

How can community organizations develop strategic partnerships with schools?

Partners across Oklahoma are standing ready with resources and services to support student learning. But navigating the complexities of local school systems can be challenging. [*In School, Family and Community Partnerships*](#), Dr. Joyce L. Epstein writes, “Partnerships are not more work, but **the** work. Not harder work, but smarter work to mobilize all available resources that will contribute to student success.” To effectively mobilize these resources, partners must first understand how schools operate, how decisions are made and how their proposed partnership strategy aligns with the school’s goals and priorities.

This brief is designed to assist community organizations as they partner with schools to leverage pandemic relief resources to benefit students.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Successful partnerships require a foundation of [mutual trust and respect](#). This foundation is built by taking time to collaborate and evaluate partnership opportunities with a school, create shared goals and priorities, and strategize for long-term success. [Establishing common ground](#) in the beginning ensures partnerships are driven by what is best for students and families while creating a “win-win” for partners and schools.

There are many reasons why community partners may find it difficult to navigate the complexity of schools. Educational acronyms can be confusing. Academic calendars and daily schedules are often determined months or years in advance. Budgets, policies and procedures vary from school to school. Often, it can be difficult to determine where and

at what level (e.g., superintendent, principal, federal programs director, counselor, teacher, PTA group, etc.) to start a partnership conversation. Even schools within the same district may function differently.

Effective partnerships, [whether transactional and short term or more sustaining and long term](#), also require an investment of time and talent by everyone involved. The most transformational partnerships create space and time for the structure needed to ensure partnerships have high involvement, frequent interaction and a shared mission.

KEY INSIGHTS

- Successful partnerships should be based on mutual trust and respect to ensure all partners benefit.
- Community members and families should play a role in the partnership development process.
- Partnerships often start as small, pilot projects that grow through coordination, collaboration and dedication into strong partnerships to meet the needs of students.

SEE ALSO

- [How can schools and communities partner to provide summer learning experiences?](#)
- [TeleEDGE webinar: Partnering for Summer Learning](#)
- [How can school and community partnerships support the mental health needs of students?](#)

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Educator Marian Wright Edelman famously said, “You can’t be what you can’t see.” Diverse partnerships with school leaders and stakeholders help close opportunity and achievement gaps that exist for students.

Stakeholder feedback (e.g., forums, panels, surveys, etc.) is useful in the planning, implementation and evaluation of partnerships. By [engaging stakeholders with diverse backgrounds](#), community organizations and schools make room for partnerships with a range of worldviews, richer conversations and more comprehensive collaborations. This approach to partnerships ensures the most vulnerable students have [access to services, resources and support to meet their academic, social and emotional needs](#).

Partnerships with a diversity of input and membership create a safe, secure and supportive environment to discuss, explore and develop [cultural competence](#) strategies that can be leveraged to meet the needs of historically underserved students.

RECOMMENDED ACTION STEPS

The [National Association of State Boards of Education](#) (NASBE) has established practical steps for working with schools. When exploring partnership opportunities with schools, NASBE recommends:

- Decide what category the partnership seeks to address (i.e., curriculum, policy, practice, service provision and/or coordination, personnel, supplemental or supportive programs, etc.). Once determined, community organizations can research how decisions about that issue are made in the state, district and/or school.
- Learn as much as possible about the state, school district or school being considered for the partnership, as well as their history with or position on the type of services you would like to partner to provide.
- Seek out other partners in the community with similar goals. Many schools create [community asset maps](#) to help them pair student and family needs with community resources.
- Be prepared for three outcomes: 1) The school is not ready to implement and/or there is more work to be done; 2) The school is ready to implement the partnership with changes to the original plan; or 3) The school is ready to implement the partnership. Whatever the outcome, continue discussions and collaboration if the partnership has the potential to positively impact students.