Family and Community Engagement
Collaborative Partnerships with Community Organizations

Keywords: school-community, partnerships, collaboration, family, community organizations

What Is the Topic

Community partnerships play a crucial role in supplementing educational efforts by offering services such as language support, cultural integration workshops, mentorship initiatives, and after-school programs. For ELs, community organizations serve as empowering agents that can positively impact learning outcomes and family engagement (Carolyn, 2001). Partnerships between schools and community-based organizations have been found to be effective in supporting students and bridging the gap between their school and community environments (Rutherford and Billig, 1995). Community and partner organizations such as cultural centers, private corporations, and churches, among others, can play an important role through initiatives like mentorship programs, internships, or sponsorships that enhance educational opportunities for ELs. Collaborative partnerships entail active communication, cooperation, and respect between educators and families. Schools recognize and value the knowledge, experiences, and cultural backgrounds that families bring to their children's education. This collaborative approach extends beyond traditional notions of parent involvement or engagement, emphasizing a reciprocal and empowering relationship where both schools and families work together as equal partners to create supportive learning environments for EL students. Corporate partnerships might also be involved, providing resources such as technology, scholarships, or vocational training programs that support the academic and career development of ELs and their families. Similarly, Sanders (2006) argues that local non-profit organizations, foundations, and service clubs can also collaborate with schools to offer scholarships, fund extracurricular activities, or organize community events to promote engagement, trust, and communication within the local community and school.

As educators and school leaders delve into the knowledge, strategies, and practices presented in this brief, it is crucial to remember a fundamental distinction: while many immigrants are English learners (ELs), not all ELs are immigrants. Understanding this nuance allows us to foster inclusive environments where every learner's unique background is acknowledged and celebrated. To better support the needs

of ELs and their families, schools are increasingly partnering with community-based organizations (CBOs). Partnerships between community-based organizations (CBOs) and schools have been recommended as an effective approach to assist students in achieving academic success (Honigsfeld et al., 2019). Such partnerships are currently connecting schools directly with community organizations and assisting ELs in ways that go beyond the schools' traditional methods.

What Is the Evidence Base

Building community schools (Figure 1) is a transformative approach that integrates an educational program with extended learning opportunities, family and community engagement, and essential social services. The coalition of community schools argues that these schools function as hubs, fostering partnerships between the school and various community resources. Their emphasis on community engagement is believed to contribute to enhanced student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities (Allen, 2000).

- A study conducted by Temple-Adger (2001), focused on school-community-based organization partnerships, shows positive results on successful partnerships that enhance the academic achievement of language minority students. The study emphasizes the importance of flexibility in partnerships and programs, highlighting three key aspects of responsiveness identified by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students. These aspects include program designs that are linguistically and culturally appropriate for language minority students, ensuring the accessibility of programs both physically and psychologically for participants, and fostering the belief that students have the capabilities to succeed in school (Almaguer, 2022).
- This article describes an elementary school in Maryland that implemented community involvement strategies to help newcomers who did not speak English engage and learn about the resources available in the school and the local community. The community engagement initiatives included organizing weekend soccer tournaments, providing English and computer classes for parents, families and caregivers, and offering an array of community services, such as housing assistance and mental health counseling. In addition to 91 out of 98 English learners excelling in state reading tests, participants in weekend soccer tournaments exhibited increased physical activity. Families attending English and computer classes reported enhanced empowerment, fostering better communication with school faculty.
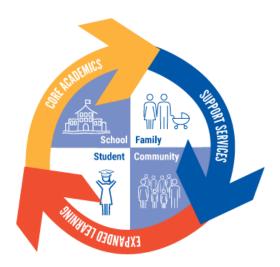
Figure 1. Community Schools Model

Community-connected Model for ELs is a set of strategies to involve ELs in learning experiences outside the classroom. This model advocates for coordinating services and resources for families, students, and schools through partnerships with community organizations. Allen (2000) argues that when schools and educators use this model, they can help ELs explore and build upon their own interests, as well as observe and collaborate with adult experts across various workplaces and occupations.

- Using aspects of the model above, Francine et al. (2001) addresses the educational experiences encountered by Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Vietnamese families with language barriers in New England. The authors examined the role of community-based organizations (CBOs) in overcoming various barriers experienced by these families. This study draws insights from focus groups, reflections from a career ladder program, and a summer academy designed for Southeast Asian middle school students. The findings emphasize that CBO-school relations result in positive outcomes at the community, interpersonal, and personal levels.
- Similarly, in a case study, Walker (2012) discusses a rural Midwest school district's collaboration with local community organizations that aimed at the needs of English language learners. Led by the district EL coordinator, the district and the local community formed a diversity committee to develop projects to effectively meet the social, academic, and health-related needs of ELs and their families. The district, realizing the importance of community collaboration, expanded its EL program and implemented various initiatives, including professional development, a newcomer center, and sheltered English classes.
- Multilingual programs are also trying to foster community engagement efforts for EL students and families drawing from the community-connected model.

OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Summary

Review of relevant literature: Theoretical basis	Review of relevant literature: Support of identified research and practice	Empirical evidence on how it serves students and promotes systemic change
Community-connected Model for ELs formed by various strategies to involve ELs in learning different skills outside the classroom.	This model focuses on providing schools and educators with the resources and skills needed to foster successful school and community partnerships.	This model has been proven to: - Increase academic success - Transition to work or completion of vocational/technical education - Advance ELs' language skills by interacting with English-speaking adults in the workplace (Miano, 2011).
Building community schools transformative approach that integrates an educational program with extended learning opportunities, family and community engagement, and social services.	Describes EL families through a framework of agency and knowledge. Almaguer contends that while many community schools operate with limited district involvement, it is crucial for schools, especially those serving low-income communities and ELs populations (Almaguer, 2022).	In a video, Randi Weingarten, President of AFT (American Federation of Teachers), discusses the benefits of community schools for English language learners. One of the benefits include: addressing socio-emotional instructional needs of ELs.

Equity Considerations

Educators need to take into account the unique characteristics and experiences of refugee families and students to identify suitable instructional approaches and outside of school resources such as those provided by community organizations (Hou, 2006). In providing support, it is important to recognize that some refugee students may possess English language proficiency, while others may not have prior academic instruction in English. A study conducted by Lambe (2008) discusses how a town in West-central Minnesota with a population of 2,400 emerged as a focal point for immigration in the early 2000s. The school district encountered various challenges, including "ethnic tensions" within the local community and limited resources to address this issue. However, the school district decided to

collaborate with a multicultural committee to invite EL families residing in the town "to educate students about different cultures" (Lambe, 2008, p. 2). Similarly, using evidence-based best practices, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) developed a set of practical tool
s that may be a guide for strengthening partnerships between schools, families, and communities. The following resources can be helpful in guiding educators and school leaders about how to support the inclusion of immigrant and refugee students and families:

- The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services provides a toolkit with questions and answers about refugees.
- The Family/School Partnership Program: This program aims to cut through the potential fear, alienation and disempowerment that refugee families and students might experience when engaging with the U.S. education system.
- This article provides suggestions for including mentors to support refugee family-school relationships.
- EdResearch for Action offers relevant evidence-based information about immigrant-origin students that might be useful to consider.

> ### *Example from the Field*
>
> Multilingual and mainstream teachers may also use common planning time to ensure that their curriculum is aligned and that all students have access to community-connected learning opportunities.
> https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=slcediversity

Considerations for Local Context: Strategy Selection

We recommend identifying points and guiding questions in consideration of local context during the planning process and in selection of strategies. We encourage educators and also school leaders to familiarize themselves with the characteristics of their school communities and programs offered within their schools, as school districts may offer different resources like programs or other initiatives aimed at fostering family and community engagement and collaboration. One example could be, La Grande School District family and community involvement plan. Moreover, the following questions and recommendations can also help:
- Why is community engagement important for the success of ELs in my school and school district?
- What are my strengths and abilities as an educator to foster community partnerships and collaborations?
- What are the first steps to take to increase English language learners' involvement in community-connected learning?
- What does a high-quality community-connected learning opportunity invite English language learners to do?
- What are some things that a school/district should consider regarding involvement. For example, should schools and districts consider restructuring to support the involvement of English language learners in community-connected learning?

- What CBOs are available in my area?

What Can Educators and School Leaders Do: Strategies for Success

If you are unsure about initiating collaboration with local community organizations, that is perfectly fine. A first step may include calling some organizations in your area and scheduling informal conversations. You may be pleasantly surprised at how quickly ideas emerge. As schools, districts and educators identify strategies to foster school-community partnerships, the following resources can provide some guidance:

- A good place to start is the Institute for Educational Leadership that describes five stages and milestones for establishing a successful community school program.
- Epstein's framework included in the Oregon Department of Education guidelines aims to identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development using this framework.
- Oregon Department of Education integrated guidance for student success can be an important resource for educators and school leaders to obtain ideas to better support all students.

Strategy 1: Determine a "Welcome" Process for your School

Primary audience: educators, school staff, newcomer families, refugee/immigrant EL families
Description: This activity focuses on cultivating a comprehensive and welcoming environment for newcomer and refugee/immigrant EL students. This activity encompasses strategies such as learning about students' cultural backgrounds, facilitating access to essential community resources, organizing regular neighborhood meetings, with multilingual support if needed, and addressing families' and students' stress and mental well-being. This strategy ensures that refugee families and students have access to crucial support services, facilitating their integration into the broader community. It also promotes collaboration between the school and external support networks.

- **How to use it?** The school and/or district could develop a comprehensive list of essential community resources such as food and clothing, health care centers, and adult English Language Development (ELD) classes; Share this information during conferences or family events; Organize meetings in neighborhoods, considering the convenience of families; Provide multilingual support, food, childcare, and use federal funds for transportation if necessary.
- **How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?** This strategy ensures that families have access to crucial support services, facilitating their integration into the broader community. It also promotes collaboration between the school and external support, enhances cultural competence within the school environment, strengthens community ties and support systems for families.
- **How does it support changes in the systems?** This activity has the potential to promote systemic change within and outside the school as it enhances cultural competence within the school environment, strengthens community ties and support systems for families, and establishes a foundation for ongoing collaboration between schools and families.
- **Known or potential cautions? What not to do?**

- ○ Avoid Assumptions: Schools and district staff should refrain from making assumptions about families and students based solely on their cultural background, recognizing the individuality of each student.
- ○ Maintain Confidentiality: When supporting families and/or students, it is essential to uphold confidentiality to ensure a safe and trusting environment.

Strategy 2: Start a System of Community School

Primary audience educators, families, students

Description: This is a local engagement strategy designed to help schools establish and coordinate initiatives with community organizations, fostering improved success for ELs and increased family engagement. Acting as partners, this program facilitates the organization of in- and out-of-school resources, support systems, and opportunities, creating an integrated approach to enhance the well-being and academic achievements of young people. The University of Nebraska developed a toolkit with Q&As, strategies, and checklists specifically designed for involving ELs in community-connected learning efforts.

How to use it? Steps/indicators include:

- Look for ways that ELs can contribute to their neighbors (especially those who have young children or older adults) by doing neighborhood clean-ups and volunteer work.
- Inform local neighbors about the opportunity to tutor, volunteer, or donate used goods to the school and EL families.
- Look for places where interests and activities overlap. Consider posting a community board where everyone can post what they need or can offer.
- Look for fundraising opportunities, such as a local yard sale that raises money for a new parent center.
- Tell the community about the challenges your EL families are facing. For example, if you have a new group of refugees arriving, collaborate with their placement agency to collect household items, furniture, and winter clothing.

How is it beneficial? Who benefits from it?

Working with community organizations can be highly beneficial for ELs and their families. By organizing resources and opportunities, this strategy addresses the unique needs of ELs, ensuring they have access to tailored support services. Additionally, the collaborative approach involving families fosters a sense of community and involvement, enhancing the overall educational experience for ELs and their families.

How does it support changes in the systems?

At the system level, Community Schools bring about transformative changes by uniting diverse stakeholders through a Collaborative Leadership Structure. This collaborative approach helps break down silos and establishes a more integrated and holistic support system for students and families.

Known or potential cautions? What not to do?

While implementing the Community Schools Program, it is recommendable to avoid a top-down approach that neglects the active involvement of community stakeholders. Ineffective communication and insufficient engagement with families and local organizations may hinder the success of the

program. Additionally, overlooking cultural sensitivity and failing to recognize the unique needs of ELs and their families could undermine the inclusivity and effectiveness of the Community Schools initiative.

Implementation Considerations

As we embark on creating a plan and proceed with implementation, it is useful to consider topic-specific aspects as well as general factors and guiding questions that can increase the likelihood for successful implementation. Consider answering the following questions as educators and school leaders develop plans and implement strategies to foster collaborative partnerships:

- How can educators collaborate with community-based organizations to enhance family efficacy and support for English learners, ensuring that initiatives align with the unique needs and cultural backgrounds of EL families?
- What strategies have demonstrated success in leveraging community partnerships to provide resources and programs that empower EL families to actively engage in their children's education?

Local Context

- How does the local context influence EL family efficacy and support, considering factors like transportation, time constraints, and the sociopolitical environment of the community?
- To what extent is the implementation plan sensitive to the unique local challenges and opportunities in promoting support for EL families?

Also consider:

- Geographical Factors: How do the location and size of the district/school impact the practical aspects of plan implementation?
- Learning Mode: What considerations are needed based on the learning mode (in person/remote/hybrid/other) prevalent in the local context?
- Duration: How long is the plan designed to last, and what measures are in place for its continuous effectiveness?
- Reliability: Is the implementation plan reliable and realistic given the local context, and what factors contribute to its sustainability?

Implementation Plan and Process

The following questions and answers grounded in empirical research can further enhance clarity and provide practical guidance for educators and school leaders as they navigate the implementation process and monitor progress effectively.

- **What is our capacity for implementation?**

The capacity for implementation depends on various factors, including available resources, staff expertise, and organizational readiness. Educators and school leaders should assess the readiness of

the school and district to engage in collaborative partnerships, identifying any gaps in resources or training, and determining the level of support needed to effectively implement the plan. As argued by Allen (2007), families, schools, and communities need to work together to actively take part and share responsibility in building mutually respectful relationships and partnerships.

- **How are families involved in the implementation of the plan?**

Engaging EL families in the implementation process is critical for its success. Educators and school leaders can involve families by providing opportunities for participation in decision-making, provide opportunities to provide feedback on proposed strategies, and valuing their insights and perspectives (Epstein, 2019). Moreover, creating channels for open communication and collaboration ensures that EL families feel empowered and invested in the process.

- **How will we know if the implementation is successful?**

To determine the success of implementation, Henderson et al. (2007) suggest establishing clear indicators and evaluation methods. This includes tracking academic performance data, assessing levels of family engagement, and gathering feedback from stakeholders, when pertinent. Monitoring progress against predetermined goals and objectives, tracking key performance metrics, and conducting regular evaluations can help determine the effectiveness of the implementation and identify areas for improvement.

- **What resources do we need to implement the program(s)?**

Although funding is generally not required in the implementation of the strategies offered in this brief, we suggest educators and school leaders explore what funding opportunities may be available that could be useful (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). If funding is limited in the school district, educators and school leaders may consider exploring outside resources, such as Oregon's Department of Education grants and funding opportunities. Another organization that tends to offer funding is The Spencer Foundation. Additionally, fostering financial stewardship and involving District Equity Committees in the budgeting process can help prioritize resources based on student and community needs. Also consider the Oregon Department of Education's Guideline to spending funds responsibly.

- **Are accessibility supports in place?**

Accessibility is key to ensuring that all EL families can fully participate in and benefit from our collaborative efforts. This involves providing language interpretation services, offering transportation assistance, accommodating diverse scheduling needs, and creating inclusive spaces (Weiss et al., 2010). By addressing accessibility barriers, schools and districts can promote equitable access to opportunities and resources for all EL families.

Learn More

Allen, L. (2000). Involving English Language Learners in Community-Connected Learning. Diversity, 9. https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcediversity/9

Allen, J. (2007). Creating welcoming schools: A practical guide to home-school partnerships with diverse families. New York: Teachers College Press

Almaguer, I. (2022). Fostering Successful Communities of Collaboration Through Educational Partnerships: Strengthening Bilingual Learners' Language and Literacy Achievement Along the Texas-Mexican Border. In I. R. Management Association (Ed.), Research Anthology on Bilingual and Multilingual Education (pp. 1267-1284). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-3690-5.ch064

Epstein, J. L., et al. (2019). School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action. Fourth edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Retrived from https://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/school-family-and-community-partnerships/book242535#description

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share.Phi Delta Kappan, 136.

Francine F. Collignon , Makna Men & Serei Tan (2001) Finding Ways In: Community-Based Perspectives on Southeast Asian Family Involvement With Schools in a New England State, Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR), 6:1-2, 27-44, DOI: 10.1207/S15327671ESPR0601-2_3

Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). Beyond the bake sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships. New York: The New Press

Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. G. (2010). Collaboration and co-teaching: Strategies for English learners. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin

Honigsfeld, A., Dove, M. G., & Honigsfeld, A. (2019). Collaborating for English learners : a foundational guide to integrated practices (Second edition). Corwin.

Hou, Feng, & Morton Beiser. (2006). Learning the Language of a New Country: A Ten-Year Study of English Acquisition by South-East Asian Refugees in Canada. *International Migration*, *44*(1), 135-165. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2006.00358.x

Johnson, M. (2004, July 25). Diversity and growing pains come to small-town Wisconsin. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Koyama, J.. & Kasper, J. (2020). Pushing the boundaries: Education leaders, mentors, and refugee students. Educational Administration Quarterly, 57(1), 49-81.

Lambe, W. (2008). Small towns, big ideas: Case studies in small town community economic development. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, School of Government. Retrieved from http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/cednc/stbi/pdfs/stbi_final.pdf

Miano, A. A. (2011). Schools reading parents' worlds: Mexican Immigrant mothers building family literacy networks.Multicultural Education,18
Rutherford, B., & Billig, S. (1995). Eight lessons of parent, family, and community involvement in the middle grades. Phi Delta Kappan, 77, 64-68.
Temple-Adger, C. (2001) School-Community-Based Organization Partnerships for Language Minority Students' School Success, Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR), 6:1-2, 7-25, DOI: 10.1207/S15327671ESPR0601-2_2

Sanders, M. G. (2006). Building school-community partnerships: collaboration for student success. Corwin Press

Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2005). Involvement counts: Family and community partnerships and mathematics achievement. Journal of Educational Research, 98(4), 196–206

Walker, A. (2012). Collaborating With the Community: Lessons from a Rural School District. TESOL Journal, 3(3), 469–487. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.25

Weiss, H. B., Kreider, H., Lopez, M. E., & Chatman-Nelson, C. (Eds.). (2010). Preparing educators to engage families: Case studies using an ecological systems framework (2nd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.