



UTILIZING THE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

The Minnesota Alliance With Youth works to ensure all young people are connected to their communities, have hope for the future, and are able to realize their dreams. One of the key ways we are able to achieve those goals is through mobilizing communities to become more engaged with youth and vice versa. We firmly believe that all young people have strengths and assets that can and should be tapped into by their communities. We also believe that communities – schools, churches, businesses, government, families, and youth themselves – have much to offer young people. The Alliance is committed to providing technical assistance to communities, schools, and organizations who are developing School-Community Partnerships as a strategy for engaging youth and communities. One way this is accomplished is through the Alliance’s AmeriCorps Promise Fellow program (see more at www.mnyouth.net) .

As young people develop and grow through their middle and high school years, increasingly, they are missing two essential resources/promises that the school-community partnerships can make possible for them:

- Caring, focused, long-term relationships with adults in addition to their parents/guardians
- Opportunities to be heard and make a difference in their communities – to believe they are full of assets and not deficits.

Adding these two elements into their lives during adolescence redirects youth toward a positive future that results in academic improvement, positive social development, and youth ownership of their own possibilities. Communities need to make the choice to invest in youth in a variety of ways.

What is the School-Community Partnership?

School-Community Partnerships (SCP) are collaborative networks of community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, school staff, parents, business leaders, government officials, and youth who are working to ensure that all young people in their community have access to the fundamental resources they need to be successful: caring adults; safe places; a healthy start; effective education; and an opportunity to give back. These partnerships recognize that schools alone cannot educate young people. In addition, they commit to authentically engage youth in the life of the community. The schools and communities that choose to work collaboratively to make these investments possible – accomplish more together than any individual school, city government, or community group could accomplish alone.

Why investment in Youth & Communities matters:

When disadvantaged children go to a quality preschool the graduation rate from high school is 65%. *When support continues through childhood and adolescence the graduation rate increases to 91%. (University of Chicago)*

It costs taxpayers almost \$2 million dollars in criminal justice costs, victim costs, drug abuse related costs, lost wages and taxes for each young person that drops out of school and embraces a life of crime and drug use. (Vanderbilt University)

What do School-Community Partnerships Do?

School-Community Partnerships typically start out by identifying areas that they wanted to develop or strengthen as a group. Typically, SCPs work on improving communication (to avoid duplication), assessing the political climate within a community for engaging youth as assets, or developing more intentional means of collaborating across programs. The groups typically meet bi-monthly or quarterly and provide ongoing financial, human, and programmatic resources (such as access to space, materials, etc) to the work of the Partnership. For many SCPs, hosting an AmeriCorps Promise Fellow through the Alliance is the first time they have a dedicated person who can support the partnership's efforts in the community.

How does an SCP work?

Partnerships work collaboratively to share ideas for how to connect youth to the community, often through service projects, leadership opportunities (such as serving on boards, city council, etc) as well as after-school programs. The members of the partnership identify what resources they have to contribute. For example, a businessperson or a group of businesses might recognize they have financial resources they could contribute to help cover the cost of transportation for after-school activities. In assisting the community in this way, those businesses also garner more respect and visibility through their philanthropic giving. A faith community might offer to provide space for activities or provide space in their monthly newsletter so the Fellow or another member can recruit volunteers. In return, the organization connects with the community in a new way. A representative from the city council might propose developing a youth advisory to explore how the city council can promote more youth-friendly policies and programs.

The members of SCP connect intentionally with the school system to support its efforts to educate young people as well as engage families in the education process. This requires that schools make concerted efforts to involve members outside the typical school system to invest in their students. Schools will need to work to make volunteer opportunities accessible to youth and adults as well as provide space and time for youth workers to engage youth in co-curricular activities such as tutoring programs, service-learning clubs, 4-H leadership programs, etc. In turn, schools become the central meeting space for all members of the community, not just those who have students enrolled. As community members are more connected to the school through a variety of means, one could argue the more likely they will be able to find support for school funding and programs in the community.

The school-community partnerships that host AmeriCorps Promise Fellows commit to:

- Work together to change community stereotypes about youth who are failing, and the community's responsibility to provide a different path for them;
- Thoughtfully choose a cohort of at least 25 youth to participate in the program managed by the Fellow; and
- Bring resources to the partnership in the form of caring adult volunteers to work with youth, a supportive environment in which the Promise Fellow can help make the partnership's dreams a reality, and financial and in-kind resources.

Examples of potential members of the SCP:

School teachers, administration and support staff
Families & Parents & Youth

Youth-supporting Organizations (ex. Local mentoring organization, after-school program staff, teen drop out prevention specialists, etc)

Government officials (ex. Mayor or representative from county/regional state office)

Businesspeople (ex. Owner of a shop where youth tend to congregate, members of the local Rotary or Kiwanis club, etc)

Law enforcement (ex. Town or county sheriff, probation officer, etc)

Faith Community Representative (ex. Pastor, rabbi, imam, youth pastor, or other clergy)

SCP members may be involved in inviting new members to be part of the team as well throughout the year.

School Community Partnership Development

The Alliance is often asked: what does a functioning SCP look like? Below are typical characteristics of partnerships from a beginning to advance level. The size and scope of the partnership will change overtime, but generally new SCPs are made up of 4-6 individuals and/or organizations and while advanced ones may have upwards of 20-30 individuals and/or organizations represented who may be split up into working groups of smaller sizes to tackle certain issues or projects.

Beginning Partnerships: Stakeholders Identified but few Formal Processes in Place

- The partnership may have a meeting schedule, but does not have an established process for communication between meetings. Members of the partnership are new to each other and/or have only informal communication networks.
- The partnership has no goals or only recently defined goals and has not collected information to measure its progress toward achieving goals.
- The political climate of the partnership is unknown, neutral, or may be negative. The leadership of the partnership is not yet established, is informal, or is unclear.
- The partnership needs many resources, including financial, in-kind, and/or human.
- The partnership does not have a plan for choosing, replacing, or sustaining partners and resources.

Proficient Partnerships: Systems are Working, but where to next?

- The partnership has a meeting schedule and working systems for communication between meetings.
- The partnership has defined its goals, members agree to the goals, and there is a plan to collect data to measure goal achievement.
- The political climate of the partnership is positive. The leadership of the partnership may be limited to a small number of individuals, but is respected.
- The partnership has some, but not all, of its needed resources, including financial, in-kind, and human.
- The partnership has discussed how to sustain, replace, and add partners and resources.

Advanced Partnerships: Established Systems, Goals, & a Diversity of Partners

- The partnership has open and clear communication. There is an established process for communication between meetings. Members of the partnership feel connected to each other and have informal and formal communication networks at all levels.

- The partnership has clear goals and methods for collecting data. The partnership regularly collects and uses data to measure goal achievement and refine goals as needed.
- The history and environment surrounding power and decision making is positive. The leadership facilitates and supports team building, and capitalizes upon diversity and individual, group and organizational strengths.
- The partnership understands the community, including its people, cultures, values and habits.
- The partnership has access to needed resources, including financial, in-kind, and human.
- The partnership has a plan for sustaining partners and resources. This involves partner guidelines and plans for replacement of partners.

School-Community Partnership Development Resources

Borden, L. and Perkins, D (1999, April) "Assessing Your Collaboration: A Self-Evaluation Tool" Journal of Extension Volume 37 Number 2. <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999april/tt1.html>

Search Institute www.search-institute.org. Special thanks to Nancy Tellett-Royce.

School-Family-Community Partnerships resource report
www.nwrel.org/partnerships/cloak/booklet-one.pdf

Community Schools assessment booklet: www.communityschools.org/assessmentnew.pdf

Detailed report on the national standards for School/Family/Community Partnerships:
http://www.doe.state.in.us/publications/pdf_other/SFCPnarrative.pdf

Short checklist for schools to measure their family-community partnerships:
dpi.wi.gov/fscp/pdf/fchk1st.pdf