COMMUNITY & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

PRINCIPALS SHARE WHAT WORKS

Coalition for Community Schools

National Association of Secondary School Principals

NAESP
National Association of Elementary School Principals
Serving All Elementary and Middle Level Principals

MetLife Foundation

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Amy C. Berg
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with Generous Support from the MetLife Foundation

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ABOUT THE COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

An alliance of more than 170 national, state, and local organizations, the Coalition represents organizations engaged in community development and community building; education; family support and human services; government; health and mental health services; policy, training, and advocacy; philanthropy; school facilities planning; and youth development as well as local, state, and national networks of community schools.

The Coalition's mission is to mobilize the assets of schools, families, and communities to create a united movement for community schools. Community schools strengthen schools, families, and communities to improve student learning.

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The Coalition for Community Schools is staffed by the Institute for Educational Leadership.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mission Statement

The Coalition's mission is to mobilize the assets of schools, families, and communities to create a united movement for community schools. Community schools strengthen schools, families, and communities to improve student learning.

Steering Committee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following principals for sharing their experiences; this paper would not have been possible without their help.

Matin Abdel-Qawi, *Principal, East Oakland School for the Arts, Oakland, CA*
Students at this school receive pre-professional arts training along with the core academic curriculum and earn some of the best test scores in the district.

Arthur Abrom, *Principal, Lafayette Elementary School, Lancaster, PA*
Lafayette offers a mentoring program, a Family Center, and extensive before- and after-school programming.

Karling Aguilera-Fort, *Principal, Fairmount Elementary School, San Francisco, CA*
Fairmount is a K–5 school that offers a comprehensive Spanish immersion program and arts and enrichment programs after school.

Carlos Azcoitia, *Principal, John Spry Community School, Chicago, IL*
This Pre-K–12 school partners with local universities and community organizations to give students the opportunity to participate in a variety of special programs, from fine arts to internships.

Cindy Bartman, *Principal, Shaver Elementary, Portland, OR*
A Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) community school, Shaver employs community volunteers and the resources of various local partners to provide a range of after-school programs for its K-5 students and their families.

Jim Beaver, *Principal, Greenfield Middle School, Greenfield, IN*
With such organizations as its Parent Leadership Group and the multiple extracurricular programs it offers its students, this grades 6-8 school stresses student, family, administrative, and community engagement and cooperation to maximize students' academic success.

Sudie Bock, *Principal, Lakeview Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
Lakeview, one of a network of Community Learning Centers (CLCs), or community school, in Lincoln that uses the local school as a community hub, is characterized by significant family involvement and high student achievement.

Carol Cash, *Principal, Hanover High School, Mechanicsville, VA*
This rural high school engages students in a rigorous academic curriculum through such offerings as its International Baccalaureate program and encourages a broad-based school community via its Parent Teacher Student Association.

Teresa Coenen, *former Principal, Harlan Community Middle School, Harlan, IA*
To benefit both the surrounding rural community and students' personal development, The Harlan Community Middle School engages its 6-8 grade students in community service projects and other activities throughout the school year.

Mary Eileen Champagne, *former Principal, George Washington Community School, Indianapolis, IN*
With 49 community partners, this grades 6–12 school provides a host of academic support services ranging from health to college-prep to service learning to recreational activities to adult financial literacy.

Vonnie Condon, *former Principal, Woodmere Elementary School, Portland, OR*
Woodmere, a SUN community school, uses a variety of reading intervention strategies, an extended day program and numerous business partnerships to help students succeed.

De Ann Currin, *Principal, Elliott Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
This school has partnered with the YMCA of Lincoln to create the Elliott CLC, providing opportunities and supportive services that lead to improved student learning and stronger families.

Larry Dashiell, *former Principal, Jefferson High School, Portland, OR*
Divided into four smaller "academies" this urban high school joins with local businesses and science organizations to offer students an array of magnet arts and science/technology programs.

Beverly J. Eby, *Principal, Gilbert A. Dater High School, Cincinnati, OH*
In addition to its regular academic program, which prepares students for college and/or employment upon graduation, this grades 7–12 high school also offers students a more rigorous academic curriculum, the Special College Preparatory Program (SCPP).

David S. Ellena, *Assistant Principal, Midlothian Middle School, Midlothian, VA*
Leaders of this middle school schedule "Community Chats" as a method of soliciting community feedback and sharing the school's student and staff successes with the surrounding community.

Kathy Evasco, *former Principal, West Lincoln Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
A Pre-K–5 school, West Lincoln is a CLC that uses the school as a hub for community services, like the Summer Literacy Program and the Hispanic Family Club.

Diane Fisher, *Principal, Abraham Lincoln Middle School, Lancaster, PA*
A full-service community school, Lincoln works with the Community Action Program of Lancaster County to provide community services, after-school programs, and family involvement activities.

Rick Fraisse, *Principal, Alder Elementary, Portland, OR*
This K–5 school prides itself on its diversity and seeks to develop students socially and intellectually through its life-skills and strong academic programs.

Conrado Garcia, *Principal, Foy H. Moody High School, Corpus Christi, TX*
Known for its Health Science Academy, Moody recently widened its focus to include the Arts and Humanities; Industrial Trades and Technology; Business and Professional Management; and Pre-Engineering, Math, and Science Academies.

Denise Greene-Wilkinson, *Principal, Polaris K–12 School, Anchorage, AK*
Polaris is the only urban public K–12 school in Alaska. Up to 500 students attend multi-age classes where the curriculum is student-centered and focused on experiential learning.

Janette Hewitt, *Principal, Washington Elementary School, Lancaster, PA*
Approximately 625 students from kindergarten to fifth grade attend Washington, which offers a Suzuki violin program that starts in first grade and uses the Boys' and Girls' Town Education Model to teach social skills.

Kim Johnson, *Principal, Lincoln Elementary School, Evansville, IN*
This Pre-K–5 school is one of the Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation's community schools. A Site Council made up of family members, staff, and representatives from the community meets regularly to discuss the needs of the school and to coordinate programs.

Joseph Kirkland, *Principal, Jenkins County Middle School, Millen, GA*
Family involvement and consistently strong academic performance marks this grade 6–8 school where 77 percent of students receive free/reduced lunch.

Dave Knudsen, *Principal, Saratoga Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
Saratoga has been celebrated as a United States Title I Distinguished School. This CLC offers an assortment of programs including a community garden and G.E.D. preparation for adults.

Kathy Kubik, *Assistant Principal, Everett Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
A CLC community school, Everett helps students by using "looping," a strategy where students stay with the same classmates and teacher for two consecutive years.

Madeline Latham, *Principal, Lanai Road Elementary, Encino, CA*
This K–5 school was recently designated a California Distinguished School and honored by the LA City Council for academic achievement and family–community involvement.

Janice G. Leslie, *Principal, Herndon High School, Herndon, VA*
Herndon High School guides students via services such as its Career Center, which advises students on the many vocational, study-abroad, volunteer, and college opportunities open to them.

Antonio Lopez, *Principal, Clarendon Elementary, Portland, OR*
During bi-monthly meetings with families conducted in their native languages, this K–5 school, in which 50 percent of students speak a language other than English at home, listens to the needs of its families.

Beth Madison, *Principal, George Middle School, Portland, OR*
A SUN community school, George partners with various outside service providers to operate a school-based health clinic and many before- and after-school programs.

Sue Maguire, *Principal, Mt. Anthony Union High School, Bennington, VT*
Mt. Anthony offers rigorous academic courses that meet the needs of all students, including advanced placement classes, a School-to-Work program, as well as community-based learning experiences.

Joseph Malone, *Principal, Ockley Green Middle School, Portland, OR*
This community school and 21st CLC site offers a wide range of extended day activities, such as Strong Tactics Against Negative Decisions (S.T.A.N.D.), Latino Success Program, and African Drumming; during- and after-school programs are supported by partnerships with multiple local cultural and academic institutions.

Larry Mays, *Principal, Edward Hand Middle School, Lancaster, PA*
The 600 students at Hand have the chance to participate in a wide-range of extra-curricular activities, like Judo and Nutrition Nuts, as well as Learning Is For Everyone (L.I.F.E.) and after-school programs like art therapy and the Cultural Club.

Gonzalo Moraga, *Principal, Stevenson YMCA Community School, Long Beach, CA*
A 2004 "California Distinguished School," Stevenson is a year-round school that partners with the YMCA to offer many extended day services and school-site activities for students and families.

John Neal, *Principal, Mickle Middle School, Lincoln, NE*
Through its association with Lincoln CLCs and Lincoln Parks and Recreation, Mickle Middle School, offers students the option of an after-school enrichment program that provides homework help and organizes social, creative, and athletic activities.

Helen Nolen, *former Principal, Buckman Arts Magnet Elementary, Portland, OR*
All students at this high performing K–5 school participate in the magnet arts program. As a SUN community school, Buckman is able to provide a before- and after-school program and offers social and health services for students and families.

Willie Poinsette, *former Principal, Robert Gray Middle School Portland, OR*
As a SUN community school, Grey offers enrichment classes, and before- and after-school programs, with the support of community partners like Reed College.

Roy Reynolds, *Principal, Parkrose High School, Portland, OR*
This SUN high school opens its doors to the Portland community, offering a range of after-school programs for students as well as ESL and computer classes for adults.

Cindy Schwaninger, *Principal, Hawthorne Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
As a Lincoln CLC site, Hawthorne Elementary provides before- and after-school programs, weekend and summer enrichment programs for students, and a variety of other support services for other Lincoln community members.

Bess Scott, *Principal, Goodrich Middle School, Lincoln, NE*
As a Lincoln CLC community school, Goodrich is able to provide its 700 students with a variety of after-school activities. Goodrich won first place in the 2003 national competition, "Healthy Schools, Healthy People, School Network for Absenteeism Prevention."

Pam Sedlacek, *Principal, Huntington Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
This Pre-K–5 school engages students in grade-specific major projects throughout the school year, and as a Lincoln CLC it provides a variety of after-school and summer enrichment programs, such as its Technology Program's website design course.

Wendy Shapiro, *Principal, Mastbaum Area Vocational Technical High School, Philadelphia, PA*
The Mastbaum Area Vocational Technical High School offers students opportunities for directed work experience that complement its curriculum.

Ignacio Solis, *former Principal, Ernesto Serna School, El Paso, TX*
Ernesto Serna is a Pre-K–8 school where 88 percent of the 700 students are economically disadvantaged. The school builds on the skills of the largely Hispanic population with a bilingual curriculum.

Wanda Soto, *Principal, The Ellen Lurie School PS 5, New York, NY*
A full-service Children's Aid community school, The Ellen Lurie School supports learning and achievement for the entire family with a broad, extended day program as well as through social and medical services offered on site.

Lourdes Vazquez, *Principal, Martin Luther King Elementary School, Lancaster, PA*
The Learning Is For Everyone (L.I.F.E.) after-school programs at this elementary school include the Peace Club, where students learn peace and social skills and participate in community-service projects.

Ira Weston, *Principal, Paul Robeson High School for Business and Technology, Brooklyn, NY*
This Brooklyn school is known for its authentic engagement with the community and for its students' success.

Ruth Ann Wiley, *Principal, Riley Elementary School, Lincoln, NE*
Riley is a Pre-K–5 CLC community school that was recognized in 2002 as a Gold Star School.

We would also like to acknowledge the important contributions of the following people.

Mary Cary, *Maryland State Department of Education*
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FOREWORD

A principal's strong leadership is vital to school and student success. So too is community engagement, which is a key component of nearly every framework describing comprehensive school reform. Regrettably, however, community engagement has received short shrift in the implementation of previous reform strategies.

This is changing. The challenges that today's principals face have led to a vigorous and renewed interest in community-based solutions. More and more, principals are engaging their communities; many are developing community schools. As a result, they see positive changes in student academic achievement and other key aspects of development. They also see increased community support for public education.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) both promote community engagement as a core element of their leadership development and reform agendas. The leaders of NAESP and NASSP are proud to be active partners in the Coalition for Community Schools, which is focusing renewed attention on the vision of the community school across the country. National foundations—such as the MetLife Foundation, which graciously funded this study—are taking an active role also by supporting community engagement work.

In this context, NAESP, NASSP, and the Coalition for Community Schools are pleased to jointly publish *Community and Family Engagement: Principals Share What Works.* The paper explores ways in which principals of community schools—and other principals who, though they may not yet identify their schools as community schools, are responding in a very similar manner—work successfully with community partners, families, and other key stakeholders to improve student outcomes.

By reflecting on the topic from the perspective of principals, the text offers insights about why they engage community, why doing so is hard, and what strategies and approaches they find most effective. We know this information will be valuable to principals who devote their energy and passion to the education of America's children. It also will inform the work of school systems, which must support their principals in this work, and of those involved in developing the next generation of principals.

We encourage your feedback, both to us and to the staff of the Coalition for Community Schools.

Sincerely,

Ira Harkavy
Chair
Coalition for
Community Schools

Lisa Villarreal
Vice Chair
Coalition for
Community Schools

Gerald Tirozzi
Executive Director
National Association
of Secondary School
Principals

Vincent Ferrandino
Executive Director
National Association
of Elementary School
Principals

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"When you do this work you become part of the community and they know who you are and that you are willing to be a part of them. Then we can all work together—teachers, neighbors, senior citizens, businesses, and everyone else—to really leave no child behind."

LOURDES VAZQUEZ
MARTIN LUTHER KING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LANCASTER, PA

Schools can't do it alone was the simple, but powerful, mantra that echoed throughout each focus group, interview, and meeting held to inform this report. Increasingly, these principals, and others across the country, are turning to their communities for the resources needed to build capacity, to run schools effectively, and to achieve positive student outcomes.

The image of the isolated principal, working alone in an empty school building after formal classes end, is a relic of the past in many communities. In its place a new picture is emerging—one in which schools stay open evenings and weekends and students and community members learn in new ways during more hours of the day. Led by principals who work across traditional boundaries and develop new kinds of relationships that help them do their jobs more effectively, these efforts benefit students and, in turn, their families and communities.

Growing demands on teachers, principals, and district officials to be accountable for the success of all children are critical factors driving this change. To help all students succeed, these principals are convinced that schools *and communities* must pay attention to the multiple dimensions of young people's lives. They pay attention to academics, but they also direct attention to other factors that influence the development of young people—including physical, social, and emotional health; a motivating, engaging, and safe environment; and family and community support.

These principals are creating the conditions necessary for learning. Research shows that success for all children involves creating these conditions.[1] Schools alone cannot do this; but together, schools, families, and communities can develop creative solutions to meet the diverse needs of all young people.

The Conditions For Learning[2]

Condition 1:	The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
Condition 2:	Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
Condition 3:	The basic physical, mental, and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
Condition 4:	There is mutual respect and effective collaboration between families and school staff.
Condition 5:	Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.
Condition 6:	Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.

The experiences shared with the Coalition for Community Schools, collected from interviews and focus groups conducted for this paper, indicate that principals increasingly rely on partners in the community to address these conditions and to provide all students with the resources and opportunities they deserve. According to Sue Maguire, the principal of Mt. Anthony Union High School in Bennington, Vermont, "Our main job is academics, but you have to address the other parts of life at the same time. You can't do any of this without working with the community."

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement is a two-way street where the school, families, and the community actively work together, creating networks of shared responsibility for student success. It is a tool that promotes civic well-being and that strengthens the capacity of schools, families, and communities to support young peoples' full development. Community engagement is the hallmark of a community school.

Principals paint a vibrant picture of community engagement: local community-based organizations and businesses working as partners with the school; community residents actively participating in the education of young people; advocates and community associations bringing resources to schools; and the school actively reaching out to be a resource to the community. Family involvement, too, is a part of community engagement. In a growing number of places, community engagement is the strategy for developing and sustaining a comprehensive community school.

What Is A Community School?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. It has an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. The community school's curriculum emphasizes real-world learning through community problem solving and service. By extending the school day and school week, it reaches more families and community residents.

Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers, and community partners. A community-based organization, public agency, or the school itself works to mobilize and coordinate school and community resources. The results are greater student success, stronger families, and healthier communities.

When implemented effectively, community engagement reduces the weight that many principals have traditionally carried alone. The community school—schools that act as community hubs, focusing attention on academics as well as all the other factors that help young people succeed—exemplifies authentic community engagement. Principals of these schools know that engaging the community is not just another program to be implemented, but a new way of approaching the increasingly demanding job of the principal. They believe that because of the networks of support the community provides, their students will have the richness of opportunity and experience they need and deserve.

These principals also know that community engagement is not easy. Even when principals understand the importance of community engagement, many find it difficult to "clear their plates" enough to get started. New principals especially are uncertain about which obligations can best be delegated or delayed or about how to cut safely through bureaucratic red tape. And community engagement demands energy. Despite these challenges, more and more principals are discovering that the benefits outweigh the challenges and are defining ways to make community engagement happen.

THE SIX KEYS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Despite the diversity of experience represented, almost every principal interviewed for this paper came to one conclusion: forging connections between the school, families, and the community helps young people succeed. Their comments suggest six keys to community engagement:

1–Know Where You're Going

Create a vision of what your school should look like and develop a plan for how to get there. Begin by seeking input from school staff, families, partners, and community residents. Any vision must incorporate the diverse interests of all members of the school and community. Make sure that the vision's goals and objectives are broadly owned.

2–Share Leadership

Invite those partners from the community who share your school's vision to also share resources, expertise, and accountability for targeted objectives. Work deliberately with staff, families, and the community to reach established goals.

3–Reach Out

Learn about the community and become a visible presence in it. Listen to what families say they want—not just what others think they need. Respond honestly. Make changes that advance the school's vision.

4–Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room

Acknowledge and address issues of race and class and define diversity as a strength. Create opportunities for honest conversations about differences from the earliest stages of vision building. Distinguish between assumptions and facts.

5–Tell Your School's Story

Know how to make your school's vision come alive. Use stories and data to engage all kinds of community groups in conversations about why public education matters and what they can do to help. Create the political will to support school efforts.

6–Stay on Course

Only engage in partnerships that are demonstrably aligned with your school's vision, goals, and objectives. Regularly assess your progress. Focus on long-term sustainability.

USING THE SIX KEYS TO ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Each key to community engagement informs the strategies principals use to engage stakeholders in their schools. The following chart (see Figure 1) shows the relationship between the hard work of engaging community members and the benefits of using the Six Keys to overcome barriers and to build engaged community relationships.

Figure 1. Using The Six Keys To Engage Stakeholders

STAKEHOLDERS	WHAT MAKES IT HARD?	WHAT MAKES IT WORK?
FAMILIES	✦ Negative experiences ✦ Language and cultural differences ✦ Issues of race and class ✦ Lack of preparation	1– Know Where You're Going: **Define vision for family engagement broadly** 2– Share Leadership: **Encourage families' contributions and leadership** 3– Reach Out: **Meet families where they are** 4– ID Elephant In Room: **Create a welcoming environment and have honest conversations** 5– Tell Your School's Story: **Be visible in the community** 6– Stay On Course: **Continually assess progress**
STAFF	✦ Isolated and overwhelmed staff ✦ Poor implementation ✦ Lack of fit	1– Know Where You're Going: **Ensure staff are involved in planning the school's vision** 2– Share Leadership: **Begin with the Golden Rule and expect the best from staff** 3– Reach Out: **Use early adapters and positive results to bring staff along** 4– ID Elephant In Room: **Ensure staff are culturally competent** 5– Tell Your School's Story: **Talk about the school's vision constantly with staff** 6– Stay On Course: **Make learning part of teaching**
PARTNERS	✦ Accountability ✦ Space and facilities use ✦ School culture versus business culture	1– Know Where You're Going: **Look for mission match and build formal agreements** 2– Share Leadership: **Collaborate across boundaries; fund a full-time coordinator** 3– Reach Out: **Distinguish between school culture versus business and CBO culture** 4– ID Elephant In Room: **Be aware of power differentials** 5– Tell Your School's Story: **Share students' successes and the challenges they face** 6– Stay On Course: **Don't be afraid to say "No"**
THE PUBLIC	✦ Lack of training ✦ Politics ✦ Minimal contact with residents who don't have children in school	1– Know Where You're Going: **Ask for input from the community** 2– Share Leadership: **Use staff to communicate and be proactive** 3– Reach Out: **Encourage an ongoing dialogue about education** 4– ID Elephant In Room: **Create a community "hub" where all are welcome** 5– Tell Your School's Story: **Share stories of successes** 6– Stay On Course: **Use data effectively**

Coalition for Community Schools

INTRODUCTION

"Community engagement is critical in our district. Schools with the highest number of community and parent volunteers have the highest test scores. The association has been evident in a clear upward trend over the last five years."

KATIE MCGEE
SUPERINTENDENT
BRUNSWICK COUNTY, NC

Community engagement is a two-way street where the school, families, and the community actively work together, creating networks of shared responsibility for student success. It is a tool that promotes civic well-being and that strengthens the capacity of schools, families, and communities to support young peoples' full development. Community engagement is the hallmark of a community school.

In the past, many school principals identified their primary role as manager—success meant keeping their schools running smoothly. Today, effective principals know that they must do much more than "keep the buses running on time." The only bottom line that counts is student success. Complex academic, social, and economic barriers, however, keep many students from meeting their potential. The contemporary challenge for the principal is to break down these barriers and create the conditions for learning.

Rising accountability, increased student diversity, and decreased funding have forced principals to become instructional leaders and change agents, staff developers and community liaisons, public relations managers and resource procurers. Everyday they are called upon to make dozens of decisions and to put out countless "small fires." The best among them realize that a major tool at their disposal is a more fully engaged community—one that draws on the strengths of multiple stakeholders from every sector.

Actively engaging the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success is one of six standards for principal leadership outlined by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP).[2] The Association encourages principals to build greater ownership for the work of the school, to share leadership and decision making, to encourage meaningful family involvement, and to connect families with the health and support services students need for successful learning.

The Conditions For Learning[3]

Condition 1:	The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
Condition 2:	Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
Condition 3:	The basic physical, mental, and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
Condition 4:	There is mutual respect and effective collaboration between families and school staff.
Condition 5:	Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.
Condition 6:	Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.

Similarly, the Breaking Ranks framework for high school reform conceived by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)[4] recommends the following: Schools should "institute structural leadership changes that allow for meaningful involvement in decision making by students, teachers, family members, and the community and that support effective communication with these groups." They also recommend that high schools build partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and universities, creating authentic avenues for community engagement.

Despite these expectations, the *2004–2005 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*[5] found that many new principals do not feel prepared to work with families; even fewer consider themselves prepared to work with the community. At the same time, the survey clearly demonstrates the importance of the relationship between home, school, and community—both in student's lives and in their success at school. When such connections are lacking, teachers report that they face increased demands and that students are more likely to perform poorly. Difficulties that students bring to school—ranging from health concerns, to a lack of motivation, to family circumstances and community problems—create additional burdens for teachers who struggle to address various student needs when they are not equipped to do so.

Addressing these challenges means working to fulfill the conditions for learning. Community schools—schools that act as community hubs, integrating an array of services and opportunities through partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and institutions of higher education, among others—pay special attention to fulfilling these conditions. The partnerships and collaborative strategies present in these schools reflect the knowledge and belief that the school and the community must work together to address these conditions by building a network of responsibility for student success.

Community School Vision

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. It has an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. The community school's curriculum emphasizes real-world learning through community problem solving and service. By extending the school day and school week, it reaches more families and community residents.

Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers, and community partners. A community-based organization, public agency, or the school itself works to mobilize and coordinate school and community resources. The results are greater student success, stronger families, and healthier communities.

Effective principals support their teachers by addressing these conditions—and to do that they must engage the community. Even when principals understand the importance of community engagement, however, many find it difficult to find the time and the resources to get started. New principals especially are uncertain about which obligations can best be delegated or delayed. Central office policies often offer very little guidance to help principals in training staff, hiring a community coordinator, tracking useful data, or linking their efforts across schools and districts.

This discrepancy—between what educators believe is necessary to improve student outcomes and what they feel prepared and able to do—reflects a growing tension in schools around the country.

The purpose of this paper is to share the lessons and advice of principals who have been able to bridge this gap. To capture these lessons, the Coalition for Community Schools conducted a series of interviews and focus groups and engaged principals in further dialogue concerning this issue.

These principals approach community engagement as an on-going process rather than a one-time action. They know that community engagement happens when they work hand-in-glove with community partners, families, staff, and others toward a shared vision for their school, develop the capacity to drive the vision forward, and share accountability for the results. Such authentic community engagement grows out of broad-based and focused collaboration that spans traditional boundaries. Its purpose is to bring the school additional resources, expertise, and political support that will help students achieve at high standards and strengthen families and the community. For a growing number of principals, the vision of the community school drives their community engagement work.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS REPORT

Part I: **The Six Keys to Community Engagement** looks at central lessons distilled from the principals' experiences:

Key 1. Know Where You're Going
Key 2. Share Leadership
Key 3. Reach Out
Key 4. Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room
Key 5. Tell Your School's Story
Key 6. Stay on Course

Part II: Engaging Key Stakeholders discusses how these Six Keys relate to the hard work of authentically engaging families, school staff, partners, and the broader public. It draws on current research as well as the experience of school leaders to outline challenges, benefits, and strategies for successful community engagement. Each strategy presented in this section is based on one or more of the six keys.

Postscript: **Preparing and Supporting Educational Leaders** discusses ways higher education institutions can provide training for principals who want to do this work. It also addresses the role that the central office plays in community engagement.

Throughout the paper, the text refers frequently to the principals who informed this work. As much as possible, their voices were used—through direct quotes and stories—to guide the writing. The reader should note that the term *principal,* as used in the paper, usually refers to the experience of the principals in this group. When reflecting on the work of these principals, we often refer to them as "our principals" or simply "principals."

Methodology

The research for this paper involved phone interviews with individual principals, group sessions with principals from the same district, as well as focus groups at national conferences and other gatherings. These principals had leadership experience in elementary, middle schools, and high schools; were from urban, suburban, and rural settings; and worked with student populations that ranged from low income to high. While not every school represented was formally termed a "community school," every principal was working to establish most of, if not all, the conditions for learning that characterize a community school approach.

In addition, further dialogue with principals, school district personnel, directors of principal preparation programs, and community school advocates was used to flesh out the findings from interviews and focus groups.

Participants were asked three broad questions:
- Why do you think community engagement matters?
- What makes it hard?
- How have you made it work?

What follows is not intended to be a step-by-step guide nor a precise recipe for community engagement. Every community is different and every school partnership needs to find its own vision and path forward. The purpose of this report is to share with principals—and those who work with them, including superintendents, school board members, teachers, family members, community partners, as well as those who fund, design, and implement principal preparation programs—the principles of community engagement as it is being practiced by their peers and to help them think about how they can apply some of that experience.

The report is organized so that time-strapped readers can quickly focus on key lessons, then look at those of special interest in more depth. Doubtless, many will recognize some of the problems encountered—and take heart in the knowledge that they are not alone. We hope that reading about how colleagues have tackled similar challenges will inspire principals to find new ways for engaging their communities.

PART I

THE SIX KEYS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

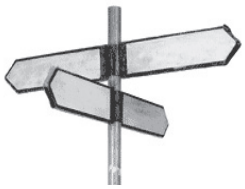
"Our community engagement efforts have increased parent participation by about 25 percent…and helped increase student attendance by about 30 percent. Our message to parents is that school is fun and we care about children and their families. Community engagement has helped us meet our adequate yearly progress goals."

JOSEPH KIRKLAND, PRINCIPAL
JENKINS COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL
MILLEN, GA

The Six Keys to Community Engagement are designed to help school leaders begin such efforts with their eyes open and to take steps that will sustain their success. These lessons were distilled from conversations with principals about the problems, benefits, and strategies they encountered in engaging key stakeholders (as discussed in Part II). Each key emphasizes clear and effective communication for establishing common ground; coordinated efforts for identifying and using resources effectively to meet goals; and shared accountability for improving outcomes and sustaining improvements. Successful implementation begins and ends with passionate commitment; taken together, these Six Keys show how strategic, steady efforts ensure that school leaders end up where they want to be.

KEY 1: KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING

1 Know Where You're Going



"If you don't know where you're going, you will probably end up somewhere else."

LAURENCE PETER

The first and most crosscutting key to community engagement, according to almost all principals interviewed, is a clearly defined idea of the kind of school one wishes to create and a detailed plan for getting there. School leaders use a well-defined and agreed upon vision statement to provide guidance and to build public support. The vision's broad outline becomes a template against which to consider staff, curriculum, and instructional changes and to assess school progress. A clearly stated vision also helps school leaders justify and explain decisions that may be unpopular with one or more stakeholder groups. When bolstered by stories and data, the vision becomes a school leader's single most important means for engaging public support and defending continued reform efforts.

The vision should be a product of collaboration, reflecting the needs and desires of families, staff, and the community. Often principals begin development of their school's vision by tapping into the energy of existing committees or teams. Group conversations that are already focused on specific issues—student achievement or fundraising, for example—can quickly get the visioning process off the ground. Established groups are often well versed in critical school and community issues and they frequently have strong perspectives. It is essential—and helpful—to listen to all of these viewpoints when first developing the school's larger statement of purpose and direction.

Building a School Vision with the Community

When Conrado Garcia became principal at Foy H. Moody High School in Corpus Christi, Texas, he wanted to build a vision that reflected the voices of the whole community and clearly articulated the community's role in school success. Instead of making assumptions, he asked everyone the same question—teachers, students, families, central office staff, school board members, and local shopkeepers: "If you could change just one thing in this school, what would it be?" The answer came back loud and clear—expect more from students and give them more opportunities to achieve excellence.

With support and involvement from teacher leaders and community members, Moody planners developed a comprehensive set of initiatives. They emphasized the following characteristics: greater opportunities, expectations, and supports for students; alternative schedules that allow students to take more credits; improved guidance programming; more emphasis on honors courses; and greater community input.

A committee composed of university professors, doctors and hospital representatives, health-care staff, students, family members, and others designed a rigorous health sciences program and created mechanisms to ensure that students could meet the challenge. Today, the health sciences magnet program enrolls some 280 students and has graduated its first class. Sixty percent of its students come from the neighborhood. The remainder come from all over the city, attracted by the unique opportunities Moody provides. Ninety-seven percent of students in the first graduating class are college bound.

KEY 2: SHARE LEADERSHIP

2 Share Leadership

"Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

VINCE LOMBARDI

Responsive schools grow out of vigorous leadership that is both broadly distributed and strategically focused. As demands on the individual principal's time, energy, and resources mount, schools and districts are moving toward shared leadership approaches. Principals themselves increasingly interact with their communities, seeking out the resources, energy, and support that collaboration with others can provide. In growing numbers, these leaders work hand-in-glove with community partners, families, staff, and others to develop a shared vision for transforming traditional schools into genuine community schools.

These principals learned to share decision making across boundaries—without losing control or diminishing their leadership. They also value distributing leadership internally, which allows multiple members of the school community, including family members and staff, to share leadership functions. Shared leadership builds staff commitment to school improvement efforts and contributes to staff satisfaction.

The Importance of Coordination

Janette Hewitt, the Principal of Washington Elementary School in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, stresses the importance of sharing leadership with a community school coordinator and with community partners. "There is so much on the teacher's plate already with testing that we need support from the community and someone to coordinate this support," says Hewitt. Fortunately, she has a community school coordinator—sometimes called a resource coordinator or liaison. This person is often hired to help the principal find partners in the community, to sustain the relationship once a partner has committed to the school, and to manage the work of multiple partners thus ensuring that services are not duplicated and that staff know which supports and resources the partner is sharing with the school.

"The match with your coordinator is extremely important. Hiring my coordinator was the most important part of this work." Hewitt feels strongly that, if at all possible, the principal should be the person who interviews and hires the coordinator. She advises that principals look for characteristics such as flexibility, excellent interpersonal skills, very high energy, and a strong motivation to help students and families succeed. Once the right person is hired, she believes it is important for the new coordinator to facilitate open communication with the rest of the staff and with the principal. To do this, Hewitt suggests putting the coordinator in an office near the principal and the guidance counselor. "Some of the most productive work that gets done is through informal conversations between the coordinator and staff members who work in close proximity to the coordinator's office."

KEY 3: REACH OUT

3 **Reach Out**

"Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open."

J.K. ROWLING

Knowing the community surrounding your school—and encouraging your staff to learn about and engage with the community—is an essential component of a truly authentic community engagement strategy. The Rules of Engagement, outlined in *Education and Community Building, Connecting Two Worlds,*[6] encourages school staff to find out "where your students and families live, work, and play after school." It recommends that educators ask some of the following questions: *What banks, hospitals, community organizations, civic groups, and businesses provide services or jobs? What local issues are people talking about on call-in shows and in the news? What assets are available that might help the school? What school resources might be useful to other community groups?*

Many of our principals survey families, students, staff, and sometimes community members about specific issues or needs. Some convene focus groups or even day-long conferences to engage various stakeholders. In preparing for these efforts, schools increasingly use demographic data and review factors like immunization rates, poverty, homelessness, and many others to help communities set realistic goals and to direct appropriate resources for meeting them. School leaders gather useful data from census reports, United Way publications, local agencies, and school sources. In addition to starting conversations, data are used to establish baselines for tracking progress over time. In some schools, the curriculum itself is a pathway toward a shared community school vision.

Using Asset Mapping to Learn About the Community

According to Ira Weston, the principal of Paul Robeson High School in Brooklyn, New York, asset mapping is an important means for discovering untapped community resources and for keeping abreast of community changes and needs—as seen through the eyes of the young people who live there. Every year, Robeson's freshmen map their own community as part of the social studies curriculum. With guidance from their teacher and the principal, students divide a map of the community into a grid. Student pairs are assigned a particular area on the grid and then walk through the area, taking detailed notes and looking for specific youth-related opportunities and services. Collected data are compiled on a master map, which is then reduced to wallet size and distributed to students, teachers, and families.

This exercise produces a valuable resource for families seeking services amd helps everyone involved with the school learn about the surrounding community and identify gaps in supports and services. Weston uses this information to sharpen and focus the school vision and his partners' continuing efforts to implement it. "Our school has always been a school in and of the community. This type of activity helps students and others see that their community does have value. And it also helps these young people understand some of the ways they might improve their community. I want my young people to know that they're important and to know that they can make a difference."

KEY 4: DON'T IGNORE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

4 Elephant In Room

"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color."

MAYA ANGELOU

Growing diversity is a defining fact of American education. No longer a primarily urban concern, suburban and rural schools must also find ways to unite students, families, and staff—any of whom may speak a different language and have different cultural beliefs, style of living, and income as well as skin color—into cohesive learning communities. Our principals define such diversity as a strength—and a challenge.

Principals urged open and honest discussions of these issues—instead of pretending they don't exist. An important function of such conversation is to help both school staff and families distinguish between cultural assumptions and cultural facts—paying closer attention to economic factors that may affect behavior. Helping staff better understand the economic, political, and social realities in which families live improves their ability to communicate with the community and helps them to motivate young people in their own learning.

Understanding Cultural Differences

At Saratoga Elementary in Lincoln, Nebraska, about ten percent of students are American Indian. "Many American Indian children were coming late to school," says Principal Dave Knudsen, "and some teachers interpreted this to mean that their families didn't value education. But, when we began talking to families about this problem, we learned that many believed that the spirit is not yet attached fully to the body when children are young and if children are forced to do things they don't want to do, their spirits might never fully bond with their bodies. So, adults try not to impose their own will on their children. Sometimes this means that their children do not get up and out to school on time. But it doesn't mean that their families don't care or aren't involved in their lives"

It was important for Knudsen's teachers to learn about this belief. "Once we understood what was going on, we were able to find ways to work within this belief system. For one thing, we tried to make sure that learning was more hands-on and theme based. Students became more enthusiastic about learning. We found that it really makes them want to come to school. It also values the idea of more holistic learning—an approach that is highly respected in this American Indian community. We also gave these parents activities to do with their children at home, so that learning was going on at home and the students weren't falling further behind even if they were not in class."

KEY 5: TELL YOUR SCHOOL'S STORY

5 Tell Your School's Story

Try...communicating, with fullness and accuracy, some experience to another...and you will find your own attitude toward your experience changing."

JOHN DEWEY

The Public Education Network (PEN) sets out a compelling theory of action in *Taking Responsibility: Using Public Engagement to Reform Our Schools.* It argues that public engagement, coupled with specific school reform goals, results in sustained policy, practice, and public responsibility for public education. Our principals highlighted their experiences in a way that translates this theory into practice. "Many people get hung up on educational rhetoric," says Joseph Kirkland. "But we can't lose sight of the fact that we're dealing with real people. Care and compassion have to be number one. We have to learn to communicate and to tell our story well. Once parents and the community pick up on this, they will do a lot."

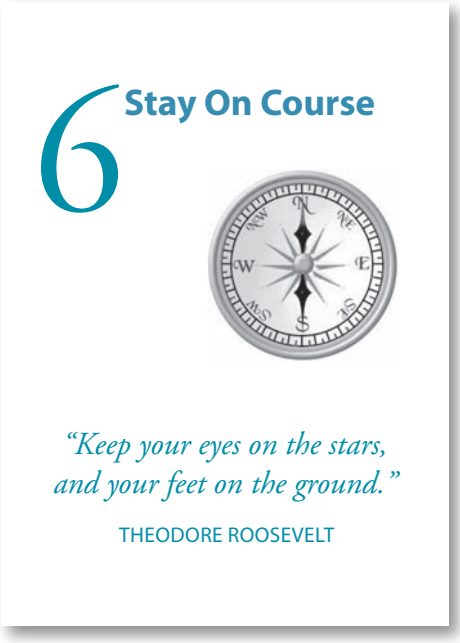
Principals capture attention by sharing honest stories about teaching and learning and by using relevant facts and figures strategically—to move their audiences toward action. They look for allies and develop teams who can speak to many different constituencies—existing faith and civic groups, collaborative efforts focused on youth and education issues, teachers unions, public education funds, and intermediary groups, among many others. They call on partners to identify and share statistical information that makes their case, and they use that data to establish baselines and to inform policy.

Holding Community Conversations

Madeline Latham, the principal of Lanai Road Elementary School in Encino, California, has learned how to build public and financial support effectively for her school. She says the key is having conversations with the community. Latham talks with everyone about her school and her students. She tailors her message for the audience to whom she is speaking, but the theme is always the same: Student success is a shared responsibility, and we all play a role. When speaking to the business community, Latham goes "straight to the money." She uses real estate data to argue, "A good school increases property values and leads to more money spent at local businesses." She also points to the fact that, as test scores have risen, community families have returned to the school. "I also tell them," Latham emphasizes, "their financial support and physical presence tells children that they're important, which builds pride, success, and shared values in these future adults." These conversations have helped families and community members understand that "Lanai is a good place for their financial contributions. They know that additional support is necessary if they want a 'premier school' for their children."

In making her case to families, Latham points out that, since 1999, the school's academic performance index has risen nearly 350 points, with Hispanic students' scores increasing 100 points in the first year. "This was a clincher for parents." More community families are attending Lanai rather than going elsewhere, and fewer students are being bused into the neighborhood.

KEY 6: STAY ON COURSE



Well-aligned partnerships are based on a coherent, intentional strategy for providing all the conditions necessary for learning. Services, supports, and opportunities are selected because they create specific components of a school vision—clearly and without duplication. This careful attention to alignment also calls for continual assessment and data-based decision making.

Alignment is only one half of the school improvement challenge—sustainability is the other. Of particular importance is regular assessment of all aspects of the school's community engagement strategy, including how partners are helping the school achieve its vision. Principals should ensure that activities and resources provided by partners will remain in the school over the long haul. They should ask themselves whether these activities will endure, even after they are no longer the principal of the school.

Staying Focused on the School's Mission

"We need to stay focused and not dilute the program," says Denise Greene-Wilkinson, principal of Polaris K–12 School in Anchorage, Alaska. "It is important that activities are not catch-as-catch-can. People have great ideas," says Greene-Wilkinson. "My job is to make sure they fit within our school's vision and framework. For every proposal we need to ask: How does this fit in with what we are trying to do? Will it help or get in the way of what we need to do? If you are nebulous, you'll just end up floating nowhere."

At Polaris, an administrative team and the "principal's desk" serve as clearing-houses for all ideas proposed by potential partners. An elected advisory board—made up of six family members, four teachers, and twelve students—also makes sure that the school is holding to its mission and forming long-term partnerships that will support the school's vision. Its community partnerships provide mentors for students and create opportunities for them to shadow scientists, researchers, and doctors.

PART II

ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS

"The whole community needs to say to our kids,
'You each have your own majesty and beauty.'
We all need to help our young people see this."

IRA WESTON
PAUL ROBESON HIGH SCHOOL
BROOKLYN, NY

The Six Keys are used to inform the work of authentically engaging families, school staff, partners, and the larger community. This section explores principals' views on what makes engaging these stakeholders difficult and shares their strategies for overcoming these obstacles. A symbol representing each key provides a visual tool for connecting it to specific strategies.

SIX KEYS LEGEND

1 **Know Where You're Going**

2 **Share Leadership**

3 **Reach Out**

4 **Don't Ignore Elephant In Room**

5 **Tell Your School's Story**

6 **Stay On Course**

ENGAGING FAMILIES

Traditionally, family involvement focused on parent involvement. In addition to parents, many other primary caregivers—grandparents, tribal elders, older siblings, court-appointed guardians, foster parents, even baby-sitters and nannies—are important figures in the lives of American school children. This fact calls for a broader definition of *family.*

As the meaning and purpose of family involvement expands, actually implementing it becomes more challenging. Previously, schools were content to develop a coterie of dedicated parents, willing and able to manage fundraisers and to provide volunteer help in classrooms. Today, while those contributions still matter, family involvement is seen as a primary vehicle for academic improvement—it calls on every family to actively participate in their children's education,[7] at home and in school, and to become role models by actively volunteering and assuming leadership positions. No Child Left Behind explicitly requires that schools develop collaborative forms of family involvement. As a result, many principals incorporate family involvement strategies into their school improvement plans.

WHY IT MATTERS

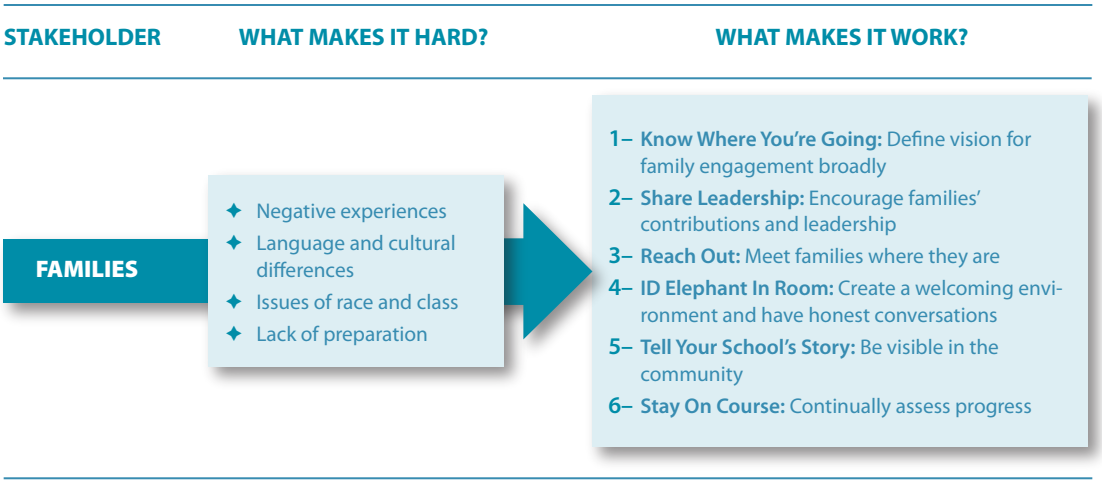
Families are children's first teachers and their most influential role models and motivators. Research conducted by the U.S. Department of Education and others[8] shows that family involvement—including factors such as parenting style, family participation in learning activities, and parental expectations—is a more accurate predictor of student achievement than family income or socioeconomic status. When families are involved in their children's education, their children are more likely to continue their own education.[9]

Children receive powerful messages from family–school relationships. When children view their parents as interested in what happens at school and see them in regular and respectful contact with school staff, they are more likely to bond with their teachers and learn more from them.[10] Teachers tend to have higher expectations of students whose parents are more involved; such children tend to have higher test scores and grades.[11] At the most basic level, when families are involved, students are more likely to attend school and to participate in testing, which allows districts to meet annual progress goals.

While family involvement efforts often focus on younger students, older students also benefit. In addition to the degree of family connectedness, multiple research studies

> *"Relationships become the infrastructure of the school, so you need to be intentional about this in your vision."*
>
> CARLOS AZCOITIA
> JOHN SPRY COMMUNITY SCHOOL
> CHICAGO, IL

Figure 2. Using The Six Keys To Engage Families



show that family attitudes toward education and careers are reflected in youth attitudes toward work and career choice.[12]

WHAT MAKES IT HARD

Families want their children to do well in school. Principals know this, but most acknowledge that engaging families can be extremely difficult. The principals interviewed were able to successfully engage a core set of parents and family members in the work of the school, but many continue to ask, "How can we move beyond reliance on the same few people and expand this group?" Even the most faithful participants can become overloaded and burn out. In addition, when parents perceive a small, entrenched leadership group, they may decide not to volunteer their services; this lessens the infusion of new energy and ideas. Many principals find involving "hard to reach" families—those who never come to the school or rarely respond to teachers' overtures—one of their most difficult and frustrating tasks. What creates this barrier between home and school?

Negative Experiences

Parents who disliked school or who did not do well academically may find simply entering a school building uncomfortable. Interactions with school staff may sometimes remind otherwise able adults of their unsuccessful school career. School activities are sometimes designed to tell families what they need to know to do a better job—without asking what families want or what they are already doing. School staff may sense parents' negative reactions. When this happens, it is difficult for parents and staff to engage on an equal footing and work together effectively. Families from very different financial backgrounds may find it difficult to understand and support each other. Without fully understanding the facts that shape each family's experience and participation, they may make judgments about each other's skills, abilities, and motivation.

Language and Cultural Differences

When teachers and family members do not speak the same language, they often have different ideas about who should make the effort to communicate. Some immigrant groups were raised to see school staff as educational authorities. They believe the best way to support their children is by deferring to the specialized training and experience of school staff. When school staff are not well-informed about families' cultural perspectives, deference can be mistaken for disinterest. In addition, it is easy for staff and other parents to assign cultural labels to behaviors that have very little to do with group values and much more to do with poverty and its associated lack of access to supports and opportunities.

Issues of Race and Class

Both negative school experiences and cultural differences are complicated by unaddressed issues of race and class. This is frequently true for schools in which the majority of staff are of one race and families another. More affluent parents may find it easier to make their voices heard and to become involved in school decisions than families with fewer resources. Less affluent parents may feel as though they have less to offer. As a result, family involvement efforts may not fully reflect the full range of student needs and family strengths.

Lack of Professional Development and Preparation

Many leadership preparation programs do not prepare principals for the hard work of family involvement. A critique of principal preparation programs, by Fredrick Hess and Andrew P. Kelly, indicates that only a fraction of a percent of coursework addresses parental relations. Most principals learn such skills on the job and they often lack the resources and time for exploring new and innovative strategies. As one principal told us, *"it's like building a plane while it's in the air."*

> *"Kids are part of a family and families are a part of a community. We don't work in isolation. It's common sense."*
>
> SUE MAGUIRE
> MOUNT ANTHONY UNION HIGH SCHOOL
> BENNINGTON, VT

WHAT MAKES IT WORK

Carlos Azcoitia, the principal of Spry Community School in Chicago, states that principals must build "relational trust" to lay the foundation for academic achievement. Once open and respectful lines of communication are established, schools should develop a variety of ways for families to participate in their children's learning and in the life of the school—and to have fun in the process.

Know Where You're Going

Define your vision for family involvement broadly

Providing "spaghetti dinners" and other food-related activities is important, but there are more ways to involve families. Activities can range from the daily involvement necessary for making sure a child is prepared for school and ready to learn to interaction with other adults and staff at the school to participation in and leadership of efforts designed to enhance the school community. According to Karling Aguilera-Fort, principal of Fairmount Elementary School in San Francisco, "There are so many ways to involve families. You just have to think creatively."

"Engage families by broadening the concept of parent involvement," says Gonzalo Moraga, Principal at Stevenson YMCA Community School in Long Beach, California. "Many of our mothers wanted an exercise class. So we created one. This got parents to come to the school. Teachers began taking the exercise class too. Having teachers and parents in the same class helped break down barriers and both groups began feeling comfortable talking with each other. It's not what you think about when you think about 'parent involvement,' but it really worked." Moraga also empowers parents by having them run a staff meeting. "This helps parents feel like they have a voice in the school, and it helps build relationships with teachers. It levels the playing field," says Moraga.

Share Leadership

Encourage family contributions and leadership

Principals encourage collaborative family–teacher–school relationships that value the expertise and experience of families. No matter what their background, families bring talents and knowledge that sometimes are taken for granted. For example, sharing interesting personal histories or the customs of another culture might bring aspects of the social studies curriculum to life.

In addition to welcoming families and valuing their contributions, schools should identify family members with nascent leadership capacity and encourage their participation. Find ways to nurture this capacity by encouraging revolving committee leadership and co-chaired committees that combine more seasoned members with newer participants.

Reach Out

Meet families where they are

"Parents who feel wanted, needed, and appreciated tend to become more involved," says Diane Fisher, a principal from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Home visits significantly deepen trust. According to Ignacio Solis, former principal at Ernesto Serna in El Paso, Texas, parents see that school staff "…are nice people and they really want to help." Teachers have a chance to see where and how their students live. For many staff, this can be an eye-opening experience. Home visits are most effective when a parent liaison or someone from the community arranges them. Community partners, who may have more direct ties to families, can also facilitate these meetings. A letter or phone call to the family is recommended so that teachers and families can agree on a mutually convenient time. Staff may wish to visit in pairs, especially if it is their first experience. Principals should structure release time for teachers so that home visits do not take away time from their regular instructional duties.

Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room

Create a welcoming environment and have honest conversations

Families are more likely to participate when they feel invited and when diversity is acknowledged and viewed as a strength. In some schools, flags are displayed in corridors, representing the many countries from which students and their families come. Easy-to-read school maps help visitors find where they are going. When schools have security guards posted at entrances, every effort should be made to welcome families so they don't feel screened out.

Families, school staff, and community partners may have very different ideas about what they expect from each other and what they feel they can contribute. Frequently, issues of race and class complicate different parties' understanding of these differences in experience and perspective. Because these subjects are difficult to talk about, it is easy for one group to make assumptions about the other—assumptions that can be incorrect and

damaging. At El Paso's Ernesto Serna Elementary School, small group sessions bring teachers, families, and community partners together to better understand each other. "Sometimes," says Ernesto Serna's principal, "these sessions have gotten emotional. But they have also made a difference."

Tell Your School's Story

Be visible in the community

A principal's active participation in family and community events is crucial. When families see the principal making time for events, they assume that such activities are important. The message sent says, "I care and you can, too." At Abraham Lincoln Middle School in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, principal Diane Fisher makes it her business to attend family activities developed by her after-school coordinator. "I don't have to *do* anything. I just show up and talk to parents. It makes me a human being, not just the person who calls parents when something is wrong." Principals like Fisher take advantage of these opportunities to talk with—and listen to—parents.

Stay on Course

Continually assess progress

Many principals rely on personal knowledge of the neighborhood, gathering information informally and convening small conversation groups. School staff can assess progress in a variety of other ways. Surveys, focus groups, and community conversations can all be used to make sure that family involvement strategies are working and that the school's vision is met. Constant evaluation and use of data in decision making help principals target areas that need improvement and focus on those strategies that really work.

"Family involvement makes it possible to influence your community more positively and influence children's lives by giving them more opportunities earlier. It takes more time but the payoff is student success."

IGNACIO SOLIS
ERNESTO SERNA SCHOOL
EL PASO, TEXAS

Planting the seeds of family involvement

"Community engagement is critical," observes Dr. Katie McGee, the superintendent of schools in Brunswick County, North Carolina. She estimates that her school system has more than 3,000 volunteers, about half of whom are parents. Each elementary school has a parent facilitator who is paid with Title 1 and state Smart Start funds. This person works with all families in efforts to involve them more closely in their children's education.

Dr. McGee knows that this level of family involvement takes patience and time. She encourages principals to start small, working with parents who are already involved, even if there are only a few. When these parents speak with others, they spread the word that parents are welcomed and valued. But this trickle-down effect takes time. McGee asks the principals in her district to "see the value of planting seeds of family and community involvement and waiting for them to germinate."

ENGAGING STAFF

Principals intent on transforming their schools know they need their teachers working with them every step of the way. When teachers buy into the school's vision for success, they incorporate its values and goals into their instruction and their relationships with families, other staff, and students.

WHY IT MATTERS

Competent and well-prepared teachers strongly affect student learning. Shared leadership and decision making among school staff characterize high-achieving school districts. So too does continuous engagement in planning, implementing, and reviewing curriculum and instruction.[13] Research also shows that teaching effectiveness and satisfaction among teachers are affected by the extent to which they view their work environment as a community with clear and shared goals. Teachers who see themselves as full and active members of a supportive school environment will work to create similar learning contexts for their students.[14]

WHAT MAKES IT HARD

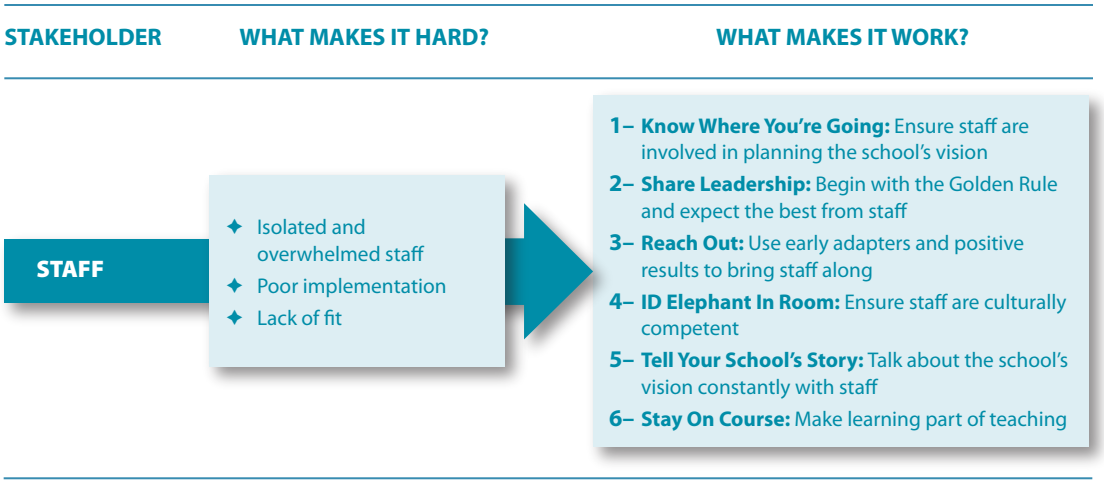
Without a supportive and involved staff, the hard work of community engagement is all but impossible. Teachers and other staff members often know the importance of this work in theory, but pay little attention to it in practice. What makes it so difficult to bring these teachers on board?

Isolated and Overwhelmed Staff

As one teacher put it, "I don't need another 'to do.'" They feel called upon to solve social problems single-handedly—teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and a host of other at-risk behaviors. Yet, teachers are not equipped to do this work and most know little about their students' home or community life. Teachers wonder where they will find the time to engage families when they are already doing yeoman's work to provide for each child's needs *and* to meet yearly progress requirements.

> *"At first we all thought, 'I don't need another thing to do'; but now that we've been doing it for awhile, we wouldn't do school any other way."*
>
> KIM JOHNSON
> LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
> EVANSVILLE, IN

Figure 3. Using The Six Keys To Engage Staff



Poor Implementation

Teachers may react to new ideas in the following way: "Been there, done that." This is especially true when improvements are introduced as *a fait accompli* or when they smack of interventions that were tried previously—and failed. Most teachers understand the value of parent volunteers, but some hesitate to relinquish control to non-teachers—often based on negative experiences. They wonder whether these new additions will be effective and worry that supervising them will cut into valuable teaching time.

A Lack of Fit

In some schools, a small proportion of teachers simply "don't get" the idea of community engagement—and they are not likely to change their minds. They prefer silent classrooms and total control, viewing parents and potential community partners as intrusive and disruptive. It can be very difficult for principals to bring such teachers along. Changing behavior is fairly easy, but surmounting entrenched resistance can be very difficult.

"Teachers know what needs to be done, but they are overwhelmed. They have previously worked in isolation. Bringing in community has brought back hope."

ARTHUR ABROM
LAFAYETTE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA

WHAT MAKES IT WORK

Know Where You're Going

Ensure staff are involved in planning the school's vision

Often, staff view community engagement as another program to implement, taking them away from teaching. "Occasionally teachers will grumble that partnerships take time from instruction," says Ira Weston. They can also feel out of the loop and unsure of what goes on in the school outside of their classrooms. One way to build a school's culture of engagement is to empower teachers as leaders and to involve them in planning and implementing the school's vision. Many principals do this by soliciting opinions at staff meetings and through surveys and informal conversations and encouraging teachers to participate in site-based planning teams and in community meetings. The principals interviewed emphasize the importance of keeping their doors open and encouraging an ongoing, open dialogue about the school's vision.

Share Leadership

Begin with the Golden Rule and expect the best from staff

Staff members, like students and their families, have interests, attitudes, goals, and constraints that affect the way they work. One recommendation for principals is adherence to the Golden Rule: Treat teachers the way you would want them to treat students and families—a strategy that begins with understanding and ends with support. Awareness of personal factors makes it easier for principals to engage teachers and other staff in appropriate ways. Younger teachers with high energy *and* loans to pay back, for example, often make good candidates for paid positions in after-school programs. Veteran teachers may be more interested in opportunities that allow them to share their experience in workshops or mentoring relationships and to develop other leadership skills outside the classroom.

Without question, clear and high expectations of staff are every bit as important as they are for students. Effective school leaders understand that staff are people too, but they communicate a sense of urgency about school reform. This effort includes a strong commitment to community engagement. Set the bar high and most staff will rise to meet it.

Reach Out

Use early adapters and positive results to bring staff along

Not every teacher automatically adapts to the idea of community engagement. Most can be "brought along," however, especially when peers with similar experiences and responsibilities see its value. Early adapters can draw other teachers into the work of engaging family and community members.

Principals can show the benefits of the extra time and effort spent on community engagement by recognizing the contributions and creativity of teachers who do put in extra time. Acknowledge the contributions of the larger school community by pointing out even small differences in student attitude, attendance, or parent comments. Sharing ideas and results can keep hard working teachers motivated and bring others on board. Says Ignacio Solis, "Good ideas catch fire and make teachers want to do more."

Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room

Ensure staff are culturally competent

Cultural competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and attributes that enable people to work effectively across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines. Many of the principals interviewed addressed issues of cultural competency by having "courageous conversations" with community members. The same strategy is also important when it comes to working with school staff. Talk openly and honestly about issues of race and class instead of pretending they don't exist. Legitimize the concerns of families, students, and community members and help staff learn how to address and approach these issues.

Tell Your School's Story

Talk about the school's vision constantly with staff

A vision needs to be kept alive; otherwise it can get lost. Engaged principals share their school's vision every chance they get. They hold meetings, study groups, even book clubs with staff to underscore the importance of community engagement. Ira Weston talks to teachers all the time about the importance of the school's partnerships with families and the community. In these conversations he emphasizes the idea that opening students' eyes to possibilities outside their neighborhood is always time well spent. He makes sure teachers see the benefits that show up—typically in better student performance. Teachers who understand this correlation are more likely to volunteer in engagement efforts.

Stay on Course

Make learning a part of teaching

Genuinely engaging staff means taking steps to create a fully integrated learning organization—one that makes continuous learning as important for staff as it is for students. Staff development is not limited to technical skill building. By creating opportunities for exposure to challenging ideas and new conversations, staff development activities can broaden the perspective of both new and experienced educators and deepen their understanding of teaching and learning.

Creating a Learning Community for Staff

"Getting everyone to work together has taken time," says Denise Greene-Wilkinson, the principal of Polaris K-12 School in Anchorage, Alaska. "It took a good five years to become the school we are today. We needed to create a cohesive vision that everyone believed in. The process began with a core group of staff and community members with similar beliefs. They all saw that they needed to give more than just classroom work and believed that the extra effort was all worth it. The team built agreement, in part, by surveying families every year. Over time, the idea of the school has become clearer and sharper with input from staff and community members."

Wilkinson suggests holding a "Socratic Seminar" once a year on various topics such as democracy and education and community asset mapping. When Greene-Wilkinson holds this type of seminar, she generally convenes it on a weekend and offers her teachers a university credit option. "I also offer a school-wide seminar twice a year that is open to students, families and the community," says Greene-Wilkinson. "The most recent of these seminars focused on a series of short stories about the purpose of education. These seminars help to unite the staff around a set of core values, build on their leadership strengths, and create a sense of community within the school."

ENGAGING PARTNERS

Schools exist in communities—they contribute to them and they need their help. Community partnerships recognize that schools can't do everything on their own. In every school, active partnerships help students feel connected to their communities. In under-resourced schools, engaging community partners can help level the educational playing field and give students the chance to do their best.

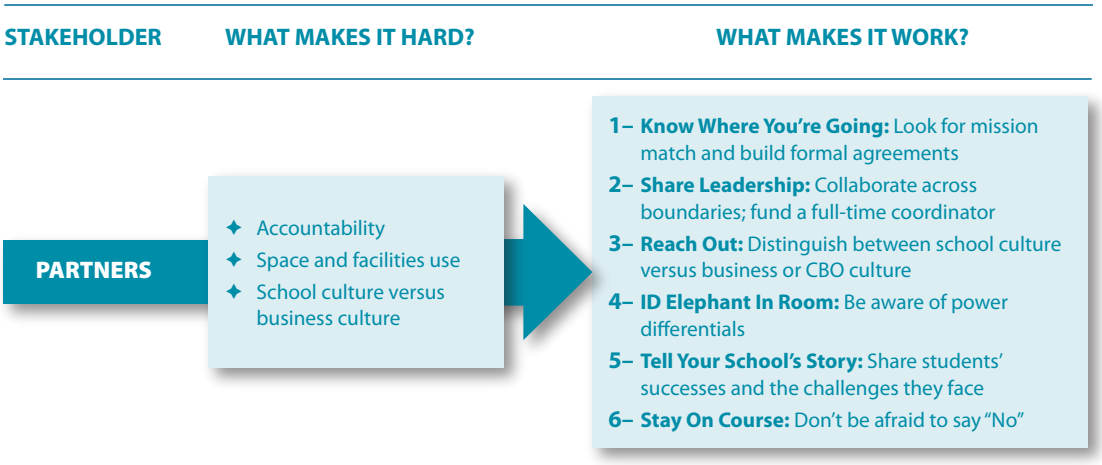
WHY IT MATTERS

Shrinking budgets and narrowly focused academic curricula make it harder than ever to provide essential learning and enrichment activities, even for the most affluent schools. Music, art, field trips, intra-mural athletics—even recess—give students a reason to come to school. Far from being frills, these activities cultivate a sense of community and belonging and motivate students to do their best work. At the same time, poverty, immigration challenges, unaddressed physical and emotional health issues, unstable homes, and unsafe neighborhoods continue to make school success an uphill battle for a growing number of students. These problems are often most pronounced in low-income areas, but they exist in almost all schools.

Community partners help schools address these issues in three important ways. First, they help students and their families access health, mental health, and social services more easily—when and where they are needed. Second, they create learning opportunities that develop both academic and nonacademic competencies in students by exposing them to positive examples and adult guidance—both in the classroom and in the community—and by providing safe opportunities for experimentation and leadership. Such participation helps young people develop along multiple dimensions—socially, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. Third, partnerships create relationships that increase young people's stockpile of social capital—their ability to move successfully in the larger world beyond their immediate neighborhoods and communities.

> *"All communities have a number of untapped assets. Individuals in the community, faith-based organizations, community and neighborhood associations, colleges, hospitals, libraries, businesses, and social service agencies, among others, are all valuable community assets."*
>
> JIM BEAVER
> GREENFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL
> GREENFIELD, INDIANA

Figure 4. Using The Six Keys To Engage Partners



WHAT MAKES IT HARD

Accountability

It can be difficult for principals to open their school and trust its well being to organizations and personnel not under their direct control. Once outsiders are invited in, a well-meant hodgepodge of activities can easily develop. Unacknowledged differences in priorities, communication styles, and goals between partners and school staff can lead to tension and even conflict. Knowing how to put multiple partnerships under one umbrella and keep them moving in the same direction can be a struggle.

Space and Facilities Use

School space is often limited; tight quarters can make matters worse. Even though partners provide valuable services, it may be hard to adequately house them in schools where space is at a premium. Teachers may find it difficult to have community partners use their classrooms after the regular school day. Transportation to and from after-school activities and to off-site locations often creates major problems. It takes a long-term vision as well as day-to-day management skills to ensure that partnerships become mutually beneficial relationships.

School Culture Versus Business and Community-Based Organization Culture

The language and mores of the business world are often much different from those found in the world of education. Bob Knudsen, of Lincoln, Nebraska, advises principals to "…speak the language of your potential partners, especially if they are business people. Edu-speak and Business-speak are two different languages. Business-speak is more proactive instead of reactive." Similarly, community-based organizations may have different ways of talking about problems and solutions.

WHAT MAKES IT WORK

Know Where You're Going

Look for mission match and build formal agreements

Many principals stressed the importance of finding businesses and organizations whose missions overlap in some way or are consistent with the vision of their schools. Finding opportunities to share the school's vision with community leaders and learning about the goals and missions of other community stakeholders is essential. The real challenge, however, is to identify areas of overlap, then help potential partners see "what's in it for them." All kinds of organizations are interested in working with schools, but often for very different reasons. "Be aware of your potential partner's perspective," says Sudie Bock, Principal at Lakeview Elementary in Lincoln, Nebraska. "Be clear about what you need and what they want."

Mechanisms for facilitating smooth working relationships and open communication with community partners vary widely. In many cases, informal agreements are adequate, however, more formal relationships are helpful when a school is large and has multiple partners. Formal agreements have the advantage of spelling out what each partner agrees to do and to provide. A carefully negotiated arrangement can minimize tension over sharing facilities and lead to greater accountability and less duplication of service.

Matin Abdel-Qawi of Oakland, California, held a meeting when he became the principal of East Oakland School of the Arts and asked the school's partners a simple but poignant question, "*Who are you and why are you here?*" Abdel-Qawi's school was so inundated with partners and volunteers that, when he arrived as principal, he had people in his building he didn't know. "When I would ask who these people were, my staff would tell me that they were partners here to help the school. But I had no idea what they were doing. Meeting with them and clarifying their roles helped me sort out who was doing what and make sure that everyone's efforts were coordinated and not being duplicated."

> *"A major barrier to engaging the community is thinking that school and community are separate entities. They are not. They are one."*
>
> JOSEPH KIRKLAND
> JENKINS COUNTY MIDDLE SCHOOL
> MILLEN, GA

Share Leadership

Collaborate across boundaries and fund a full-time coordinator

Community engagement efforts are more likely to be sustained when leadership is shared. At the end of the day, superintendents and principals are accountable for everything that goes on in their schools, especially student achievement. When school leaders develop collaborative relationships across institutional boundaries, however, partners are more likely to meet their agreed upon responsibilities, stay invested in joint initiatives, and motivate each other to expand their success. Multiple sources of leadership are developed and accountability is distributed.

In individual schools, practitioners from partner agencies and school staff may develop school site councils to plan activities jointly. Participants learn to appreciate each other's goals, strengths, and constraints. As trust and communication grow, they are better able to align activities that meet their shared vision.

School partnerships deliver considerable long-term benefits to schools. But they shouldn't be thought of as a free lunch. They take time and resources to nurture, develop, and expand. Despite the best advanced planning, logistical problems arise. Agreements need to be adjusted and a school's extensive repertoire of activities must be managed on a daily basis. Strong front-office leadership and support are critical. Our principals also recognize that a comprehensive program of services, supports, and opportunities requires a skilled and committed coordinator.

Reach Out

Don't be afraid to ask for help

Potential partners should have a clear understanding of the school's needs and its strengths. This helps define expectations for both the school and the partner. One way principals communicate their schools' needs is to approach potential partners and simply ask them to listen. "To build capacity at Elliott," says Principal De Ann Currin, "I knew I had to do what I feared most. I had to ask people I didn't really know for help. Then I realized that I could just tell the story of our school and our students and that would convey what was needed." She also encourages potential partners and donors to think about their own educational experiences. "I ask them: 'What part did these experiences play in who you are today?' They begin to listen and to hear with their heads and their hearts."

Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room

Be aware of potential power differentials

Schools don't have the same monetary resources as a major corporate partner. School partnerships, however, provide corporations with a means for building goodwill toward their company and understanding their community in new ways; corporate employees gain opportunities for personal growth. Partnerships are more equitable when schools make clear the *quid pro quo* on which their relationships are based.

Tell Your School's Story

Share students' successes as well as the challenges they face

Robeson's Ira Weston uses "counter stories" to help potential partners think more deeply about the purpose of education and how it can be fostered in public schools. For example, instead of only telling about conventional school success, he also uses vignettes to illustrate the barriers students must overcome. These stories help future partners think about teaching and learning in very different ways.

For example, he tells of one student who failed a written exam testing her knowledge of cell division. Her teacher was certain the student knew more than her written answers conveyed, so the teacher asked the student if she could explain what she knew in other ways. Feeling comfortable with a teacher she trusted, the girl later developed a dance sequence that expressed her clear understanding of mitosis and the other cell processes she had studied. This brief "counter story" helped an audience of non-educators quickly grasp that, for some students, success often comes in increments. It further helped them see how important it is for teachers to measure success in creative ways.

Stay on Course

Don't be afraid to say "no"

Not every potential partnership can or should be pursued. Ask the following critical question: *Is a prospective partner going to bring results that are important to the school and community?* In addition, partners bring in resources, but they also require school space, scheduling, and supervision. This is especially true for those schools just beginning to engage community partners. Schools should make careful decisions about how existing

and newly gained resources will be allocated. Even with an apparently close mission match, partners should take care to provide activities that are tightly aligned with specific school goals and objectives and offer learning opportunities that enhance school day activities rather than replicate them. By using selective decision making to develop a coherent program, a school can increase its capacity to attract other partners and to build a comprehensive set of services and supports.

Defining Relationships with Partners

Many of our principals, including those in Chicago; Lincoln, Nebraska; New York City; and Portland, Oregon, developed formal relationships with their partners. Typically, such agreements are grounded in a written vision for student success that is shared by the school and its partners; a written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) further defines the relationship between the partner and the school.

Once a partnership has been formed, MOUs are often created to clarify goals and expectations. They generally delineate the following:

- Shared vision and mission of the school and the partner
- Responsibilities and expectations of both school and partner
- Person or people responsible for overseeing and managing any programs the partner might offer in the school
- Plans for regular meetings to review progress and to identify areas in need of improvement
- Monitoring and evaluation responsibilities of the school and the partner
- Type of training that staff, school personnel, and volunteers should receive and who is responsible for providing that training
- Procedures for incorporating school staff into the partner's program and the partner into school activities to foster better understanding and joint responsibility

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

At its best, public engagement helps schools build local capacity for ongoing dialogue about education and creates the political will to turn good ideas into real and sustained change. Traditionally, school leaders have focused their attention internally; they primarily relied on relationships with school board members and the central office to increase their resources. Even though they are located in communities, most schools have operated in isolation from them. An increasing number of principals, however, realize that if they are to advance a comprehensive, youth-centered agenda and meet increasingly rigorous state standards, they must seek wider public support.

WHY IT MATTERS

As publicly supported institutions, schools are subject to the wishes and needs of taxpayers. In most school systems, a majority of voters do not have children enrolled in public schools; they have little first-hand knowledge about what schools need. When bond issues and levies are introduced, the public is often unaware of the need for these initiatives and underestimates their value. Public engagement strategies help inform the public and provide an opportunity for citizens to become invested in shaping local school efforts. Community awareness—of what schools accomplish and what they need—increases the likely passage of levies and bond issues, helps establish relationships with potential partners and with families, and attracts volunteers to the school. In addition, efforts to engage public support improve school climate and set the stage for academic achievement.

A number of evaluations also suggest that public engagement activities and efforts to extend service-learning opportunities and community problem solving bring new energy to communities. Public engagement efforts not only increase positive public perceptions of school reform initiatives, but they also improve security and safety in surrounding areas, strengthen community pride, and increase citizen engagement and student participation in school and community service.[15]

WHAT MAKES IT HARD

Lack of Training

Most principals are not trained in public engagement nor is it seen as a significant part of their role. Some dislike the introduction of a sales-oriented element into their educational work. Others simply feel they do not have the skills needed to engage the public effectively. Some principals avoid public conversations or situations in which they might be required to answer questions or defend their work.

Figure 5. Using The Six Keys To Engage The Public

STAKEHOLDER	WHAT MAKES IT HARD?	WHAT MAKES IT WORK?
THE PUBLIC	✦ Lack of training ✦ Politics ✦ Minimal contact with residents who don't have children in school	1– **Know Where You're Going:** Ask for input from the community 2– **Share Leadership:** Use staff to communicate and be proactive 3– **Reach Out:** Encourage an ongoing dialogue about education 4– **ID Elephant In Room:** Create a community "hub" where all are welcome 5– **Tell Your School's Story:** Share stories of successes 6– **Stay On Course:** Use data effectively

Politics

Principals say that community engagement is often difficult because the terms *community* and *politics* are almost synonymous. "Schools are one of the only places where the public can take out its anger," says Sue Maguire of Mt. Anthony Union High School. Successful principals understandably seek to avoid political quagmires. Community concerns can become volatile—a negative school image, even though unfounded, can persist indefinitely. As a result, principals often feel it is better to stay above the fray. In doing so, however, they forfeit opportunities for building bridges across different sectors of their community and for increasing the support schools need to advance their vision.

Residents Who Don't Have Children in School

Approximately 60 percent of Americans do not have young people currently enrolled in public school. This figure may explain why voters often don't approve bonds and levies for school improvements. They are simply removed from the challenges that schools face. Finding ways for taxpayers to feel connected with their neighborhood schools is a major challenge that must be overcome.

WHAT MAKES IT WORK

Know Where You're Going

Ask for input from the community

The school's vision needs to reflect the diverse needs of the community. Principals learn about their communities by reaching out for input. Diane Fisher of Abraham Lincoln Middle School says, "You need to talk to fami-

lies and people from the community. What do they bring to the school? What do they want? You can't do this work without finding out these things and knowing who your customer is."

Share Leadership

Use staff to communicate and be proactive

The best spokespeople for schools tend to be alumni, teachers, and families. Local public education foundations are also vital and important sources of leadership and support. An effective communications strategy taps all these resources. Many schools have public relations committees composed of families, staff, students, and school partners who create positive press about the school and respond quickly to negative events. In some schools, volunteers write letters to the editors of local papers; in others, PR committee members are more informal, using simple conversations to tell their friends and neighbors about positive things happening at the school.

Reach Out

Encourage an ongoing dialogue about education

Some principals suggest that schools must work with the community to think through the purpose of and vision for the school. This means that principals should articulate their own personal educational philosophy. Creating and maintaining an open dialogue with the public—through newsletters, public meetings, informal conversations in the community, and other vehicles—begins to pave the way toward public awareness, helping community members see that they are part of a network of responsibility for student success. When ideas about education are placed in the public square, the public becomes more accountable for implementing the programs and ideas they believe will help students achieve desired outcomes.

Don't Ignore the Elephant in the Room

Create a community "hub" where all are welcome

Opening up the school for neighborhood events—for community meetings, arts-and-crafts shows, neighborhood association meetings, among other things—provides an entry point for those community residents who might not have any other reason to visit the school. Embracing and celebrating all races and ethnicities fosters a feeling of community and says to the public, "all are welcome, all belong."

Tell your School's Story

Share stories of success

School personnel see dozens of examples of what schools are doing right. Unfortunately, these steady, everyday accomplishments seldom make front-page news. Placing a few concise stories can offer a comfortable and effective way for principals to bolster the school's image, build understanding, find out what the community wants, and obtain their help. Even principals who are hesitant to engage in PR work find it easy to tell others about the students and programs they care about. The challenge, say principals, is to halt the negative spin by choosing stories that illustrate the school's positive vision and that are consistent with its needs and message. Use examples to encourage public conversations about why learning is important—and how they can help.

Stay on Course

Use data effectively

Well-chosen anecdotes capture an audience's attention. Used with compelling data, these stories can move diverse audiences to action. According to PEN,[16] effective use of data is important: Use data to promote understanding and transparency about school reform; identifying and sharing data often pushes partners to deeper levels of commitment; data create a baseline for outcomes and inform policy and practice.[17]

Schools and districts engaged in school reform should think about which three or four sources of data might show promising trends and carefully choose which variables can be tracked as simply as possible. When actual data are not available, principals can often extrapolate and report reasonable estimates based on larger trends and shifts; partners can also provide further information. In choosing which data to report, principals and PR team members should think about the audience to be addressed and which information it will find most compelling. "We often look at only obvious, easy-to-collect data, like test scores. It's important to look for other data that say what people really think of their school in order to find out what direction you need to go in," says Conrado Garcia of Moody High School.

A Community Shares Responsibility for Student Success

John Spry Community School, in Chicago, Illinois, features a K–12 learning center as well as a partnership with Alivio Medical Center and others that address a number of community needs. The school acts as a true hub of neighborhood activity. Open late into the evening and on weekends, students, families, and the larger community have come to know Spry as a second home that both welcomes and reaches out to everyone. According to its principal, Carlos Azcoitia, "Schools have the power to become the focus of the community, connected to daily lives and experiences, and thus can share the educational responsibility with other responsible partners."

This formula has worked well for Spry. With a 98 percent attendance rate, the school has the highest attendance record of any public high school in Chicago—even higher than the city's elite selective enrollment schools and lauded charter schools. In the spring of 2006, Spry's first graduating class took the stage at commencement. Every single student on the stage had been accepted to college.

POSTSCRIPT

PREPARING AND SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

"You become part of the community, they know you, and that you are willing to be a part of them. It has to be all of us working together."

LOURDES VAZQUEZ
MARTIN LUTHER KING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA

Conversations with principals about their experiences leading community engagement efforts clarified three things. First, leadership preparation programs must provide more instruction and field experience in community engagement. Second, school districts should find ways to support community engagement and provide principals the flexibility needed for doing this work most effectively. Third, school and community should build a systemic framework for community engagement.

The following suggestions are based on discussions with principals, school district personnel, and directors of principal preparation programs, as well as the experience of community schools leaders across the country.

PREPARATION

According to a 2005 report published by the Education Commission of the States,[18] highly qualified leaders excel in the following areas: articulating a vision; making strategic decisions; using data; improving curriculum and instruction; being effective managers; providing staff with professional growth and shared leadership opportunities; and shaping school cultures that engage teachers, families, and communities in meaningful ways.

All these capacities are reflected clearly in the principals' comments and in the strategies for community engagement detailed in this report. Yet, many principals reported that formal preparation programs taught them little about how—or even why—to

engage families and communities as educational partners. When asked what motivated their interest and helped them succeed in their community engagement efforts, these principals pointed to their own experience growing up in supportive communities, being a parent, having personal roots in the community, on-the-job experience, and support from other colleagues.

Principals did not suggest that professional training programs explicitly under-value community engagement. Instead, they noted that their training programs were already tightly packed and focused more on theory than practice. In general, they wanted more real-life, practice-based experience that would have given them the opportunity and flexibility to explore these issues.

SUGGESTED PRACTICES

1. Provide Training In Interpersonal Skills

The principals cited in this report agreed that principals must, first, be effective instructional leaders with strong interpersonal skills. School leaders also should develop their listening skills, as well as their ability to share information and collaborate. In their view, preparation programs do a reasonably good job of teaching technical skills, but they are less adept at helping principals acquire a full complement of adaptive skills—the interpersonal behaviors and attitudes that enable principals to share leadership and to engage families, staff, and community partners as educational equals. They agreed that principals, both sitting and aspiring, need enhanced preparation in social and emotional skills.

2. Provide Training In Culturally Competent Leadership

As this country's demographics continue to rapidly change, principals must gain the knowledge and skills that are required to effectively work with students, as well as families and communities, who represent numerous ethnicities, races, cultures, and religions. To do this well, leaders must be able to understand the influence of these and other factors on learning. They also must be aware of and understand the patterns of discrimination, inequality, and injustice.

3. Provide Training about Community, Collaborative Strategies, and Community Engagement

When asked what preparation would have been most helpful, principals emphasized the importance of substantive, community-focused content and hands-on experience. They called for coursework that helps school leaders understand the structure, function, and politics of communities. Additionally, they recommended content that included a focus on adult development; training in political skill-building, communication strategies, and collaboration techniques for reaching across both institutional and cultural bound-

aries; exposure to negotiation techniques; and relevant data collection and analysis methods. They also emphasized that these topics should be grounded in project-based work and recommended that preparation programs provide more interdisciplinary instruction—combining faculty and expertise from schools of education, business, communication, and social work.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN PREPARATION PROGRAMS

A recent report by the Institute for Educational Leadership and the Illinois Education Research Council[19] finds some promising movement towards reconfiguring state policies and redesigning training practices that emphasize leadership for learning—along with a greater emphasis on staff, family, and community engagement. While they remain in the minority, heartening efforts are underway in numerous principal preparation and professional development initiatives run by universities, partnerships between school districts, and other organizations, as well as in a newer crop of non-traditional training programs. These initiatives seek to identify and nurture homegrown leaders; to focus coursework and requirements on solving real-world problems; and to use learning strategies that develop shared leadership and team-building skills. Much remains to be done, such as expanding training venues like these and encouraging additional creative efforts to grow leaders able to lead twenty-first century schools in twenty-first century communities.

Some leadership preparation programs already focus on the importance of community. Some examples include the following:

- The First Ring Leadership Academy is a collaboration between the 13 school districts surrounding the city of Cleveland, Ohio, and Cleveland State University's College of Education. These school districts are all struggling with issues of poverty, transience, violence, underemployment, and achievement gaps—all related to racial inequity. The program provides intensive training for aspiring principals with a particular focus on the role of community. It emphasizes the use of community-based solutions to address complex issues. Twelve workshops over a fifteen month period focus specifically on topics of social justice, family involvement and community development, in addition to curriculum, instruction and management.
- The Principal Leadership Institute (PLI), a university-based initiative housed at the Behring Center for Educational Improvement at the University of California, Berkeley, is preparing a new generation of leaders for urban schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. The 14-month program includes multi-disciplinary courses including law, public policy, business, and education as well as a structured practicum in the candidate's district. Course work also includes an extensive community mapping project that allows students to gain an intimate working knowledge of the community in which they will work. In addition, the program focuses on how race, gender, and class affect student success. Future principals learn how to have "courageous conversations" about racism and poverty.

SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

Most school districts function bureaucratically and communicate with individual schools in a generally top-down manner. School principals are held accountable for student success, yet their authority is often limited by school district policies and structure. Such structural impediments create difficulties for principals when making decisions about budgets, hiring, staff development, curriculum, and instruction.

Effective central office leadership is essential for implementing successful improvement efforts at the building level. Types of higher-level backing range from simply permitting local experiments to removing roadblocks and providing tangible assistance, both financial and in-kind. Such district-level support creates more collaborative relationships among school and community leaders and legitimates new approaches to teaching and learning at the building level. Successful initiatives, especially when publicly supported by multiple stakeholders, can prompt district partners to expand supportive policies and practices and influence district-wide change.

Acquiring support from the school district is difficult largely because central office staff may not be amenable to or aware of creative solutions and autonomous efforts dictated by local needs. Community engagement efforts that develop at the building level often do so without any support from higher up. In fact, some principals prefer to operate under the radar. Instead of waiting for permission to launch new initiatives, many would rather take some risks and ask for forgiveness later. While this entrepreneurial spirit gets the ball rolling, it is seldom enough to adequately sustain and expand local efforts. Schools may experience frequent obstacles without the resources to overcome them. Even in districts that allow considerable leeway, principals are constrained by hours of record-keeping and strictly administrative obligations, which eat into the time available for improvement efforts.

SUGGESTED PRACTICES

1. Provide Policy Flexibility

Persistence and sharing evidence of success may help districts see the value in removing major roadblocks that make it harder for principals to engage in innovative activities. Support can include transferring more management responsibility to local sites, loosening rule-based regulatory systems, and allowing more flexibility in line-item budgeting.

2. Provide Professional Development Opportunities that Support Community Engagement

Central office resources can be used to directly support school reform efforts. District offices usually have significant staff development and training capacity. Making these resources available to individual schools removes a major responsibility from school staff and encourages high-quality professional development activities.

3. Encourage Peer-to-Peer Support and Mentoring

Leaders need support, too. Pioneering principals, especially those working to break new ground, need safe and constructive opportunities to interact with others facing some of the same challenges—to share information, ask for advice, and occasionally vent their frustrations. Staying in touch by phone, meeting periodically for dinner, or convening more formal sessions helps principals support each other as they engage in similar work. Conversations can be open-ended or focused on a specific topic. A one-on-one "buddy relationship" that pairs a new principal with an experienced one is an effective mentoring strategy. While principals who work in the same district have a great deal in common, relationships established with colleagues from different districts at regional, state, and national conferences can also be helpful and easily maintained by e-mail or phone. Participants who come from different settings are less apt to discuss personalities and more likely to focus on issues.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Some districts are moving toward providing the support and flexibility necessary to work effectively with the community. Examples include the following:

- In Chicago, repeated requests from principals helped launch a new central office program that will exempt 85 schools from some mandated reporting. This new policy will free up more time for principals to build community relationships and to expand the schools' ability to support student learning.
- In New Brunswick County, North Carolina, teachers once resisted working with parent volunteers, assuming that the time needed to supervise them would take time away from their own teaching. Now the district office provides and oversees training of the parent volunteers. Each volunteer receives three half-day training sessions before they enter the classroom. After four to six weeks, they return for additional training. They communicate regularly with the parent facilitator at their assigned school and receive additional support from the central office as needed. In additional to specific training in reading instruction, volunteers also learn about a variety of other topics such as how to develop supportive relationships with students and strategies for working with children who have specific learning issues.

BUILD A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY SCHOOL STRATEGY

In an effort to create a systemic framework for community engagement, a growing number of school and community leaders are forging innovative working relationships to establish community schools. Such schools create a structure for sustainable community engagement practices and ensure that all stakeholders in the community share responsibility for and provide support and opportunities to young people.

In many school districts, this work is already being supported. What follows are some examples of where it's working well.

- In Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon, the school district, with city and county partners, has developed strong and ongoing support for school-based change initiatives. The Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative is a collaborative effort between public and private entities to make sure that schools are truly community hubs. An operating team in each school—consisting of the principal, the SUN site manager, and the school's lead partner—direct efforts to integrate recreation, enrichment, health, mental health, and family support services within the school. A site advisory committee—made up of partners, family members, students, and school staff—works with each school to ensure that it provides the supports and opportunities the community needs.
- In the small town of Tukwila, Washington, located outside of Seattle, all five schools are community schools. The community school initiative serves students and their families with extended-day and transitional programs, as well as family and community services such as annual health fairs, yearly physicals, immunization, dental clinics, family nights, and literacy centers. The principals at these schools are deeply involved in managing the activities that multiple partners provide to the schools. The city provides staffing for recreation services and a full-time counselor at each elementary school.
- In Lincoln, Nebraska, about half of the elementary and middle schools are comprehensive Community Learning Centers—a term synonymous with community schools. At each site, coordinators from community-based organizations work with school staff and community members through a School Neighborhood Advisory Committee to plan programs that serve students and their families. Principals play an active role—working hand-in-hand with the coordinator to attract and sustain programs that will benefit their students. Activities include extended-day learning opportunities, social services and counseling programs, and programs that help families support their children's learning.

More examples of this work can be found in *Growing Community Schools: The Role of Cross Boundary Leadership*.[20] This document takes the lessens of community school initiatives at the city, district, and school level and provides the reader with insights on how to scale up and sustain these initiatives.

ENDNOTES

1 M. Blank and A. Berg, *All Together Now: Sharing Responsibly for the Whole Child* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2006).

2 *What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do: NAESP in Focus* (Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2002).

3 M. Blank, A. Melaville, and B. Shah, *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Public Schools* (Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, 2003).

4 *Breaking Ranks II* (Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).

5 *2004–2005 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Transitions and the Role of Supportive Relationships* (Rochester, NY: Harris Interactive, Inc., 2005).

6 J. Jehl, M. Blank, and M. McCloud, *Education and Community Building: Connecting Two Worlds* (Washington, DC: IEL, 2001).

7 The Coalition for Community Schools refers to *family involvement* as a "condition for learning." The Harvard Family Research Project includes it as a component of "complementary learning," which involves learning that takes place outside of school and fosters student achievement. [See: *http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~hfrp/projects/complementary-learning.html*]

8 See Henderson and Berla (1994) and U.S. Department of Education (1994, 2001) cited in Blank, Melaville, and Shah, *Making the Difference,* 27.

9 Ibid.

10 See Comer (1988) cited in *Making the Difference,* 28.

11 See Larueau (1987) cited in *Making the Difference,* 27.

12 See Catsambis (1998) cited in *Making the Difference,* 29.

13 See Iowa School Boards Association (2000) cited in *Making the Difference,* 19.

14 See Becker and Riel (1999) cited in *Making the Difference,* 30.

15 *Making the Difference,* 43.

16 *Taking Responsibility: Using Public Engagement to Reform Our Public Schools* (Washington, DC: The Public Education Network (PEN), 2004).

17 Ibid.

18 *What's Happening in School and District Leadership?* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 2005).

19 *Preparing School Principals: A National Perspective on Policy and Program Innovations* (Washington, DC: The Institute for Educational Leadership, 2003).

20 M. Blank, A. Berg, and A. Melaville, *Growing Community Schools: the Role of Cross-Boundary Leadership* (Washington, DC: The Coalition for Community Schools, 2006).

RESOURCES

Resources available through the Coalition for Community Schools

To download and for more information, go to: *www.communityschools.org* under Resources.

Blank, Martin J., Amy Berg, and Atelia Melaville. *Growing Community Schools: The Role of Cross-Boundary Leadership.* Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, 2006.

Melaville, Atelia, Amy Berg, and Martin J. Blank. *Community-Based Learning: Engaging Students for Success and Citizenship.* Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, 2006.

Melaville, Atelia, Bela P. Shah, and Martin J. Blank. *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools.* Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, 2003.

Melaville, Atelia. *Community Schools: Partnerships for Excellence.* Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, 2000.

Resources available from the National Association of Secondary School Principals

For more information, go to: *www.NASSP.org*

Constantino, S. *Making Your School Family Friendly.* Reston, VA: NASSP, 2002.

NASSP. *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform.* Reston, VA: Author, 2006.

_____. *Breaking Ranks II™: Strategies for Leading High School Reform.* Reston, VA: Author, 2004.

_____. *Bridge Builders: Establishing Effective School–Community Relationships.* Reston, VA: Author, 2003.

Resources available from the National Association of Elementary School Principals

For more information, go to: *www.NAESP.org*

NAESP. *Leading After-School Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do.* Alexandria, VA: Author, 2006.

_____. *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do.* Alexandria, VA: Author, 2005.

_____. *Sharing the Dream: Stories of Principals Actively Engaging Communities.* Alexandria, VA: Author, 2005.

_____. *Essentials for Principals: Strengthening the Connection Between School and Home.* Alexandria, VA: Author, 2001.

Resources available fromMetLife

To read the MetLife Surveys of the American Teacher, go to *www.MetLife.com* under Corporate Citizenship.

COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

VISION, MISSION, AND PARTNERS

The Coalition for Community Schools is an alliance of national, state, and local organizations in education, K–16, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government, and philanthropy as well as national, state, and local community school networks. The Coalition advocates for community schools as the vehicle for strengthening schools, families, and communities so that together they can improve student learning.

Our mission is to mobilize the assets of schools, families, and communities to create a united movement for community schools. Community schools strengthen schools, families, and communities so that together they are better able to improve student learning.

The Coalition for Community Schools partners include the following organizations:

Community Development/Community Building
Asset-Based Community Development Institute
Center for Community Change
Development Training Institute
National Community Building Network
National Congress for Community Economic Development
National Council of La Raza
National Neighborhood Coalition
National Trust for Historic Preservation
National Urban League
Police Executive Research Forum
The Harwood Institute

Education
American Association for Higher Education
American Association of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
American School Counselor Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council of Chief State School Officers
Council of the Great City Schools
Developmental Studies Center
Learning First Alliance
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Community Education
National Education Association
National PTA
National School Boards Association
National Service Learning Partnership
Pacific Oaks College, CA

Family Support / Human Services
Alliance for Children and Families
American Public Human Services Association
Child Welfare League of America
Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, University of Illinois at Chicago
Family Support America
National Center for Family Literacy
The Educational Alliance
United Way of America

Local And State Government
National Association of Counties
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Governors' Association
National League of Cities
US Conference of Mayors

Federal Government
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Learn and Serve America Twenty-First Century Learning Centers

Health And Mental Health
American Public Health Association
American School Health Association
National Assembly on School-Based Health Care
National Mental Health Association
Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education National and Recreation
UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools

Local Community School Networks
Achievement Plus Community Learning Centers, St. Paul, MN
Alliance for Families and Children, Hennepin County, MN
Baltimore Coalition for Community Schools, MD
Bates College/ Lewiston Public Schools, ME
Birmingham Public Schools, AL
Boston Excels, MA
Boston Full Service Schools Roundtable, MA
Bridges to Success, United Way of Central Indiana, Indianapolis, IN
Bridges to Success, United Way of Greater Greensboro, NC
Bridges to Success, United Way of Greater High Point, NC
Bridges to the Future, United Way of Genesse County, MI
Chatham–Savannah Youth Futures Authority, GA
Chelsea Community Schools, MA
Chicago Coalition for Community Schools, IL
Chicago Public Schools, The Campaign to Expand Community Schools in Chicago

Community Agencies Corporation of New Jersey
Community College of Aurora/Aurora Public Schools, CO
Community–School Connections, NY
Community Schools Rhode Island, RI
Evansville–Vanderburgh Corporation School Community Council, IN
Jacksonville Children's Commission, FLKidsCAN!
Lincoln Community Learning Centers Initiative, NE
Linkages to Learning, Montgomery County, MD
Local Investment Commission, Kansas City, MO
Mesa United Way, Mesa, AZ
Minneapolis Beacons Project, MN
New Paradigm Partners, Turtle Lake, WI
New Vision for Public Schools, NY
Project Success, IL
Rockland Twenty-First Century Collaborative for Children and Youth, NY
School Linked Services, Inc., Kansas City, KS
SCOPE, Central Falls, RI
St. Louis Park Schools, MN
St. Louis Public Schools, Office of Community Education, MO
Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN), Portland, OR
United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania/
First Doors to the Future, Philadelphia, PA
University of Alabama–Birmingham/Birmingham Public Schools, AL
University of Dayton/Dayton Public Schools, OH
University of Denver/Denver Public Schools, CO
University of New Mexico/United South Broadway Corp/
Albuquerque Public Schools, NM
University of Rhode Island/Pawtucket Public Schools
West Philadelphia Improvement Corps, PA

National Community School Networks

Beacon Schools Youth Development
Institute at the Fund for the City of New York
Children's Aid Society
Collaborative for Integrated School Services,
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Communities in Schools
Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania
National Community Education Association
School of the Twenty-First Century, Bush Center, Yale University

Policy, Training, And Advocacy

American Youth Policy Forum
Children's Defense Fund
Cross Cities Campaign for Urban School Reform
Education Development Center
Eureka Communities
Family Friendly Schools, VA
Foundations, Inc.
Institute for Responsive Education
Institute for Social and Education Policy, New York University
National Center for Community Education
National Center for Schools and Communities, Fordham University
John Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Stanford University
Joy Dryfoos, Independent Researcher
National Child Labor Committee
National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education
National Youth Employment Coalition
Parents United for Child Care, Boston, MA
Public Education Network
The Finance Project
RMC Research
The Rural School and Community Trust

Philanthropy

Carnegie Corporation
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
KnowledgeWorks Foundation
Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation
Polk Bros. Foundation
Rose Community Foundation
The After School Corporation
Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds

School Facilities Planning

Concordia, LLC
Council of Education Facilities Planners International
National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities
New Schools/Better Neighborhoods
Smart Growth America
Twenty-First Century School Fund

State Entities

California Department of Education
California Center for Community–School Partnerships
California Healthy Start Field Office
Child and Family Policy Center, IA
Children First, OH
Community Schools, Rhode Island
Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
University of Kentucky/Lexington Public Schools
Illinois Community School Partnership
Education Leadership Beyond Excellence
Foundation Consortium, CA
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
New Jersey School-Based Youth Services/Department of Human Services
Office of Family Resource and Youth Services Center, KY
Ohio Department of Education
State Education and Environment Roundtable
Tennessee Consortium for Full-Service Schools
Washington State Readiness-to-Learn Initiative
Voices for Illinois Children

Youth Development

Academy for Educational Development
AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research
America's Promise
Association of New York State Youth Bureaus
Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
Boys and Girls Clubs of America
California After School Partnership/Center for Collaborative Solutions
Camp Fire USA
Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth
Families of Freedom Scholarship Fund
Forum on Youth Investment
National Collaboration for Youth
National Institute for Out-of-School Time
National School-Age Care Alliance
After School Resource Network
Partnership for After School Education
YMCA of the USA

Coalition for Community Schools

Strengthening Schools, Families, & Communities

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