



THE PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM: AN 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.

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.

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>

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



HOW DOES THE PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM WORK?

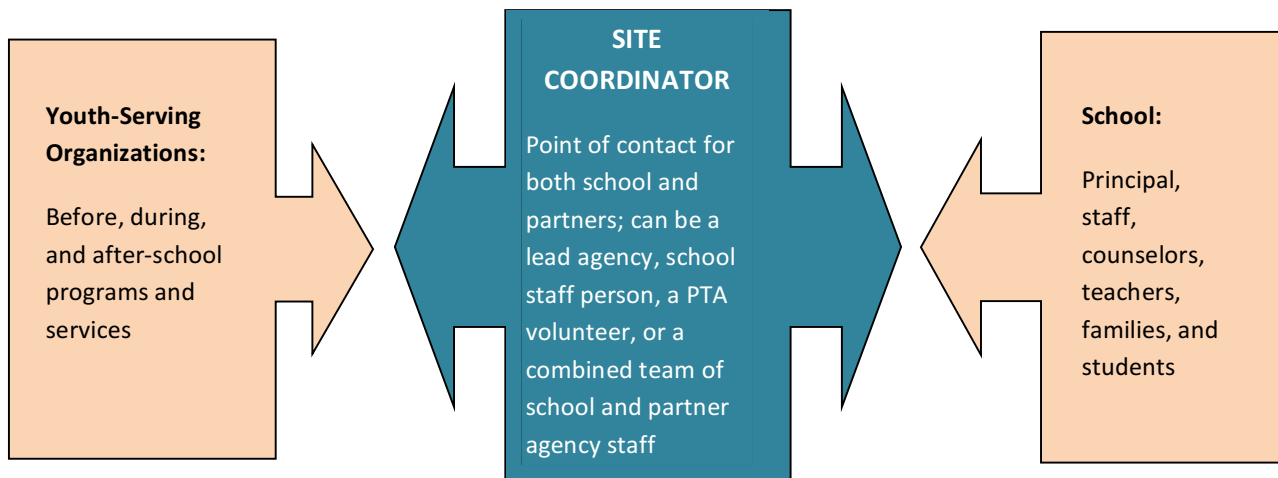
Just like all ecosystems, the partnership ecosystem is strongest when partners and schools work together to create optimal learning environments for students. For the most part, well-coordinated and cohesive services at the school level share certain characteristics, shown below:



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. Ideally, the site coordinator or coordination team works closely with the leadership of the school.





THE IMPORTANCE OF SITE COORDINATION

Effective site coordination creates, strengthens, and maintains a bridge between a school and partner organizations. Site coordinators facilitate and provide leadership for collaborative processes and coordinate a continuum of services for children, families, and community members. A site coordinator or coordination team can act as a liaison for many different areas, such as:⁴

- Parent and Family Engagement
- Community Engagement
- Youth Development
- Academic Alignment
- Partner Programs and Services (physical and mental health services, after-school enrichment opportunities, mentoring, early childhood education, etc.)

There are a number of different ways schools in King County and elsewhere have envisioned the site coordination role. The next section summarizes different staffing models for site coordination. No matter what the model, the most successful partnership sites have a clear point of contact for partners.

MODELS OF SITE COORDINATION

Site coordination often becomes the responsibility of the principal or school counselor by default. However, there are a number of alternative models in use. Examples include:

- The Chicago Public Schools created a **Community Schools Coordinator** position in its personnel structure to reduce the burden on principals. This person staffs a committee that meets regularly to ensure that student needs are being met. See the full job description from the Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) here at http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Job%20description_CS_Coor_pdf.pdf.
- Sometimes a site-based **Coordinating Team** is a workable approach to site coordination. The team is typically comprised of school staff members, representatives of partner agencies, and sometimes parents. CCS also provides an example of how a coordinating team works on their website at http://www.communityschools.org/about/community_school_coordinators_network.aspx.
- A site coordinator who is employed by a **Lead (Partner) Agency** can serve as a liaison to the school and can coordinate the work of other partners. Sometimes this lead agency is one of the partners working in the school, and sometimes it is an intermediary organization. Read a job description for a site coordinator employed by an intermediary agency on the Neighborhood Leadership Institute website at <http://neighborhoodleadership.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Glenville-Wraparound-Description.pdf>.
- Communities in Schools (CIS) deploys **Site Coordinators** in high-need schools. These individuals are in charge of providing school-wide enrichment opportunities and intensive case management

⁴ Retrieved from http://www.communityschools.org/about/community_school_coordinators_network.aspx.



to the neediest students. Read more about the CIS Seattle model at <https://seattle.ciswa.org/services/site-coordination/>.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD:

The school and partner leadership at White Center Heights Elementary School know that the key to making partnerships work is constant communication. That is part of why having a strong and dedicated coordinator in place can be so critical to the success of a partnership. At White Center Heights, they hired Andrea Gardner, a credentialed teacher, as the Extended Day Outcomes Coordinator, a position that serves as the intermediary between the school staff, students and families, and potential and established partners. The decision was made to fill this role with a credentialed teacher because they were especially interested in meeting academic needs in the time that followed the regular school day. With this background, Ms. Gardner was able to hit the ground running and establish systems in identifying partners that would be a good fit for the school.

Tips to consider:

- Think about the key qualities a site coordinator would need to help with achieving your school's vision for partnerships.
- Consider how much time it will take to get this person up and running. Developing trust and relationships with staff and partners take time.
- Consider any current staff, volunteers, or partner agencies that are already connected to the school that may be a good fit for this position.

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 services, interests, and capacity of partner organizations and the schools with which they work. The main partnership types referenced in this document are:⁵

- **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.

⁵ Adapted from the Oakland Unified School District, Community Partner Identification Tool. Retrieved from <http://www.ousd.org/Page/11101>



Partnerships are managed by a Site Coordinator that is employed by a lead agency – in this case the YMCA. The Site Coordinator manages partners and works directly with school staff to align services.

Example: Partnership Ecosystem at Cleveland High School, Seattle Public Schools ⁶		
CHARACTERISTICS		
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.
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>

⁶ Seattle Public Schools, Cleveland High School, *Partner Protocol Template*, K.Domingo



GETTING STARTED WITH PARTNERSHIP

In practice, most school sites do not have the kind of thriving ecosystem described above. Many school and organizational leaders are hesitant about the idea of partnership, or they simply do not know where to begin. **YDEKC's Partnership Toolkit** (available online at <https://ydekc.org/resource-center/school-community-partnership-toolkit/>) is a compilation of resources designed to help community organizations and schools navigate all phases of the partnership process. Tools are organized into the following sections:

- 1. Assessing Readiness:** Resources in this section can help leaders consider the benefits and challenges of partnership, and their school or organization's capacity and willingness to invest.
- 2. Mapping Needs and Assets:** Resources in this section can help program leaders understand the needs of young people in the community, and document existing services and gaps in service.
- 3. Establishing Partnership:** Resources designed to help with some of the foundational aspects of partnership – creating shared vision and documenting agreements and commitments.
- 4. Working Together:** Resources in this section can help leaders establish the practices and structures that will help them maintain communication with partners about all aspects of partnership work.
- 5. Evaluating Programs:** These resources can help leaders to establish planning and evaluation practices that can help sustain the partnership over time.