

PARTNERSHIPS, NOT PUSHOUTS

A Guide for School Board Members: Community Partnerships for Student Success

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This framework for school board members has been developed by organizations representing thousands of students, educators, parents, and policymakers from across the country. Special thanks to a working group of school board members from NSBA's National Black Caucus of School Board Members, National Caucus of American Indian/Alaska Native School Board Members, National Hispanic Caucus of School Board Members, and the Council of Urban Boards of Education for their thought leadership in helping shape this document. We all recognize that great public schools can support the success of all children only if the richness and strengths of communities are reflected in the way schools promote student well-being, foster healthy relationships, and support community development.

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I. Students & Policies We Need

In today's global economy, a high-quality, comprehensive education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite for success. Such an education must promote academic knowledge and skills, as well as the kind of individual and social competencies that are essential for navigating the relationships and challenges of the modern world. Because economic progress and educational achievement are inextricably linked, educating every American student to graduate from high school—academically, socially, and emotionally prepared for college and a career is a national imperative.



To ensure the success of this national imperative, we must provide all students with a positive, supportive, safe, challenging, and equitable learning environment. Such an environment is dependent on the people who work in the schools, an intentional plan, and policies that encourage stronger student-centered supports and community, and school partnerships.

These partnerships require school boards to move toward educational models that strive to educate the whole child and involve the entire community.

Over the past decade, progress has been made to keep students engaged and to bolster rates of college and career readiness. One progress indicator is high school graduation rates. The national high school graduation rate for the class of 2010 reached approximately 75 percent.¹ This is an 8 percent increase since 2000. For African American and Latino students, the gains in

graduation rates since 2000 have been especially significant, with as much as double digit increases. Despite these gains, far too many young people, mainly students of color from educationally and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups and communities, are leaving school without a high school diploma or severely underprepared for college level work. It is estimated that 1 million students will fail to graduate on time each year, a loss of 5,500 students each day.²

According to recent analysis, every student who leaves high school without a diploma costs society hundreds of thousands of dollars over the student's lifetime in lost income. Studies show high school graduates will obtain higher employment and earnings than students who drop out. It is estimated that if the current dropout rate could be reduced by just half, it would yield almost 700,000 new graduates a year, resulting in a net benefit to the public of nearly \$90 billion for each year of success, or nearly \$1 trillion after 11 years.

The impact of missed educational opportunities is significant, whether it's in a child's early years, or in high school and college. Research shows that what happens in schools has a great impact on whether a student stays in school and graduates. Even for students who have difficult home lives, dropping out usually can be explained by the cumulative impact of negative learning experiences, punitive disciplinary responses, low adult expectations, disengagement and a lack of academic and emotional support at school and in the community. These all contribute to a complex mix of school system inadequacies and challenging student school experiences that can be the main drivers for explaining "pushouts" in low-income and rural communities.³

A Primer on Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

(Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning)



High quality education in academic, social, and emotional learning includes two complementary approaches: (1) explicit instruction designed to directly promote academic, social, and emotional learning, and (2) the creation of positive learning environments and school climate that foster conditions and experiences, such as healthy and affirming relationships with adults and peers, positive role models, and appropriately stimulating and well-structured curricula, where students feel safe and engaged, and where deep learning can occur. The effectiveness of programming that promotes students' academic, social, and emotional learning is well-established. A meta-analysis of 213 studies showed that, on average, educational programs designed to promote social and emotional learning were capable of producing 11 percentile-point gains in academic achievement, compared to traditional educational programs that were not designed to directly promote social and emotional competencies.

SELF-AWARENESS: The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and how these influence behavior. Self-awareness also includes the ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.

SELF-MANAGEMENT: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.

SOCIAL AWARENESS: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms.

Framework for Student-Centered Supports



(Based on Datnow, A. Levin, B., Carrier, N. (2012). *Changing School District Practices. The Students at the Center Series*. Retrieved at www.nmef.org.)

“Pushouts” occur when students leave school before graduation because of a system and community that are not committed to their success. Sometimes, students also become victim of pushout through out-of-school suspensions, a national crisis affecting more than 3 million students per year, especially students of color. This suggests that to be effective, efforts to improve student achievement must address adult behavior, personal student factors and systemic issues that push students out of school. It also offers an important reminder that student support efforts must start as early as possible, and be comprehensive in nature, much before high school.

Both equity and economics demand a different path in education. The urgency to meet new college-and-career-ready standards has never been greater, given the record number of children living in poverty and a rapidly changing student population with unique needs. *It is critically important for educators, parents, community members, and policymakers to come together to establish a new “supports- and opportunity-based” vision for education reform that promotes policy change built around the needs and strengths of students and families.* The visual to the left captures the key aspects of supports-based schools; capacity, climate, community and system cohesion.

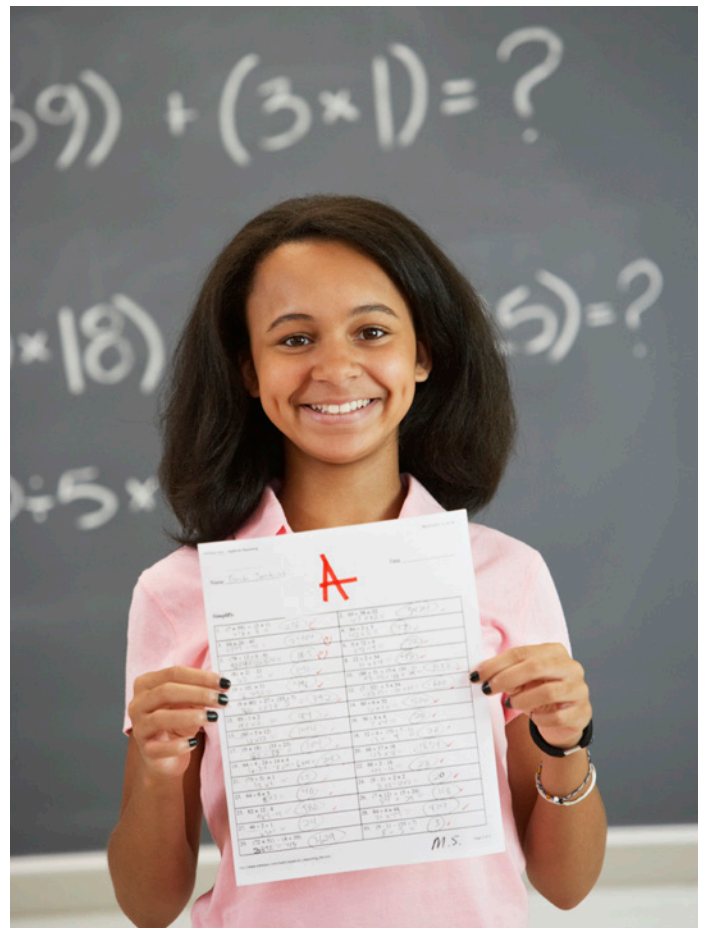
A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

This policy guide is designed to provide school board members with a blueprint for better-coordinated support and opportunity systems for children and families, in partnership with key stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, other school staff, principals, district officials, community partners, and elected officials so all children can benefit from a Personal Opportunity Plan—from the time they enter the public school system until they graduate from college. This guide examines the role of individualized learning plans and the leveraging of community partnerships in delivering more time, attention, and personalized and tailored resources directly to students. It is structured so policymakers can build on concrete action steps to adapt strategies to meet their own local needs. It also gives school board members a chance to examine current district partnerships and determine what new efforts and capacity might be needed to promote and sustain more comprehensive and cohesive education models. These whole-child strategies—centered on the academic, social, emotional, and physical health of every student—require a different type of policy vision and school design, as well as deep partnerships in order to be successful.

II. What are Personal Opportunity Plans (POPs)?

Personal Opportunity Plans are student-centered and student-directed plan that maximize a student's academic, social, emotional, and college and career development and foster success in school and life. "They are not a one-time activity, but an ongoing process by which the student defines, explores, and then refines his or her interests and goals throughout the school system."

- POPs are a vehicle for teachers, school staff, and community partners to collaborate in support of students.
- POPs support students' learning and opportunity planning from one year to the next.
- POPs are not intended to be a compliance mechanism for teachers and administrators, but rather part of the culture driving school-community decisions from the time a student enters the system.
- POPs support students' self-assessment of their academic progress, college and career readiness, and social and emotional development.
- POPs support student and parent review and reflection of students' school data.
- POPs support students in making the best decisions, based on their personal strengths, academic qualifications, interests, study and career aspirations, and postsecondary opportunities.
- POPs engage students (and families) in activities and work tasks focused on completion of graduation exit requirements and postsecondary plans.
- POPs document students' school accomplishments, participation in youth development opportunities, and recognitions, honors, and awards.
- POPs track students' behavior as well as physical, social, and emotional well-being.
- POPs track the status, progress, and results of academic, behavioral, and mental health interventions.



III. All Students Benefit from Personal Opportunity Plans (POPs)

All students, no matter the zip code, can benefit from schools that are closely attuned to their academic, social, emotional and health strengths and needs. However, as the U.S. student population continues to become more ethnically and racially diverse, students of color in particular can experience enormous benefits from Personal Opportunity Plans and more targeted supports.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, for the first time in history, children of color represent the majority of babies born in the U.S.. It is projected that by 2050, about 50 percent of the U.S. population will be African American, Latino or Asian. Thus, the future viability of the nation's communities, labor force, and democracy will be predicated largely on the mobility and opportunities provided for children of color.

When students leave school without completing their academic goals, they lose an important opportunity to succeed. While the factors related to the push out crisis affect all students, it disproportionately impacts students of color; special education students; English Language Learners; foster care youth; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth; teen parents; and students in the juvenile justice system and alternative education settings.

Research reveals that students of color, particularly males, are the group most likely to be pushed out. In the 2009-10 school year, the overall graduation rate for Black males in the U.S. was only 52 percent—higher than the rate of 47 percent two years ago, but still leaving nearly half of Black male students without a critical key to their future well-being. This crisis is affecting Latinos as well, with only 58 percent of Latino male ninth-graders graduating from high school four years later.⁵ Similarly, for some Asian groups the graduation rates are low: 40 percent of Cambodians and Hmong and 32 percent of Laotian populations do not complete high school.⁶

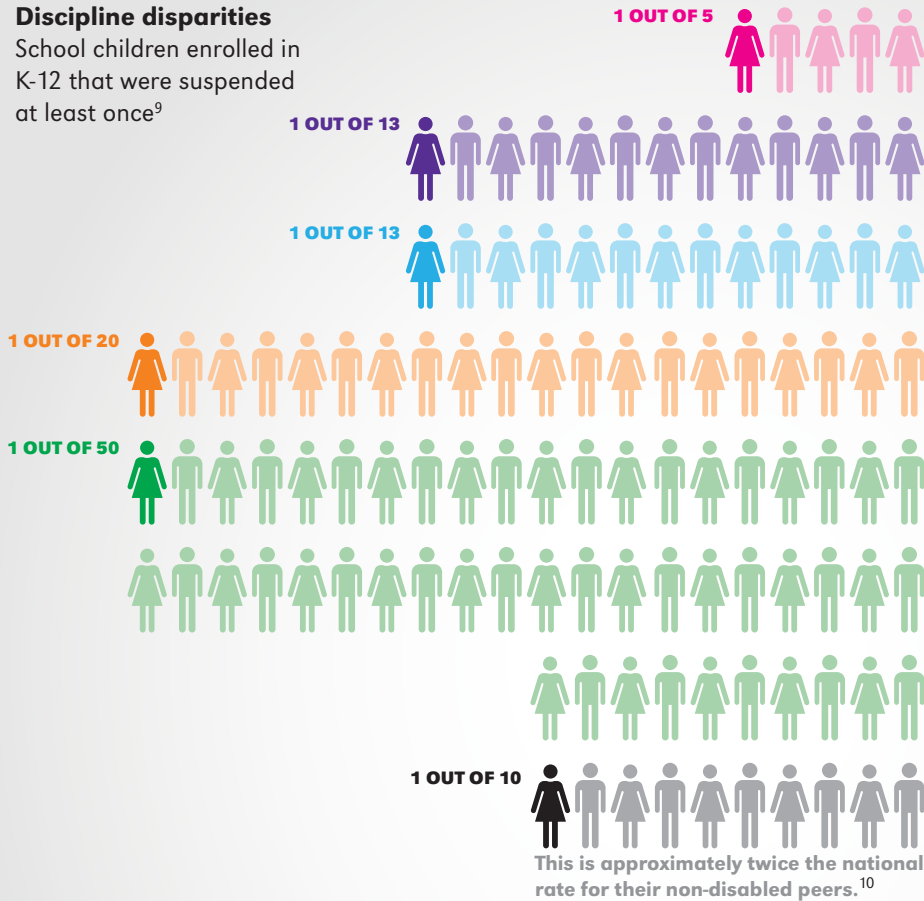


As advocates for equity and excellence in public education, school boards play an instrumental role in addressing the pushout crisis through effective board leadership and governance. Boards set the district-wide vision, focus on student learning needs, provide structure and resources for success and advocate for academic excellence for all students within their district. Boards must also use their position to design, support, and implement policies that address the needs of students, schools, and communities.

Opportunity Gaps Driving Student Pushout

Discipline disparities

School children enrolled in K-12 that were suspended at least once⁹



- African American
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Latino
- Caucasian
- Asian American/Pacific Islander
- Students with Disabilities

Access to pre-k disparities

50%

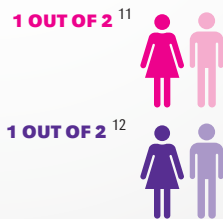
of poor children in kindergarten are ready to learn at age 5.⁷

1 out of 2

3- and 4-year-old children are not enrolled in preschool.⁸

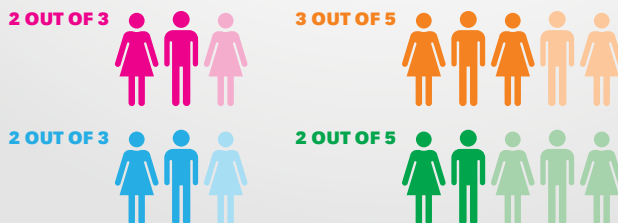
Resource disparities

(funding, staffing, curricula, enrichment) Students attending schools that do not offer a full range of math and science courses



College-going rates

Students not enrolled in college or university¹³



No access to adult mentor



4 out of 5

youth do not have a mentor for academic, emotional and social success.¹⁴

IV. Community Schools: One Strategy for Delivering POPs

Personal Opportunity Plans provide tailored supports similar to Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and can work more effectively if structured under a broader framework of school and community partnerships known as “community schools.” They represent one of many strategies for delivering personalized supports for students. Community Schools build upon the assets, expertise, and unique needs of each community in which the school is situated. They mirror the reality that schools cannot effectively serve students and families on their own.

As Melaville & Blank state, “One of the most important, cross-cutting social policy perspectives to emerge in recent years is an awareness that no single institution can create all the conditions that young people need to flourish....”

Schools, families and communities must work together to meet the needs of our children. Each entity shares common goals related to the educational, physical health, and social and emotional well-being of children and youth within the classroom and community. School-community partnerships can weave together critical resources and enhance strategies that students and their families can use to promote success in school and beyond. Community schools offer a multifaceted strategy for delivering Personal Opportunity Plans to students.

Community schools broadly share a common set of attributes, including:

- Meeting the needs of children and their families academic and social emotional supports through partnerships and wrap-around services.
- Engaging instructional approaches and robust and well-rounded curriculum including arts, sports, and other creative activities.
- Expanding and restructuring the school day to maximize learning time and enrichment experiences.
- Including families, community members, and school staff in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of school progress.

- Supporting a school-site leadership team, often comprised of educators, union representatives, parents, community partners, and others that is responsible for creating a shared vision for the school, identifying desired results and helping align and integrate the work of partners into the school.
- Investing in a full-time community school coordinator to recruit and nurture community partnerships to contribute to the outcomes determined by the school-site leadership team.

Defining Community Schools

As defined by the Coalition for Community Schools and Title I guidance (U.S. Department of Education, Sept. 2, 2009), a community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. It provides academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement, and brings together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities for children, youth, families, and communities. The school is generally open for extended hours for everyone in the community. Community schools may operate in all or a subset of schools in a Local Education Agency.

Principles for Emerging Community Schools Supporting POPs

Not every school may be ready to fully implement a community school strategy right away. The following three key principles of community schools can be used by any site to begin to incorporate into its practices ways of increasing staff capacity and impact for Personalized Opportunity Plans:

1. **Assets and needs assessment:** Each school conducts an assets and needs assessment based on input from school staff, students, and families. The assessment should reveal the school's strengths and programs to build on, as well as identify needs that aren't currently being met. This assessment will help inform what infrastructure is needed to ensure that POPs can be implemented successfully.
2. **Collaborative leadership structure:** School-level decisions are made and discussed, not only by an administrator but also by a leadership council representing teachers, other school staff, students, families, and community members. This diversified and collaborative leadership structure brings in more perspectives and gives stakeholders shared ownership of student success.
3. **School-community partnerships:** Partnerships should fill in any gaps in services the district may have and help strengthen current school programs. These partnerships can support students through health and wellness services and provide them with enriching learning opportunities through afterschool activities, internships, career shadowing, and more to enhance their personalized opportunity plans.

When implemented with meaningful community participation, community schools can meet many needs and provide enriching opportunities for students, families, and the community. Rather than dismantling neighborhood public schools, community schools seek to coordinate resources and community partners into schools to support and enhance the learning of students and strengthen the fabric of the community.

Community schools represent one of many strategies to support the delivery of Personal Opportunity Plans. The community school coordinator works with students, teachers, and families to ascertain what students need for support (mental health, dental, physical health, etc.) and what they seek for enrichment (whether students are interested in science, art, etc.). The coordinator then finds community partners to address these needs and offer enrichment activities for students, giving students more support and opportunities than they would be able to access otherwise. In this way, Personal Opportunity Plans are

maximized at community schools through the critical role of the coordinator who develops those partnerships for students.

There are exemplary community school initiatives across the country, and a network of these schools working at a systems level to achieve results and emphasize more comprehensive and personalized learning approaches. From the 35 community learning centers in Cincinnati, Ohio, to the more than 70 SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) schools, in Multnomah County, Oregon, to the district-wide growth of community schools in Oakland, California, many places are demonstrating how to implement POPs effectively in a customized way.

V. Community Framework for Personal Opportunity Plans

School board members can help lead a policy vision for public schools, in partnership with community organizations, school administrators, and teachers unions to place student learning and growth at the center of communities, from cradle to career. An integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development requires visionary policy thinking. It also demands a notion of teaching and learning that emphasizes real-world learning through community problem solving and service.



For school board members looking for an action framework for implementing a community vision for public education, a systems approach model—centered on personalized supports and resources for all students—represents a very promising option. It requires buy-in from key people (such as students, parents, teachers, and other school staff, principals, district officials, community members, and elected officials), and a process that translates a policy idea on paper into real action in the classroom and at school sites.

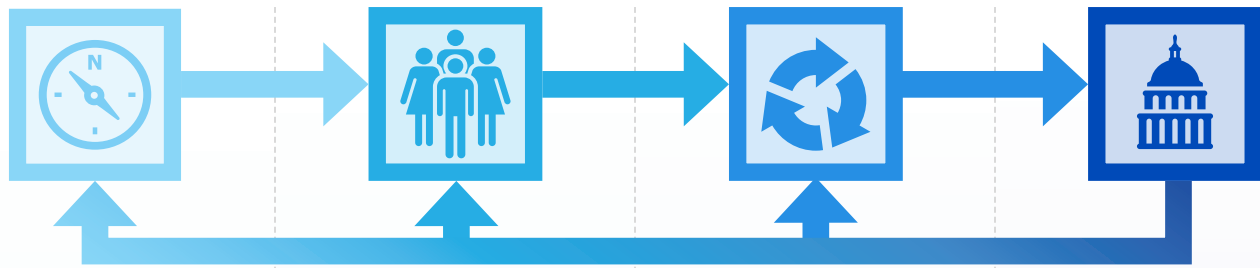
Personal Opportunity Plans reflect a deep respect for diversity and for each student’s unique characteristics, assets, and future goals. POPs recognize that each student’s family and community are also unique. For that reason, POPs engage each student’s entire support system in the process of fostering student growth and development. School boards play an essential role in this

process in working with school administrators and teachers unions to establish policies and an infrastructure that will support this vision and approach. In turn, teachers and educational leaders play a direct role in setting and consistently communicating high expectations for each student. For example, school personnel, including principals, teachers, and other staff all know students by name. Students are organized and supported in setting and achieving effective goals, and they feel respected and valued in the process. Teachers have the time to collaborate regularly to determine the best ways to meet student needs or change courses if a current strategy is not resulting in student growth and development.

Students and teachers spend time working together and they have a sense of community derived from sharing ideas and developing plans together. Students feel they belong in the school community and are genuinely bonded to school. They have strong, mutually respectful relationships with their teachers as well as feel connected to their peers. As a result, students can consistently show progress and growth in their learning over time. When highly effective school leaders, teachers, and other school staff work with community partners, great things are possible—for students, and for their families.

This section outlines four key elements needed for implementing a “supports-based vision” from policy to the classroom, including people, processes, and plans. The next section will show how personalized instruction and supports for students can be augmented through the implementation of a community schools framework.

Process for Implementing Student-Centered Supports



Policies that work require input of students, parents, and educators every step of the way



PLAN

- Create and sustain partnerships from pre-K to higher-education continuum, taking into account critical student transitions through resolutions or memorandums of understandings.
- Develop an integrated and cohesive system to support resolutions or memorandums of understanding.
- Articulate a clear process for student growth and success for each student.
- Develop school-wide strategies to weave in POPs efforts throughout the school day and beyond (including before and after school and during school breaks).
- Invest in professional development of teachers, community partners—and, when applicable, community school resource coordinators—in effective ways that integrate POPs into instruction.



PEOPLE

- Establish meaningful professional relationships geared towards supporting children and families from all public sectors.
- Involve educators and school personnel, higher education partners, parents, families, caretakers, afterschool providers, health and wellness providers, local businesses, community-based and faith-based organizations, and elected officials.
- Include parents, relatives, and anyone else students consider to be their family.
- Appoint a Community School Coordinator.



PROCESS

- Establish a common understanding of student and family needs and areas for desired enrichment.
- Coordinate efforts between school and community partners from a student's early years until their graduation.
- Establish timelines, budgets, protocol, and priorities for use of resources (financial and human) to meet student needs and enrichment most effectively.



POLICIES

- Support strategies of community schools' delivery of POPs.
- Provide strategic district thinking and structures for successful implementation.
- Establish MOUs between key partners and stakeholders to establish shared resource agreements to distribute people and resources thoughtfully.
- Use non-policy structures (i.e. regional roundtables) to better coordinate efforts among key constituents.

VI. What School Board Members Need to Know



School boards play a crucial role in creating the vision, establishing the framework, and providing the resources for developing a student-centered environment that addresses the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students. School board members must be knowledgeable about the needs of their students, teachers, and other school staff as well as the community resources available to address the needs for the teaching and learning environment. The themes below can be used

to help identify and implement evidence-based policies and practices, such as Personal Opportunity Plans and community school designs that support the education of the whole child. They can also help drive district thinking around leveraging various community partners to strengthen and enhance the educational experiences of students. The themes touch on the role of capacity, climate, community, and cohesion as critical elements of a community schools effort driven by Personal Opportunity Plans.



CAPACITY

- a. Does the district have policies that encourage or promote community partnerships? If so, how can those policies be strengthened to ensure that the emotional, social, and academic needs of all students are being met?
- b. Are the teachers, principals, administrators, and other school staff in the district provided with the necessary professional development and resources to build meaningful relationships with parent and caregivers that strengthens their beliefs in the value of public schools and build their knowledge of college and career planning and preparation?
- c. How can the district build on what teachers, administrators and other school staff have already done to create stronger relationships with the community stakeholders that enhance the academic experience of students?
- d. Does the district's operational plans and budget provide the necessary programs and resources to promote the positive social, emotional, ethical and civic development of students? If not, is the district leveraging other public agencies' resources to achieve this?



CLIMATE

- Does the district have a shared vision and plan for promoting, enhancing, and sustaining a positive teaching and learning environment? How do the district's policies reflect the creation of this type of environment?
- Are there set district policies that specifically promote the development and sustainability of social, emotional, ethical, civic, and academic skills, knowledge, and engagement of students?
- Do district policies support a comprehensive, coordinated system that encourages student engagement, addresses barriers to teaching and learning, and re-engages students who have been disengaged?
- What practices does the district use to identify, prioritize, and support positive social, emotional, ethical, and civic development of students and to enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities?
- How do our district's data collection and accountability measures demonstrate the impact of efforts to promote social, emotional, civic and academic learning? Do they demonstrate the impact of school-wide efforts to promote safety, connectedness, and engagement?



COMMUNITY

- Does the district provide students with opportunities to enter into dialogues with adults at school, in the community, and in local government?
- What type of outreach has the district engaged in to increase the use of volunteers in school, integration of service-learning, and opportunities for members of businesses and local government to connect with students and schools?
- What is the district protocol for partnering with community-based organizations, local government agencies and other entities in addressing the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of the students and their families? Does the district have a system in place to determine the effectiveness of these partnerships?
- Are there district-wide policies that promote effective family-school-community partnerships and commit and organize (or re-organize) resources such as funding and professional development to make them work?
- What community partnerships does the district have in place to support students' exploration of college and career opportunities?



COHESION

- Are all of the district departments and partnering agencies focused on promoting the learning and positive social, emotional, ethical, and civic development of students? How are they working together to enhance engagement in teaching, learning, and school-wide activities?
- How does the district negotiate the usage of resources and services between their community partners, teachers, school staff, and across other public agencies to ensure that the needs of the students are being met?
- What system does the district have in place to ensure that the coordination of the services provided by outside partners are not fragmented from early education until students enter the postsecondary system? What mechanisms are in place to ensure regular and appropriate communication between partners?
- How are collaborative and engagement initiatives managed (e.g., definition of appropriate roles, responsibilities, expectations, decision making parameters)?
- Does the district link the needs and resources of schools, families, and the community to enable the development of a comprehensive system of learning opportunities and support?

VII. Community POPs Strategies in Action

There are many examples of what districts can do to support the collaborative efforts of schools, businesses, faith-based institutions, higher education partners, health providers, and other community partners. This section identifies some of those possibilities. These examples can be used by school board members to determine how to best support POPs and create more customized, supportive, and enriching instruction for students.

School board policies and coherent district strategies are essential to developing a school system that can meet the needs of the student population and set clear standards for community growth and success. They also are essential to ensuring education professionals have the funding and resources to sustain safe and supportive learning environments, to driving an agenda that is linked to the strengths of the community, building the capacity of educators when possible, and pushing for cohesive systems that serve students and families from the first day they enter the school system. In addition to funding and resources, these policies can play a crucial role in ensuring collaboration across public agencies. **The strategies listed below are divided into four categories, but are all aimed at accomplishing a single goal: ensuring a strong connection from schools to communities and a curriculum that is engaging and relevant to the needs of society and the workforce.**



CAPACITY



CLIMATE



COMMUNITY



COHESION





CAPACITY

Everyone has a role in supporting Personal Opportunity Plans as part of a community schools vision. This includes educators, families, and community. Teachers must be prepared to personalize learning to meet the needs of different learners so that academic, social, and emotional support is proactive rather than reactive. Meaningful relationships between school staff members and families hold the promise of raising parental expectations, strengthening parents' belief in the value of schooling, and building parents' knowledge of the language of schooling and college and career planning. Community partners can link schools to businesses, youth organizations, colleges, and other institutions to support students' exploration of college and career opportunities and place-based experiences in the world of work.

Molly Stark Elementary School

Bennington, Vermont



Molly Stark offers a range of family-strengthening services and programs in addition to health and child care. Parents can enroll in GED classes at the school one evening a week. Child care is available during these sessions, as are playgrounds for parents with infants and small children. The center also provides transportation and scholarships for GED testing. Additionally, a Community Leadership Training program offered in conjunction with the Bennington County Child Care Association provides community members with education and experience in citizenship and advocacy for themselves and their children.

Nashville Public Schools



Tennessee

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools is part of a national network of eight districts, the Collaborating District Initiative, to strengthen the social and emotional capacity and conditions of their schools. The network is coordinated by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), whose involvement in this initiative has helped shape a strategic plan based on a 10-year, comprehensive review of school system evaluations. *Education 2018* lays out a district-wide approach to providing high quality education to students with diverse needs through personalized learning supports and experiences. These experiences are designed to meet the needs and interests of every student and aim to strengthen relationships that are the foundation of effective teaching and learning. The strategic plan Nashville developed is designed to transform and reorganize the traditional “top-down” management system of the central office to one in which the central office supports schools and school leaders in their efforts to create a collaborative culture.



Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC)

Indiana

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC)

uses the community school strategy district-wide. EVSC decided to “grow” the successful local Cedar Hall Elementary School full-service community school into other district schools and over 70 community agencies now sit at the table. They are working together to find creative ways to support children and families in the community at the school site. Focusing on building the capacity of both educators and community members simultaneously, the school system uses school-based site councils made up of parents, school staff, and representatives from community agencies that meet monthly to discuss the needs specific to each school. The Principal and/or facilitator lead a strategic planning process to identify, assess, and determine needs for each school site.



Recommendations

These examples highlight the importance of devoting time to growing the capacity of all stakeholders in a community schools model, while developing a strategic plan that mirrors that commitment. They also capture the importance of promoting shared leadership and responsibility within schools, so more than one staff person (i.e. the teacher) is aware of the unique needs of each student. The success and sustainability of Personal Opportunity Plans within a community schools model are predicated upon the ability to build system capacity one person at a time.



CLIMATE

School climate permeates not just the classroom, but every space where students and staff gather—on school buses, in cafeterias, on the playground, in school counselors’ offices, and at off site school activities. Catering learning experiences to student needs and interests can affect school climate by influencing the culture and mindset of professionals and students.

Roy Clark Elementary School

Tulsa, OK

At Roy Clark Elementary, students and families are given personalized attention to better support students’ learning and academic enrichment. Part of the **Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI)**, the program’s focus on personalized supports and opportunities for students is evident through a few key practices. Students’ well-being is reviewed at monthly Student Assistance Team (SAT) meetings with community partners. The school then provides wrap-around services through the leadership of the community school coordinator to meet students’ needs. School professionals are offered special staff development to help them evaluate student improvement. Progress is monitored through individual student intervention plans that review students’ progress on targeted indicators.





Oakland Unified School District

California

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has developed key school board policies that uphold the principles of community schools and personalized learning. For example, OUSD developed a school board policy promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) that clearly communicates the belief “that SEL is integral to high quality education for all students and OUSD learning communities.” This policy was partially driven by the district’s involvement in CASEL’s Collaborating Districts Initiative, and has helped spur a variety of actions, including the creation of infrastructure and leadership to support SEL through professional development and partnerships with families and the community. Another OUSD board policy promotes school-based decision making, consistent with the collaborative principle of community schools.



John C. Fremont High School

South Los Angeles, California

This community school proves what is possible in fostering a supportive climate at the school level. A ninth grade success group aims to address the low performance of entering freshmen through a mentor program that pairs them with mentoring juniors and seniors. A breaking-the-prison-pipeline group convenes students, families, and community members to find solutions in the school and the community to address the school-to-prison pipeline issue; and Fremont’s peer mediation program has been so successful that it has led to a much lower suspension rate compared to other high schools in South Los Angeles. Students are now training teachers in peer mediation so they understand how students are improving school climate.



Recommendations

There is no one formula for schools to follow to ensure a learning environment that is safe and supportive. However, the examples in this section show how a dominant mindset that emphasizes the social and emotional well-being of all kids can be contagious not only in the way adults interact with students, but also in how students can model the importance of healthy, productive relationships with peers.



COMMUNITY

In many places, schools operate as the town center, bridging students and caretakers to service providers, including higher education institutions, faith-based partners, businesses, healthcare, and colleges. How districts maintain relationships with the community and link individualized learning needs to community assets can significantly influence the breadth and depth of academic, social, and civic experiences for children. How schools interact with the surrounding community can also have a significant influence on whether personal opportunity plans become not just part of the culture of schools but also part of the surrounding community.

Cincinnati Public Schools

Ohio



School board policy outlines the transformation of every school into a community learning center. **The com-**

munity learning centers serve as the hubs of the community, providing health and social wellness services, after-school programming, early childhood education, parenting classes and other services that are open during the regular school day as well as in the evening and weekends. Cincinnati's community learning centers serve as the hubs of the community. Oyer pre-K-12 school houses the nation's first vision clinic. The clinic is run in partnership with the city health department and has full-time optometrists, vision therapists, and eyeglass technicians. (Oyer also has a dental clinic.) Because the community learning centers operate as a shared space for the community, they are open in the evenings and on weekends and often serve as sites for social functions that bring a range of community members into the school.

Owsley County Elementary School

Boonsville, Kentucky



In Boonsville, a family resource center serves as an accessible way for parents to support the school and receive critical services like health services. The district pays about \$5,000 per year per school for a nurse and does Medicaid billing for students who qualify. The Quality Care for Kids program brings mobile clinics to the school for dental screenings and for hearing and vision screenings. The local Lion's Club assists in purchasing eyeglasses when needed. The district participates in the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, addressing health and wellness issues among students, staff, and community health workers.

Hartford Public Schools

Connecticut



The investment of key city groups in Hartford's **community schools initiative** reflects the local ownership and buy-in for community schools. Mayor Pedro Segarra's office, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, and the Hartford Public Schools all contribute funding to and participate in the Hartford Partnership for Student Success (HPSS). At the beginning of the city's community schools development in 2008, the Hartford Board of Education adopted a policy outlining a framework for implementing community schools in the district through diversified funding. This framework required schools to maintain public-private partnerships, a community school director, and expanded school-based services for students. The district also has a "strategic operating plan" which includes family and community partnerships.



Recommendations

A community orientation is central to delivering a relevant and engaging school experience for students and families. These models highlight the many ways in which public schools can provide a public service to the surrounding region—especially in rural communities—that goes beyond academic support. Schools must be synonymous with community development.



COHESION

Supporting cohesive educational partnerships requires more than school board policies. It requires a shared and committed idea of what's possible for students when adults take individual responsibility for the growth and development of each and every child in the school system. School campuses remain central headquarters for ensuring partnerships are student-centered. However, the onus for crafting more seamless pre-K to college pathways for students cannot rest solely on teachers, principals, and district administrators. System cohesion is predicated on the ability of partners to work collaboratively, sharing resources and making regular communication a high priority.

Noble High School

North Berwick, Maine

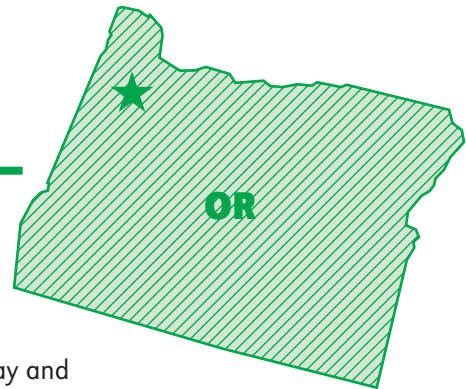


Driven by a set of regional educational goals established by three communities, Noble High School shows that a cohesive system is not limited to geography. Three townships have built a “whole community” school design model for both students and adults, offering a unique collaborative vision for other rural schools. Cohesion is reflected not only in the design of the comprehensive school that brings all three communities together, but also in the broad range of services provided. Early education, health care services, service learning, performing arts, culinary arts, and adult education are offered as a broad array of options because of a commitment from the townships to share resources and people to ensure student success.

Portland & Multnomah County Schools

Oregon

The **Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Initiative** is a cohesive collaboration of the city, county, state, and school districts in Portland/Multnomah County, Ore. Nearly 70 SUN Schools work to extend the school day and strive to be community centers by linking with other community institutions, such as the libraries, parks, neighborhood health clinics, and area churches and businesses. This collaboration is guided by an intergovernmental agreement among the districts, county, and city. The agreement specifies processes by which the three entities work together to create and support a shared vision, common goals, and a clear communication structure to support the SUN Community Schools.



Kansas City, Missouri

Local Investment Commission (LINC)

LINC operates the Kansas City community schools initiative, known as Caring Communities, that involves a total of around 30,000 students, seven school districts, and 60 schools. At each school, LINC provides funding, support staff, training, and data systems. LINC also facilitates site councils for each school comprised of families, neighbors, and local businesses to guide neighborhood-level activities. The most significant initiative – one which strengthens system cohesion – is an out-of-school-time program at more than 40 elementary schools. Families can count on an accessible, affordable place for their school-aged children to receive out-of-school-time care even if they change school districts. Additionally, LINC provides specialized training in financial literacy, free tax preparation, parent education, and family literacy.



Recommendations

Creating seamless systems requires significant time, people, resources, and commitment from a host of individuals and organizations. Cross-sector partnerships can be solidified through intergovernmental agreements, but must evolve as individuals and organizations learn how to work together most effectively. Sustainable education systems are led by people who are always seeking new and creative ways to improve how students and families are best served.

VIII. Resources

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Appendix A: Defining Personal Opportunity Plans

Words matter: Implications of choosing the words “Personal” and “Opportunity” to describe a student plan

Educators and advocates might choose to use any of the following monikers to describe the concept of ongoing student planning in school: Personal Learning Plan; Individualized Learning Plan; Postsecondary Plan; Personal Postsecondary Plan; Personal Academic Plan; College and Career Plan; or School Transition Plan. By qualifying the student planning process with the words “personal” and “opportunity,” POPs have an even greater potential to become meaningful and empowering experiences for the entire range of learners. Here’s why:

A Personal plan:

- Values a holistic view of each child by affirming the unique characteristics of each individual person—his/her learning profiles, abilities, strengths, talents, interests, aspirations, and personal qualities and character—and assumes that the sum of these characteristics will inform students’ thinking about their plans and the big and small decisions they make for themselves from one year to the next.
- Implies that a plan is student-directed with the support of teachers, peers, and families. (It’s not something done to a student—it’s something done by a student.)
- Implies that the process involves some degree of self-directed choice in selecting the right courses and learning experiences that maximize academic, social, and emotional growth and development.
- Implies a flexible, adaptive process and personalized pacing that fits each individual’s needs, interests, and stage of cognitive, social, and emotional development rather than a lock-step, one-size-fits-all approach.
- Calls for goals that move beyond school transition planning (middle school to high school) or postsecondary planning (high school to college and career) to include personal growth and development.
- Implies a relational process that fosters lively dialogue and thoughtful planning with peers, school staff, and families.

Considerations: If personal engagement with adults and peers is not a priority throughout the planning process, the completion of a POP can turn into a rote “fill in the blank” or “click the box” exercise, leaving students bored and disengaged. If students experience an abject lack of choice or a severely limited range of learning experiences—few or no opportunities to 1) choose courses, electives, content study within a course, assignments, projects, and assessments or 2) participate in co-curricular, extracurricular, and other youth development opportunities—the completion of a POP can turn into an inauthentic task bereft of the kind of learning and life experiences that help students discover their strengths, talents, interests, hopes, and aspirations. POPs will not be personal if the vast majority of a student’s learning experiences are coercive, adult-driven, or restricted to a narrow regime of required core academics.

An Opportunity plan:

- Encompasses more than narrowly defined educational experiences focused primarily on academic coursework. An opportunity can be any experience inside or outside of the regular school day and regular school year that supports students’ academic, social, emotional, and career development, mastery, or leadership.
- Implies an inclusive perspective about students’ future aspirations—one that values all types of opportunities after high school graduation.
- Implies more than an academic plan focused on doing what it takes to earn high grades and high test scores in order to be prepared for the next learning experience.
- Implies an equal focus on present and future experiences—the plan is about more than postsecondary preparation.

Considerations: Schools that focus most of their planning activities on students’ efforts to “get into college” without an equal emphasis on exploring viable career options that match a student’s personal learning profile, strengths, and interests do so at considerable risk. Opportunities that might ignite a student’s motivation and commitment to continued learning might be missed altogether.

Appendix B: Options for School Board & Intergovernmental Policies (From the Coalition for Community Schools & Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning) For Student-Centered Supports

SCHOOL BOARD POLICIES

1. Cincinnati, Ohio
Cincinnati City School District Community School Policy
2. Hartford, Connecticut
Hartford Board of Education Policy on Community Schools
3. Seattle, Washington
School and Community Partnership Policy
4. Oakland, California
Policy on Social and Emotional Learning
Lead Community Partner Policy

CITY AND COUNTY POLICIES

5. San Pablo, California
Resolution of The City Council of The City of San Pablo
Authorizing Support for Full Service Community Schools in
San Pablo
6. Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon
County's Intergovernmental Agreement

NOTES

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PARTNERSHIPS, NOT PUSHOUTS

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