

BACK-TO-SCHOOL

BLUEPRINT

PLANNING FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE AFTER COVID-19

ACCESSING ESSENTIAL SERVICES

ACCESSING ESSENTIAL SERVICES



Students spend just 20% of their waking hours in school. The other 80% of their time, spent outside the classroom, has a direct impact on academic success. When children have access to an appropriate range of prevention, intervention, and enrichment experiences, they thrive both personally and academically.

By connecting families with community organizations, educators support the whole child. This includes referring families to resources that meet their basic needs, such as food and housing. It also includes connecting students with enriching community-based learning, such as dance clubs and internships. These connections are beneficial for every child, and are particularly critical for those from marginalized communities.

Out-of-school factors including housing instability, a lack of nutritious food, and inequitable healthcare keep too many students, specifically students of color and those from low-income families, from reaching their potential. Racial and economic inequities have been exacerbated as a result of COVID-19. When students return after extended school closures, many will face new challenges. Students may have lost their housing or faced illness in their family. Others lacked the technology necessary to access coursework and connect with friends in the era of social distancing.

This action guide is designed to help educators and administrators address the holistic needs of children and families. It includes strategies to connect students with community resources, engage families through asset-based partnership, and expand learning with an emphasis on enrichment. Each section features embedded resources, including videos and articles to support further learning. At the end of the guide, a *Going Deeper* section offers detailed resources focused on implementation. Please note that all content included in embedded links comes directly from the organization that produced the resource.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

● Introduction	
○ Why Essential Services Matter	4
○ Action Guide Overview	7
● School-Based Strategies	
○ Understanding the Landscape	10
○ Building a Structure	14
○ Family Partnerships	18
○ Cross-Sector Coordination	22
○ Expanded Learning	29
● Thinking Bigger: Community Schools	
○ Community Schools: A Strategy for Equity	34
○ What Does a Community School Look Like?	37
● Take Action	
○ Action Steps	42
○ Going Deeper	45

INTRODUCTION

WHY ESSENTIAL SERVICES MATTER



DEFINING ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Essential services refer to the resources, programs, and connections that children need to survive and thrive. Though all families need access to essential services, they do not need the same services. This action guide describes a process in which educators identify each child's unique strengths and needs. Using this information, school-based teams connect families with community-based resources to support the child's growth and development.

Support plans benefit students in every community. Though, for the 33% of Massachusetts children from economically disadvantaged families, these plans are particularly crucial (DESE Profiles, 2019). Children living in poverty lack access to essential resources including food and adequate shelter. When students enter the physical or virtual classroom, their basic needs must be met before they can actively engage with instruction. Essential services include food assistance, housing support, medical care, transportation, and other basic resources.

Though addressing basic needs is critical, these services alone are insufficient. Every child has a range of academic and non-academic strengths. In order for children to reach their potential, these strengths must be nurtured within and outside of school. Enrichment opportunities are wide-ranging, and include services such as music lessons, sports camps, and internships. Due to vast racial and economic inequities, low-income students and students of color often have limited access to enrichments. Given that enrichment is vital to student success, we refer to it as an essential service throughout this guide.

In addition to services that address students' strengths and needs, children need to feel welcome, to see that their voice matters, and to be respected by peers and adults. When these conditions are in place, students thrive. The bullet points below summarize children's prerequisites to learning.

- **Basic Needs Met** — Some students may be distracted by hunger, have difficulty connecting with peers due to trauma, or face mental health conditions that lead to high levels of anxiety. These needs must be addressed before children can fully engage in the classroom.
- **A Sense of Agency** — When youth feel like they have a voice, they are more likely to engage in and take ownership of their learning. Students whose schools and out-of-school-time programs provide them with a sense of agency are more academically motivated than students who are left out of decision-making conversations. Read more about [Exploring Youth Voice and Youth-Adult Partnership](#) from Education Northwest.
- **A Sense of Belonging** — Students who experience a sense of belonging within their schools and communities are happier, healthier, and more engaged learners. A sense of belonging leads to higher attendance rates, lower anxiety, and better academic performance.
- **A Holistic Education** — Enrichment provides students with the opportunity to develop passions, learn new skills, and build strong relationships. Schools can work with out-of-school-time (OST) partners to ensure that every child has a well-rounded education.

STUDENT SUPPORT AND EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

In Massachusetts and across the nation, students of color and those from low-income communities have inequitable access to physical health supports, mental health supports, advanced learning opportunities, and enrichment opportunities. Many also attend schools with punitive discipline policies and low academic expectations. The [linked article](#) from the Center for Reinventing Public Education describes how limited access to enrichment contributes to a system of vast inequity. By partnering with local organizations, schools can meet each child's needs and address community barriers. Examples are included below:

- **Healthcare** — *Leah* attends a school with no nurse. She has missed many days of school due to her asthma. Educators can connect her with a health clinic to ensure she has appropriate medical support. Once she is healthy, Leah will spend more time at school.



Last summer, *Emilio* witnessed a violent event near his home. This school year he has struggled to turn in assignments. Emilio's school has only one social worker, and the social work caseload is currently full. Emilio needs a referral to a community-based mental health provider to process his trauma.

- **Enrichment and Acceleration** — *Deja* excels in her math classes. Her teacher is concerned that the school's curriculum does not provide sufficient opportunities for *Deja* to develop this strength. In order for *Deja* to reach her potential, her high school will enroll her in a course at a local college.

Kevin is interested in performing arts. Unfortunately, music and dance clubs were cut from the school budget last year. In order to grow this passion, *Kevin* will receive a referral to a community-based arts program.

- **Basic Needs** — *Stephanie's* family is homeless. Her family cannot afford to provide a healthy breakfast before school. In addition, *Stephanie* does not always have clean clothes to wear to school. *Stephanie* needs a combination of school- and community-based resources to address these needs before she can fully engage in the classroom.



WHY ARE ESSENTIAL SERVICES RELEVANT NOW?

In light of the current global pandemic, more families are facing joblessness. This impacts families' ability to meet basic needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and transportation. COVID-19 has disrupted the lives of all students, with a disproportionate impact on those from marginalized communities. During a time of distance learning, many children struggled to access assignments due to language barriers, limited technology, and other challenges.

Children will return to school dealing with the physical, emotional, and academic impacts of the virus. Educators cannot address these impacts alone. In partnership with families and communities, schools can meet each student's unique needs. The [linked resource](#) from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University explores the wide-ranging effects of COVID-19 on child development.

ACTION GUIDE OVERVIEW

SUPPORTING EVERY STUDENT

As educators prepare for Fall 2020, it is important to shift from a mindset of “certain students need extra support and guidance” to “all students need extra support and guidance.” By connecting families with essential services, schools create the conditions for every child to thrive. In addition to facilitating a smoother re-entry, these resources prepare students for long-term success.

The Case for Holistic Supports

Every child is unique, and no two children experience the same developmental journey. It is imperative to acknowledge the variance in students' experiences, both in the challenges they face and the strengths they carry. In order to personalize supports, educators can develop a process to review the strengths and needs of every child. This review should include a discussion of multiple developmental domains, such as emotional wellbeing, physical health, and academics. This guide describes a process for gathering information about each child and developing individualized support plans.

Usually schools review about 10% of students who need intensive support as part of a Student Support Team (SST). Expanding this work to include all students is beneficial for learning and development. This [America's Promise Alliance resource](#) shares scientific research detailing the benefits of individualized supports, even for children who are succeeding in school. A review of every child should not replace the school's existing structure for students with significant needs.

Student Support Models

There are many ways in which schools can provide integrated supports. This ranges from relatively simple strategies, such as Index Card Rosters, to comprehensive strategies like full-service community schools. The bullet points below provide examples of support models, ranging from simple to complex.

- **Index Card Rosters** — Index Card Rosters are an effective, easy-to-implement strategy for schools getting started with integrated supports. Educators can implement this strategy with existing staff during meetings that are already built into the school schedule. This [Edutopia video](#) provides an overview of the model.
- **Integrated Student Support** — Many of the strategies presented in this action guide focus on integrated student support (ISS). ISS is "a school-based approach to promoting students' academic success by developing or securing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement" (Child Trends, 2014).

Several of the specific methods described in this guide are inspired by the work of the Systemic Student Support Academy (S3), a partnership between Boston College's Center for Optimized Student Support and the Rennie Center. The S3 model prioritizes 1) a comprehensive review of each child, and 2) an individualized plan that addresses each child's prevention, intervention, and enrichment needs. This [Child Trends resource](#) includes evidence supporting a range of ISS models.

- **Community Schools** — In a [community school model](#), educators partner with local organizations to bring a range of non-academic supports into the school building. Community schools are a long-term, high-impact strategy, which require significant planning on the part of educators, families, local organizations, and city officials.

SCHOOL-BASED STRATEGIES

This action guide focuses on the steps required to create an individualized support plan for every child. An effective plan addresses a child's academic and non-academic needs. In order to identify these needs, educators develop a process to discuss each child. Once needs are identified, school staff partner with community organizations to provide necessary supports. Meaningful partnerships with students and families are critical to the success of each child's plan. Though accessing essential services is not a linear process, educators will likely find it beneficial to implement some of the strategies in this guide in order.

It is important to note that the steps in this guide represent just one student support model. The *Thinking Bigger* and *Going Deeper* sections of this guide includes guidance on other potential models, including full-service community schools.

- ➔ **Understanding the Landscape:** Key tasks for a shared leadership team
- ➔ **Building a Structure:** Steps required to develop an individualized plan for each child
- ➔ **Family Partnerships:** Strategies for an asset-based family engagement
- ➔ **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Strategies to connect children with out-of-school supports
- ➔ **Expanded Learning:** Strategies to bring enrichment into the school building
- ➔ **Thinking Bigger, Community Schools:** An overview of community schools as a strategy to advance equity

SCHOOL-BASED STRATEGIES

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

"Education is seen as one of the primary ways that students, regardless of their life circumstances, are able to reach their dreams. But the reality is that a large number of students face severe challenges outside of school that can impact their ability to do well in school."

— Community School Playbook



Integrated supports connect children with resources that nurture their physical, social, emotional, and academic strengths. They also address the academic and non-academic barriers to learning that inhibit school performance and child wellbeing. In order to provide these supports, educators must partner with families, community organizations, social service agencies, and out-of-school-time programs. This section describes the foundational elements that must be in place before schools can connect children with the resources they need. It describes the importance of:

- ❑ Engaging a **diverse and inclusive leadership team** to develop a shared vision for student supports
- ❑ Creating an **asset map** of community resources aligned to families' needs and priorities
- ❑ Developing a **school-based staffing plan** to discuss each child and develop individualized support plans

Developing a Shared Vision

Partnerships between schools, community organizations, and families create a web of in-school and out-of-school supports that children need to thrive. In building a system of integrated student support, a school must convene a planning team of diverse stakeholders to develop a shared vision. Through a vision-setting process, students, families, educators, and community partners all have opportunities to describe their goals and priorities for student support.

Practice Shared Leadership

To identify and implement supports that capitalize on the community's assets, the school can form a shared leadership team. This team should be diverse, inclusive, and representative of the larger community. Shared leadership is an ongoing process that requires trust and strong relationships. It is not enough to have a diverse group of stakeholders present at decision-making meetings. Effective teams work collaboratively to create the conditions for each individual to authentically share their priorities and concerns. The tabs below describe several conditions for effective collaboration.

Trust and Respect

In practicing shared leadership, educators and school administrators must prioritize diverse voices. In many schools, community members and families of color face significant barriers to participating in decision-making processes. Notably, most U.S. schools "expect parents to engage with the school system in ways consistent with White, middle-class parenting and behavioral norms" (Yull et. al., 2018). Educators need to identify and deconstruct these norms in order to include all voices in the decision-making process.

Equitable Group Norms

Every group has norms. Too often, these norms are unspoken and based upon the values of the white-dominant culture. When working collaboratively with diverse stakeholders, it is important to co-create group norms that allow everyone to participate. For example, conflict avoidance is an unspoken rule in white-dominant culture. When discussing student supports, leadership teams will need to counteract this norm. The group may develop norms to expect disagreement, welcome emotion, and engage in respectful conflict.

Cultural differences in decision-making and attitudes toward authority can create misunderstandings in a group working towards a common purpose. It is important to provide training to ensure that everyone has a voice in decision-making, as well as to offer both formal and informal leadership opportunities. The [article from IA State](#) provides a place to get started. All stakeholders should have the opportunity to add to and revisit norms on an ongoing basis.

Leadership Training

For many principals, students, families, and educators, shared leadership represents a significant change from the status quo. All stakeholders need leadership training in order to shift towards a collaborative decision-making model.

Shared decision-making often involves seeking consensus. Consensus does not necessarily mean that all group members agree. Rather, all group members acknowledge that their voice has been heard and that the will of the group emerged in the decision-making process. In order for consensus-based decision-making to be effective, those in traditional leadership roles, such as the school principal, must step back to

provide space for others to express their opinions. The [resource from Seeds for Change](#) provides guidance on getting started

It is important to note that although all stakeholders need leadership training, they do not all need the same training. Parents and community members who have not gone through the U.S. educational system may need training to understand current norms of school culture. Educators and school leaders need cultural competency training to understand the diverse students, families, and community organizations with whom they are working. This training is critical to building authentic and trusting relationships.

Produce an Asset Map

One of the leadership team's first tasks will be co-developing an asset map. Every community has a range of assets. Before educators can connect students and families with the supports they need, they must identify local resources. The voices of student and family representatives are critical to ensuring that resources listed on the asset map align with family needs. In the beginning, this asset map may be as simple as a spreadsheet that lists the following information about each resource:

- Organization name
- Contact information
- Resource(s) offered by the organization
- Location
- Eligibility criteria
- Pay structure: no-cost, sliding scale, etc.
- Additional notes

Schools may decide to start small, listing just a few resources on the asset map. Over time, the team can add community resources. Resources to include on an asset map are:

- School- and community-based nutrition resources, including food banks, low-cost farmer's markets, and social service agencies that connect families with government benefits.
- Educational supports for children and families. This can include after-school tutoring programs for children and adult education classes for their caregivers.
- School- and community-based medical, dental, and mental health care.



Develop a School-Based Staffing Plan

To identify the supports that each child needs, schools can form a student review team. This team should include a group of committed staff members who are leaders in each developmental

domain, such as academics, health, and social-emotional wellbeing. In addition to identifying domain-specific leaders, the team must appoint a leader to serve as team coordinator. This individual will be responsible for creating an ongoing meeting agenda, recording notes, identifying meeting locations, and setting a meeting schedule.



Key roles on the school-based team include:

- **Social Worker** — Mr. Walker, the social worker, identifies community-based supports to address students' basic needs including food and housing.
- **School Principal** — Mr. Williams, the school principal, serves as a liaison between the school review team and the shared leadership team.
- **School Nurse** — Ms. Avalon, the school nurse, identifies appropriate physical and mental health supports for each child.
- **Master Teacher** — Ms. Huynh, a master teacher, identifies appropriate academic intervention and enrichment opportunities.

Once a vision is identified, an asset map is created, and a school-based team is in place, educators can begin to develop individualized plans for each child. Continue to the next section to learn more about *Building a Structure* to review all students.

BUILDING A STRUCTURE

The section describes the **school structures necessary to review all students and develop individualized plans.**

Students learn across a range of settings, including at school, at home, and in the community. Students' experiences in all areas of life interact and impact development. To meet the holistic needs of each child, school-based teams should devote time to review every student. This section describes the review process.

The steps below align with the work of the [Systemic Student Support Academy](#). There are many ways that teams may choose to do this work. Additional examples are included in the Going Deeper section of this guide.

The steps for a high-level overview of a robust student review process are listed below. As described in each section of this guide, schools will likely begin with a simpler process. [This policy brief](#) by the Center for Optimized Student Support et al., distills insights from the sciences and lessons learned from practitioners to advance effective systems of integrated student support.

- 1. Develop a System** — Develop a system to track student strengths and needs in various domains including academics, health, social-emotional development, and family resources such as housing and nutrition. The tracking system could be an online database or Google sheet with information about each child.
- 2. Engage Families** — Families know their child better than anyone. Educators must engage students and families to share their strengths and challenges. In partnership with families, educators can identify the most effective supports for every student.
- 3. Meet with Educators** — Schedule meetings with classroom teachers to discuss every child's strengths and needs for the upcoming year.
- 4. Develop a Plan** — Develop a plan that includes individualized resources for every child. For some, this will be more extensive, including referrals to community-based housing and food assistance. For all students, these resources should include opportunities to discover and deepen their strengths. For example, if a child is interested in basketball, this plan could include a referral to a neighborhood-based league.
- 5. Follow Up** — Engage in two-way family conversations to ensure that supports are accessible and meet each child's needs. More information on two-way communication is included in the Rennie Center's [Rebuilding Community](#) action guide.

SCHEDULE STUDENT REVIEW MEETINGS

The previous section described the importance of reviewing the academic and non-academic strengths and needs of every student. Teachers and administrators need to build time into the school schedule for this task. As described below, it is important to differentiate between meetings to discuss all students and those designed to support students with more intensive needs.



All Students

Staff can use existing structures, such as grade-level team meetings, to review each child's strengths and needs. Teams can plan to review several students during each meeting. If grade-level team meetings are not an option, staff may choose to build a separate meeting into the school schedule - or to extend the length of existing Student Support Team (SST) meetings.

Students Requiring Intensive Support

In most schools, staff meet regularly as part of a Student Support Team to discuss students with the most intensive needs. During meetings, staff develop intervention plans, as part of a [multi-tiered system of support](#), focused on tier 2 and tier 3 academic and non-academic supports. The SST team is not replaced by the review of all students.

Prepare for Student Review Meetings

It is critical to discuss a range of student data in student review meetings. This includes:

- Surveys that ask about a child's interests, hopes, and dreams
- Academic performance data and work samples
- Staff sharing concerns regarding a student's physical/medical needs
- Staff and family observations

Team members should gather this information in advance of the meeting and arrive prepared to discuss each child.

Develop a Meeting Structure

Depending on time allotted, teams may decide to review as many as 8-10 students per meeting. Each meeting should include an opportunity to:

- ❑ Review a subset of students.
- ❑ Follow up on previous student reviews
- ❑ Identify next steps for each child. This may include a referral to a community-based provider or a referral to the SST team.

In order to use time effectively, teams should **build a template** to collect student-specific information and next steps. For each domain (academics, social-emotional, wellness, etc.), teams should discuss:

Strengths

1. In what areas does this child excel?
2. What are the child's assets? (bilingualism, life experiences, cultural knowledge, etc.)
3. What is the child passionate about and interested in?
4. What resources does the child already benefit from? (school-based programs, community programs, etc.)
5. What are the child's hopes and dreams?

Needs

1. In what areas does the child struggle?
2. Does a lack of academic, social, or financial resources contribute to this challenge? For example this could include a lack of summer enrichment, a demanding work schedule, or inadequate healthcare.

Support Ideas

1. What school- and community-based supports can help the child develop their strengths and passions?
2. What school- and community-based supports can address the child's academic and non-academic needs?

CREATE STUDENT-SPECIFIC PLANS

Based upon data collected during review meetings, the team creates a holistic plan that responds to student strengths and needs. At the beginning, this plan can be very simple, with a bulleted list of 2-3 action steps. As the process develops, teams may decide to create more robust, individualized plans. Examples of student-specific action steps include:

- ❑ A phone call to the child's family recommending that the child enrolls in a before-school math tutoring program with volunteers from the local college.

- ❑ A referral to a performing arts class, which will provide a creative outlet and help the child build confidence.
- ❑ A referral, provided by the school social worker, to housing resources.

As the work progresses, teams may decide to develop more detailed plans. The [Partnerships, Not Pushouts report](#) describes the promise of student-centered Personalized Opportunity Plans.

Monitor Plan Implementation

Once plans are developed, schools need a tracking system to monitor implementation. The tracking system can be very simple, such as a shareable online spreadsheet with a place to input key dates and information. Below are the basic elements of a data system.

Assign Referrals

The tracking system should include:

- The recommended service
- The date of the referral
- The name of the staff responsible for providing a referral

Track Service Delivery

The tracking sheet should include a place for staff to note referral status. This includes the date that the student received the service.

Follow Up with Families

The tracking sheet should include the name of a staff member who will follow up with the student and family. Staff should add notes about student and family feedback, which the team can discuss at an upcoming review meeting.

IDENTIFY WHOLE-SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

By discussing the strengths and needs of each child, educators gather critical information about the entire community. They can use this information to strengthen supports offered within the school. For example, if a large number of families face food insecurity, the school can start a backpack program to provide students with food each weekend. If students and families express interest in a career exploration program, the community can begin working together to put this program in place. Each of these actions help transform the school into a learning hub that prioritizes the needs of the entire community.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS



“When schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more.”

— Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

A FOUNDATION OF TRUST AND RESPECT

In order to develop individualized plans that meet the needs of each child, educators must prioritize meaningful family partnerships. When families trust schools, students are more likely to trust their educators. Active family participation helps students develop a sense of belonging, which directly impacts academic outcomes. It also ensures that resources in a child's plan align with family priorities. For family partnerships to be meaningful, the relationships between educators and families must be based in respect and trust. The section below describes essential elements of authentic family engagement.

Making Engagement a Priority

As Dr. Karen Mapp describes in [this video](#), family engagement is often seen as an "add-on" to the work of schools. To create meaningful change and advance equity, family engagement must be a schoolwide priority. As part of this priority, educators must make deliberate efforts to rebuild trust with families of color, non-English speaking families, and low-income families whose identities and input have historically been devalued in schools. In doing so, educators send a clear message to marginalized families that their participation and contributions are integral to student success.

Recognizing Culture

To partner in a meaningful way, educators must take time to understand families' diverse cultures. Too often, schools adopt colorblind approaches to family engagement, which expect families to adapt to white-dominant norms of school interaction. Rather than improving school practices, this approach to engagement expects families to comply with current norms (Yull et. al., 2018).

In a Central New York school district, educators prioritize race-conscious family engagement. Through a Parent Mentor program, the district works to "(1) understand barriers to the involvement of parents of color, and (2) reframe parents' role in the school system as advocates whose primary purpose is to bridge cultural disconnects between White teachers and students of color" (Yull et. al., 2018). Further detail about the program is included in this [School Community Network article](#).

Asking for Input

Families know their children better than anyone. In identifying the resources that best meet the needs of each child, educators must consult families. Family input should not be isolated to decisions that impact the individual child. Educators should also consult families regarding schoolwide improvement priorities. The table below describes the difference:

Child-Specific	School-wide
Families respond to a survey to share their hopes, dreams, and concerns for their child this school year.	Families, students, and educators work together on a school discipline reform committee.
Families meet with a teacher to discuss out-of-school enrichment programs that align with their child's interests.	Families partner with educators on a school lunch task force to incorporate culturally appropriate meals.

Equitable Family Engagement

[This resource](#), Strategies for Equitable Engagement from the State Support Network, provides strategies for schools and districts to promote equitable family engagement. For example:

- Navigating cultural differences
- Creating multiple engagement options
- Practicing self-awareness of one's own values and culture

ASSET-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

Every family has strengths. In order to develop strong relationships, educators must take time to learn about the assets that each child and family brings to the school. In doing so, educators will improve each child's school experience.

Shared Responsibility

Include families in school improvement and student support conversations. Examples of ways to engage families in decision-making include:

- Asking a parent representative to serve on a curriculum-selection committee

- Partnering with families to develop a playground redesign funding proposal
- Surveying families about their priorities for after-school enrichment

Family Education

Family members are the child's first and most important teachers. Educators should provide families with the information they need to support the child at home. This includes:



- Offering parent technology trainings. This is particularly important during times of distance learning, especially for families who have not used school-provided devices in the past.
- Sharing strategies for non-English speaking families to support literacy at home. This includes helping students develop reading and writing skills in their home language.
- Providing parent workshops on the college application process.

Continuous and Positive Communication

Continuous communication between families and teachers is foundational to positive relationships. Educators can:

- Engage families as experts by asking about their child's interests, dreams, and needs
- Meet individually with families via in-person meetings, virtual meetings, or home visits
- Ensure most communication focuses on positive news and shared learning, rather than disciplinary issues. For example, outreach to families should happen when a student has a positive experience with a peer or experiences a breakthrough in a math lesson.

By actively listening to each family's experiences, sharing responsibility, and promoting positive associations with school through training and outreach, educators can build relationships based on trust and shared priorities.

GETTING STARTED WITH FAMILY VOICE

Educators and school leaders can use the following strategies to begin incorporating family voice into day-to-day school operations.

- Take time to **meet individually with every family**, either at the students' home, at school, or virtually. Ask families about their hopes, dreams, and fears for the year ahead. Share various ways that families can access school resources.

- **Incorporate family representatives in school improvement efforts.** For example, this can include engaging family representatives on a summer learning planning team. Ensure that families present on committees reflect the diversity of the school community.
- Use the school building to **host community gatherings**, events and celebrations. Prioritize events that celebrate family culture. This can include a cultural dance, music performance, potluck, or history night.

The Rennie Center's [Rebuilding Community](#) action guide shares additional strategies for building authentic relationships with students and families.

CROSS-SECTOR COORDINATION

This section focuses on **community coordination** to address **students' enrichment, prevention, and intervention needs**.



Schools cannot address student needs in isolation. In order to help all children thrive, schools can draw upon the resources of the entire community.

Once school teams have met to identify the needs of each student, school-based staff follow up to connect families with appropriate services. This section describes the role of school staff in developing community partnerships and coordinating support services.

Many of the strategies described in this section represent a heavy lift for school teams. Educators will likely begin with a much simpler process than the one described here. Ideas for getting started with limited time and resources are included throughout the section.

THE ROLE OF A COMMUNITY LIAISON

In seeking to connect students and families with essential services, many schools hire or reassign a staff member to serve as a school-based coordinator. This individual is responsible for facilitating a process in which educators review the needs of all students and connect families with local resources. Schools can use a variety of funding sources to cover this position including Every Student Succeeds Act and Medicaid Community Benefit dollars (America's Promise Alliance, 2019).

Hiring a community liaison is unlikely to be immediately feasible for most schools. In that case, it is important to acknowledge the significant time required to connect students with community-based resources. Staff members will need dedicated time in their schedules to perform this role. As described in the *Building a Structure* section, schools without a full-time coordinator typically share the responsibility across multiple team members:

- **A master teacher** coordinates with community-based tutoring, STEM, and literacy programs
- **A guidance counselor** works with local employers to connect students to internships
- **A social worker** coordinates with healthcare providers, including those focused on mental health

The Outreach Process

Once a student's individualized plan has been created, school-based teams must clearly identify how the plan will be implemented. Interact with the graphic below to learn more about the process.

Implementing Juana's Plan



During the 5th grade team meeting, staff discussed Juana's strengths and needs across multiple domains. In collaboration with Juana and her family, the team identified areas to support Juana's growth and development.

The following scenario, based off the work of the [S3 Academy](#), represents a detailed process which schools can aspire towards. When schools are first getting started, the process will likely be much less complex.

Academic Development

Juana is excelling in math. She told her teacher that math class is her favorite part of the day. One day, she hopes to use her math skills in her career.

Juana needs the opportunity to further develop this strength outside of school. As an action step, her classroom teacher will reach out to a neighborhood-based robotics club. The club meets on weekends at a community center near Juana's home.

Health and Wellness

A toothache has been distracting Juana from her schoolwork. Her mom shared that the family does not have insurance. In addition, her family does not speak English. They have been unable to find an affordable dentist due to a language barrier.

Per Juana's plan, the school social worker will make a referral to the neighborhood health clinic. The health clinic has bilingual staff who can enroll Juana and her family in MassHealth. A patient coordinator at the clinic will help the family schedule a dental appointment.

Enrichment

Juana expresses herself through music and dance. Her school does not offer music classes so she has limited opportunities to develop this passion during the school day. Juana's family wants to enroll her in a meaningful summer learning program. They are most interested in a program that will celebrate Juana's cultural background and connect her to peers who share her culture.

Per Juana's plan, the school's art teacher will connect Juana's mother with a neighborhood-based Afro-Latin music organization. The organization provides a summer camp for youth.

Follow-up

Next month, the classroom teacher, social worker, and art teacher will follow up on Juana's plan. They will make sure that Juana is scheduled for a dental check-up, registered for the summer music program, and attending the robotics club. They will also connect with Juana and her family to ensure that these services meet the family's needs.

Collaborative Structures

Juana's plan, described above, is not where most schools will start. The steps below outline starting points that lower the burden on individual educators to track down appropriate services for every child. As the work gets underway, schools may move towards a more robust process.

1. Develop a **database of community resources**. In the beginning, this may be as simple as a Google spreadsheet shared with the school-based team. This database should include key information about each resource including contact information, a contact name, location, and eligibility criteria. For example, if a soccer program is available for ages 10+, this should be noted.
2. **Start small**. In the beginning, schools may identify just 2-3 community partners with which they will connect students. For example, the team may identify a point of contact at the neighborhood health center and the local YMCA. Combined, these services will begin to address families' prevention, intervention, and enrichment needs.
3. Create a **system to track services**. For example, after referring Juana's family to the health clinic, a team member should note if the referral was successful and Juana got the care she needed.
4. Begin to engage in **two-way communication**. OST providers have information about student strengths and interests that can help teachers improve instruction and vice versa. Building relationships across sectors helps educators and community partners improve their work.

BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

When schools and community organizations work together, all students benefit. The section below describes the ways in which cross-sector collaboration improves children's learning and wellbeing.

Building Social Capital

Through cross-sector relationships, schools help students build social capital. Social capital refers to "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000). These connections and relationships have significant benefits that last well beyond a student's K-12 career. Examples include:

Workforce Connections

When it comes to finding a job during and after high school, relationships are often more important than a job-seeker's skills. Given vast racial and economic inequities, many students lack the social network they need to find employment.

Schools can open doors via connections to local businesses. Employers can hire students for after-school and summer internships, during which students gain skills and meet mentors who can unlock career opportunities.

Collective Action

The barriers that inhibit student success extend well beyond classroom walls. Many out-of-school-time (OST) organizations do powerful community organizing work, providing opportunities for youth to address injustice and spark social change.

For example, the Jóvenes en Acción program at Boston's Hyde Square Task Force equips youth to address a community problem that affects their lives. Through intensive training, youth learn to research the problem, identify their goals, and mobilize support. The program's youth organizers have participated in legislative hearings, engaged in lobbying, and used local media to further their efforts. Through such efforts, youth build social capital and learn how to use community connections to advance social change.

Social Relationships

Students develop meaningful and authentic peer relationships in activities based in a shared passion. For example, when engaged in arts and culture programs, students have opportunities to reflect on their identities and experiences - and learn about the identities of their peers. On a basketball team, youth learn to rely on one another in a setting that is very different from a math or language arts class. These friendships and social connections are a source of resilience and mutual support for youth as they progress through school and beyond.

Learning Across Settings

The school building is only one place where meaningful learning happens. By working in coordination with youth development programs, educators connect students to opportunities that are far more expansive than what schools can offer alone. During programming that takes place after school, on weekends, during school vacation, and over the summer, students develop their passions and build relationships that support their holistic development in and out of school.

There are many ways that schools can partner with out-of-school (OST) time programs. This includes making referrals to local programs and granting school credit for learning that takes place outside of school. Below describes a few ways in which schools formally connect OST programming to school-based learning.

Micro-credentialing

Across the country, school districts are looking for opportunities to give students credit for the rich learning that takes place in after-school and summer programs. The [report from the Rennie Center](#) details how OST programs in Providence and Boston issue digital badges to credential the skills that students gain in the community. Students receive credentials for technical skills, such as coding, and 21st century skills, such as critical thinking. Digital badges serve as portable evidence of students' skills, and can be included on transcripts, resumes, job applications, and LinkedIn profiles.

For example, students at DownCity Design in Providence use mathematical, analytical, and collaboration skills to tackle design challenges that make their community a more inclusive place to live. In recent years, students revitalized a park by building a boat-themed toddler play area. DownCity Design students have earned digital badges for skills including communication, teamwork, and perseverance. Students who earn badges post them on resumes and job applications. Badge earners are also guaranteed summer jobs in the City of Providence.

Work-Based Learning

Too many students leave high school lacking the skills they need to succeed in their desired careers. Schools can partner with local employers to provide opportunities for career preparation during and after school. Work-based learning programs can range from short-term internships to longer-term co-ops or apprenticeships.

Meaningful career preparation programs require significant planning on the part of educators, employers, students, families, and community organizations. The Rennie Center's [Postsecondary Readiness action guide](#) addresses this topic in detail.

Community-Based Coursework

As schools develop partnerships with OST programs, learning will increasingly take place outside school walls. For example, students may take a calculus class at a local college instead of a high school math class. They may participate in a science-related OST program in lieu of a school-based elective. The [case study from the Rennie Center](#)

explores how the Edward M. Kennedy Academy for Health Careers uses the city of Boston as a campus, connecting students to opportunities for deeper learning.

MAKING PARTNERSHIPS WORK

“Communities must step forward to create systems of opportunity and support in which teachers, upon identifying a non-school problem in the life of a child, can pick up a telephone and connect with someone in the community who can actually do something about the issue.”

— Paul Reville, 2018



In order to support the holistic needs of each child, organizations working across a range of sectors must dedicate time to collaborate. This section describes what effective cross-sector partnerships look like.

Shared Priorities

As described in the Building a Structure section of this guide, a shared vision is the foundation of an effective partnership. Out-of-school-time providers, school-based staff, and social services organizations share common goals related to child and family wellbeing. Often, these organizations use different language to express their vision. Shared goals, focused on the wellbeing of children, help guide diverse organizations' collaborative work. The Aspen Institute case study on [School-Community Partnerships](#) highlights the importance of common goals.

Leadership Commitment

In order for organizations from diverse sectors to devote the time and resources necessary for collaboration, leadership investment is critical. Whether as part of a school- or city-based effort, leaders across various sectors should identify time to meet on a regular basis. In all leadership

meetings, it is critical that the composition of the group reflects the diversity of the local community. Two potential partnership structures are highlighted below.

City-Led

As described in the [Education Redesign Lab toolkit](#), a Children's Cabinet is typically organized by a city mayor. It is a designated forum in which leaders from local health clinics, schools, OST programs, and family support organizations collaborate to better serve the community's children. Cabinet members develop shared goals, share data, identify community gaps, and address redundancies.

School-Led: Partnership Team

If a cross-sector collaborative structure does not exist in the community, a school or district leader can champion this effort. As described in the Understanding the Landscape section of this guide, team members should include representatives from a range of youth- and family-serving organizations.

Those included on the partnership team must have authority to make decisions on behalf of the organizations they represent. It is also critical to include student and family voice on this team. Team members can determine the appropriate frequency for leadership meetings, though it is important to meet regularly.

Deepening Partnerships

As partnerships develop, collaboration is likely to expand. At this point, representatives from various organizations may develop a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) to guide their work. If any data, particularly confidential student data, will be shared, partners will need to detail expectations for data privacy in a formal agreement.

EXPANDED LEARNING

WHY EXPANDED LEARNING MATTERS

Students engage with school when they can relate to the material they are learning and when they see the real-world importance of their work. Enrichment programs, offered in and out of school, often provide the hands-on, active learning that students crave. Unfortunately too few students, particularly in low-income communities and communities of color, have access to these experiences. While wealthy families supplement students' instruction with dance classes and music lessons, economically disadvantaged families do not have the same options. Below is relevant data on out-of-school-time equity.

- By the time a child living in poverty reaches 6th grade, they have likely spent **6,000 fewer hours** learning than their wealthier peers (HechingerEd blog).
- Middle-class students are **8 times more likely** than their low-income peers to engage in enrichment learning outside of school (Boston After School & Beyond, 2020). This disparity widens opportunity gaps between students across racial and economic lines.

What Can Schools Do?

In addition to referring students to out-of-school time programs, educators can bring enrichment into the school building. Many schools accomplish this by extending the school day or strengthening school-based before- and after-school programs. As described in the video from [Leaving to Learn](#), educators should engage students and families to ensure that opportunities offered at school align with students' expectations, interests, and needs.

The Benefits of Expanded Learning

Expanded learning is critical to education and personal development. This section explores the many benefits of school-based expanded learning.

Relevance

Too often, academic coursework feels disconnected from students' day-to-day lives. By integrating community partners in academic instruction, educators can provide opportunities for students to apply academic skills to real-world situations. One example is included [here](#).

At **Generation Citizen**, an action civics program, students apply an understanding of democracy to enact community change. Massachusetts students participating in Generation Citizen have worked to advance transportation justice, make school funding more equitable, and reduce gun violence.

Identity Formation

Many community-based programs prioritize opportunities for students to understand their history, celebrate their culture, and develop a positive ethnic-racial identity. For example, at Sociedad Latina in Boston, students connect with their diverse cultures and traditions through music, media, dance, and visual arts. This [video created by Sociedad Latina](#) students, features students sharing the importance of their culture and heritage. Sociedad Latina offers a combination of in-school and out-of-school youth programs. For example, the organization's STEAM Team provides culturally relevant science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics enrichment at middle schools in Boston.

Mentorship

Youth development programs have long prioritized strong relationships. Through arts, sciences, and athletics, students have diverse opportunities to build strong relationships with caring adults via a shared passion. Despite research showing the academic, social, and emotional benefits of mentoring, a third of students grow up without this resource (MENTOR, 2020). By integrating community partners in daily school operations, schools have the opportunity to change this statistic.

Empowerment

Students from marginalized communities, and particularly communities of color, face injustice everyday. In housing, education, policing, transportation, and many other areas of their lives, youth deal with the pervasive barriers created by structural racism.

Many youth-serving organizations, particularly those focused on youth organizing and advocacy, provide opportunities for students to use their voices and experiences to enact change. In addition to bettering schools and communities, youth organizing has powerful benefits for the students who participate. Students develop a sense of personal and collective agency, which benefits them at work, in college, and in their communities. They learn to advocate for themselves and push back against injustice in education and all other facets of their lives.

Schools have opportunities to integrate youth organizing into academic coursework including civics, social studies, and language arts. Schools can also partner with community organizations to offer school-based after-school programs.

Creative Outlets

Many critical subjects, such as science and the arts, have been squeezed out of the typical school day due to funding cuts and a focus on reading and math. By integrating community partners and extending school hours, educators and community organizations can provide students with a holistic education that sparks creativity, develops students' interests, and prepares students for higher education and careers. This [Brookings Institution article](#) shares evidence on the impact of the arts in education and personal development.

The benefits of expanded learning are deep and diverse. Through active learning, students explore their educational and career interests and develop the confidence to pursue their passions. They form strong relationships with peers and adults to support them through life's challenges. They celebrate and connect with their cultures, while developing a sense of agency to push back against inequitable systems and policies. By working in partnership with community organizations, teachers and school leaders can provide a more equitable education.

EXPANDED LEARNING AT SCHOOL

Expanded learning harnesses community resources to provide opportunities for students to build critical skills. Expanded learning can take place before school, during the school day, after school, on weekends, during vacation weeks, and over the summer. The section below provides examples.

Extended School Day

In recent years, schools across Massachusetts have extended their hours. Rather than offering enrichment exclusively in after-school programs, this has provided the opportunity for schools to integrate music, arts, physical education, and other key subjects during the school day. Schools with an extended day often weave community partner programming throughout each students' schedule. For example, students may begin the day with literacy before transitioning to an enrichment block offering youth organizing, dance, or soccer instruction.

Schools without extended hours can also integrate enrichment through before- and after-school programs offered within the building. For example, several Massachusetts schools offer the [BOKS program](#) before school. This fitness program provides opportunities for children to run, play, and connect with peers before the school day begins.

Vacation Week

During December, February, and April vacations, many students lack a safe place to play and learn while their caretakers are at work. Some Massachusetts schools offer Acceleration Academies during these weeks. Acceleration Academies have traditionally been offered to struggling learners, providing students with extra learning time with the school's most impactful instructors. To prepare students to meet rigorous, grade-level standards, these academies engage students in hands-on, project-based learning.

Other schools engage community partners, such as arts and sports organizations, to offer school-based programming during vacation weeks. Community partner programs are typically open to all students.

Summer

Some Massachusetts schools do not close when academic coursework pauses for summer vacation. In partnership with community organizations, educators ensure that every child has an enriching summer experience. For example, the Harvard/Kent Elementary School in Boston offers a 5-week summer program in collaboration with local partners. The program is designed to

prevent summer learning loss, foster social-emotional wellbeing, and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation (Boston Public Schools, 2018). The [Wallace Foundation's Summer Learning Toolkit](#) offers a set of resources for schools and community partners looking to launch a high-quality summer learning program.

Scheduling Considerations

There are several different ways that schools can offer expanded learning opportunities. As described in the [article from Expanding Learning](#), options include:

1. **A school day that seamlessly transitions into an out-of-school offering.** See the example from Pine Jog Elementary School in Florida
2. **A longer school day that includes embedded time for enrichment.** See the example from Hilton Elementary School in Baltimore
3. **A school year that transitions into full-day, active summer learning.** See the example from the Harvard-Kent Elementary School in Boston

INTEGRATING ACADEMICS AND EXPANDED LEARNING

When expanded learning is working well, enrichment experiences are well-connected to students' classroom learning. The academic school day seamless blends with after-school programs. In some schools, educators do not differentiate the school day from after-school programming. Instead, they refer to after-school as 8th and 9th period. Educators and community partners can use the following strategies to integrate expanded learning with traditional academics.

- **Whole-School Meetings** — During monthly schoolwide meetings, teachers and community partners share their plans for the month ahead and identify ways to integrate and reinforce learning across settings.
- **Regular Check-Ins** — Teachers and community partner staff meet at regular intervals to discuss the needs of specific students. They share the child's strengths, areas where the child is facing challenges, and ways that the teacher and program staff can partner to support each child.
- **Classroom Partnership** — Community partner staff work with teachers throughout the school day, joining classrooms to support small-group instruction and meet individually with students.

THINKING BIGGER: COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: A STRATEGY FOR EQUITY

THE CASE FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Schools play a central role in the lives of children and families. However, for families and students of color, educational institutions have often been places of compliance and assimilation, rather than a space of connection and liberation. Community schools represent an educational model in which the school serves as a resource hub for children, families, and community members. Effective community schools are not built via a top-down approach. Instead, the services offered within the school are determined in partnership with children and families. The [video from NEA](#) provides an overview of the community school model.

Getting Started with Thoughtful Planning

Community schools are not a short-term solution. They require significant planning and financial resources to design programming that is aligned with families' priorities. This section provides an overview of the community school model. Guidance on getting started with community school planning is included in the *Going Deeper* section of this guide.

This section explores the history of community schools, focused on the community school model as a strategy to advance equity.

A Response to Vast Inequity

By sharing space with medical providers, adult education organizations, and youth enrichment programs, community schools serve as a resource center for children and adults. More importantly, they offer a gathering place for families to connect with others in the community, building children's and adults' social capital.

Due to a long history of oppressive land use and zoning policies in the United States, low-income communities and communities of color experience inequitable access to essential services, including food, water, transportation, education, healthcare, and social services. Community schools respond to this inequity by bringing essential services into the school. The drivers of racial inequity are found in every facet of U.S. society. Examples are included below.

Zoning

Racially targeted zoning practices like redlining isolated people of color in poorer neighborhoods, where they faced a lack of resources. To this day, people in lower-income urban, suburban, and rural spaces do not have equal access to social service providers (Brookings). The [Systemic Racism video](#) includes a brief explanation of the multi-generational impacts of redlining.

Civic Engagement

There is "incontrovertible evidence that poor and non-white students are receiving demonstrably less and worse civic education than middle-class and wealthy white students" (Levinson, 2012). A historical mistrust in systems like government has resulted in young people of color and those in low-income spaces having fewer opportunities to participate in community and civic engagement (Gaby, 2016).



Education

An opportunity gap between students of color, low-income students, and their white, more-affluent counterparts developed and widened as a result of factors like culturally unfriendly school environments, a lack of access to health and social services, and family exclusion from educational activities. In Massachusetts and across the nation, the opportunity gap results in disparate educational outcomes for students based on race and family income.

For more on opportunity gaps, visit the Rennie Center's 3rd Action Guide: [Accessing Grade-Level Content](#).

Since the early- to mid-1900s, community schools have played a role in the fight for educational equity. As described in the quote below, schools for African American children in the mid-late 20th century provided a gathering place for community members. These schools strengthened the Black community as they faced segregation, racial violence, and dehumanization.

“Under both de jure and de facto segregation, schools for African American children functioned as important social hubs controlled by and serving the black community, with broad-based participation, collaborative relations, and shared experiences and attempts to mitigate economic hardships and violence from white supremacists.”

— Maier et. al., 2018

The Freedom Schools of the 1960s offered a "summer program that was designed to prepare disenfranchised African Americans to become active political actors on their own behalf (as voters, elected officials, organizers, etc.)" (Civil Rights Teaching, 2017). Though specific elements of community schools vary, many maintain an equity-oriented mission. Today's community schools provide access to social services, a quality education, and a space for community members to gather and build trust.

Why are Community Schools Relevant Now?

Community schools provide an **equitable response** to the **racial and socio-economic isolation** that too many of the Commonwealth's communities face today. They are open every day and offer a host of opportunities, resources, and support services. Community schools improve learning through a deliberate focus on family health and wellbeing. At the core, they are designed to amplify community voices and close relationship gaps between schools and the communities they serve.

Here, in a crisis that disproportionately impacts low-income communities and communities of color, educational leaders have an opportunity to address physical, social, and economic distress by improving community access to essential services. Community schools offer one model to connect families with the resources they need.

WHAT DOES A COMMUNITY SCHOOL LOOK LIKE?

Imagine walking through the doors of a school... Down the hall in classroom 104, a teacher and a parent are meeting, sharing strategies to reinforce learning at school and at home. To your left, Kiana, a 4th grader, is getting her eyes checked at the optical center. Her teacher referred her due to recent trouble reading. Outside, Ms. Williamson's 2nd grade class is working in the community garden, learning about healthy eating and the science of plants. The bell rings and it is time for advisory, where each student will spend time with a trusted adult to plan their summer learning. After school, families and community members will gather for a picnic on the playground, during which they will build relationships with each other and with educators.

Schools integrate resources from the community to support the needs of every child and family through the following strategies:

- **Inclusive School Team** — Bus drivers, crosswalk guards, and janitorial staff all interact with students on a daily basis. In community schools, these individuals serve as full members of the school team. They build relationships and share information about students that educators may not see within the classroom.
- **Students' Basic Needs** — Community schools address each child and family's basic needs. Students can access health resources such as annual physicals or eye exams. Families can enroll in food programs and receive clothing and school supplies.
- **Student Voice** — Agency and empowerment are critical to student success. Community schools develop norms with students, ask children for feedback, and use knowledge of each child's dreams to inform curriculum and classroom culture. [Read more](#) on student voice from Edutopia.
- **Equitable Family Engagement** — Too often families, specifically families of color, are left out of conversations about student success and school improvement. Community schools actively engage family members to form meaningful and positive relationships. They also offer family supports, such as adult education, housing support, and employment resources.
- **Expanded Learning** — Community schools meet students' needs by strengthening before-, after-, and out-of-school opportunities. Students have voice and choice to engage in activities that align with their interests. Many schools engage in an extended day model where they keep their doors open before school, after school, on weekends, and during the summer months. This provides a space for community gatherings, adult learning, parenting seminars, and youth programs.

KEY PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Community schools are open most of the time, including evenings and weekends. They provide continuous, active learning by supplementing classroom instruction with out-of-school enrichment partnerships. Ideally, they have a full-time community liaison, a role discussed in the Cross-Sector Coordination section of this guide. This individual creates partnerships and manages programs within the school. The information below describes the various ways in which community schools meet the holistic needs of students, families, and communities.

Connect...

Students:

- with engaging curriculum/instruction and enrichment opportunities.
- with pathways to college and career readiness.
- with a bounty of supports to ensure they are healthy, happy, safe, and nurtured.

Families:

- to a network of peers, increasing social capital and leadership within their community.
- to adult learning opportunities and job training programs.

Educators:

- to comprehensive and individualized development opportunities.
- to dedicated support staff who help students get the resources they need to succeed.

Collaborate...

- With families, community partners, and students to individualize student supports, increase family wellbeing, and improve community health.
- With educators, families, and community organizations to strategize about how to develop each child's strengths and meet their needs.

Create...

- Welcoming school environments that promote healthy relationships between educators, students, and families.
- A school culture in which students' non-academic needs are prioritized as highly as their academic needs.
- Leadership opportunities for parents and families within the school community.
- Plans to monitor school-, community-, and student improvement.

WHAT STUDENTS SAY ABOUT COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

"The key thing to a community school is where you do things together, learn together, and have fun together."— **Kids Talk about Community Schools**

Schools can be brokers of relationships and opportunities, a place where students build social and emotional skills, find a sense of belonging, and strive for big dreams. By placing families at the center of planning and action, community schools support students' academic and non-academic goals. [This video](#) shares children's perspectives of community schools.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN ACTION

There are over 5,000 community schools in the United States, each supporting students and families in a range of ways. Below you will find mini case studies highlighting effective practices that schools are using to connect families with essential services.

[Oakland Unified School District, Oakland, CA](#)

In 2011, Oakland, CA announced that its district would become the first Full-Service Community School District in the nation. Through federal and local grant funding, the district has since hired community school managers in 50 schools. These managers build local partnerships, collaborate with families, and integrate community resources into the school.

[Gardner Pilot Academy, Allston, MA](#)

Gardner Pilot Academy serves as a local hub for academics, youth development, family support, healthcare, and community development. The schools's goal is to support the whole child and the whole family. GPA's community school model began in 1997, when educators partnered with City Connects at Boston College to address trauma, inequitable healthcare, inadequate housing, and limited English proficiency in the school community.

Today, GPA maintains partnerships with City Connects, the YMCA, Brighton-Allston Mental Health, Joseph Smith Health Clinic, Harvard University, and Boston University. Through these partnerships, the school addresses the holistic needs of students and their families.

[Quitman Community School, Newark, NJ](#)

Via an extended day and blended learning model, Quitman Community School individualizes learning for each child. The school's extended day program is staffed by teachers and community members. It is designed to expose students to academically and culturally enriching programs.

Families get involved by volunteering in classrooms and the cafeteria. The school also offers adult learning programs such as GED preparation and aerobics. Educators and community members partner to engage in community improvement efforts, including advocating for better public transit in the neighborhood.

[Chicago Public Schools, Chicago, IL](#)

CPS is home to the largest community school system in the nation, known as the Community Schools Initiative (CSI). CSI has over 200 schools, which operate in partnership with nearly 50 non-profit organizations. CSI schools serve as hubs to meet students' and families' academic and non-academic needs.

Key features include:

- Campuses open mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekends and into the summer.
- Schools connect children and families to a range of services that foster social and economic well-being.
- Educators engage parents and the community to improve academic achievement.

Schools offer:

- Job training courses for families
- Access to onsite medical and dental care
- Performing arts lessons for youth

CPS' Five Year Vision shares additional information about the Community Schools Initiative.

[East Somerville Community School, Somerville, MA](#)

East Somerville Community School offers UNIDOS, a bilingual and bi-cultural Spanish-English immersion program, as well as El Sistema Somerville, an intensive after-school music program based on an international instructional model.

ECHS is committed to trauma-sensitivity, engaging in mindfulness and stress management for students. School staff and partners provide comprehensive professional development to help educators understand and support students with trauma. The school site council meets monthly to develop and implement a School Improvement Plan, with specific goals focused on relationships and trauma-sensitivity.

WHO LEADS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

School leadership typically evokes the image of principals, deans, and headmasters. In community schools, decisions are made by leveraging the collective expertise of educators, families, students, and community partners. In order to create a school whose offerings, values, and practices align with the community's priorities, diverse stakeholders must have a voice in all school decisions. If educators plan to move forward with a community school strategy, it is important to involve students and families early in the planning process. Guidance on getting started is included in the *Going Deeper* section of this guide.

TAKE ACTION

ACTION STEPS

This section includes a **list of action steps** for school leaders and educators to provide essential services for students and families.



FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

To Do Now:

The following actions can be implemented immediately.

- ❑ Identify a **student support model** that your school will use this year. Schools may want to begin with a simpler strategy, such as [Index Card Rosters](#). This provides a foundation for a more substantive process in the future.
- ❑ Build **time in the school schedule** for staff to meet to review the needs of each child.
- ❑ **Identify staff members** who are experts in each developmental domain including academics, physical health, and emotional wellbeing. These staff members will form the school-based team.
- ❑ Provide **professional development** for all staff on integrated student supports and race-conscious family engagement.
- ❑ Assess current leadership and decision-making structures and begin learning about different models of **shared leadership**.

- ❑ **Provide formalized leadership roles** for family members on school committees.
- ❑ **Host gatherings**, either virtually or in-person, that bring the community together. It is important to include students, families, educators, and community partner organizations in these events to build in-school and out-of-school connections.

To Do Later:

- ❑ Provide **leadership training** for staff, partners, students, and families participating on the shared leadership team.
- ❑ Engage the shared leadership team to create a **vision** for student supports. A shared vision is critical to the long-term success of the initiative. School leaders should expect the vision-setting process to take a few months.
- ❑ Practice shared leadership by engaging in **consensus-based decision-making**. Begin by providing an orientation for all team members. The [Seeds for Change](#) website includes guidance on getting started.
- ❑ Partner with community organizations to **host after-school programming** and adult education classes in the school building.
- ❑ Consider opportunities for local healthcare organizations to **provide medical and dental services at school**. Offer these services to all students, families, and community members.

FOR SCHOOL-BASED TEAMS

To Do Now:

- ❑ Identify a school-based **team coordinator**. This individual will be responsible for determining meeting times and meeting locations. They should also set an agenda for each meeting with input from team members.
- ❑ Engage students, families, and community-based organizations to develop an **asset map**.



This map should

- include community resources that students can access right away. It is important to include resources that are available virtually, given that physical spaces may close again due to COVID. Virtual resources should have an asterisk on the asset map.
- ❑ Schedule **student review meetings**. At the beginning, these meetings can be very simple, with teams spending just a few minutes discussing each student. In partnership with the shared leadership team, educators can work towards a more robust process.
- ❑ Identify a **preliminary meeting structure**, with time allotted to discuss multiple students per meeting. The meeting structure should easily transition to a virtual format if needed.

- ❑ Develop a **preliminary template** for individualized student plans. In the beginning, this may be a bulleted list of student strengths, needs, and action steps across 2-3 domains.
- ❑ Develop a **preliminary system to track service delivery**. At the beginning, this could be a shared spreadsheet with the child's name, the name of the service, the status of the service, and the date of referral.

To Do Later:

- ❑ In partnership with the leadership team, **identify data** to incorporate in student review meetings. This includes student surveys, report cards, and medical records.
- ❑ Develop a **long-term tracking system** for individualized plan implementation. For example, this system could include a place to assign referrals to particular staff member. Once a referral is assigned, the system can trigger an email alerting staff of the required action.
- ❑ Work with the leadership team to develop a **robust individualized plan template**. This plan should include a place for key academic and non-academic data.
- ❑ **Monitor implementation** of students' plans. Schedule time to follow up with each family to see how the services are working.
- ❑ Use findings from students' individualized plans to **identify whole-school improvements**. For example, if many students need support using devices, the school can schedule technology trainings for all students and families.
- ❑ Identify opportunities to **grant school credit** for learning that takes place outside of school. For example, students can opt to take a civics course through an out-of-school-time organization rather than taking the course at school.
- ❑ Explore the **community school model**, which provides the opportunity to bring essential services into the school building. Teams can begin by reviewing the [Community Schools Playbook](#).

GOING DEEPER

This section includes resources to support further learning.

1. [COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PLAYBOOK](#), *PARTNERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING*
2. [FAMILY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT](#): CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT THROUGH AN EQUITY LENS, *WESTED*
3. [TOOLKIT FOR EXPANDING LEARNING](#), *EVERY HOUR COUNTS*
4. [BUILDING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: A GUIDE FOR ACTION](#), *NATIONAL CENTER FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS*
5. [BUILDING CITY-WIDE SYSTEMS OF OPPORTUNITY FOR CHILDREN](#), *EDUCATION REDESIGN LAB*
6. [RACIAL EQUITY ANALYSIS TOOL](#), *SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS*
7. [DESIGN THINKING FOR EDUCATORS](#), *IDEO*