for Community Schools (NCCS) and the Connecticut Center for School Change (CCSC), comprising one component of the funded school districts’ family, school, and community partnership building. The paper shares the early results, challenges, and key lessons learned in the context of the Hartford Foundation’s capacity-building investment, to inform the future work of the foundation and comparable initiatives undertaken by education funders nationally.

### *Background on CSDE’s Alliance District Program:*

The Connecticut State Department of Education describes the Alliance District program as “a unique and targeted investment in Connecticut’s lowest-performing districts.” The CSDE launched the Alliance District program in 2012 as part of its Turnaround effort, headed by Desi Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer. Thirty districts statewide became eligible to receive special funds through the program “to support district strategies to dramatically increase student outcomes and close achievement gaps by pursuing bold and innovative reforms”. Over the past five years, the districts submitted extensive annual plans to the CSDE organized around the state’s four pillars of school improvement:

- Talent: Systems and strategies to recruit, hire, develop, evaluate, and retain excellent school leaders, teachers and support staff.
- Academics: Rigorous, aligned, and engaging academic program that allows all students to achieve at high levels, including aligned curricula, instruction, and assessment.
- Culture and Climate: Positive learning environment that supports high-quality teaching and learning, and engages families and the community as partners in the educational process.
- Operations: Systems and processes that promote organizational efficiency and effectiveness through the use of time and financial resources.

Of the thirty Alliance Districts in Connecticut, seven are located in the region served by the Hartford Foundation.

*Background on the Hartford Foundation’s Complementary Alliance District Investments:*

The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving serves 29 towns in north-central Connecticut—a large geographic area that is home to 750,000 residents. As the region’s community foundation, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving “works with donors, nonprofits, and community leaders to put resources into action for Greater Hartford.” The Hartford Foundation’s board established three priority investment areas: (1) vibrant communities (community and economic development); (2) learning from birth through college (education); and (3) family economic stability. The Alliance District investment that is the subject of this report falls within these priorities, and builds on substantial prior Hartford Foundation investments in school-community partnerships focused in the city of Hartford, including a major community schools investment, after-school programs, and the Hartford Partnership for Student Success (a Hartford leadership group that includes the Hartford Mayor’s Office, the Hartford Public Schools, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, and the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut).

Beginning in 2014, the Hartford Foundation provided each of the Alliance Districts located in its region with a planning grant opportunity to develop an approach to increasing or strengthening district partnerships both with families and with community resources, building upon existing district and school improvement plans. These grants marked the Hartford Foundation’s first efforts to help school districts outside of Hartford to deepen their partnerships not only with families but also with health and mental health service providers, dental and vision care services, cultural institutions, and resources focused on boosting students’ career and college readiness.

From a philanthropic perspective, the Hartford Foundation’s investment strategy rested on several key insights:

- Private philanthropic resources, strategically deployed, can complement and enhance major public investments in school improvement to deepen specific areas of work.
- Because the seven Alliance Districts faced varying challenges and opportunities, the Hartford Foundation approached its investments in a responsive, and not prescriptive, way. The districts were encouraged to provide a rationale for their proposed approach to family and community partnership, based on the specifics of their district and school improvement plans filed with CSDE as part of its Alliance District program.
- This flexibility was balanced by (and set within) a frame of evidence-based practices that were introduced to the districts by the Hartford Foundation as part of their shared learning agenda.
- Planning grants can provide a major return on investment since under-resourced low-income school districts often have to juggle competing priorities making it difficult otherwise to allocate adequate staff time and energy to thoughtful planning.
- Grants to school districts can be enhanced and supported by additional investments in capacity-building, documentation, and evaluation.

From a best practice perspective, the Hartford Foundation’s investment strategy used three current evidence-based frameworks as the theoretical underpinnings of its Alliance District work:

- Anthony Bryk et al.’s essential elements of school improvement, outlined in the book *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*: This research documented the salience of authentic family and community engagement as an essential ingredient of school improvement, based on the researchers’ analysis of 200 K-8 schools in Chicago over a seven-year period.<sup>1</sup>

- Karen Mapp’s dual capacity framework for family engagement: This framework outlines the elements required to build the capacity of schools and families to act as partners in promoting children’s learning and healthy development and emphasizes the centrality of links to learning in all family engagement activities.<sup>ii</sup>
- The National Center for Community Schools’ principles of effective school-community partnerships: These ten principles emphasize the importance of joint planning, mutual respect, continuous improvement, and complementary skills among partners.<sup>iii</sup>

*Individualized District Strategies:* During the planning grant phase, the participating districts engaged in a variety of planning activities—such as convening staff and community teams, conducting focus groups and surveys, engaging specialized consultants, reviewing professional literature and attending courses and symposia—in an effort to deepen their knowledge and broaden their purview of alternative approaches to family and community engagement. Each district also took the time to tailor its approach to the specifics of its district and school improvement plans. As a result, to date, six of the districts have received implementation grants organized around these specific strategies:

- Bloomfield Public Schools: The key improvement strategy selected by this district was to extend learning time for students through an extended day and year, using a combination of certified teachers and youth development staff from a lead partner agency. New staff included a full-time director (a district staff member) who initiated work at one pilot elementary school in year one and expanded to a second elementary school in year two. Bloomfield’s long term goal is to implement extended learning opportunities to support student success system-wide.
- East Hartford Public Schools: The *Partners in Achievement* initiative embraced a dual capacity family engagement strategy and hired a Director of Family and Community Engagement whose work to implement a number of related new partnership initiatives has since been supported by a Steering Committee made up of parents and several community agencies. In addition, the district developed new Family and Community Liaison positions at five of six elementary schools and measures to end what it termed “silo efficiency” (having staff doing overlapping work in different parts of the organization), unifying the efforts of entities charged with addressing different aspects of family and community engagement across the district.
- Manchester Public Schools: This district established an Office of Family and Community Partnerships to unify and bring coherence to the work of nine Family Resource Centers while substantially increasing its partnership with the Office of Neighborhoods and Families in the town of Manchester and others supporting student learning and student success. In addition, Manchester expanded the membership, reach, and effectiveness of a working coalition of community agencies initially focused on early childhood education, expanding their purview and activity to include positive youth development and an increased focus on their links to student learning and family support.
- Windsor: Windsor established a new Office of Family and Community Engagement and adopted two well-established models (Teachers and Parents in Partnership, in elementary schools; and the Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Teacher Home Visit model). In addition, Windsor has used the Early Development Instrument (EDI) developed by UCLA, and other needs and interest assessments, to determine how to support young children’s school readiness through increased partnership with

parents and community stakeholders.

- Windsor Locks Public Schools: This district moved to system-wide “career and college pathways” employing new personalized and experiential learning opportunities for students. The district hired a Coordinator of Family and Community Engagement and has since offered targeted professional development for staff as well as new learning experiences for family and community partners. The districts’ new pathways are offered to students beginning in the sixth grade and continuing through high school. New community partners are helping the district to expand students’ exposure to learning opportunities that prepare them for college and careers.
- Vernon Public Schools: The Vernon Public Schools did not receive an implementation grant in an initial round of grantmaking, primarily because of changes in district leadership. However, Vernon subsequently received an implementation grant and has been included in the capacity-building supports and services offered by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and its capacity-building partners (National Center for Community Schools, Connecticut Center for School Change, Cross & Joftus, LLC. and Center for Assessment and Policy Development).
- Hartford Public Schools: The Hartford Public Schools received a planning grant that has not yet moved to the implementation phase but this district has participated in the various capacity-building efforts, described below.

## Section II: The Case for Capacity-Building Assistance as Integral to the Overall Investment Strategy

The Hartford Foundation recognized that capacity-building involves more than knowledge transfer—that, in fact, “at its heart, building local capacity is about organizing communities of action, facilitating connections to power, and providing the tools and skills for inventing effective strategies for change.”<sup>v</sup> This approach to capacity-building honors the learners’ prior knowledge and local context, and makes learning opportunities frequent, accessible, compelling, and focused on real-world tasks. Similarly, the Hartford Foundation understood that effective capacity-building should be developmental in nature, client-centered, and rooted in a relationship of trust.<sup>vi</sup>

The Foundation used a multi-pronged strategy for capacity-building that combined a variety of *collective learning opportunities*, coupled with the tailored consultation and on-site coaching that is the focus of this report. The other collective activities included:

1. Quarterly Colloquia that introduced teams of district leaders to research and other important content, including core frameworks of Family, School and Community Partnership. The Colloquia also offered guided opportunities for team planning and for creating a shared understanding of key concepts;
2. Cross-site training workshops that provided opportunities for district teams and community partners to work together on strategic planning and early implementation issues; and

3. A District Leaders Network that provided an ongoing structure for the newly hired Directors of Family and Community Engagement to learn from one another and share best practices.

On a parallel and connected track, each district had access to *on-site consultation/coaching* that was tailored to their individual strengths, needs, and proposed plans. Provided primarily by consultants from the Connecticut Center for School Change, this on-site consultation employed a solid theoretical approach to capacity-building, one that views diagnostic assessment as a joint process, with agreement reached on important issues. In this approach:

- The consultant helped the client analyze the situation and reach his/her own conclusions about important issues and solutions;
- The consultant provided technical assistance and best-practice resources related to the client's goals and plans, taking account of contextual realities;
- The consultant stayed involved during implementation, advising on managing change and overcoming barriers, assisting in data collection related to key implementation indicators, and helping the client adjust implementation plans in accordance with progress and barriers; and
- The consultant sought opportunities to coach the client, maximizing opportunities for learning, and building the client's skills and commitment to implementing plans.<sup>vii</sup>

In addition, the Foundation made important investments in *off-site professional development* for its grantees. Several district leaders participated in Karen Mapp's Family Engagement Summer Institute at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and others participated in the Institute for Educational Leadership's national Family Engagement Conference.

### Section III: Implementation of the Capacity-Building Efforts

As outlined above, the Foundation invested in a set of inter-related capacity-building efforts designed to help the Alliance District grantees to achieve their proposed goals. Throughout the process, the Foundation recognized that, while the funded districts had chosen different strategies and approaches, they share a common overarching goal: to organize family, school and community partnerships strategically around student success.

1. **Quarterly Colloquia:** The Foundation organized these formal half-day seminars for teams from the funded sites as a strategy for reinforcing the shared conceptual frameworks that undergirded the FSCP investment. Importantly, the Colloquia also served as a means of building a professional learning community among district leaders, including superintendents. The Foundation strongly encouraged attendance at these sessions, and all districts adhered to that shared understanding. Topics for each Colloquium were determined by the Foundation, in consultation with the district leaders and the capacity-building team. The initial Colloquium focused on the Foundation's expectations for the initiative and on the shared conceptual base of the funded Family, School and Community Partnership work, including the Bryk and Mapp frameworks. Subsequent sessions have focused on such topics as implementing effective family engagement, addressing the needs of immigrant students and their families, achieving racial equity and cultural competency, and developing coherence around FSCP initiatives.

Every session provided opportunities for team time planning and cross-site learning.

2. **Cross-Site Training Workshops:** As an example, in July 2016, NCCS and CCSC offered an all-day training workshop for site teams and their community partners on *The Value of Strategic Partnerships*. This hands-on learning opportunity allowed the newly hired district Directors of Family and Community Engagement to play a leadership role in convening their community partners and conducting joint planning around their collaborative work over the next school year. The training helped the community partners understand, from their district’s perspective, how their knowledge and skills could address the learning needs of children and families.
3. **District Leaders Network:** Districts used part of their Foundation grants to establish a new position devoted to family and community engagement and the District Leaders Network served an important purpose: building a professional learning community among this affinity group. The Network has since evolved into the District Leaders Think Tank meeting monthly, actively supported by the Foundation’s Education Investments Officer. This group has produced a big payoff as peers within this affinity group have learned from one another, both formally (during structured sessions) and informally (reaching out to one another as needed).
4. **Tailored On-Site Consultation and Coaching:** Three senior education staff members from the Connecticut Center for School Change provided individualized on-site consultation and coaching throughout the contract period (April 2016 through June 2017), serving as liaisons between the Foundation and its grantees. The consultants used information from the grantees’ proposals and progress reports as well as extensive conversations with the Foundation’s staff and the grantees themselves as the basis for their interventions, which focused on helping the sites develop or strengthen strategic partnerships in their communities that are focused on supporting student learning and student success. Because the grantees developed specific and responsive approaches to expanding family, school and community partnerships, the consultants drew on their prior knowledge of the districts and communities as well as their extensive experience working in similar schools and districts to support the grantees’ implementation work as thinking partners and critical friends.
5. **Off-Site Professional Development:** As noted above, grantees had opportunities as part of this initiative to participate in national professional development opportunities, including Karen Mapp’s Family Engagement Summer Institute at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Others participated in the Institute for Educational Leadership’s annual Family Engagement Conference.
6. **Other Capacity-Building Supports:** The Foundation hired Cross & Joftus to provide assistance to all of the grantees on project financing and sustainability. In addition, the Center for Assessment and Policy Development worked to document and evaluate the efficacy of the grant strategy with a particular focus on two sites—Bloomfield and Manchester.

*Lessons Learned about Capacity-Building:* This unprecedented investment in capacity-building yielded several important lessons:

- **Paying attention to coordination among capacity-builders:** The Foundation convened monthly conference calls among members of the capacity-building team, making sure that team members were aware of one another’s work as well as of the latest developments in the funded districts.
- **Maintaining a focus on the big ideas:** The capacity-building team intentionally reinforced core concepts (introduced at the first Colloquium and reiterated in Foundation documents, including its Request for Proposals) in all interactions with grantees—for example, consistently reiterating the focus on links to learning in all family engagement and the new opportunities made possible for school districts through strategic partnership development.
- **Responding to changing conditions:** During the course of the initiative, as the planning work moved into implementation, the state of Connecticut and the City of Hartford experienced significant financial challenges—which, of course, affected the sustainability planning and other aspects of capacity-building. Similarly, the outcome of the Presidential election in November 2016 put a spotlight on immigration issues in these communities, leading to a decision to focus the next Colloquium on that topic.
- **Allowing innovation to flourish:** The Foundation has allowed grantees to learn from their implementation experiences and to make course corrections, including budget modifications, as their work evolved—for example, adding new partners whose work they were not familiar with during the planning phase of their relationship with the Foundation.
- **Fostering cross-site learning and positive, trusting relationships:** Although cross-site learning was built into the initial design of the technical assistance offerings (e.g., through the Colloquia and District Leaders Network), the Foundation staff and consultant team has made concerted efforts throughout the initiative to foster informal connections across sites as well. At a recent convening, several superintendents observed that one of the greatest benefits of their districts’ participation in this initiative was the strong and productive relationships they were able to create with their superintendent peers.
- **Creating opportunities for leadership development at multiple levels:** The importance of leadership at the superintendent level cannot be over-estimated. The Foundation has provided opportunities for the Alliance District superintendents to articulate and advance their respective visions for systemic change and to share those visions with one another. In addition, the Foundation supported leadership development at other levels within these districts, including among assistant superintendents and FSCP directors.
- **Recognizing that capacity-building efforts need to extend to multiple constituents:** In addition to building capacity at multiple levels within districts, the Foundation has made investments in school-level and strategic partner leadership.
- **Clearly defining roles and responsibilities from the outset:** This work involves identifying the responsibilities of each strategic partner as well as of school and district staff. An outside consultant serving as a “critical friend” can help district and school staff as well as their strategic partners to



sharpen their thinking around clarifying appropriate roles and responsibilities in a shared enterprise. A related insight is the importance of identifying measurable outcomes from the beginning in order to document and assess the impact of the program, and to hold all partners accountable for results.

- **Ensuring alignment between policy and practice:** Most of the Foundation’s Alliance District grantees have developed new board-approved FSCP policies as part of this initiative, which have helped to institutionalize improved practices at the school and district levels.

*Key Challenges Addressed in the Capacity-Building Work:* Similarly, several challenges emerged during the work:

- Old ideas about family and community engagement had to be updated and replaced by contemporary, research-based concepts, structures, and practices. This paradigm shift was difficult for some grantees to make since long-held beliefs, myths and biases are often not apparent to the individuals who hold them—for example, the belief that family and community partnerships are nice but not necessary to school improvement; the myth that low-income parents don’t value education as much as more affluent peers; or the view that community organizations are “vendors” rather than partners. The Foundation and its capacity-building team addressed these issues through consistent reinforcement of the core research-based ideas that undergird the initiative (family and community partnership as essential ingredients of school improvement; dual capacity requires both schools and families to change their behavior; links to learning need to be explicitly integrated throughout the work; not all community partnerships are strategic).
- District staff face competing priorities on a daily basis, and it is difficult for them to “steal the time” for planning. The Foundation tackled this issue head-on by offering planning grants and maintaining an active stance throughout the planning period. Similarly, the capacity-building team addressed this issue by building team planning time into all Colloquia and trainings and by offering planning assistance (directed toward continuous improvement) during on-site consultations and coaching.
- Coherence among all Family and Community Partnership efforts and other district improvement work is important and does not happen on its own. A conscious effort is needed to keep all stakeholders informed and moving in the same direction. This is particularly true in regard to school leaders developing an understanding and appreciation for the role strategic partners can play in supporting their improvement efforts.
- For strategic partnerships to work as part of strengthened family, school and community connections, they need someone to drive the work, take ownership, and create the conditions where there is “skin in the game” for all those involved. Strategic partnership work is complicated and bumps up against deeply ingrained practices involving organizations with different “life cycles” (budgetary, political, and grant driven cycles, for example) so it takes longer than anticipated and just starting with a small step can set the stage for more engaged and coordinated participation in the future. Outside support and technical assistance serve as an important catalyst to long-term success.
- Many districts needed help in learning how to use on-site coaching. Some staff reported that “we have never had access to this kind of help before.”

## Section IV: Overall Assessment

By combining survey data from grantees with our own observations, the NCCS and CCSC members of the capacity-building teams view the Foundation's capacity-building investments as extremely worthwhile. Grantees report that they appreciate, and benefit from, the varied approaches to learning and development—both collective and tailored—and that they are particularly grateful for the opportunity to learn and apply new content. For example, the concept of strategic community partnerships—those that add value to (and are integrated into) the district and school improvement plans—was new and useful to all of the districts. Similarly, the concept of integrating links to learning into all family engagement work across districts proved to be a clear and compelling idea that all districts were able to begin embracing. At a recent convening, the first comment from a superintendent spoke to exactly that issue. He observed that his district's relationship with parents and other family members had moved from a service orientation to a true partnership—that is, his district now viewed parents as authentic partners in the complex process of supporting all children on the road to productive adulthood.

## Section V: Implications for Other Funders

The work of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving in its Alliance District initiative runs counter to a recent and growing trend in private philanthropy—the trend that sees a lot of foundations designing their own initiatives and seeking grantees with capacity to implement their stringent, often rigid, designs. In contrast, the Hartford Foundation saw an opportunity to leverage major change by using a complementary grantmaking approach that addressed an important gap in public funding (the lack of priority placed on family, school and community partnerships to support student learning and student success). Coupled with its leveraging strategy, the Foundation agreed to allow potential grantees to make the case for their preferred approach, based on the local context and current state of their family, school and community partnership work. Finally, in addition to its district-level grants, the Foundation chose to make complementary investments in capacity-building, making sure that those investments were tightly coordinated with one another and that they were responsive to the needs of grantees. In summary, then, the lessons for other funders are:

- Use the power of leverage to gain a major return on philanthropic investment and to enhance public investments;
- Understand and honor the importance of local context in producing sustainable change;
- Undergird philanthropic investments in solid research;
- Recognize the value of planning grants as a vehicle for helping busy professionals devote needed time for concerted planning efforts;
- Make complementary investments in capacity-building to ensure that grantees have every opportunity to succeed;
- Recognize the value of an outside consultant to help maintain the focus of the work in light of competing priorities.

## Section VI: Conclusion

This report is not the end of the story—in fact, it represents an evolving tale of complexity and continuous improvement. The work in these Alliance Districts will continue during the 2017-18 school year and beyond, the demographics in these districts will continue to change in more or less dynamic ways, and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving will continue to serve its 29-town catchment area, as it has done now for 90 years. What is known is this: the Hartford Foundation made a thoughtful and deliberate set of investments in these Alliance Districts that honored the contextual differences of these local communities, respected the difficult work of public education in Connecticut’s unsettled economy, and created the conditions for success, promoting true systemic change.

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<sup>i</sup> Anthony S. Bryk, Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John O. Easton, *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Karen L. Mapp, *Partners in Education: A Dual-Capacity Framework for Family-School Partnerships*, Washington, DC: SEDL in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, 2013.

<sup>iii</sup> National Center for Community Schools, *Principles of Effective Partnerships*, New York, NY: The Children’s Aid Society, 2001.

<sup>iv</sup> Norm Fruchter, Michele Cahill, and Ellen Wahl, entitled *Building to Capacity: A Review of Technical Assistance Strategies*, New York: Institute for Education and Social Policy, New York University, February 1998.

<sup>v</sup> *Ibid.*

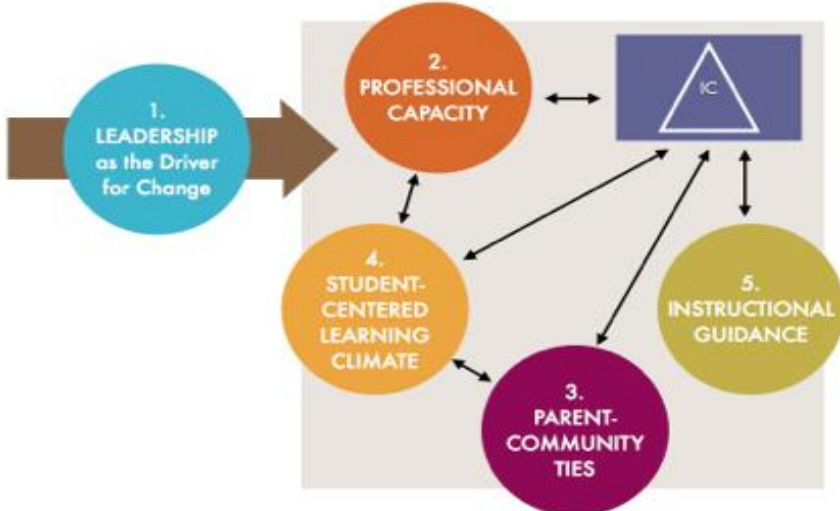
<sup>vi</sup> Barbara Blumenthal, “Rethinking Capacity Building,” *Foundation News & Commentary*, May/June 2004, pp. 43-6.

<sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*

# Section VII: Appendices

## FIVE ESSENTIAL SUPPORTS

The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research



**Figure 2: The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships**



# Principles of Effective Partnerships

Effective partnerships between public schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) require willingness and commitment. Both sides of the partnership have to be willing to make it work. While you cannot plan for every eventuality along the way, there are some basic steps you can take to make the partnership run smoothly:

**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 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. The CBOs leaders and staff should spend time on-site in the school, during the regular school day; and school leaders and staff should visit the CBO 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 CBO 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 provider.

**Involve Parents as Partners.** The sooner you involve parents from the community, the easier it will be to spread the word of your new program and mobilize community support. With their unique perspectives on the strengths and needs of their community, parents 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 program 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 mode is training. Make sure you arrange for joint orientation and training opportunities for school and CBO staff to enable all the partners to develop the skills they will need to make their collaboration work. Small, interactive workshops should focus on developing 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. Also, remember that the context on both sides of the partnership keeps changing. Schools will get new mandates, CBOs will gain and lose funding streams, and schools and CBOs 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 (Chief Professional Officer) relationship to the on-site interactions between teachers and youth workers.

**Be Strategic.** In meetings with school partners, listen carefully to what's on their minds, and think about ways you can respond to their needs. With new standards and increased accountability, schools are under increasing pressure. But with these pressures have come new opportunities. Constantly assess what your CBO is bringing to the partnership (including program, staffing and financial resources) – and be proactive in offering to make these resources available to your schools and school district.

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