Core Function → **School Culture and Climate**

Effective Practice → The school environment reflects and honors the diversity of the community it serves.

Success Indicator CC11: The school leaders actively pursue on-going partnerships with a variety of community organizations to increase community involvement in the school and to maximize the school's use of community resources throughout the school year, not only during designated weeks or months. (5870)

Overview: To close performance gaps for English learners (ELs), a variety of school support structures are necessary. Many times, schools alone cannot provide all the educational and developmental experiences necessary for ELs success, particularly for students living in poverty. ELs frequently need an organized support network that includes community partners to address their needs to be successful (Blank & Villarreal, 2015). School-community partnerships are collaborative efforts that can foster the achievement of strategic initiatives and lead to improved outcomes for students and school communities (Hauseman, Pollock, & Wang, 2017). By approaching school-community connections as a mutually beneficial endeavor, school leaders can create and sustain effective community partnerships that benefit ELs.

Questions: How can community partnerships benefit ELs and their families? What strategies can school leaders use to create and sustain community partnerships that benefit ELs and their families?

How can community partnerships benefit ELs and their families?

Trusting school-community partnerships have been shown to contribute to improved student learning, achievement, behavior, and attendance (Bryan & Henry, 2012; Durlak, Weissburg, & Pachan, 2010; Epstein, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002); educator efficacy (Haines, McCart, & Turnbull, 2013; Lawson, 2003); and enhanced connections among community members (Hill & Taylor, 2004). School-community partnerships can foster connections to supplementary education services that the school cannot provide, garner much needed financial and material resources, and offer opportunities for students to build social capital through access to community individuals and their resources (Auerbach, 2010; Hands, 2015). These opportunities for developing social capital are especially crucial for students with lower-income and/or ethnic minority backgrounds, who may not otherwise have this access through their family or personal relationships (Hands, 2014). Community partners can be any community organization concerned about the education of the community's children; they can include non-profit organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Club), faith-based institutions, local government agencies (e.g., health department), higher education institutions, civic organizations (e.g., United Way), and local businesses within the community (Blank, Jacobson, & Melaville, 2012).

Community organizations can play a vital role in building a support network for ELs by offering resources schools may not have at their disposal, in their work with these students and their families. For example, many schools experience difficulty locating interpreters for school events or conferences who can translate for parents; some community organizations may be able to provide print translations, interpreters, or recommendations for additional translation services (¡Colorín Colorado!, n.d.-a). Other key support services that can be provided by community partners include educational opportunities such as GED and/or citizenship classes, after-school tutoring programs, medical and services, and student internships (¡Colorín Colorado!, n.d.-a). New immigrant communities with diverse customs and cultural backgrounds often present further challenges for schools educating ELs. Community organizations with a

cultural/national affiliation can provide cultural liaisons and/or historical/political experts to educate school staff about specific cultures or countries and their historical or political backgrounds (¡Colorín Colorado!, n.d.-a).

Community schools, which place emphasis on intentional multiple partnerships with community providers, offer a central location that connects the school, family, and community in their work towards the vision of student success (Blank, 2011). A community school "is a public school—the hub of its neighborhood, uniting educators, community partners, and families to provide all students with top-quality academics, enrichment, health and social services (often called wraparound services), and opportunities to learn and thrive" (Coalition for Community Schools, 2017, p. 1). Community schools have gained attention to create equitable education systems by providing support and resources that address out-of-school barriers to learning, increasing educational resources at the school, and fostering parents' and community members' feelings of ownership towards the school (Daniel, 2017). Community schools offer extended, sustained and comprehensive learning experiences and support that can take place before, during and after school, and many times extend into the summer, reducing the summer learning loss often seen in disadvantaged student populations (Blank & Villarreal, 2015; The Children's Aid Society, 2011). Research on community schools has shown that they positively impact many academic performance outcomes, decrease performance gaps, reduce chronic absenteeism, and can offer a substantial return on investment (Adams, 2010; Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Martinez & Hayes, 2013; Walsh, et al., 2014). Community schools can benefit ELs and their families by engaging community partners to provide supportive supplemental programs for students (e.g., dental services) and parents (e.g., English courses offered by community college instructors), and by providing programs for recent immigrants and refugees (e.g., citizenship classes) (¡Colorín Colorado!, n.d.-b).

What strategies can school leaders use to create and sustain community partnerships that benefit ELs and their families?

Increasing community involvement through strategic partnerships that maximize a school's use of community resources throughout the school year requires comprehensive planning by school leaders. The community school's literature offers lessons for developing effective and sustainable community partnerships for community schools that are of relevance to any school leaders seeking to establish such partnerships (Blank, et al., 2012):

- Ensure all school partners share a common, results-based vision for school improvement to sustain the initiative.
- Engage community stakeholders by creating formal relationships and collaborative structures for the partnership.
- Develop shared ownership by encouraging open dialogue about challenges and solutions as partnerships unfold.
- Generate and share targeted and useful data on student, family, and school outcomes; impact data can also be used to secure future funding.
- Develop central office capacity to sustain and empower community partnerships.
- Leverage community resources and braid funding streams.

At the school level, leaders can also ask families about issues that are of concern to them and which organizations may make good school partners. Schools may also consider offering local organizations free space in the school to bring needed services closer to families. Community members can be invited to talk with parents about their services (e.g., librarians, nurses, etc.); schools should consider that EL parents may be wary of attending these sessions due to lack of proof of legal residency and should be assured that identification will not be checked (Breiseth, et al., 2011).

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Resources

For a video demonstrating a community schools approach with ELs in Baltimore, see:

http://www.colorincolorado.org/videos/classroom-videos/community-schools-and-ells

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