

Work with Community Partners

Introduction

While schools should strive to provide in-house support and interventions as part of their approach to mental health, there are often times where the needs of students may exceed a school's capability. In partnership with the surrounding community, schools can offer a seamless continuum of support to a large population of students with and without mental health difficulties. Strategic and aligned community partnerships ensure students receive consistent mental health support, increase access to a broad range of community services, and expand professional learning opportunities for mental health promotion, intervention, and treatment. A strong school–community partnership increases the health of both the school community and the community at large. This can be achieved through learning opportunities for staff and community members, a shared vision and responsibilities, careful planning, and the creation systems for feedback and information sharing.

Guidance to Get You Started

- **Develop strategic and aligned partnerships** that support school-wide mental health initiatives. Partners should include those who can support mental health initiatives within the school (e.g. local yoga studio) as well as provide services outside of the school (therapists and counselors). Seek out collaborations with partners who will truly share ownership over positively impacting the lives of children and families. You may want to consider establishing partnerships with the following entities:
 - Healthcare providers
 - Community-based non-profits
 - Out-of-school time partners
 - Juvenile justice system
 - Contracted service providers
- **Create channels of communication and collaboration between school stakeholders and external partners.** Consider what the student referral process will be like and how continued communication (e.g. between a child's teacher and therapist) will function and be maintained. One potential avenue for creating seamless communication between entities is to invite community partners to be part of the school SEL team alongside staff, students, and families.
- **Meet regularly with all stakeholders in the partnership** to review priorities, goals, and needs. These meetings between entities also continue to build relationships and trust, develop a common vocabulary, and learn the same content and best practices. Additionally, develop strategies for data management and review in order to properly

A Look at Some Benefits

Environment Within and Beyond School

The community in which a student lives, beyond their direct family unit and school community, is a critical developmental environment. When schools work with the community, it can provide consistency and continuity.

Individual Factors

Community partnerships can expand the range of resources and support available to individual students helping to address a broader range of needs and providing further opportunities for all students to develop individual factors critical to mental health.

Relationships with Others

Community partnerships can broaden the range of individuals that students are able to interact with, helping them to form relationships with peers and adults from different contexts and backgrounds.

Research suggests that partnerships between external community entities may promote:

- Streamlined access to services, fewer conflicts with services delivery, access to a broader array of services, enhanced communication between agencies. (Impact Report)
- Increased efficiency and sustainability of mental health initiatives (National Center for School Mental Health)
- A more positive association with student achievement (Wood & Bauman, 2017)
- Increased understanding of and support for the work being done in schools from boards of education and policymakers (National Center for School Mental Health)
- Increased connection to the improvement and success of the broader community (Cohen, 2006)
- An increase in the school's reputation and positive perception by students, family, and the community (Wood & Bauman, 2017)

assess partnerships, make adjustments, and decide if new/ additional partnerships need to be developed to support all students in the community.

- **Cultivate students' community awareness and engagement** by having them conduct community research and interviews or take community tours. Involving students in both the selection and maintaining of stakeholder engagement can teach a variety of skills beyond mental health goals.

Additional Resources to Explore

Nine Elements of Effective School Community Partnerships to Address Student Mental Health, Physical Health, and Overall Wellness

Strong school–community partnerships are essential for a world-class, 21st-century education, and more and more communities across the country are creating such partnerships. The Coalition for Community Schools and the National Association of School Psychologists outline nine key elements necessary for creating and sustaining effective partnerships to improve student mental health, physical health, and overall wellness.

Building a Community Model for Student Behavioral Health

A joint effort between Boston Public Schools and community agencies provides students with access to targeted behavioral health services.