

## Building Community-Schools Relations

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Many of today's leaders in education, business and community development are coming to realize schools alone cannot prepare our youth for productive adulthood. It is evident schools and communities should work closely with each other to meet their mutual goals. Schools can provide more support for students, families and staff when they are an integral part of the community. On the other hand, agencies can make services more accessible to youth and families by linking with schools, and they can connect better with and have an impact on hard-to-reach clients. Appropriate and effective collaboration and teaming are seen as key factors to community development, learning and family self-sufficiency.

Partnerships should be considered as connections between schools and commu-

nity resources. The partnership may involve use of school or neighborhood facilities and equipment; sharing other resources; collaborative fund raising and grant applications; volunteer assistance; mentoring and training from professionals and others with special expertise; information sharing and dissemination; networking; recognition and public relations; shared responsibility for planning, implementation and evaluation of programs and services; expanding opportunities for internships, jobs, recreation and building a sense of community.

School-community partnerships can interconnect together many resources and strategies to enhance communities that support all youth and their families. They could improve schools, strengthen neighborhoods and lead to a noticeable reduction in young people's problems. Building such partnerships requires visioning, strategic planning, creative leadership and new multifaceted roles for professionals who work in schools and communities.

### Partnerships

The following list reflects community resources that could or currently partner with schools:

**County Agencies and Bodies** (Departments of Health, Mental Health, Children & Family Services, Public Social Services, Office of Education, Police & Fire Departments, Planning Area Councils, Recreation & Parks, Library, Housing Authority, etc.)

**Municipal Agencies and Bodies** (Parks & Recreation, library, courts, civic event units)

**Post Secondary Education Institutions/Students** (Community colleges, state universities, Cooperative Extension, public & private colleges and universities, vocational colleges; specific schools within these such as Schools of Law, Education, Nursing, Dentistry, etc.)

**Service Agencies** (PTA/PTSA, United Way, Lincoln Action Program, Mediation Center, clothing & food pantry, Visiting Nurses Association, Cancer Society, Red Cross, Salvation Army, volunteer agencies, Human Services Federation)

**Service Clubs & Philanthropic Organizations** (Lion's Club, Rotary Club, veteran's groups, Woods Charitable Fund, Lincoln Community Foundation, Southeast Community Foundation, Cooper Foundation, Community Services Fund, etc.)

**Youth Agencies & Groups** (Boys & Girls Clubs, scouts, 4-H, Cedars Youth Services, Child Advocacy Center, etc.)

**Sports/Health/Fitness/Outdoor Groups** (YMCA of Lincoln, Cornhusker Place, athletic leagues, local gyms, conservation associations, etc.)

**Community-Based Organizations** (Neighborhood and homeowners' associations, Neighborhood Watch/Patrol, block clubs, housing project associations, economic development groups, community development corporations, civic associations)

**Faith Community Institutions** (The Lincoln Interfaith Council, Catholic Social Services, Lutheran Family Services, congregations and subgroups, etc.)

**Ethnic Associations** (Asian Community Center, Hispanic Community Center, Indian Center, Germans from Russia Society, etc.)

**Artists and Cultural Institutions** (Museums, art galleries, zoo, theater groups, TV & radio stations, literary clubs, art groups, writers' organizations, collector's groups)

**Businesses/Corporations/Unions** (Neighborhood business associations, Chamber of Commerce, Goodwill Industries, local shops, restaurants, banks, AAA, school employee unions)

**Media** (Local newspapers, TV & radio, local access cable)

**Family Members, Local Residents, Senior Citizens Groups**

### Online Resources Relevant to School-Community Partnerships

Building Coalitions  
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/bc-faet/index.html>

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice  
<http://www.air.org/cecp/>

Center for Community Partnerships  
<http://www.upenn.edu/ccp>

Center for Schools & Communities  
<http://www.center-school.org/>

Collaboration Framework-Addressing Community Capacity  
<http://www.cyfernet.org/nnco/framework.html>

Source: *School-Community Partnerships: A Guide*; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003

### Activities

There are a variety of activities in which schools can become involved to build/improve school-community partnerships; below are some suggestions:

**1. Encourage Community Use of School Facilities:** Often the school buildings sit empty after the end of the normal school day. Encouraging non-profit community groups to use the facilities is not only good use of resources but also provides opportunities for the school to get involved in community projects.

**2. Senior Citizens Banquet:** At least once a year, perhaps around the time of music concerts, invite senior citizens to a luncheon banquet at the school; banquet can be sponsored by a school service organization, by non-profit corporation, or by private

industry. Usually, parents are willing to come in to assist in the preparation of the meal.

**3. Back to School Week:** Choose a week during the school year to invite parents and community members to your school. Make a special effort to personally invite community and business leaders to attend school for the day, or part of the day.

**4. Career Day:** Hold annual career days; this is not only good educational experience for the students, but also helps local business people to learn more about the school and school's needs. In addition, it helps to understand the employment needs in the area.

**5. News Releases:** News releases mailed to local media could be a good strategy for public relations and community outreach programs.

**6. Newsletters:** Provide

periodic newsletters not only to the families of the students, but also to board members, business leaders and other community members. A simple database can be used to include new people; encourage members of the school community to suggest other folks who might be included in the mailing list.

**7. Honor Roll:** In the local media, publish a list of students who made significant accomplishment during the school year.

**8. Gold Cards:** Give students who earn a place on the Honor Roll a Gold card which is sponsored by participating businesses who provide discounts to those students for marking period. Some businesses provide reduced prices on items in their stores, while others allow students to have something for free, for example, a free video rental, etc.

