

Building Successful Partnerships Between Higher Education and Community School Strategies



BINGHAMTON | COMMUNITY
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Overview and Background

Community schools are a local engagement strategy (not a program) with an integrated focus on academics, services, supports and opportunities that lead to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools are responsive to the unique needs of each community.

The **University-Assisted Community School** approach supports institutions of higher education, school districts, and community leaders in developing successful partnerships to help youth, families, and communities thrive. This toolkit provides information and examples about how to mobilize the vast resources of universities and colleges.

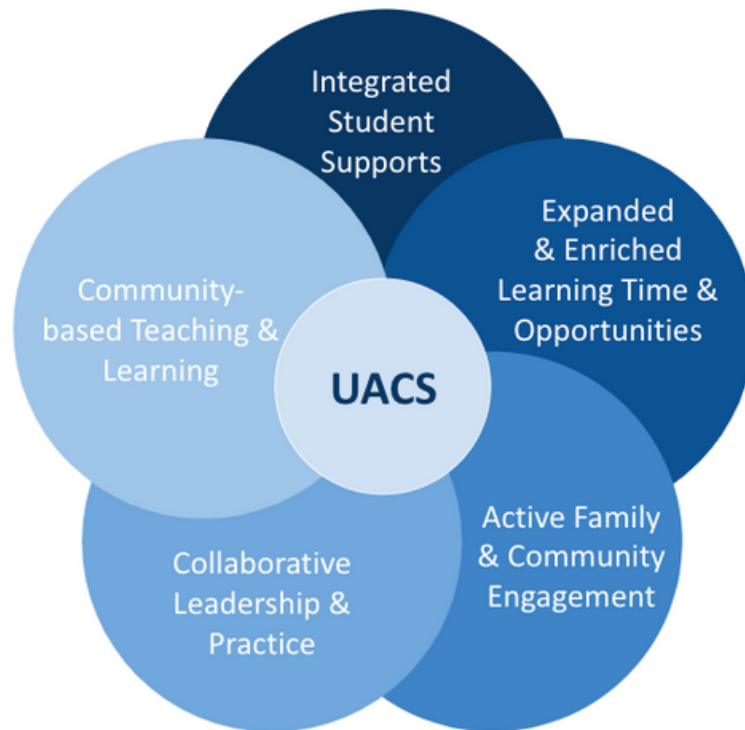
“The fate of universities, their local communities, and cities are *intertwined*.”

-Ira Harkavy, Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania

Overview and Background

University-assisted community schools are:

- A place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources, including higher education
- Schools are hubs (in-person, hybrid, or virtual)



- Partnerships between higher education, schools, families, and community partners expand opportunities, supports, and services for children, families, and the community
- Democratic, anti-racist, justice- and equity-seeking institutions

Ten Tips for Building Successful Partnerships



Develop a SHARED VISION

A clear vision is imperative in order to:

- Be ready to share your needs and any ideas to meet them, big or small
- Come with a completed needs assessment or a plan to conduct one – this can be an area higher education can assist
- Think through what you hope higher education can do for your school
- Get to know the departments ahead of time in areas that may align with your needs

Promising Practice: Needs Assessments



A suburban school district in Broome County, where the first step is to conduct a Needs Assessment at the school level. Results of Needs Assessments have resulted in prioritizing extended learning opportunities, family engagement, and literacy programming, which then guided how to leverage faculty and student engagement to address specific needs.



Emphasize Community Schools as an EQUITY STRATEGY

Equity is a priority for higher education.

- Consider how to leverage groups and programs offered at area institutions already – who is already doing work around equity?
- Connect with students who may not have access or insights about pathways to higher education
- Build relationships with communities that have been historically marginalized, to understand needs and priorities in your area

Promising Practice: Meaningful Family Engagement



A city in New York's Southern Tier has developed an intentional, people-centered process that guides family engagement work. Creating relationships with families and learning about them from an asset-based mindset helps to ensure that actions considered with an integrated equity lens.

- Emphasize how community schools elevate voices, assets, and needs of people with diverse identities, experiences, and perspectives

Ten Tips for Building Successful Partnerships

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Highlight MUTUAL BENEFITS

High-impact, skill-rich environments for learning, equity strategies, and faculty research agendas can serve as a beginning foundation.

- Service learning/community engaged learning coursework
- Many scholarships require community engaged opportunities
- High-stakes funding often requires community engagement and funders also appreciate public education working with higher education

Promising Practice: Collaborative Partnerships



Binghamton University's Center for Civic Engagement works to align college student internships with school needs. They assess college students' preferred experiences and professional interests and match those to priorities identified by schools, benefitting both the college students and school community.

Did you know?



Individually, each of the four pillars of Community Schools positively impacts student outcomes. When all pillars are applied and well-implemented, their impact on schools, teachers, students, and families is multiplied (Medley & Darling-Hammond, 2018).

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Identify CHAMPIONS

There are champions in every organization. Look for motivated colleagues within your network, learn about what energizes people, and connect around common goals.

- Start with relevant and connected departments/ colleges: Civic Engagement, Education, Children & Families, and Health
- Find community leaders who also work in higher education (faculty and staff)
- Foster relationships with faculty and staff who have a passion for community work or research

Promising Practice: Community Collaborations



An assistant professor with research interests in STEM identity and makers spaces has become a champion in local rural middle schools (grades 6-8). They are leveraging coursework with college students to provide expanded learning opportunities for students in younger grades.



Did you know?

University students who become informal educators and mentor to youth has been shown to increase adolescents' interest and engagement in STEM (Ko et al., 2018).

Ten Tips for Building Successful Partnerships

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Identify Areas of ALIGNMENT

Identify areas within higher education that likely meet a need within a school district.

- Strategize projects with mutually beneficial components such as with social work, teacher, and counselor preparation programs
- Utilize findings from school needs assessments to discover areas where higher education resources may be relevant and helpful
- Review resources to build common language and initiatives (e.g., school strategic plan, comprehensive list of support services)

Promising Practice: Alignment Across Programs



Binghamton University social work students support area schools in Broome County with the "Keeping It Positive" program. The project recognizes positive behavior and incorporates language and themes into components of family engagement. This strategy meets a need within the schools and aligns with several competencies that social work students must practice in their training.



Recommended Resource:

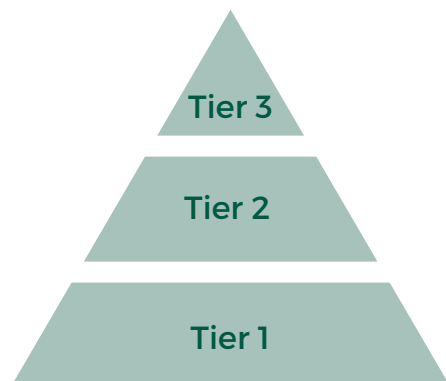
The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) has a sample [Initiative Inventory](#) that can be used to review program offerings and needs and support strategic planning.

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Use an EXPANDED TIERED SYSTEM OF SUPPORT Framework

An expanded tiered system of support framework helps educators provide academic and behavioral strategies for students with various needs.

- “Community schools have the channels in place to accurately identify the needs and hopes of the school community, and then to triage those needs.” (Long, 2020)
- Consider higher education resources that may be adaptable or suitable for each tier (e.g., universal supports, individual services such as tutoring)



Promising Practice: Thinking Outside the Box



During Covid-19, it was evident that there was a digital divide across communities. Distributing computers to all families was not a solution because not everyone had internet access. Relationships with parents helped identify broad needs versus acute needs. Community schools were able to triage challenges, and direct families to services like rent relief, employment opportunities, or internet services. Without meaningful relationships, these needs would have remained unknown.

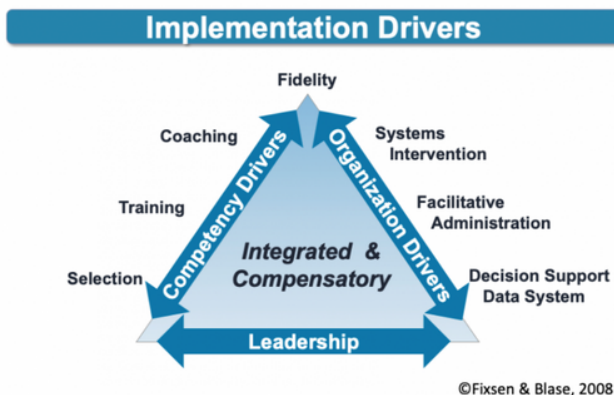
Ten Tips for Building Successful Partnerships

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Utilize IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE

Focus on building internal capacity, systems, and processes.

- Use existing implementation tools, such as National Implementation Research Network (NIRN)
- Analyze your own organization to understand strengths and gaps in capacity
- Use implementation science to guide sustainability planning



Source: [National Implementation Research Network \(NIRN\)](#)

Resource Spotlight: National Implementation Research Network

Implementation Drivers facilitate the success of initiatives. Capacity around competency, organization, and leadership are the universal features that must be present among successfully implemented programs and practices. Grounding implementation in these three core areas is necessary to initiate and support classroom, school, and district level change. This creates structure for planning and establishes pathways for sustainability.

Ten Tips for Building Successful Partnerships



Engage in **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

There is no one size fits all approach – plan to iterate.

- Assess with your partners what is working and areas of challenge, and revisit the data often
- Implement strong evaluation plans to drive improvement strategies
 - What do you want to learn from the data?
 - Create feedback loops with faculty research findings and your organization
 - Use students for data collection and analysis

Promising Practice: Mindful Reflection



At Binghamton University Community Schools (BUCS), social work interns are surveyed each year to provide feedback to BUCS, regarding their school site placements, and the Department of Social Work. This process has provided important insights, strengthened partnerships and expanding services to young people.

Did you know?

For every \$1 invested in establishing a community school and hiring a site coordinator, the national average of return on investment (ROI) is \$7.30. In New York's Connected Community Schools (Rome, Waterville, Dolgeville) the average ROI for a Community School coordinator is \$14 for every \$1 invested. UFT's United Community Schools data shows \$100,000 investment in a Community School director can bring in \$600,000 in services and grants (NYSUT, 2021).



Ten Tips for Building Successful Partnerships

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Foster COLLABORATION

Strong collaboration can build and strengthen social capital including relational trust.

- Set realistic expectations in terms of timing and outcomes
- Clarify roles and opportunities for partnership (e.g., funding streams)
- Develop sustainability plans and identify necessary support
- Establish clear lines of communication; understand partner goals and preferences



Promising Practice: Effective Communication



Communicating assets, challenges, and updates among partners is key to success. For example, Binghamton University students have struggled to travel to rural schools without their own transportation, creating a barrier to delivering services. This need was prioritized and funding from a community partner was reallocated to support the expansion of transportation to rural schools. This level of transparency can help schools and partners to leverage available resources.

Ten Tips for Building Successful Partnerships

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Seek LEARNING NETWORKS and TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance helps to build the capacity of individuals, organizations, and institutions to achieve desired outcomes, from universal to individualized methods.

- Co-learn with existing networks around community schools (e.g., UACS National Network; NY/NJ UACS Learning Network; Regional Technical Assistance)
- Connect with local and regional education centers
- Share your projects broadly, no matter where you are in development

Resource Spotlight: NYSED CS TAC



The New York State Education Department (NYSED) founded three Regional Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers to support the development and sustainability of effective community schools across New York state. The Technical Assistance Centers operate in three regions: New York City, Central/Western, and Eastern, providing free resources and support.



Resources and Further Exploration

Please explore the resources below to support your planning and implementation:

- [UCLA Center for Community Schooling Journal](#)
- [Netter Center for Community Partnerships - University of Pennsylvania](#)
- [Universities and Community Schools Journal](#)
- [Binghamton University Community Schools](#)
 - [Community Schools Online Advanced Certificate](#)
- [University-Assisted Community Schools National Network](#)
- [New York / New Jersey University-Assisted Community Schools - Archived Webinars](#)
- [NYSED Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers](#)
- [New York State United Teachers \(NYSUT\) Community Schools Fact Sheet](#)
- [National Implementation Research Network \(NIRN\)](#)
 - [Implementation Stages](#)
 - [Implementation Drivers](#)
 - [Initiative Inventory](#)

Citations and Contact Information



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Information in this toolkit was supported by the following sources:

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