ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TOOLKIT

Toolkit 4 in the Utah Educational Leadership Toolkit Series

Prepared for Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic (ULEAD) Education

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In this toolkit, Hanover Research and ULEAD explore strategies and resources that current and aspiring school principals can utilize to meet the criteria outlined in Strand 4: Community Engagement of the Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This toolkit provides guidance and resources to support current and aspiring school principals in developing their personal capacity for leadership and meeting the criteria outlined in the **Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership** (located **here**). Specifically, this toolkit is designed to develop current and aspiring principals' skills and knowledge related to **Strand 4: Community Engagement**.

Utah's Educational Leadership Strand 4: Community Engagement

Strand 1: Visionary Leadership	Strand 2: Teaching and Learning	Strand 3: Management for Learning	**Strand 4: Community Engagement**	Strand 5: Ethical Leadership	Strand 6: School Improvement	Strand 7: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in order to create an inclusive, caring, safe, and supportive school environment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 4.1: Demonstrate an approachable, accessible, and welcoming disposition to families and members of the community.

Standard 4.2: Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community.

Standard 4.3: Understand, value, and employ the community's resources to promote student learning and school improvement.

Standard 4.4: Work to collaborate with families around items such as cultural perspectives and practices, transportation, work schedules, and language to ensure that all families can be fully engaged in the school community.

Source: Utah State Board of Education[1]

Research shows that—aside from teachers—**school principals are the most influential school-based factor in promoting student achievement.**[2] Specifically, research finds that principals account for a quarter—on average—of their school's overall impacts on student achievement outcomes. Likewise, research observes that differences in student achievement up to 20 percentage points may occur when a school has an "above-average principal" rather than an "average principal."[3]

Effective principals are integral to their school's success.[4] Research shows that effective principals positively impact the mission and vision of their schools and student and staff outcomes.[5] In particular, effective principals are more likely to retain qualified and effective teachers, which helps drive student achievement.[6] More broadly, research highlights that " it takes multiple in-school factors coming together to significantly improve student achievement on a larger scale" and "that principals are in a unique position to bring those factors together."[7] The impact of having an effective principal is greater in schools facing more challenges. Researchers find "no documented instances[…]where troubled schools are turned around if they do not have a talented leader."[8]

Indeed, it is accurately and "widely believed that a good principal is the key to a successful school" given the many roles they fill: instructional leader, staff evaluator, lead disciplinarian, overseer of

daily operations, school representative to families and the community, and more.[9] Principals are integral to all aspects of their school's operations, from the quality of the teachers to the instructional strategies used with students to the overall school climate.[10]

As such, principals require an array of knowledge and skills to act as effective change agents, instructional leaders, and personnel managers.[11] This **Engaging Families and Communities Toolkit**— and the six accompanying toolkits in the *Utah Educational Leadership Toolkit Series*—support Utah's current and aspiring principals in meeting the demands of the Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership to successfully:[12]

- Shape a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards;
- Create a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail;
- Cultivate leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision;
- Improve instruction so teachers can teach at their best and students can learn at their utmost; and
- Manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

Why Utah's Schools Need Strong and Effective Principals

> *Everyone remembers a teacher that inspired them. How many people remember their principals? Principals ensure that schools are open, that teachers are receiving the support they need, and that classrooms are environments that will help all students learn.*
>
> *The strongest model for schools is one in which principals are creative, innovative instructional leaders. They find opportunities for teachers to lead. They support teachers in their growth and create a safe space for adults to take risks in their learning. As educators look at what builds a great school, they need to look at the principal. Who is at the helm? What vision have they set for their communities? How have they developed an environment that fosters learning and creativity?*
>
> ***Students need great teachers, and teachers need great leaders. One can't exist without the other.*** *Principals bring in opportunities for their communities. They find resources where there weren't any before. They connect families. They find places for children to thrive both in and outside of the classroom.*

Source: U.S. Department of Education[13]

OVERVIEW

This toolkit:

- ✓ Explores strategies that principals can leverage to **build public trust in their school** to form a firm foundation for family and community engagement;
- ✓ Investigates policies and procedures to **increase families' and communities' access** to school activities and **broaden their opportunities for engagement**;
- ✓ Describes processes for **inventorying and mapping family and community assets**; and
- ✓ Presents effective strategies to support the **formation and sustainment of strong family and community partnerships**.

AUDIENCE

This toolkit is designed to support current and aspiring school principals across the state of Utah in meeting the criteria outlined in the Utah State Standards for Educational Leadership, particularly in relation to **Strand 4: Community Engagement.**

INVITE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

BUILD PUBLIC TRUST AND CREATE A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Whether a principal recognizes it, their school is constantly communicating with internal and external stakeholders about its goals, values, and programs. If a school rarely or sporadically communicates with students, staff, families, and community members, those stakeholders may perceive a lack of caring or negligence on the school's part, leading them to place less trust in the school. In contrast, consistent, meaningful, and frequent communications between schools and stakeholders promote trust in schools as distinct entities and serve as a foundation for meaningful relationships between schools, families, and community members.[14] Because families and community members "need to trust schools" before providing active support, **principals must monitor and carefully plan for all interactions their schools have with stakeholders, from schoolwide communications and initiatives to personnel-level interactions (e.g., teachers-to-parents, front office staff-to-community visitors).**[15]

Principals should also realize that—unless they are commencing their tenure at the opening of a new school—their school possesses a unique history of interactions with stakeholders that drives public perceptions.[16] This means that school principals should " take time to learn about the culture and the history before trying to make changes" or implement a specific policy agenda to improve public relations with their community.[17] Relatedly, families' and community members' perspectives on K-12 education as a whole, driven by national, state, regional, and municipal events, heavily influence their opinion of their local school or schools.[18] Being aware of public perceptions around a given school (and its larger district) can help principals work to advance existing levels of public trust with their organization by taking concerted actions.[19] This means confronting the problems faced by a given school community, leveraging and broadening existing successes, and transparently communicating around both successes and failures.[20]

Orienting Principal Actions to Establish a Positive School Reputation

ACTION	DESCRIPTION
Be an Example	Principals need to dedicate themselves to effective practice and students' academic, social-emotional, and physical well-being. They also need to encourage their school's staff to do the same. Students, families, and community members will only trust schools if those schools act in the best interest of their students, their families, and the larger community. As such, principals must ensure that all policies and practices undertaken at their schools reflect a commitment to and caring for students and other stakeholders.
Gather and Show Proof	Principals should seek to collect proof of their school fulfilling its commitments to students, staff, families, and the community at-large. Principals themselves can generate such proof via formal policy statements and plans that outline the action steps that their schools will take to best support desired outcomes. They can also encourage the collection of data around such actions and the communication of results related to those actions to promote successes. At the same time, the principal will want to communicate shortcomings honestly and transparently to promote stakeholders' trust in the school's ability to identify and solve problems.
Prioritize Communication	Principals should work to ingrain a "customer service-oriented" attitude throughout their schools' daily operations. Staff members should work actively to build relationships with students, families, and community members to drive student success. Moreover, the school should leverage all available communication channels (e.g., social media, community forums, print messaging) to disseminate relevant information to and to collect feedback from the public.

Source: School Webmasters, LLC[21]

Principals should understand that building trust and actively engaging in public relations with its stakeholder communities are actions that should occur consistently, in both times of success and times of challenges.[22] Comparatively, principals should reflect on whether the policies their school enacts, the actions they and their staff take, and the goals and principles that drive policies and actions support student success and prioritize the many facets of students' well-being (e.g., physical, social-emotional).[23] Provided these items accomplish their purposes around student outcomes, the larger school will be more likely to possess and maintain a positive culture that primes stakeholders for success and promotes public trust in the school as an institution.[24]

Why Is Public Trust So Important?

> " *Trust is the glue that holds social networks and relationships together. In schools, trust is considered to be the result of several dispositions working in concert, among these are integrity, honesty, openness, concern, benevolence, personal regard for others, competence, reliability, and consistency. Trust has been linked with organizational effectiveness in business settings, and in schools, trust among and between stakeholders is linked to higher student achievement. While principals cannot bear full responsibility for creating trusting cultures in their schools, their behavior sets a tone and a foundation for creating trusting relationships and professional community in other groups.* "
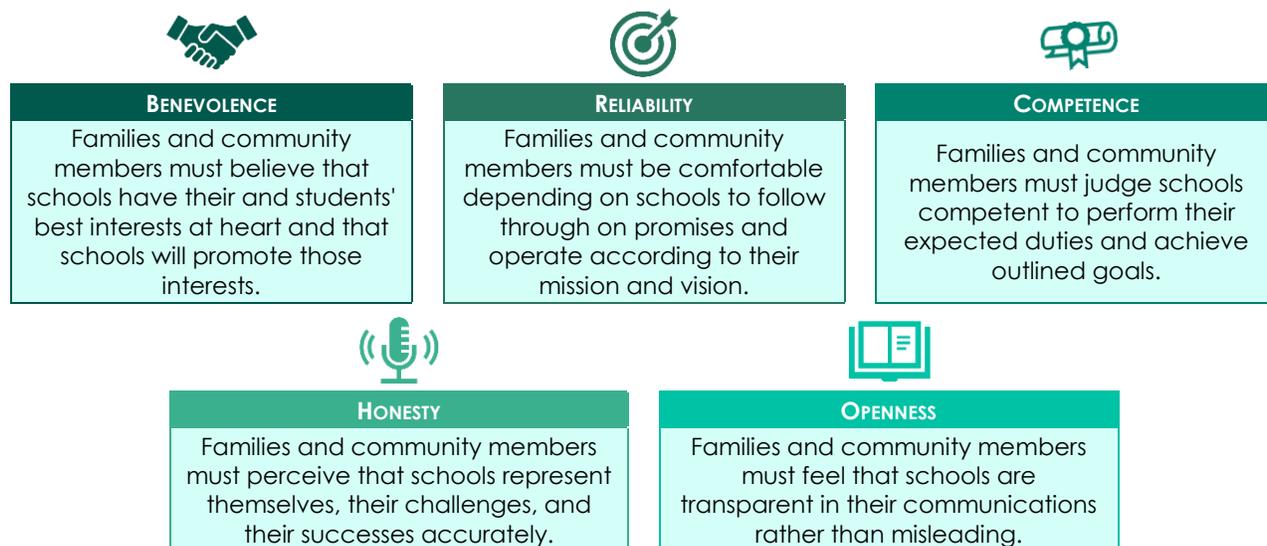
Source: Advance Education, Inc.[25]

To best promote external (and internal) stakeholders' trust in the school, principals must set the tone and lead by example.[26] This means that principals must actively and openly perform their duties in concert with the school's and district's outlined vision and mission and place the highest priority on their school's work with students.[27] Similarly, principals will want to create and maintain communication channels to keep students, staff members, families, and community members informed about their school's operations and values, as well as the successes and challenges faced by the school.[28] Doing so will help principals minimize misinformation and focus stakeholders on the good work their schools perform for students' and other stakeholders' benefit.[29] Likewise, principals should ensure that all internal and external communications they execute:[30]

- Highlight the future and what their school has the potential to achieve;
- Use data and facts to reduce ambiguity about their vision for the school;
- Appeal to stakeholders' emotions, values, and the deeper needs that motivate them;
- Remain positive, grateful, and idealistic as a counterweight to any negative messages that stakeholders might receive; and
- Use collective statements (i.e., "we are," "we will") to increase a feeling of belonging and collective identity among students, staff, families, and community members.

It is important to remember that establishing enough trust with families and communities that they feel welcome to participate in school activities and collaborate around programs is a continuous process that builds upon every interaction these stakeholders have with a given school's principal and staff.[31] Therefore, principals should proceed with benevolence and transparency in all actions they take and communications they proliferate. Essentially, principals must first act in the best interest of their school's students while also being open and honest in their words and actions. Principals will also want to work to abolish barriers to the formation of trusting relationships between external constituencies and school-based personnel.[32] Indeed, principals must navigate the multi-faceted nature of trust-building, as families and community members will "assess many elements simultaneously when making judgments of trust" and determining whether their input and participation will be welcomed by their local school.[33] Establishing familial and community trust and confidence in the school as an institution is integral before these stakeholder groups will lend their support.[34]

Core Components of Familial and Community Trust in Schools

BENEVOLENCE	RELIABILITY	COMPETENCE
Families and community members must believe that schools have their and students' best interests at heart and that schools will promote those interests.	Families and community members must be comfortable depending on schools to follow through on promises and operate according to their mission and vision.	Families and community members must judge schools competent to perform their expected duties and achieve outlined goals.

HONESTY	OPENNESS
Families and community members must perceive that schools represent themselves, their challenges, and their successes accurately.	Families and community members must feel that schools are transparent in their communications rather than misleading.

Source: School Webmasters, LLC[35]

On the next page, the **"Evaluating School Characteristics that Build Public Trust Checklist"** provides a list of criteria and school characteristics that correlate with trust-building with families and communities. Principals can use this tool to determine the extent to which their school's programs, policies, and procedures promote the confidence of external stakeholders.

ESTABLISH ACCESS AND CONTACT POINTS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Importantly, **principals should seek to establish collaborative two-way communications and partnerships with families and communities to promote greater engagement and involvement and, ultimately, benefit student outcomes.**[36] However, principals must realize that the nature of communications and contacts with families and community-based entities, as well as the opportunities provided for their participation in school functions, need to be tailored to the target audience.[37] Essentially, schools need to provide multiple avenues for parents and community members to engage in educational and other activities while also embedding differentiated supports—based on family and community

LEARN MORE
Watch the videos below to learn more about increasing family and community engagement:

- **"A New Day: Family, School, and Community Engagement in Education Reform"** – Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, American Institutes for Research
- **"Bringing It All Together: Family and Community Engagement Policies in Action"** – Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, American Institutes for Research
- **"Welcome to FACE (Family and Community Engagement)"** – Arlington Public Schools (VA)
- **"Dr. Karen Mapp's 3 Prerequisites of Effective Family and Community Engagement"** – Scholastic

characteristics—to increase the likelihood that external stakeholders can take advantage of provided access options and contact points.[38] The idea is to move families and community members "from routinely attending school functions as invited participants to a more active role as partners in students' educational processes."[39]

Evaluating School Characteristics that Build Public Trust Checklist

<u>Directions</u>: Principals and school leaders can use the checklist below to determine how conducive a school's actions, communications, policies, and procedures are to building public trust. Adherence to the listed items means that you and your school are practicing behaviors that will support efforts to build families' and communities' confidence in you as a school leader, your school's staff as professionals, and your school as an institution.

EVALUATION CRITERIA	YES	NO
My school prioritizes the welfare and academic success of students throughout its operations and programming.		
My school keeps the promises it makes to students, staff, families, and community members.		
My school connects decision-making back to its vision, mission, and strategic goals.		
My school solicits feedback from internal and external stakeholders before making and executing major decisions.		
My school communicates the rationale behind any decision that impacts students, families, or the community.		
My school is transparent about how decisions related to school programs and policies may affect stakeholders.		
My school uses multiple channels of communication (e.g., digital, print) to publicize its work with students.		
My school shares its successes with the broader community.		
My school has and communicates plans to build upon past successes.		
My school shares its challenges with the broader community.		
My school has and communicates plans to confront challenges.		
My school's communications are tailored to the audience's needs.		
Messaging about school operations avoids jargon and educational terminology with which external stakeholders may be unfamiliar.		
Communications from my school are designed to facilitate conversations.		
The staff at my school are courteous and respectful to their colleagues, students, families, and community members.		
My school recognizes and seeks to address concerns that arise from students, staff, families, and community members.		
My school seeks to collaborate with families and community partners to ensure student success.		

Source: Multiple[40]

As a foundational step to creating opportunities and avenues for families and communities to engage with schools, principals—in concert with other school staff—should:[41]

- **Determine Who Their School's Target Public Is**: Schools need to know which families and community entities they are currently reaching and engaging with success. Likewise, they should identify which families (e.g., low-income, immigrant) and community entities (e.g., health providers, higher education institutions) they struggle to reach. Awareness of both population sets will help school leaders brainstorm solutions to reach disengaged stakeholders and continue to engage active stakeholders.

- **Define the Desired Engagement of the Target Public**: Schools should conceptualize how they wish to engage families and communities and establish requirements and expectations for engagement. Specifically, schools require an understanding of what "minimum" and "maximum" engagement might look like in order to orient their efforts to strive to the "maximum" while maintaining the "minimum."

Types of Family Engagement

INTERACTION	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
Parenting Supports	Schools help families develop home environments to support student outcomes.	▪ Schools offer parent education classes ▪ School personnel visit the family at home ▪ Schools hold workshops on topics of interest to families (e.g., behavior management, grade-level expectations)
Two-Way Communication	Schools and families exchange information about students, policies, and programs.	▪ Teachers hold conferences with parents and guardians to discuss student progress and performance ▪ Schools translate print and oral communications to families' first language, as needed ▪ Schools host periodic events and social activities (for families and school staff to meet informally)
Family Volunteering	Schools recruit and train family volunteers to support students and school programs.	▪ Schools invite family members to assume a voluntary position (e.g., crossing guard, guest presenters) ▪ Schools accommodate family schedules and preferences to increase volunteering opportunities ▪ Schools invite families to participate on committees
Home-Based Learning Support	Schools provide guidance on how families can support student learning at home.	▪ Schools share ideas about how families can support student learning outside of school ▪ Schools provide families with information about classroom instruction and curriculum topics ▪ Schools involve parents in goal-setting for students and planning transitions
Family Input on School Decisions	Schools provide information about upcoming decisions and ask for families' input.	▪ Schools encourage participation in parent-teacher associations (PTAs) or organizations (PTOs) ▪ Schools invite families to attend school board meetings and to vote on budgets and referendums ▪ Schools solicit feedback via public forums and qualitative data collection (e.g., surveys, interviews)
Family-Community Links	Schools encourage use of community resources to strengthen student learning.	▪ Schools publish information about community services and resources ▪ Schools host presentations and meetings on community-based programs and agencies ▪ Schools form relationships with service providers (e.g., mental health, disability advocates, childcare)

Source: IRIS Center, Vanderbilt University[42]

Modes of Community Engagement

Community stakeholders can participate in school activities in a variety of ways—and with different levels of influence—by identifying needs, generating solutions, planning initiatives, and providing services. Potential roles community members can assume include:

- **Users and beneficiaries** of partnerships with schools;
- **Advisers** to schools through involvement in working groups and consultative arrangements;
- **Contributors to school management** via membership on steering committees and governing boards that work in tandem with school staff;
- **Decision-makers** as members of governing boards, school boards themselves, or supervisors of school-community collaborations; and
- **Deliverers** of specific products, services, and programs on behalf of or at the request of the school.

Source: Community Planning Toolkit | Community Places[46]

Developing knowledge of a school's families and the larger community—including associated population demographics (e.g., language status, racial composition) and community dynamics (e.g., poverty rates, historical reputation of the school)—is crucial to ensure "deliberate and meaningful inclusion of families and community partners" in a school's work with students.[43] This knowledge will allow schools to work with "culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities" via consistent two-way communication and plan purposeful events and opportunities for engagement that align with the needs and preferences of those families and communities.[44] Indeed, all communications between schools, families, and community members and all potential opportunities for stakeholders to participate in school programming should be "handled with respect and cultural sensitivity[…]to live out the values of inclusiveness and equity."[45]

Principals and other school staff, therefore, must "consider ways to include families [and communities] in the process of establishing a vision for family [and community] engagement, as well as planning school-based events and activities."[47] Broadly speaking, this means that school communications should be "regular, two-way, and meaningful" with external stakeholders and that the school should create opportunities for families and community members to volunteer their time, energy, resources, and expertise to support student learning and broader school operations.[48] At the same time, school personnel must tailor these communications and opportunities for engagement to the particular needs, preferences, and capabilities of their families and communities.[49]

Additional Toolkits on Family and Community Engagement

Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific—a subdivision of the Institute of Education Sciences and U.S. Department of Education—has published a four-part toolkit devoted entirely to "build[ing] relationships with families and community members and [supporting] family well-being, strong parent-child relationships, and students' ongoing learning and development," particularly as these items relate to diverse communities. The toolkit encompasses a variety of activities that can be used with staff, families, and community members to help them understand how to build mutual trust in one another via two-way cross-cultural communication. Links to the four parts of the toolkit are available below.

Part 1: Building an Understanding of Family and Community Engagement	➡
Part 2: Building a Cultural Bridge	➡
Part 3: Building Trusting Relationships with Families and Community Through Effective Communication	➡
Part 4: Engaging Families and Community Members in Data Conversations	➡

Source: Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific[50]

Importantly, **principals should also recognize that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to family and community engagement, necessitating solutions tailored directly to the families and communities that their school serves.**[51] In particular, principals need to work in concert with staff, families, and community members to "create collaborative and coordinated systems for family and community engagement" that differentiate supports and outreach.[52] Moreover, the structures and policies schools establish to engage families and communities must leverage multiple and innovative communication, awareness, and relationship-building strategies to reach the broadest range of constituencies possible, all ingrained with the core value that families and communities are partners in education rather than "customers."[53] Thus, principals and other school staff should study and solicit feedback from their families and community members (e.g., via surveys, interviews, historical data on engagement) to identify strategies that work and previously unidentified barriers or dynamics that inhibit greater levels of family and community engagement.[54]

Common Barriers to Family and Community Engagement

Negative Motivation for Initial School Contact	Overreliance on Digital Communications
Limited Use of Alternative Communications	Lack of Written and Verbal English Proficiency
Scheduling Conflicts with Events and Meetings	Limited Transportation Options
Childcare Challenges	Lack of Comfortability with School

Source: Michigan Department of Education[55]

To support principals in determining the challenges they will encounter in engaging families and the broader school community, the **"Reducing Barriers and Widening Access Reflection Guide"** on the following page provides a series of exploratory questions. In particular, the listed questions will help principals and other school and district staff reflect on and investigate existing barriers and dynamics that inhibit or prevent family and community engagement. The questions also provide a launching point for schools to examine potential solutions to existing challenges.

Then, on pp. 13-16, the **" School Practices Catalog to Support Family and Community Engagement"** lists a plethora of strategies that principals and their schools may adopt and implement to increase families' and community members' ability and willingness to engage productively with a given school. While every listed strategy may not be appropriate for each school, the provided inventory of resources establishes a broad foundation of potentially useful practices with which schools can experiment to better engage their specific families and communities.

Reducing Barriers and Widening Access Reflection Guide

<u>Directions</u>: Principals and their collaborating school and district leaders can use the questions presented below to guide discussions around family and community engagement. Specifically, these questions will help educational leaders reflect on potential barriers to greater engagement and strategies to increase access to school-based engagement opportunities.

? How do our own and our staff's personal and professional experiences inform their work with families and community members?

? How might our and our staff's experiences diverge from the experiences of students' families and the wider community?

? Which families are most in need of support in advocating for their children, and why?

? How can we better identify families that are in need of greater support and what kinds of supports do they require to engage at a higher level?

? Are we and the school staff equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills to engage effectively with families and the community? If not, how can the school compensate for knowledge and skills deficits?

? How might families and community members experience language, socioeconomic, or cultural barriers to engagement? What can the school do to reduce or eliminate those barriers?

? What resources are available in our school and/or community that can help families and community members learn the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the education system?

? What might make families and community members feel unwelcome at school? How can we address these items?

? What actions are school leaders and staff taking to build trust with families and the communities? What resources are being devoted to such efforts?

? How does education jargon and technical terminology factor into school-generated communications? How can we ensure communications are more recipient-friendly?

? What is the school vision for family and community engagement? How do we give families and community members a voice in crafting that vision?

Source: WIDA, University of Wisconsin-Madison[56]

🛠 School Practices Catalog to Support Family and Community Engagement

Description: The list below presents a compendium of practices, organized into six different categories, that principals and the schools they helm can leverage to broaden existing opportunities for family and community engagement and promote higher levels of engagement. These categories include:

- **Shared Leadership**: practices to build strong and distributed leadership for family and community engagement;
- **Goals and Roles**: practices to set family and community engagement priorities and define the roles of school leaders, school staff, families, and community partners in meeting goals;
- **Communication**: practices to promote communication among school leaders, school staff, families, and community partners;
- **Education**: practices to provide education and professional development for school leaders, school staff, families, and community partners to advance their knowledge and skills relative to the roles they play;
- **Connection**: practices to unite people and groups to advance the goals of family and community engagement and share their experiences; and
- **Continuous Improvement**: practices to establish policies, systems, and procedures to evaluate and continuously improve family and community engagement efforts.

Shared Leadership	❑ Appoint a school leader to improve and coordinate activities designed to improve the curriculum of the homes of children attending the school ❑ Assert principal and teacher leadership in ensuring the success of group work to develop strategies for engaging families in effective support of student learning ❑ Form an action team for partnerships ❑ Include a school community council with parents and guardians as the majority of members in school decision-making, operating with bylaws, agendas, and minutes ❑ Create opportunities to develop and engage family leaders

Goals and Roles	❑ Establish a school policy and expectation for family engagement ❑ Develop a homework policy including grade-level guidelines for amounts of homework ❑ Ensure that teachers play a critical role in building families' sense of self-efficacy for support of students' learning ❑ Assert the principal's leadership in teachers' development of personal self-efficacy for involving families ❑ Assert the principal's leadership in family involvement and school-wide efforts to support families' sense of efficacy for involvement, and include the topic in faculty discussions ❑ Develop detailed home curriculum policies and practices for school staff ❑ Understand that families are often more involved in homework and less involved at school when their children are struggling and that marginalized families do attempt to assist their children ❑ In planning, link family and community involvement activities to specific goals, consistent with and supportive of those established by the school improvement or leadership team ❑ Emphasize the importance of families' home involvement to children's school success

Goals and Roles
(continued)

❑ Include in the school budget a line item for family engagement with a portion allocated for the training and support of family leaders

❑ Develop clear school and classroom homework policies (linked to state/district policies) and share them with students and families

❑ Define family involvement so that everyone understands what it means in your school

❑ Create a demographic profile with a short questionnaire that compiles information about the school's families

❑ Establish school transition teams that include families to assist in student transitions between schools and beyond school

❑ Develop activities that are responsive to the needs of all families, including those that are ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse

❑ Identify funds and resources to implement effective family engagement practices

❑ Acknowledge and support faculty and staff efforts to engage families

❑ In school compacts, allow for multiple forms of participation

❑ Identify ways to extend educational goals through existing events frequented by families, such as athletic events

❑ Eliminate the separation between academics and extracurricular activities

❑ In schools with immigrant populations, prioritize hiring bilingual/bicultural teachers

❑ Before launching any program, first consult with a representative group of parents and guardians to identify the needs of the children and their families

❑ Ask questions, including: (a) What is our school's history of involving families? (b) What is our school's philosophy regarding family involvement in school activities? (c) What training and skills do we need for involving families in school affairs?

Communication

❑ Write and regularly distribute home curriculum practices for families including material on homework expectations

❑ Provide specific, accessible information, guidelines, and resources to help families help their children with assigned homework

❑ Ensure that every child has an electronic device to store, use, and connect their activities at school and at home with family members

❑ Increase the viable uses of social media by families and students in learning and job hunting

❑ Communicate regularly about homework expectations and respond to student and family concerns as issues arise

❑ Share homework challenges and successes with colleagues over the course of the school year and coordinate assignments across teachers or subjects to avoid overburdening students with multiple projects simultaneously

❑ Raise awareness about the needs of your school's families, and make community members aware that they can help

❑ Establish a predictable communication routine with families, including: (a) contacting families before the school year starts to let them know that school personnel are looking forward to working with them as partners in educating their child; (b) offering who the point person/s will be for the year, as well as the best ways to contact them; (c) setting up times or intervals for regular communication; and (d) articulating any information pertaining to the review or reevaluation of the child's progress

❑ Establish regular, bidirectional communication mechanisms between home and school, such as two-way home–school notes

❑ Use multiple means of communicating with families (e.g., websites, notes to home, bulletin boards, face-to-face meetings, home visits) that are two-way, allowing for familial input and feedback

❑ Provide families with specific ways through which they can help their child at home, including concrete suggestions about how to handle academic and behavioral issues

❑ Create a specific community relations plan that involves two-way communication with families

Education	Family Education
	❑ Initiate school-based classes that teach parents and guardians how to raise expectations of their children and speak and act in a way that is supportive of their children and their accomplishments
	❑ Conduct an in-school workshop series for families on improving the curriculum of the home
	❑ Provide an array of literacy activities and workshops for families and their children within the school setting focusing on the particular skills that children should be acquiring in reading and literacy so that learning becomes a shared experience
	❑ Educate families and high school students to the value of "stackable" industrial certifications
	❑ Provide training and support for family leaders
	❑ Set a scope and sequence for family education programs
	❑ Provide programs to help families understand how to support their children's education; in immigrant communities, these should be run by parents and guardians from those communities to the extent possible
	❑ Offer workshops for families to learn about and discuss their role in their child's education, including studying at home, reading at home, parent–child interaction, and learning standards
	❑ Train and use parents and guardians as leaders in family education programs
	❑ House family educators within the school
	Professional Development for School Personnel
	❑ Train teachers and administrators to become more familiar with the research on family involvement
	❑ Conduct workshops for teachers and other educators on the home curriculum
	❑ Provide professional development for teachers about family engagement in homework
	❑ Provide professional development for teachers on family engagement and working with family leaders
	❑ Conduct service seminars for teachers and administrators on the processes linking poverty to family relations and children's outcomes
	❑ Provide resources such as time, planning support, and professional development to enable special educators to collaborate with families, general educators, and other professionals involved in a child's case
	❑ Provide professional development for faculty and staff to build their capacity to work effectively with students' families
	❑ In schools with Native American students, train all staff on Native American culture, effective relationships with families, and the importance of children's social and emotional development, and expect the training to be demonstrated in daily work
Connection	❑ Establish mechanisms for two-way communication with families about homework
	❑ Provide a welcoming environment, coupled with engagement that is meaningful and varied in format and timing, to increase access for and participation by families
	❑ Partner with community agencies to address families' barriers to literacy, offering family literacy classes and other adult education opportunities
	❑ Create opportunities for schools, libraries, religious groups, and other community-based organizations to collaborate and promote community-wide initiatives that highlight the everyday importance of reading
	❑ Connect with a library with a qualified librarian accessible throughout the school day and after hours for family members as well as students
	❑ Provide a readily accessible and visible facility to be a family resource center, organized by a coordinator

Connection (continued)	❑ Invite families to an annual student-led conference
	❑ In schools with immigrant populations, hire or seek volunteers for family liaisons who can connect the school to the local immigrant communities
	❑ Create a safe and welcoming space for immigrant families to meet, and provide an attractive activity that will bring them in
	❑ Provide school-wide community and support to minority families (i.e., parent and teacher leaders, resources, monitoring, accountability, direct support, partnerships)
	❑ Partner with and invite families to get involved in the school community; identify a family liaison to help facilitate language and cultural barriers through different venues (i.e., newsletters, conferences, meetings, events)
	❑ Incorporate relevant events, projects, and curricula that value ethnic diversity (combined with academic rigor and high expectations)
	❑ Solicit and establish community involvement in the implementation of family intervention and prevention programs
	❑ Build relationships with formal and informal child-care providers in the community
	❑ Facilitate faculty–family–community discussions about issues of power and how they impact school engagement levels
	❑ Establish a "family space" within the school, with resources for families, a schedule of events, and open times for parent–parent and parent–teacher interactions
	❑ Create a structure for parent–teacher meetings that allows for sharing of information, goals, plans, and solutions for all children, and especially those developing learning or behavioral challenges
Continuous Improvement	❑ Conduct ongoing and end-of-year evaluations of family engagement programs and practices
	❑ Include parents and guardians on appropriate school teams and groups and/or seek their input in decisions made by school teams and in plans for school improvement
	❑ Conduct a homework inventory and identify various purposes in assignments; edit or discard unsuccessful assignments, and consider ways to make homework more enjoyable
	❑ Evaluate the strength of homework assignments and policy through student achievement and student and family feedback; revise and improve each year
	❑ Assess the family involvement climate with surveys, focus groups, and interviews
	❑ Disseminate and utilize research to provide knowledge and tools for teachers, counselors, and parents (i.e., workshops, training programs, college access info, ESL classes for families); focus on alterable factors
	❑ Host services based on assessment of community challenges (e.g., crime, safety, health care, nutrition, fitness)
	❑ Select and evaluate all staff based on their ability to work effectively with families and to attend to the social and emotional development of their students

Source: School Community Network, Academic Development Institute[57]

ESTABLISH RECIPROCAL PARTNERSHIPS

UNDERSTAND EXISTING CONTRIBUTIONS AND UNTAPPED RESOURCES

Principals should first recognize the tremendous value that families and communities can provide to schools and students as partners in school programming.[58] Notably, robust partnerships with families and community-based individuals can result in new innovations and stronger programs. This is due to schools', families', and communities' uniting their resources and human capital to fill gaps in services and bolster existing offerings.[59] Indeed, working with family and community partners can help schools provide better services to students and combine assets in creative ways.[60]

Tips to Learn About Family and Community Resources

Encourage families to share information about themselves during conferences and meetings

Build and maintain a database of family skills (e.g., subject area expertise)

Create community asset maps categorized by specific functions or challenges

Ask community-based entities to "adopt" a school to provide targeted assistance (e.g., donations)

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction[61]

Consequently, **schools themselves should take the initiative in reaching out to families and community-based organizations to invite partnerships, as well as conduct research to determine what kinds of assistance and support families and organizations have the capacity to provide to staff and students.**[62] This means that principals themselves—or an appointed person or group—should explore "a community to learn about its assets" and form a foundation of knowledge and a network of resources to support school-led efforts focused on student outcomes.[63] Only through such actions can schools begin to harness and engage available human capital and physical resources held by families and communities for specialized purposes.[64] In essence, schools will want to learn more about the services, resources, and expertise available to support students, staff, and families "by identifying the places, institutions, programs, and people" within a given community that can serve as assets to the school.[65]

Why Should Schools Investigate and Catalog Community and Family Resources?

> " *Learning how to ask what communities have to offer begins a process of building, creating, and developing. It brings resources, knowledge, skills, capacities, and people together. Through these connections, access to more resources and assets is at a school's fingertips. As principals and their schools build relationships with families, community members, agencies, institutions, and businesses, they increase their connections and access to a multitude of assets, in terms of both physical capital and individual and organizational expertise.* "

Source: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory[66]

Essentially, schools should generate inventories of family members, community members, and local organizations that encompass knowledge and data about the specific ways in which these parties can support school operations and student outcomes.[67] In particular, principals and their schools should seek out individuals (e.g., parents, community leaders) and organizations (e.g., businesses, nonprofit agencies) that have knowledge, skills, or resources that can bolster those programs provided by the school.[68] This means that principals and other school and district staff need to leverage their existing personal and professional contacts, as well as available information about families and the community, to pinpoint specific persons and organizations that can strengthen or supplement school offerings.[69]

Where to Locate Information About Existing Community Resources

Local Newspapers	Phone Books	Business Directories	Community Directories	Bulletin Boards	Community Newsletters

Online Directories	Chamber of Commerce	Municipal Websites	Contact with Families	Professional Networks

Source: North Carolina State University and North Carolina A&T State University[70]

In particular, **principals should seek to identify "resources and connections—talents, skills, communications, and capacities—already available in the community [rather than] what is missing."**[71] The primary purpose of drafting community and family asset maps is to have a readily accessible cache of potential partners that a given school can collaborate with to reach a specific strategic goal or desired outcome.[72] It is important to remember that family and community asset maps and inventories will be of little utility if a school never plans on accessing and leveraging the resources, services, and expertise offered by catalogued assets.[73]

The goal is for a school's asset map to keep a record of individuals and organizations that currently do provide or could provide additional support to students, staff, and families.[74] For the asset mapping process to work, principals and collaborating personnel need to understand its importance and their particular purposes in carrying out a given iteration of asset mapping. Indeed, to maximize the returns of the asset mapping process, participating staff need to identify how they think their school can use the knowledge, skills, and resources a given individual or organization possesses. Likewise, principals should also consider the next steps to utilizing an asset if there is current or future need. The asset mapping process should help schools:[75]

- Address students' academic, social-emotional, health, and other needs;
- Identify opportunities to increase service coordination and integration;
- Engage families and communities as partners to supplement school services;
- Expand the quality and quantity of existing student, staff, and family supports;
- Improve outcomes for students, families, staff, and the overall community.

Additional Resources on Family and Community Asset Mapping

A number of guides and workbooks have been published by a variety of organizations to support schools and other organizations in mapping community assets. Any of the resources linked below can provide insights to principals seeking to learn more about asset mapping.	
The Community Mapping Toolkit – Preston City Council and University of California	↗
Asset Mapping Toolkit – Clear Impact, LLC	↗
Community Building Tool Packet: Community Asset Mapping Workbook – Community Legacy Program, Our United Villages	↗
"Vitalizing Communities," Building on Assets and Mobilizing for Collective Action: Community Guide – Center for Applied Rural Innovation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln	↗

Source: Multiple[76]

On p. 20, the **"Family and Community Asset Mapping Process Infographic"** outlines specific steps that principals and other school staff can take to begin constructing maps and inventories of available family and community resources, services, knowledge, and skills. By following this process, school leaders can create an internal knowledge basis of potential partners that they may be able to collaborate with—now and in the future—to supplement school programs, close gaps in services, and better support students, staff, and families.

Relatedly, the **"Community Resource Mapping Worksheet"** on pp. 21-22 provides a space for principals and their collaborators to record information on family and community assets. In particular, users can record lists of organizations and individuals that can assist in a variety of focus areas and collect notes on how an entity can support a school in its assigned area.

INITIATE AND SUSTAIN COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

As a first step in initiating any collaborations with families or community-based entities, **principals and their collaborating school leaders and staff need to recognize the particularities of what they seek in such partnerships.** They need to establish what goals they have for partnering with families and community-based individuals and organizations in terms of how any collaboration can potentially benefit students, staff, or students' families.[77] In particular, school principals need to determine the strategic goals or initiatives for which they require or desire targeted family and community support and how they think the resources, knowledge, skills, services, and expertise offered by potential partners can support achievement of goals or successful execution of an initiative.[78]
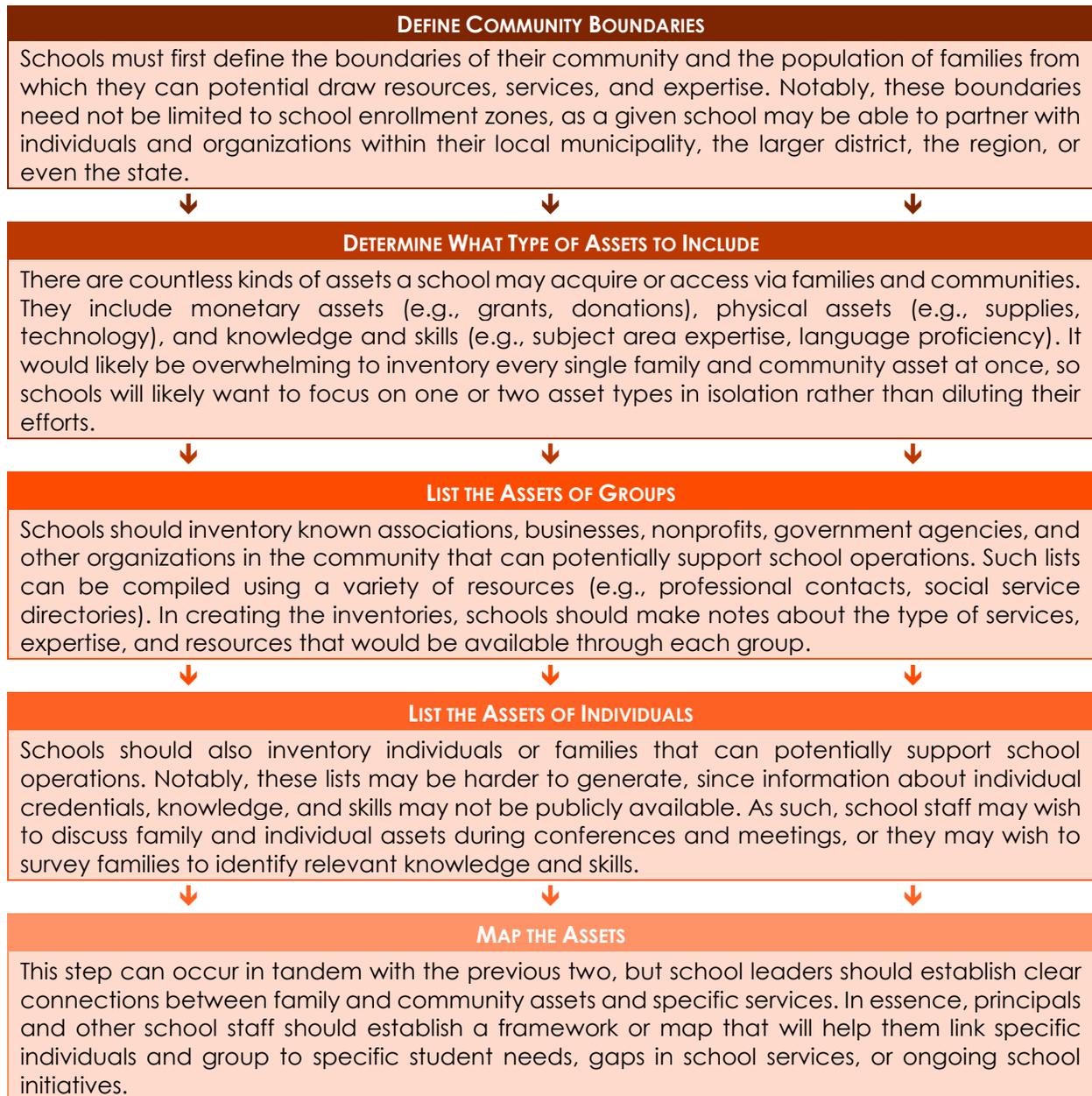
Considerations around the nature and purpose of partnerships should center on gaps in current school operations that schools need assistance in filling and aspects of programming that may benefit from supplemental physical and human capital (e.g., academic programs, extracurricular offerings, support services).[79] Indeed, principals should investigate and reflect upon how families and community-based entities "can help schools prepare students for college, career, and citizenship by offering additional opportunities, supports, and enrichment."[80] Reflecting in this manner facilitates conceptualization of the partnership types the principal and other designated school staff will seek from families and the community. At the same time, principals and their designees must determine what they wish to gain from the partnership, as well as what returns they can provide to potential partners.[81] Principals must realize that unlike a commercial contract or purely philanthropic arrangement with a private or public individual or organizations, effective and lasting partnerships rely on the mutual exchange of value between the school and the external partner.[82]

Characteristics of Strong Partnerships

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION
Student Focus	Schools and their partners approach their work with a commitment to putting students' needs first.
Alignment of Vision and Goals	Schools and their partners agree upon common goals and establish shared expectations for the functioning of their partnership. Typically, these partnerships will aim to support a school's work on previously outlined strategic priorities.
Leveraging of Strengths	Schools and their partners identify their respective strengths and weaknesses, based on past experience and existing evidence, to provide a continuum of services and supports to students, staff, and families while minimizing duplicative efforts.
Leadership and Oversight	Schools and their partners compose common memos of understanding and service agreements. They also outline a clear framework for overseeing their partnership, whether by designating individual personnel or forming a committee to guide the partnership.
Open Communication	Schools and their partners build and maintain two-way communication channels and emphasize mutual trust, transparency, and a commitment to high-quality programs as key aspects of their collaboration.
Sustained Duration	Schools and their partners commit to multi-year partnerships to support continuity of programming and guide sustained progress toward partnership goals.

Source: National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, Aspen Institute[83]

Family and Community Asset Mapping Process Infographic

Description: By following the process presented below, school principals and other educators can begin mapping available community and family assets to specific purposes at a given school. Mapping assets helps schools complete important front end work to ease the establishment of collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

DEFINE COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES

Schools must first define the boundaries of their community and the population of families from which they can potential draw resources, services, and expertise. Notably, these boundaries need not be limited to school enrollment zones, as a given school may be able to partner with individuals and organizations within their local municipality, the larger district, the region, or even the state.

DETERMINE WHAT TYPE OF ASSETS TO INCLUDE

There are countless kinds of assets a school may acquire or access via families and communities. They include monetary assets (e.g., grants, donations), physical assets (e.g., supplies, technology), and knowledge and skills (e.g., subject area expertise, language proficiency). It would likely be overwhelming to inventory every single family and community asset at once, so schools will likely want to focus on one or two asset types in isolation rather than diluting their efforts.

LIST THE ASSETS OF GROUPS

Schools should inventory known associations, businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and other organizations in the community that can potentially support school operations. Such lists can be compiled using a variety of resources (e.g., professional contacts, social service directories). In creating the inventories, schools should make notes about the type of services, expertise, and resources that would be available through each group.

LIST THE ASSETS OF INDIVIDUALS

Schools should also inventory individuals or families that can potentially support school operations. Notably, these lists may be harder to generate, since information about individual credentials, knowledge, and skills may not be publicly available. As such, school staff may wish to discuss family and individual assets during conferences and meetings, or they may wish to survey families to identify relevant knowledge and skills.

MAP THE ASSETS

This step can occur in tandem with the previous two, but school leaders should establish clear connections between family and community assets and specific services. In essence, principals and other school staff should establish a framework or map that will help them link specific individuals and group to specific student needs, gaps in school services, or ongoing school initiatives.

Source: Center for Health Policy Research, University of California-Los Angeles[84]

Community Resource Mapping Worksheet

Directions: Principals—in collaboration with other district and school staff—can use the worksheet below to understand what resources and services exist within their community, both those that a given school is already utilizing and those that are available but currently untapped. The worksheet lists many common categories of programs and services that schools can typically access via community-based partners, but **individual principals and their collaborators should tailor this worksheet to those programs and services available within their specific communities.**

FOCUS AREA	COMMUNITY PROVIDERS	NOTES ABOUT PROVIDERS	CONTACT INFORMATION
Adult Education			
Adult Employment Services			
Afterschool Programs			
Career Planning			
Childcare			
Community Organizers			
Early Childhood Programs			
Family and Child Advocacy Services			
Family Counseling			
Fine and Performing Arts			
Healthcare Services			

FOCUS AREA	COMMUNITY PROVIDERS	NOTES ABOUT PROVIDERS	CONTACT INFORMATION
Individual Counseling			
Life Planning Support			
Neighborhood Organizations			
Recreational Programs			
Social Services			
Social Work Agencies			
Sports Programs			
Supplemental Education Services			
Substance Abuse Programs			
Youth Development Programs			

Source: Federation for Community Schools[85]

Principals should seek and manage formal partnerships with individuals and organizations that add value to student learning and campus operations while avoiding potential disruptions a partnership may cause to their school's current academic, extracurricular, and student support programming. As such, principals independently consider and collaborate with potential partners to work out the logistics of any potential relationships such as hurdles or barriers that would need to be confronted.[86] Such reflections and considerations should encompass firm articulation of all involved parties' expectations for the partnership to ensure the smoothest operations possible.[87]

Evidence-Based Practices for Building School-Community Partnerships

PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION
Equality Between School and Community Partners	Educational entities will value partners as stakeholders, involve community members in policy decisions, and tailor programs to meet the needs of the community.
Diversity Among Community Partners	Schools seek both breadth and depth of partnerships that are representative of the larger community.
Emphasis on Relationship Building	Schools focus volunteer efforts on mentoring, tutoring, and recreational events that work to expand a child's natural support systems.
Utilization of Non-Monetary Support	Schools seek contributions beyond financial and material support, such as counseling and health services, program development, curriculum guidance, career consulting, and arts exposure.
Opportunities for Two-Way Communication	Broader collaboration is achieved when there is clear and open communication between partners.
Alignment of School and Partner Goals	Communities are helpful to schools when they support the school's goals, but they can be a distraction when they criticize or contradict the institution's outlined mission.
Practice of Reciprocity	Service-learning opportunities provided by the school can build goodwill and lasting partnerships while improving student outcomes.
Evaluation of Partnership Outcomes (Effectiveness)	Formal performance measures of partnership activities are adopted and used to guide remedial action.
Organizational Priority	Change management principles are used to set new priorities, garner employee buy-in, and align personal and organizational goals at the district, school, and community partner.
Use of Resources (Efficiency)	Data-driven decisions are used by district and school leadership to economically manage school-community partnerships.
Students Impacted (Equity)	Resource distribution is monitored to ensure fairness and inclusivity of students receiving benefits.

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction[88]

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