



CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
District Context and Support for School Improvement	Improving the school within the framework of district support	The District includes community organizations in district and school improvement planning and maintains regular communication with them. (2)

Explanation: To improve means to change, and change can sometimes cause people to misunderstand. Improvement planning and the process of improvement are not merely for internal consumption; they impact the community and the community has an interest in them. District communication strategies include means for regular communication with community organizations about the ongoing work of district and school improvement.

Questions: How does your district intentionally communicate with community organizations about district and school improvement processes? Do you provide opportunity for their input and feedback?

A district which includes community organizations in the school reform process communicates a willingness to further the well-being of the school community. Calling on the ability of a community to share in the work of reform demonstrates district appreciation of civic capacity. A concept introduced by political scientist Clarence Stone (2003), one aspect of civic capacity is the ability to establish trust by engaging the school’s community during the change process. Civic capacity and the trust it engenders is key to district turnaround. Although schools may be the most visible sites for the education of youth, the concept of civic capacity suggests that education is a task for the community as a whole (Barker & Robinson, 2011). Education strategy is weakened where a community role is absent (Harrison, 2011).

Recognizing that there is at times a trust and confidence gap between a community and the schools within it, the district needs to understand that this gap is common and accept the challenge of re-establishing trust. Meeting this challenge is a condition of productive communication with the community about how to improve local schools (Johnson, 2011). For example, during its restructuring effort, Chicago attempted to engage the community productively by initiating partnerships with grassroots organizations that helped parents understand why reform was necessary in their children’s schools. The city also convened groups of community members at each school who guided changes that best responded to the needs of the community at each site (Chicago Public Schools, 2005). In contrast, in the district studied by Rice and Malen (2003), opportunities for collaboration on school redesign were missed due to more urgent problems of school operations. The resulting chaos reportedly made it difficult to establish and implement a collaborative vision in reconstituted schools.

Case studies and other research provide evidence of myriad types of community supports and resources being utilized by schools and districts.

Many organizations that are not deemed formal conduits of education nonetheless have a significant influence on informal education. Besides the family and its social networks, a community’s libraries and museums, summer camps, parks, 4-H clubs, and community gardens all serve as education resources and, as such, can contribute to the district’s school improvement efforts. Cultural, linguistic, and social gaps often exist between schools and the students and families they serve; community groups or individuals, such as paraprofessionals or teachers from the school’s neighborhood, may serve as bridging intermediaries to foster more productive relationships (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Reed, 2009; Warren, 2007). In addition, school improvement partners can include large corporations and small businesses, law enforcement,



health departments, universities, faith-based and other non-profit organizations, and senior citizens among others. Some schools have formed beneficial alliances with municipal officials and the media (Brooks, 2009). Benefits provided range from providing extra adults who listen to children read (Doiron & Lees, 2009) to donated funds or goods.

Connecting with the community can help high school students engage and see the relevance of their coursework (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007), and evidence shows that students with disabilities benefit greatly from community employment experience during the high school years, e.g., work-study jobs, paid work experiences, and high school vocational education experiences (Stodden et al., 2001). An example of community supports is presented by Sheldon and Epstein (2004) in which a community connected chronically absent students with community mentors and measurably reduced students' chronic absenteeism. In other examples, grants provided funds to hire a school nurse and social worker to attend to students' physical, social, and emotional needs and to help involve parents; church volunteers organized a mentoring program (Tripses & Scroggs, 2009); and rural schools benefited from working with community-based and faith-based organizations who provided tutoring and other after-school programs.

In order to engage potential community partners, the district communicates a sincere desire for partnership, permitting time for development while also promoting community ownership (Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Processes used to develop the partnerships, such as networking, meetings in person, and the negotiation of partnership activities themselves create "win-win" relationships for the school and the community partner (Hands, 2005).

A district committed to reform views the community as a vital partner in the efforts to strengthen the transformation of schools. If a district makes an authentic effort to identify common interests across its schools and the community, and works to remove obstacles that prevent collaborative communication, then it will maximize the role of the community as an asset (Harrison, 2011). Community organizations reflect a unique population that already has a role in the education of its children. Broadening this role through partnership with the district results in a more holistic and democratic civic approach and offers an alternative to the narrow focus on formal education within bureaucratic systems (Barker & Robinson, 2011).

REFERENCE AND RESOURCES

- Barker, D. & Robinson, A. (2011). Civic capacity and the role of community in education. *Connections*. 2011. <http://kettering.org/periodicals/civicapacitycomroleeducon2011/>
- Brinson, D., Kowal, J., & Hassel, B. C. (2008). *School turnarounds: Actions and results*. Center on Innovation & Improvement. <http://www.centerii.org/survey/>
- Brooks, S. M. (2009). A case study of school-community alliances that rebuilt a community. *School Community Journal*, 19(2). <http://www.adi.org/journal/fw09/BrooksFall2009.pdf>
- Brown, L. H., & Beckett, K. S. (2007). Building community in an urban school district: A case study of African American educational leadership. *School Community Journal*, 17(1). <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss07/BrownBeckettSpring2007.pdf>
- Center on Innovation & Improvement. (n.d.). *SES outreach to parents*. <http://www.centerii.org/techassist/outreach/>
- Doiron, R., & Lees, J. (2009). It takes a village to raise a reader: Reflections on an intergenerational literacy program. *School Community Journal*, 15(2). <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss09/DoironLeesSpring2009.pdf>
- Hands, C. (2005). It's who you know and what you know: The process of creating partnerships between schools and communities. *School Community Journal*, 15(2). <http://www.adi.org/journal/fw05/HandsFall2005.pdf>
- Harrison, M. S. (2009). Toward a "relationship-based industry": Connecting central offices and communities. *Voices in Urban Education*, 22(Winter), 33–40.
- Kennelly, L., & Monrad, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Easing the transition to high school: Research and best practices designed to support high school learning*. Washington, DC: National High School Center. http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_TransitionsReport.pdf



- National School Boards Foundation. (1999). *Leadership matters: Transforming urban school boards*.
- Patrikakou, E., Weisberg, R., Redding, S., & Walberg, H. J. (Eds.). (2005). *School-family partnerships for children's success*. Teachers College Press.
- Public Impact. (2007). *School turnarounds: A review of the cross-sector evidence on dramatic organizational improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Academic Development Institute. <http://www.centerii.org/survey/>
- Reed, W. A. (2009). The bridge is built: The role of local teachers in an urban elementary school. *School Community Journal*, 19(1). <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss09/ReedSpring2009.pdf>
- Ross, S., Harmon, J., & Wong K. (2009). *Improving SES quality: Promising practices for states*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. <http://www.centerii.org/survey/>
- Sanders, M., & Lewis, K. (2005). *Three NNPS high schools develop community partnerships to improve high school programs and increase student success* (Research Brief). Type 2, 18. <http://www.csos.jhu.edu/P2000/type2/issue18/threepartnershipsR.htm>
- Sheldon, S. B., & Epstein, J. L. (2004). Getting students to school: Using family and community involvement to reduce chronic absenteeism. *School Community Journal*, 14(2). <http://www.adi.org/journal/fw04/Sheldon%20&%20Epstein.pdf>
- Stodden, R., Dowrick, P., Stodden, N., & Gilmore, S. (2001). *A review of secondary school factors influencing post school outcomes for youth with disabilities*. University of Hawaii at Manoa, National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports.
- Stone, C. (2003, June 24). *Civic capacity: What, why and whence*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Tripses, J., & Scroggs, L. (2009). Spirituality and respect: Study of a model school-church-community collaboration. *School Community Journal*, 19(1). <http://www.adi.org/journal/ss09/TripsesScroggsSpring2009.pdf>
- Walberg, H. J. (Ed.). (2007). *Handbook on restructuring and substantial school improvement*. Lincoln, IL: Center on Innovation & Improvement. <http://www.centerii.org/survey/>
- Warren, M. R. (2007). Partners for change: Public schools and community-based organizations. *Vue*, 17. http://www.annenberginstitute.org/vue/pdf/VUE17_Warren.pdf
- Wong, K. (2006). The political dynamics of mayoral engagement in public education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 76(2).