



Partnership and Community Engagement

Many school health programs are leveraged through partnerships and community coalitions because stable federal and state funding is hard to come by. Many partners have a stake in healthy schools. Given the number of potential partners, it is essential to be strategic and ensure that student learning and achievement are the focus of every partnership. Key stakeholders in the community may include health-based organizations, youth-based organizations, Education Associations and Unions, philanthropy and health-care organizations.

Community engagement has been a core component of traditional coordinated school health programs, and the new “Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child” model¹ released by ASCD and the CDC emphasized this concept by breaking out “community involvement” from “family engagement”. The model also specifically addresses the need to engage students in school health. Engaging those with “lived experience” from the population in which the program or intervention hope to impact is absolutely vital to the successful implementation and sustainability of a program.

Key components include:

- Diverse community organizations are invested in the success of the program.
- Community members are passionately committed to the program
- The program communicates with community leaders.
- Community leaders are involved with the program.
- The community is engaged in the development of program goals.

Developing and maintaining quality youth-adult partnerships requires some special considerations relative to other groups. While a full description of the theory and research behind quality youth-adult partnerships is beyond the scope of this report, key partnership structures include²:

- Youth have multiple options for participation and receive the support to progressively take on more responsibility as they gain experience and skills.
- There is clarity in the roles of youth and adults, as established by policy, position description, or compensation.
- Youth and adults receive coaching and ongoing feedback.
- The organization has established strategies to recruit and retain youth.
- Organizational resources – budget, staff training, physical space – are aligned to support quality youth-adult partnership.

¹ ASCD, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child. A Collaborative Approach to Learning and Health*. 2014. <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/publications/wholechild/wsc-a-collaborative-approach.pdf>

² Zeldin S, Petrokubi J, Camino L. *Partnerships in Public Action: Principles, Organizational Culture & Outcomes*. October, 2008. Forum for Youth Investment.



- Adults and youth each have the opportunity to reflect and learn with their same-age peers.

Quality youth-adult partnerships translate into benefits to the youth/student: increased engagement, sense of belonging, safety, community awareness; adult: connection, creativity, and empathy; and organization: policies, programs and resources better reflect the needs of the population. As it relates to sustainability, youth partners can be powerful advocates to garner both internal (student) support and external (education leadership, community partners, funders, elected officials) for a school health program.