

# Creating School and Community Partnerships



The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model provides a collaborative approach to learning and health that emphasizes the community as a critical partner in student well-being and success.<sup>1</sup> **Community engagement** happens when schools and communities work together to create solutions. The key is engaging community perspectives from people with diverse backgrounds and identities, including a variety of racial/ethnic identities, nationalities, languages, religions, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, and socioeconomic statuses. Imagine a community with strong leaders striving to improve student health, support families, and create a shared responsibility for students.<sup>2</sup> Strong partnerships between schools and their communities are crucial to student well-being and success.

## How can my school create community partnerships that work?<sup>3,4</sup>

- **Learn about your community.** Who is part of your community? Who are your community's leaders? How does the community define itself? How does your community currently engage with your school? What is the history of the school and the community, and how does that history inform current relationships between your school and community? What shared values and goals do your school and community share?

**Action:** Set aside a regular time to reach out and meet with community members and leaders in their own spaces. Learn their stories and their goals for improving the community and the school.

- **Learn your needs and strengths.** How can you use assessments such as the School Health Index to evaluate the needs and strengths of your school? What can you do to combine the results of these assessments with your community's concerns and goals to set priorities and create a strong strategic plan?

### Nonprofit in Nevada partners with local school district to support healthy students

“Create a Change Now is a local community organization that works to educate and empower children and families. We partner with schools in the Clark County School District to provide unique hands on opportunities for our students and families to engage in healthy living through nutrition, fitness and mindfulness education.”

Lisa Campbell, Chief Executive Officer,  
Create a Change Now, NV

**Action:** Collaborate with community stakeholders to develop a prioritized list of the school's needs and action items.

- **Determine specific strategic actions with community partners.** What are some specific activities that your school and community can do together? Who are the logical partners for meeting some of the school's needs?

**Action:** Invite community leaders to be members of your school health team. Determine specific priority needs on which your school and community can work together to develop an action plan.

- **Involve diverse stakeholders.** Is your school health team reflecting the diverse voices of the school and community? Are the school and community practicing cultural humility, including self-reflection on how individual backgrounds affect situations? Do the school needs you identified as part of your action plan equitably address the success of the students?

**Action:** Use data to assess the diverse needs of students, staff, and community members. Include voices from your school health team that represent the diversity of your student body and staff. Practice cultural humility by listening to your community members and encouraging Photovoice and other expressive communication methods—especially among students.

### Partnerships that support student health in Arizona

“We are working with our community partners at Sun Life Family Health Center to build a health clinic on our school campus so that we may provide general medical, dental, counseling support for families.”

Melissa Sadorf, Superintendent,  
Stanfield Elementary School District, AZ

## What can schools and communities do together?

Many schools have limited resources, making it a challenge to meet the diverse needs of students and their families. Community partners can help:

- Arrange for schools to serve as hubs to organize and deliver a range of services beyond their traditional core offerings;
- Build individual and institutional networks, assets, and resources—like facilities, materials, skills, and economic power—to promote school and community health;
- Provide wraparound services that students need to be successful, such as health care and social services;
- Offer learning and enrichment activities to strengthen student outcomes and skills.<sup>5</sup>

## How do schools and communities benefit from partnering?

Schools and communities know that engagement works best when both schools and communities are benefiting from the partnership. When schools and communities work together, you can:

- Recognize shared values and interests.
- Use inclusive decision-making processes.
- Help community members engage with schools and youth in a meaningful way.

## Where can you learn more about authentic community engagement?

- [Virtual Healthy School Resource List by WSCC Components](#)
- [Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0: Collaborative Strategies to Advance Student Learning](#)
- [Community Schools: Promoting Student Success: A Rationale and Results Framework](#)
- [The Six Pillars of Community Schools Toolkit: NEA Resource Guide for Educators, Families & Communities](#)
- [Community Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [CDC School Health Index](#)
- [Parents for Healthy Schools](#)
- [Cultural Humility](#)

### THINK CREATIVELY:

**Who should your school partner with to better support students?**

- Community leaders, such as local pastors, community elders, community health workers, and council members
- Local organizations, such as chambers of commerce, local nonprofits, and civic organizations
- Local businesses, such as small stores, local restaurants, and beauty salons and barbershops
- Health or social service organizations, such as hospitals, clinics, private practices, and insurers
- Churches, faith-based organizations, and the clubs connected with them
- Youth-serving organizations, such as after-school programs and recreation centers
- Technical and community colleges, universities, and trade schools
- Agricultural extension services and master gardener programs

### References:

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