

# Community Schools Leadership Toolkit Part 2: Strategies for Implementation



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New York State  
**COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**  
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Central/Western Region,  
Binghamton University



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# Table of Contents

Conditions that Optimize the Implementation and Development of the Community Schools Strategy	3
Effective Community Schools Processes	6
Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy	8
Using Data for Continuous Improvement within the Community Schools Strategy	15
Sustainability of a Community Schools Strategy	17

# Conditions that Optimize the Implementation and Development of the Community Schools Strategy

The Essentials for Community School Transformation framework was developed through a collaboration between the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, the Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools, the Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership, and the Learning Policy Institute. It is also recognized by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) as a comprehensive approach to building effective Community Schools systems.

The framework identifies key **enabling conditions** that serve as the foundation for a successful Community School. When starting the work of transforming a school, it's helpful to focus on the following areas:

- **Shared Vision:** School leaders work with the community to establish a common goal: creating a thriving environment where students can succeed. Together, they develop the school's vision, mission, and strategic plan to guide their efforts.
- **Trusting Relationships:** Schools build strong, trusting relationships with community partners, students, and families. This collaboration fosters a safe, trauma-free school climate that supports students' well-being, addresses barriers to learning, and creates solutions to challenges.
- **Inclusive Decision Making.** Effective school leaders ensure that school staff, community partners, students, and families all share responsibility for the initiative. Decision-making should be collaborative and inclusive of all stakeholders.
- **Actionable Data.** School leaders gather and use relevant data to identify strengths, resources, and gaps between the school and community. This data-driven approach not only informs their strategies and tracks progress but also allows the school to leverage community assets to meet students needs, ultimately enhancing both experiences and outcomes.

# Conditions that Optimize the Implementation and Development of the Community Schools Strategy

The Essentials framework outlines six **key practices** that Community Schools use to create an environment supporting the “whole child” approach to student learning and development. For a detailed description of these practices, see the [Community Schools Leadership Toolkit, Part 1: Building a Foundation](#).

- **Powerful student and family engagement**
- **Collaborative leadership and shared power and voice**
- **Expanded and enriched learning opportunities**
- **Rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction**
- **Culture of belonging, safety, and care**
- **Integrated systems of support**

The framework highlights six key elements of **Supportive Infrastructure** that are essential for developing an effective and sustainable Community Schools system. These elements can be supported by policies at the district, local, state, and federal levels, along with ongoing technical assistance and sustained investments.

- **Sustainable resources:** The Community Schools strategy relies on combining public and private funding. While it can help unlock new funding streams, it often requires a review and reallocation of existing resources (such as funding, personnel, and space) to address needs more effectively.
- **Shared governance structures:** Community stakeholders play a crucial role in guiding and stabilizing Community Schools. It’s essential to keep them engaged in the strategy and progress, starting with the assets and needs assessment. Governance structures at the school level must be responsive to changing circumstances and inclusive of the community’s diversity.
- **Continuous improvement:** Teams within the school facilitate cross-boundary communication and collective learning. They work together to identify needs, develop effective interventions, and engage in data-driven inquiry to monitor progress.

## Conditions that Optimize the Implementation and Development of the Community Schools Strategy

- **Data systems:** Stakeholders have access to relevant, timely data and a process for collaboratively interpreting and using it to inform decisions and actions.
- **Professional learning opportunities:** Ongoing technical assistance and supportive infrastructure help build the capacity of schools and their partners, ensuring they can implement the Community School's vision, mission, and goals effectively.
- **Strategic partnerships:** Schools should intentionally build a network of organizational partners that collaborate regularly to provide a wide range of learning opportunities and support for students and families.

### Leadership Tip # 5:

**Be intentional! Develop a shared vision, mission, and goals, and use data to guide strategic decisions. Build supportive infrastructure and consistently communicate a unified message to all stakeholders.**

“

#### Voice of a Leader:

**“The Community School philosophy has been an integral part of our district wide strategic plan. Today, it’s not something we do; it’s become who we are as a district.”**

**(Adams, p. 301)**

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# Effective Community Schools Processes

The community schools approach is a strategy, not a program. It's important to understand that educators and their partners are engaged in ongoing, evolving processes aimed at creating a more equitable school environment where all students receive the support they need to succeed.

- *Stages of Development:* The [Community Schools Forward Stages of Development](#) provides a guide for schools to assess and monitor their progress. The stages—emerging, maturing, and transforming—are evaluated based on three key areas:

- 1.Characteristics
- 2.Processes, structures, and tasks
- 3.Measures and benchmarks

While these stages reflect common growth patterns, it's important to note that every school and community is unique. District leaders can tailor the stages to reflect their priorities, creating a clearer understanding of progress.

- *Collaborative Teams:* Working together on common goals significantly improves both individual and collective performance, leading to better student outcomes. Developing effective collaborative teams is essential for the success of a comprehensive, intentional, and coherent Community School. Explore additional ideas about [Creating Collaborative Teams](#).
- *Partnerships:* The Community Schools strategy recognizes that schools cannot meet all student needs on their own. Successful partnerships with the community are essential. However, effective partnerships face common challenges, which require intentional efforts to develop best practices and strong relationships. [The Aspen Institute](#) highlights key practices for building successful partnerships, including:
  - Centering students as the foundation for the partnership
  - Identifying partners based on needs assessments, evidence of success, and potential for a multi-year relationship
  - Setting clear goals with defined indicators and benchmarks

## Effective Community Schools Processes

- Outlining the responsibilities and roles of both schools and partners
- Establishing effective communication practices between all parties
- *Continuous Improvement through Data Inquiry:* The Community Schools strategy depends on educators and partners using data intentionally to guide their work and monitor progress. To start, conduct a Needs Assessment to identify strengths and areas in need of support, which will inform strategic school improvement planning. Next, complete the Community Partnership Inventory to map out resources and address gaps, and the School Data Inventory to collect and analyze data for ongoing progress and benchmarking.

### Leadership Tip # 6:

**Be ready for change! The Community Schools strategy offers flexibility, allowing schools to adapt and make adjustments based on data, feedback, and the evolving needs of the school and community throughout the development stages.**

“

#### Voice of a Leader:

**“Aligning all these district supports required intentionality and coordination.”**

**(McArthur, Noser, and Majors, p. 164)**

”

## Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy

The Community Schools strategy requires collaboration across several essential roles. It's not about asking educators to take on new responsibilities but rather to approach their existing roles in new ways. This includes fostering cross-boundary collaboration and building relationships that promote mutual respect, trust, and leadership alignment at all levels.

One of the most critical relationships in this work is between the school leader and the Community School Director/Coordinator.

**District Leaders** are a crucial part of the leadership framework for the Community School strategy. They play a key role in its success by driving district-wide engagement, facilitating resource access, coordinating efforts, and ensuring resources are aligned with school needs. Additionally, they serve as a liaison to the Board of Education, keeping members informed about the strategy and its progress so they can support and communicate the work effectively.

Key responsibilities of District Leaders:

- **Promote leadership alignment** by collaborating with partners to ensure consistent direction and integration of the Community Schools strategy.
- **Build capacity** by educating various district departments on how the Community Schools strategy supports their goals and objectives.
- **Work with school and community leaders** to adapt best practices and standards to fit the district's context.
- **Monitor short-term indicators** while identifying strategies to track progress toward long-term outcomes.



## Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy

- **Reflect on the Community Schools Stages of Development<sup>1</sup>** to inform and align the district's strategy and progress.
- **Invest in resources, time, and training** to equip stakeholders with the tools needed to implement the strategy effectively.
- **Align the Community School strategy** with the School Improvement/Comprehensive Education Plan.
- **Provide evaluation support** by assisting with tool development and reporting progress to stakeholders as part of continuous improvement efforts.
- **Build broad support** for the district's vision by increasing public awareness and mobilizing funding to ensure sustainability.

**School Leaders** play a pivotal role in developing, implementing, and monitoring strategic actions that align with the Community School strategy. Their focus is on addressing student and family needs while driving continuous improvements across the school. They also work to build stakeholder buy-in and support for the strategy throughout the school community, collaborating with district leaders to ensure district-wide backing. To ensure long-term success, school leaders facilitate sustainability by planning for leadership transitions and embedding the strategy's key practices into district and school policies.

The Community Schools Stages of Development align with the Stages of Implementation outlined in NYSED's MTSS-I Guidance. In this framework, the "Installation" phase corresponds to the "Emerging" stage, "Initial Implementation" aligns with "Maturing," and "Full Implementation" aligns with the "Transforming" phase. The additional "Exploration" phase in the Stages of Implementation occurs before a school district embarks on its journey toward becoming a Community School.

<sup>1</sup>.

# Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy

Key responsibilities of School Leaders:

- **Build broad-based support** by creating consensus and challenging longstanding practices that hinder equitable educational opportunities and outcomes for all students.
- **Practice collaborative leadership** by fostering an inclusive school culture that leverages the knowledge and skills of all stakeholders. Regularly share insights on student needs and progress, ensuring everyone understands their role in the larger vision.
- **Collaborate with stakeholders** to develop and implement a shared mission, vision, core values, and goals that prioritize high-quality, intentional educational experiences.
- **Create internal accountability** by establishing schoolwide norms and continuously developing stakeholders' skills so they can effectively perform their roles.
- **Redesign organizational structures and practices** to support the Community School strategy, engaging the Community School Director/Coordinator and/or Community School Team as key partners.
  - Conduct a **Needs Assessment** to analyze the school and community's strengths and challenges, identifying areas for investment and improvement to guide strategic planning.
  - Complete the **Community Partnership Inventory** to identify and leverage resources to bridge gaps in support.
  - Use a **School Data Inventory** to collect and analyze data, tracking progress toward goals and benchmarks.
  - Perform a **Root Cause Analysis** to uncover underlying factors impacting both academic and non-academic student needs.

# Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy

- **Foster cross-sector partnerships** to support and advance the strategic school improvement plan. Encourage intentional collaboration among all stakeholders to drive shared goals.
  - **Establish teams** to harness collective knowledge for coordinated action ([Creating Collaborative Teams](#)).
  - **Build capacity** by investing in the development of stakeholders' skills and expertise, ensuring they meet expectations and contribute effectively.
- **Ensure staff alignment** by helping them understand how their work fits into the broader strategy and protecting them from distractions.

The **Community School Co-ordinator or Director** plays a key role in managing, growing, and sustaining the Community School strategy and must be included in the building-level leadership work. This requires schools to shift from traditional leadership models to a more inclusive, cross-boundary approach, ensuring that diverse stakeholder perspectives are considered and responses to identified needs are effectively coordinated.

The Coordinator fosters important conversations among stakeholders and acts as a catalyst for change within both the school and the broader community. They are responsible for coordinating resources and partnerships, navigating complex relationships, building trust, and enhancing the support network for students—academically, socially, emotionally, and physically.

**Strong leadership drives the work of the Community School strategy's multiple partners as they help maximize and remove obstacles to student learning. All Community School Directors are driven by the strength of their belief that the Community School strategy is not an add-on to what a school should do, but rather the norm for how schools promote student success. Leading a Community School requires bold direction, persistence, focus on the root cause of problems, and strategic response to environmental shifts.**

***A Guide to Community School Directors***

# Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy

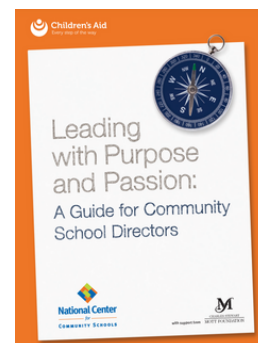
As a vital member of the leadership team, the Coordinator designs, implements, and supervises programs that address prevention, intervention, and enrichment activities, supporting students' holistic development. In collaboration with the principal, the Coordinator co-designs and oversees Community School programming that aligns with the six key practices of the Essential Framework.

Key responsibilities of the Coordinator:

- **Oversee and support coordination** of out-of-school programs and specialty services/projects.
- **Develop and maintain partnerships** with community agencies that provide essential services for students and families, such as health, dental, mental health, family support, afterschool programs, summer camps, arts, sports, and mentoring.
- **Strengthen family engagement** by maintaining regular communication with families through the building of trusting relationships.
- **Create a data-driven plan** to coordinate, deliver, and evaluate services, programs, activities, and school attendance initiatives.
- **Track student progress** in relation to the school's goals and objectives.
- **Engage in ongoing training and professional development** to stay informed about best practices and improve leadership skills.



**Sample Coordinator job description and qualifications**



**Recruitment, hiring, and onboarding of a Coordinator**

# Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy

**Teachers and teacher leaders** are crucial to the success of Community Schools, driving coherent and coordinated efforts. With their deep knowledge of students, families, and school operations, teachers offer valuable insights to design effective interventions. Their involvement ensures that students and families have more meaningful experiences, which positively impact both learning and teaching environments. Below are several ways teachers can contribute to the work of Community Schools:

- **Participate in school governance** to inform decision-making and guide strategic planning.
- **Build trusting relationships** with colleagues, partners, students, and families to foster collaboration, create a safe school climate, and address learning barriers.
- **Encourage students' growth** by promoting ownership of their education, career development, leadership skills, and community engagement.
- **Design and deliver rigorous instruction** that empowers students, aligns with learning standards, and connects to real-world, community-centered experiences.
- **Develop and use authentic assessments** to monitor student progress and create instructional responses that incorporate Integrated Student Supports to boost achievement.
- **Shape the development and use of integrated student supports and expanded learning time & opportunities** to tailor learning experiences based on students' needs.

**Community Partners** are a key element of a successful Community Schools strategy. They bring valuable resources—whether human, knowledge-based, or financial—that enrich the school environment,

## Essential Roles within an Effective Community Schools Strategy

support faculty, and diversify the curriculum. Partners also help create smaller staff-to-student ratios, allowing schools to better meet the individual needs of each child. Research shows that when schools collaborate with their community partners, including BOCES, students experience higher attendance and improved academic outcomes.

To maximize the impact of these partnerships, schools must intentionally build a strong network of partners who regularly collaborate to provide a wide range of learning opportunities and support for students and families. To begin, schools should compile a **Community Partnership Inventory** to identify their partnership assets and gaps.

Here are some ways partners can contribute to the strategy:

- **Develop and support programming**, including expanded learning time and service-learning projects.
- **Leverage partner resources** such as expertise, human capital, and financial support (e.g., donations and funding).
- **Support cradle-to-career initiatives** that connect students with local businesses and help train the next generation of workers.

### **Leadership Tip # 7:**

**Work together! As your Community School evolves, roles will adapt and expand to meet new opportunities and challenges along the way.**

“

#### **Voice of a Leader:**

**One former principal stated, “We could not do the things we do as a Community School without our coordinator and site team.”**

**(Adams, p. 299)**

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# Using Data for Continuous Improvement within the Community Schools Strategy

Improvement practices are essential for Community Schools to continually enhance opportunities, participation, experiences, and outcomes for students. These practices rely on timely, relevant, and diverse data, and a collaborative process to interpret and use the data to address student needs and gaps.

- *Getting Organized for Continuous Improvement:*
  - **Identify who will be involved** in data discussions and set clear expectations for individuals and the group.
  - **Assess the group's skills and knowledge** for data work (e.g., collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data through root cause analysis) and provide training where needed.
  - **Create a School Data Inventory** to answer three key questions:
    - What data sources are available to us and our partners to inform our work?
    - How do we access these data?
    - What additional data do we need to collect for a deeper understanding?
  - **Identify and prioritize key indicators** (leading, lagging, and interim benchmarks) to measure progress effectively. For guidance, refer to the Community Schools Forward's Outcomes and Indicators for Community Schools: A Guide for Implementers and Evaluators.
  - **Conduct a needs assessment** to analyze school and community needs, and an **equity audit** to identify how school-based inequities contribute to disparities in metrics like attendance, achievement, discipline, and graduation rates.

## Using Data for Continuous Improvement within the Community Schools Strategy

- *Engaging the Data for Continuous Improvement*: The ERASE framework, developed by Myers and Finnigan (2018), helps practitioners approach data work with an equity lens:

**E** = Examine and begin disaggregating the data.

**R** = Raise questions to identify differing outcomes and their links to systemic inequities.

**A** = Ascertain the root causes of these differences and brainstorm research-based solutions. (Click here for tools to assist with **root cause analysis**)

**S** = Select and prioritize short- and long-term strategies.

**E** = Evaluate progress by reexamining the data and making adjustments as needed.

### Leadership Tip # 8:

**Be results-driven and use data for continuous improvement! Keep in mind that data alone doesn't lead to change. Start with an "improvers" mindset—viewing the problem from the perspective of those who experience it. Then, turn the data into actionable insights that drive meaningful solutions.**  
(Bryk, 2021)



### Voice of a Leader:

**"Effective alignment and coherence among services and programs, not quantity of programs offered, determines the added value of providing additional services and experiences to children and families."**

**(Adams, p. 291)**





# Sustainability of a Community Schools Strategy

As schools move through the various Stages of Development, it's important to consistently strengthen the internal structures and practices that support their Community School. This ensures that the strategy becomes a unified, comprehensive system that supports all students, forming the foundation for long-term sustainability.

Key Activities for Sustaining Community Schools (adapted from the Children's Aid Society's Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action):

1. *Sustainability Plan* – Develop and regularly review a sustainability plan based on the needs assessment and indicator outcomes. This plan should guide future directions, adapt to changing conditions, and help identify new opportunities while addressing potential threats.
2. *Sustaining Partnerships* – Foster and maintain partnerships through clear communication, shared governance, and collaboration. Be intentional about expanding the partner network in alignment with the mission and vision. Ensure new partners are carefully selected, onboarded, and integrated into the work.
3. *Vision, Mission, and Goals* – Keep educators and partners focused by regularly communicating the vision, mission, and goals. This helps ensure clarity of objectives, demonstrates how programs improve the lives of children, families, and communities, and reduces distractions.
4. *Results Orientation* – Highlight program success through measurable results. These outcomes can help build community support and attract key champions (e.g., leaders from business, faith-based institutions, government, and philanthropy) to advocate for continued support.
5. *Succession Planning* – Ensure structures and processes are in place to support succession for key roles. Develop action plans to build a pipeline of prepared individuals for future leadership.

## Sustainability of a Community Schools Strategy

6. *Strategic Financing Orientation* – All stakeholders should be actively involved in seeking resources to sustain and expand the work. This includes securing grants and other funding from both private and public sources (local, state, and federal). Build grant-writing and reporting capabilities within the team.

### Leadership Tip # 9:

**You're making great progress! The momentum you've built is truly transformative. Just like a garden, it's important to keep nurturing and caring for your Community School with dedication and a strong sustainability plan.**

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#### Voice of a Leader:

**“Sustainability is a major and shared responsibility on the part of all members of the Community Schools team...”**

**(Lubell, 2008)**

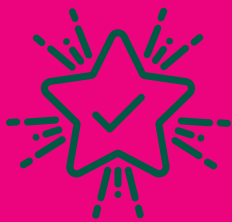
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