

# teacher-powered practices for student-centered community schools

## How collaborative leadership is foundational to transformative community schools

Student-centered community schools are intentionally designed to align community partnerships, services, enrichment programs, and classroom learning around students' strengths, hopes, and dreams. Foundational elements of student-centered community schools are collaborative leadership structures, teacher leadership, collective decision-making processes, and design-thinking. These elements result in **collective** identity, ownership, and agency of everyone in the school community especially students and families.

### 1. Partner with students and families before establishing community partnerships



A common assumption is that the resources that students need are outside of the school when **in fact there are untapped possibilities within students and families**. When schools are faced with a resource gap, schools should first look inward and partner with students and families. Students and families provide the power to propel student-centered innovation and transformation forward.

What does this practice look like?

- Listen to students and families to better understand their strengths, goals, and unmet need
- Ensure all groups are represented in decisions, especially those traditionally on the margins, have virtual and off campus options for listening sessions
- Brainstorm together especially with students and teachers to co-develop creative ideas
- Create space and time for students, families, teachers, and staff to implement the ideas

### 2. Keep students at the center of every community partnership decision

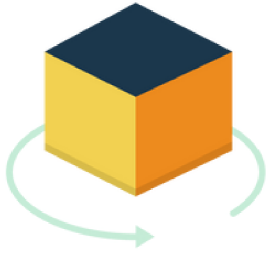


Once schools are ready to look to outside organizations to address a gap in services, schools are faced with the challenge of determining which community organization to partner with. Establishing a partnership takes time and resources, so schools need to **ensure that the organization is the right fit for the students**.

What does this practice look like?

- Learn about the organization's history, mission, goals, and past projects
- Be critical of organizations that claim to have quick fixes
- Seek partners who have an asset-based mindset and are curious about learning more about your students and school
- Engage the perspectives of students and teachers in determining if the partnership is a good fit

### 3. Co-design services and programs with community partners



Many community-based programs for enrichment and intervention come with a developed curriculum and activities. This can be a huge resource for schools that are too busy to develop programs, but many times pre-packaged programs are not culturally relevant. Community organizations alongside teachers, students, and families should **co-design programs and services to reflect the students' culture, strengths, and goals**.

What does this practice look like?

- Start with the partner's developed curriculum as a base and then add and adjust based on the needs of your students
- Create spaces and opportunities for students and teachers to co-design programs with organizations
- Get feedback from students who are participating in the program and make adjustments to create a more student-centered partnership

### 4. Invite community partners to participate in the school's collaborative leadership teams



Community partnerships are fragile. Changes in the school or the community organization can cause even the most impactful partnerships to end. Inviting partners to participate in the school's collaborative leadership structures can **increase the collective investment and commitment** to work together over time.

What does this practice look like?

- Invite community partners to participate in the school's collaborative leadership structures and practices, include them in meetings, shared documents, and co-created agendas
- Engage partners in the development of the school's plan and invite them to share accountability for student learning and well-being
- Develop relationships with more than one person at the partnership in case contacts leave

### 5. Take on a learner mindset to continuously evaluate, adapt, improve, or when necessary end community partnerships



Partnerships and schools will change over time, this is natural and healthy: student demographics are dynamic, staff members will transition, funding models and local initiatives will change, and the political landscape will fluctuate. One way to stay flexible but steadfast to the student-centered vision of the school is to develop a **collective culture of learning and deep reflection**. Taking on a learner mindset as a community will build schoolwide capacity to problem-solve creating room for new solutions and possibilities.

What does this practice look like?

- Create a rhythm of intentionally pausing and reflecting in teams: *What are we learning? What is working? What needs to change?*
- When faced with challenges, create space to identify contributing factors, gather reflections, and learn from missteps
- Be curious, not defensive
- Share learnings alongside traditional school outcome measures