

School–Community Outreach Strategies

PURPOSE

These strategies are designed for educators who are doing the active work to better understand and engage with the array of stakeholders who are a part of the community. Developing relational understandings and experiences between educators and community members creates opportunities to optimize student supports and experiences.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Review the three strategies and choose one type of outreach to get started.
2. Use the strategy description and best practices to plan your outreach.
3. Return to these outreach strategies throughout the year to build on relationships, expand your connections and capture new ideas.

In this tool, you will find three strategies to facilitate relational experiences between the school and community (inclusive of families, caregivers, and the broader community):

1. Who's Already on Campus?

- There are likely many individuals and organizations working in service of the young people of the community, often sharing the same spaces or working with the same students. Before initiating the formalities and technicalities of partnership, use this tool to start building relational understandings between school and community stakeholders. Beginning with a relational process is the foundation to uncovering shared goals, understanding different approaches to engaging young people, and finding meaningful connections between areas of work.

2. Who's in the Community?

- This tool helps school staff develop understandings about and relational experiences with the individuals, organizations, programs, services and activities that exist outside of the school walls, in the community. These connections help educators better understand student context, facilitate real-world learning connections, and can provide avenues to partnership that create a holistic web of supports for students.

3. School–Community Integration Points

- Building on the relational and inquiry-based strategies above, this strategy prompts schools and community stakeholders to draw connections between their unique assets and offerings in order to facilitate collaboration and learning opportunities for young people.

Who's Already on Campus?

PURPOSE

Relationship development is foundational to successful partnerships and collaboration. Before jumping into formal strategizing about partnerships, use this tool to start making meaningful relational connections and understand the work of other community stakeholders.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Use the proposed process to learn more about existing school–community partnerships and community involvement.
2. In the future, these initial activities can serve to launch deeper and more aligned school–community partnerships and student support.

NOTE: This tool does not function to facilitate the technical implementation of formal school–community partnerships.

This process establishes a baseline of shared understanding and relational interactions between school staff and existing community partners. A common pitfall of school–community partnerships is jumping too quickly to logistics, formal partnership agreements, and transactional experiences before better understanding each entity in the partnership. Additionally, outreach between school and community groups is often deterred by pressure to formalize partnerships too quickly. This tool supports educators in initiating two-way dialogues in a low-stakes manner and better understanding the (often overlapping) goals of each stakeholder. Through these conversations and activities, robust and coordinated opportunities and supports for young people can be intentionally developed as conversations naturally progress.

Pre-Planning

First, investigate who is already operating on the school campus. Here are a few ideas to get you started and a space to record your own thinking:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Expanded learning programs (<i>after-school, summer programs</i>) | <input type="checkbox"/> Community groups and meetings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adult learning programs | <input type="checkbox"/> PTA offerings (<i>school supply and meal initiatives, workshops, clubs, etc.</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational programs (<i>sports, arts, etc.</i>) | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clinics | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Initial Outreach

Next, choose one group to connect with and plan your initial outreach (modify accordingly if you have an existing relationship). Here are some considerations to keep in mind:

- **Introduce yourself.** Who are you and what is your role? Share relevant connections to the partner group/organization.
- **State your intentions.** What are your hopes for an initial meeting? What are you hoping to learn and share? How might this lead to further interactions and understandings?
- **Focus on relationship building.** Communicate interest, curiosity, openness, and a desire to learn.

Sample outreach:

Hello, My name is Ms. North and I am an instructional coach at Valley Middle School. As you know, many of our middle school students participate in the after-school Bridge program. They are always so excited to share what they are learning and doing. I was so interested to hear about our students' experiences participating in [program activity]. I've also noticed that many students have strong connections with your staff. I would love to find some time to connect and learn more about your work in the Bridge program (program goals, approaches, activities, and anything else you would like to share!). And, I'd love to hear what questions you have for me and your partnership with the school. Would you be able to meet sometime in the upcoming weeks?

Introductory Conversation

Here are some prompts that may be helpful in an initial get-to-know-you conversation. Let the conversation flow naturally, and focus on active listening.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How did you become involved in the program/group/organization? <input type="checkbox"/> What are some of the program/organization goals? <input type="checkbox"/> Can you tell me more about how your work supports young people and/or the community? <input type="checkbox"/> How would you describe your approach to working with young people? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What are some of the activities that young people engage in? Are there any upcoming performances/events/trips? <input type="checkbox"/> What do you think young people enjoy most about working with you? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there ways that our school could better support or be involved in your work and goals? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there anything that you want to ask me? |
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Bi-directional Visitation

A great way to continue learning about each other's work, approaches to working with young people, and areas of expertise is to visit the places and spaces that support the young people of the community, and to have the community partner visit your school and sit in on some classes. See if the community partner has an interest in a bi-directional tour/visit and consider the following tips:

- **Have a student be the guide.** Have them show you around, introduce you to what they do, show you their favorite aspects of the program/class, and tell you about things they are proud of and the important people and connections they have made.
- **Make observations, without judgement.** Notice interactions between students and with adults. What do these look like? What does engagement look like? What assets and expertise are present?
- **Ask questions.** Let the visit be guided by curiosity, an openness to difference, and a desire to understand. Inquire about aspects of the environment that may differ from yours, listen for the reasoning why, and look for opportunities to make connections and learn from each other.

School Visit

Date/Time:

Student Guide:

Community Partner/Program Visit

Date/Time:

Student Guide:

What's Next?

Jot down some of your observations, people you met, connections, and wonderings you had during these initial conversations and visits. Here are some prompts to continue your dialogue and launch into deeper partnership:

- What connections did you see between your approaches and work?
- What common goals do we have?
- What would you like to learn more about?
- What ideas for follow-up do you have?
- How can you better get to know the program and people?

Who's in the Community?

PURPOSE

This tool helps school staff develop understandings about and relational experiences with the individuals, organizations, programs, services and activities that exist in the community. These connections help educators better understand student context, facilitate real-world learning connections, and can provide avenues to partnership that create a holistic web of supports for students.

DIRECTIONS:

1. On your own or with a group, choose one of the ways to become more involved in the community.
2. Process the information with others (e.g., with a colleague, a grade team, a leadership team). What did we learn? What organizations or programs are mentioned frequently? What goals and priorities for students might we share? What more do we want to know? What are some next steps?

☐ Community Crowdsourcing

Reserve whiteboard or bulletin board space near the school entrance and pose questions for the school community to contribute (e.g., *Tell us your favorite places to visit in our community or What did you do this week in our neighborhood?*)

☐ Explore the Neighborhood

Take walks through the community and pop in somewhere new each time. Mix it up and take a walk with your class or family/community members. Plan class experiences within the community and continue making school–community connections.

☐ Classroom & Caregiver Conversations

Visit or lead a Morning Meeting or Advisory to learn more about what students are doing at home or in the community. Chat with families and caregivers about their interests, skills, activities, and/or desired involvement in learning experiences.

☐ Map It Out

Use a map to find a place you haven't been to in the community and visit.

☐ Attend an Event

Find out about events in the community through conversations with students/families, explore social/media sources, fliers, etc. and attend.

+ Add your own:

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Places to think about:

- Community-based organizations
- Youth-serving organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs)
- Health/mental health providers
- Recreation and park facilities
- Libraries and bookstores
- Museums and historical sites
- Faith-based organizations
- Senior citizen organizations
- Food banks
- Parks
- Restaurants
- Local businesses
- Local colleges or universities
- Art stores or studios
- Sport-related spaces (e.g., dance, gymnastics, martial arts studios)

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SCHOOL LEADER EXTENSION:

☐ Attend a Community Meeting

School leaders who are actively involved in the community are more attuned to its assets, challenges, and stakeholders. Strong school–community coalitions can help us better understand students' context and facilitate crucial, holistic supports and experiences for students. Look into the types of community meetings happening in your area (e.g., *Board of Education meetings, community councils, community coalitions*) and attend one to start making connections.

School-Community Integration Points

PURPOSE

This tool provides examples and planning space to draw connections between experiences in the community and possibilities for their integration into school experiences and priorities.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Read through some examples of school-community integration points.
2. Use the blank template to record your own thinking.
3. Bring these ideas to planning meetings with colleagues and start to initiate connections and partnerships.

Children develop within a context of relationships that extend beyond the school walls and that are central to their learning and development. Not all school-community connections need to be formal partnerships. As educators become better acquainted with their community members and resources, holistic connections to learning can become apparent with almost every interaction. These connections not only support student learning and engagement, they contribute to a relational sense of belonging in the community and affirmation of community resources and contributors, and increase educator understanding about and involvement in the broader community.

Sample Integration Points Between Classroom and Community

Classroom/School Focus	Community Connections
Example - 3rd grade math: Visitors can help us make real-world connections to the use of fractions in baking. <i>What happens if I need to measure 1/2 cup of flour, but I only have 1/8 and 1/4 cups? What if I want to double a recipe for a birthday party?</i> These connections also provide the opportunity to make at-home connections, share recipes, have a class potluck, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tres Leches Cafe • Parents/caregivers
Example - 5th grade reading/writing: For our focus on narratives, we can invite guests to share stories and explore oral histories and narrative features, and develop relational and cultural ties to the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members at senior center • Library: People & Stories / Gente y Cuentos program • Parents/caregivers • Afterschool coaches
Example - Elementary school recess/art: There may be time at recess to make this community connection (e.g., <i>artist creates chalk art with students outside</i>). We could also do a community walk of art/murals in the neighborhood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a local artist who creates chalk art and leaves inspirational messages throughout the neighborhood
Example - Middle school art/music: I wonder if the owner could support in set design for our upcoming school play. Would the owners be interested in a community mentorship, sharing about running their family-owned business?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main Street Hardware Store
Example - High school advisory: Rather than focus just on the technical aspects of admissions, we can talk to community members about their experiences and allow time for Q&A in Advisory. Outside of school hours, we can organize a panel discussion composed of adults and students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school alumni • Upper-grade parents/caregivers • Local college admissions counselor
Example - Any grade: There is an opportunity to expand our current curriculum about the government with guest speakers from our local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor, town/city council, local official (e.g., judge)
Example - School leader: I have reached out to attend their next planning meeting. I also plan to host a Community Coffee Hour to invite community members to the school to discuss our intersecting goals around student intervention and enrichment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Community Cares Coalition (<i>youth center, parks and rec department, library, community leaders</i>) are in conversation about expanding after-school offerings for teens in the community.

Use the following template to make your own connections (*for example: plan a field trip, invite someone to share with the classroom or school community, request resources or expertise, engage to support a specific student, etc.*). There is no right or wrong way to start! You may have some connections right away, or you may fill in one column and let the ideas simmer.

Integration Points Between Classroom and Community	
Classroom/School Focus	Community Connections