



THE PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM TOOLKIT

INTRODUCTION

***The Vision:** Authentic and vibrant partnerships between schools and youth- and family-serving organizations provide every young person the opportunity and support they need to be successful.*

Given the continued challenge of meeting the needs of every student in King County, an increasing number of school and school district leaders are realizing that they cannot go it alone. The resource and time constraints of the traditional school day mean that it cannot be the only pathway to student success. We need a coordinated approach that puts students and families at the center and calls on community partners to complement and supplement traditional school offerings through expanded learning opportunities.

A rich body of research about expanded learning opportunities and their impact on students make it clear that high-quality out-of-school-time programs can help reduce the achievement gap and positively affect a wide range of outcomes. This is particularly true when schools and community partners work collaboratively to coordinate school-day activities with the activities offered in before- and after-school and summer programs.¹ Furthermore, many educators are recognizing that a more comprehensive approach to supporting young people’s physical, social, and emotional needs can improve academic achievement.²

By building authentic partnerships between schools and out-of-school-time partners, we can create consistency across the environments in which kids spend most of their time. When multiple partners work together in productive ways, a vibrant **ecosystem** of supports can ensure that each young person’s needs are met holistically- throughout the day and throughout the year.

The Youth Development for Education Results workgroup of **the Road Map Project**, staffed by Youth Development Executives of King County has been working to identify resources and strategies that are integral to creating and sustaining thriving, authentic partnerships between schools and youth- and family-serving organizations. This toolkit is a collection of these resources. It is intended to help schools, school districts, and youth- and family-serving organizations to build the web of partnerships that can provide every young person the opportunity and support they need to learn, lead, connect, contribute, and thrive.

This toolkit draws from a number of sources: most notably, we would like to acknowledge a similar project undertaken by the Oakland Unified School District (see <http://www.ousd.org/Page/11101> for more information), which provided a model for much of the content and organization of this resource.

¹ Partnership for Children and Youth, *Time Well Spent*, <http://partnerforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Time-Well-Spent-ExecSummary.pdf>

² Harvard Family Research Project, *Partnerships for Learning*, <http://www.hfrp.org/PartnershipsForLearning>



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: The Partnership Ecosystem

- What is a Partnership Ecosystem?
- How does the Partnership Ecosystem Work?
- Components of the Ecosystem: Types of Partnerships
- How to use this Toolkit

Part I. Getting Started Guide: Five Steps

1. Assess your Readiness to Partner
2. Identify your Partnership Type
3. Understand School, Student, and Community Needs
4. Prepare for Your First Partner Meeting
5. Track Commitments and Follow Through

Part II. Growing and Managing a Partnership Ecosystem

- Elements of a Thriving Partnership Ecosystem
 - Site Coordination
 - Shared Vision and Leadership
 - Responsive Implementation
 - Shared Accountability for Success
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WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM?

An ecosystem is defined as “A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment;” more generally, an ecosystem is “a complex network or interconnected system.”³

We use the metaphor of an ecosystem to frame community-school partnerships because the environment in which partnerships operate is inherently complex, and partnerships function best when they are interconnected and dynamically attuned to student needs. The partnership ecosystem can make the most efficient use of available resources when all partners focus on what they do best and contribute to a holistic system of supports for students. In a thriving partnership ecosystem, schools and partners are committed to effective site coordination; shared leadership; aligned, responsive implementation; and shared accountability for success.

HOW DOES THE PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM WORK?

Just like all ecosystems where different organisms coexist in a web of life, partners and schools must work together to create optimal learning environments for students. There is a growing body of knowledge on how schools can integrate youth development programs and other key supports at the school level. For the most part, well-coordinated and cohesive programs at the school level share certain characteristics.

School at the Center: A Community School Strategy

The key attributes of an effective partnership ecosystem at the school site level include shared leadership, responsive implementation, and shared accountability.

Shared Vision and Leadership

- Shared vision
- Common goals and outcomes
- Collaborative decision-making

Aligned, Responsive Implementation

- Services aligned with needs
- Efficient use of existing assets
- Incorporation of new partners when needed
- Trust and strong relationships

Shared Accountability for Success

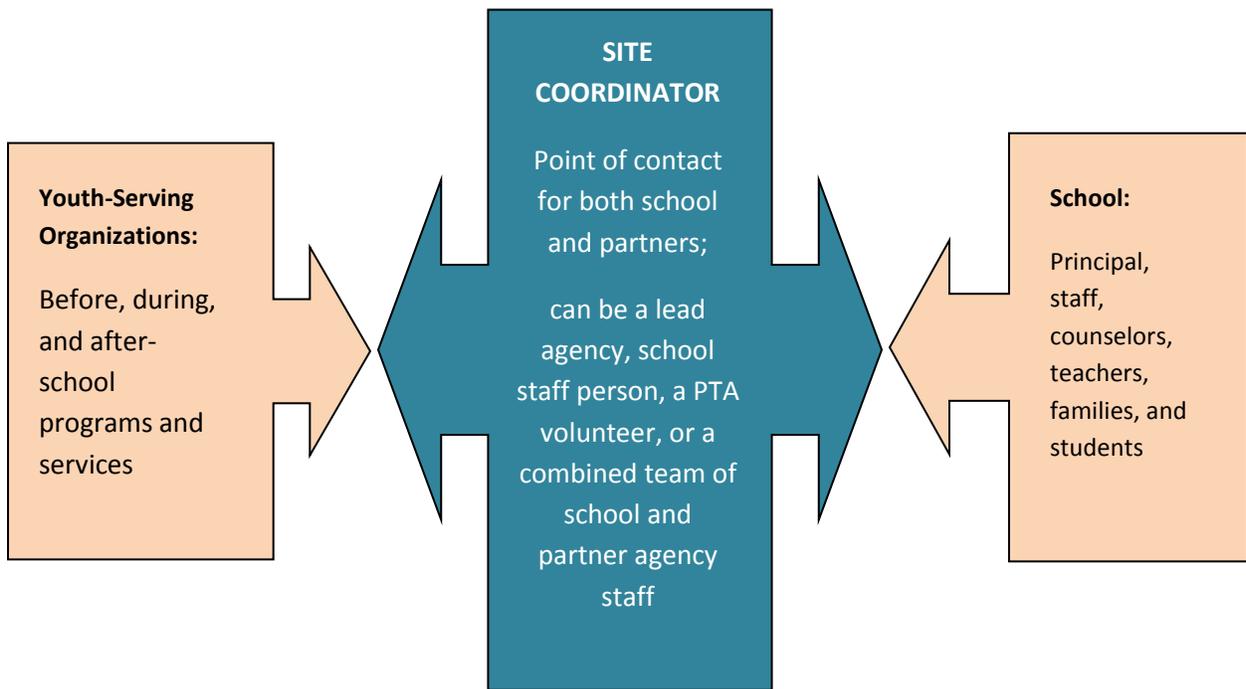
- Quality at the point of service
- Evaluation as an integral component of programming
- Use of shared data for planning

³ “Ecosystem.” *Oxford Dictionaries*. n.d.
http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/ecosystem

There are many program models that have these components; examples include Community Schools, Full-Service Community Schools, and some 21st-Century Community Learning Centers. Regardless of the specific model, **coordination** (by one individual or by a team) is essential to ensure that the core components are implemented well.

Site Coordination: The Glue of a Partnership Ecosystem

In order to lay the proper groundwork for a partnership ecosystem, the partnership must invest in site coordination. The site coordinator or coordination team serves as a central point of contact for community partners and others providing support services. Having a single point of contact that connects students and families with partner organizations for academic and social-emotional needs can make service provision much more efficient and effective. Ideally, the site coordinator or coordination team works closely with the leadership of the school and is valued at the school site.



COMPONENTS OF THE ECOSYSTEM: TYPES OF PARTNERSHIPS

At a school site, you may encounter an ecosystem that includes an array of different types of partnerships. Partnership types can vary widely depending on the needs, interests, and capacity of the partner organization and the school.

This toolkit pertains to three major types of partnerships, described below. Individual partners can move from one partnership type to another, depending on their desire and capacity to become more

integrated. It is important to note that a *variety* of types of partnerships can contribute to a healthy partnership ecosystem, and one type is not necessarily preferred over another. The main partnership types are:⁴

- **Cooperative:** Partners operate autonomously from the school. Program goals are primarily established by the partner agency, though they may share one or more goals with the school.
- **Collaborative:** The partner shares goals with the school, and communicates about progress on a semi-regular basis. The school and the partner organization maintain ultimate decision-making authority over their own activities.
- **Integrated:** The partner plays a major role in site planning processes, and shares data, resources, and decision-making authority with the school.

EXAMPLE OF A PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM WITH MULTIPLE PARTNER TYPES

Below is an example of a partnership ecosystem at Cleveland High School in Seattle. The chart below shows some of the youth-serving organizations at the school and describes their major functions. Partnerships are managed by a Site Coordinator that is employed by a lead agency – in this case the YMCA. The Site Coordinator manages the partner relationships and works directly with school staff to align services.

Example: Partnership Ecosystem at Cleveland High School, Seattle Public Schools ⁵		
Cooperative	Collaborative	Integrated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markets and recruits for programs/activities at school • One-time or occasional resource sharing or field trip opportunities • Guest lecturing, presentations, panels or judging at school 	<p><i>Same as cooperative partner plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attends Community Partner meetings at Cleveland • Provides on-going opportunities at school • Staff members are regularly present at school or school events • Actively collaborates with school • Collaborates with teachers. 	<p><i>Same as collaborative partner plus:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members work at school on a full- or part-time basis • Facilitates collaboration between school and other partners • Works to build or change school culture • Collaborates on identifying funding sources, grant writing and reporting.

⁴ Adapted from the Oakland Unified School District , Community Partner Identification Tool. Retrieved from <http://www.ousd.org/Page/11101>

⁵ Seattle Public Schools, Cleveland High School, *Partner Protocol Template*, K.Domingo

ORGANIZATIONS / PROGRAMS		
Cooperative	Collaborative	Integrated
<p>UW Astronomy Department/Alumni: Invites students to participate in building tour, free dinner, and evening lecture.</p> <p>YouthForce, Boys & Girls Clubs: Recruits students for internships and employment.</p> <p>IGNITE: Provides young women interested in science and technology with field opportunities with Microsoft.</p>	<p>OneWorld Now!: Recruits students for program, holds afterschool classes on campus.</p> <p>Summer Search: Recruits 10th graders for initial summer program followed by mentoring and college going support, volunteers at school wide events.</p> <p>Urban Impact: Runs program during advisory and Homework Center afterschool.</p> <p>Y-Tech, YMCA: Provides trainings for parents and community, afterschool program for students, in class technology support for teachers and professional development trainings.</p>	<p>College Success Foundation: Achievers program and school wide college support.</p> <p>Public Health, Seattle and King County: Operates on-site teen health clinics.</p> <p>YMCA: Implements Full-Service Community Schools grant, oversees Cleveland TEA programs and coordinates community partners</p>

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit is divided in to two main parts. The first is titled **Getting Partnership Ready**. This section provides guidance on the work that schools and organizations can do before entering into a formal partnership. The second section, **Growing and Managing the Partnership Ecosystem**, includes resources for school and organization leaders who are working to ensure that the partnership ecosystem of which they are part is as efficient, effective, and impactful as possible.

The toolkit is designed to provide an array of tools and tips to help both schools and youth-serving organizations at any stage of a partnership. School and community leaders, site and program staff, teachers, and other educators should find information relevant to their work. Some tools are labeled according to their primary target audience(s), so that you can easily find the tools best suited to you and your role in supporting the partnership ecosystem.

Review the checklist and guiding questions at the beginning of each toolkit section to get a general idea of the strengths and needs of your partnership. You can then read the section resource descriptions to identify those tools that are most relevant for you. Each tool can be used separately, or they can be used together to guide you through each stage of the process of creating and sustaining partnerships.