



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT

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A LETTER FROM THE DCPS PARTNERSHIPS TEAM

Dear Partners and School Leaders,

Enclosed you will find the School Partnership Toolkit, a new resource from the DCPS Partnerships Team designed to help build strong partnerships in support students' academic and social-emotional development. As we work together to fully understand and address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we know that effective school-community partnerships are key to providing students with the range of supports they need to be successful.

DCPS leaders believe in the transformative power of school-community collaboration, and this core belief is reflected in our theory of action that guides our work every day:

Theory of Action

If we

Build and sustain relationships between and among DCPS, families, communities, and partners that increase trust;

Increase access to information, resources, and DCPS leadership and staff;

Increase transparency and provide stakeholders with timely and equitable opportunities to advise DCPS priorities;



Build capacity in schools and central office to partner with families and communities to improve student outcomes;

Then, every DCPS student's success will be accelerated by partnerships with families and communities.

The DCPS community is stronger because of the partnerships that anchor so much of the programming our students engage in every day. But we know that building deep and impactful partnerships is not easy, so it is our hope that the School Partnership Toolkit is a first step in helping to grow school leader and partner capacity to effectively work together in support of DCPS students. Thank you for your continued commitment to the DCPS community, and we look forward to engaging with you around these topics in the coming year.

Best,

The DCPS Partnerships Team

RESOURCE OVERVIEW

USING THIS RESOURCE

The toolkit is broken up into five topic guides that allow partners and school leaders to focus on the issues most relevant to their work. Each guide includes best practices for schools and partners, relevant resources to support best practice implementation, as well as any required actions (e.g., ensuring all staff and volunteers go through the DCPS clearance process). This resource can be used as new partnerships are developed or to strengthen existing partnerships.

School-community partnerships are an evidence-based strategy that schools can use to address students' academic and social-emotional needs more effectively and efficiently. As communities work together to address the short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential that partners and school leaders align around shared, student-centered goals and that they have plans to track progress towards success on those goals.

High-quality partnerships take time and investments, requiring coordination across several areas. **The School Partnership Toolkit provides a menu of best practices and tools to support schools and partners in this coordination to maximize their impact.**

Topic Areas

1. Finding the Right Match
2. Setting Goals and Tracking Progress
3. Communication
4. Sharing Space
5. Culture and Inclusion

To put this resource into action, partners, and school leaders should consider the following next steps:

- Review this resource with your respective teams to identify priority topic areas.
- Brainstorm questions for the school leaders/partners you work with, informed by your team's discussion.
- Schedule regular check-in time between school and program leaders to discuss questions and identify shared priorities for your collaborative work this year.
- Reach out to DCPS.Partnerships@k12.dc.gov with feedback, questions, or requests for additional support using this resource.

The DCPS Partnerships Team would like to thank Dr. Reuben Jacobson and Dr. Robert Shand from American University for their input and guidance during the development of this resource.

FINDING THE RIGHT MATCH

High-quality partnerships can be transformative for students, families, and staff but they require intentional time and effort to develop and maintain. School and partner leaders need to invest time on the front end of relationship-building to ensure that a partner's offering matches the school's needs and that the school can provide the supports that partners need to be successful. The best practices and resources below focus on key strategies for determining school and program needs and ensuring alignment between the two.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Research and meet with partners to determine whether they can provide resources needed to advance school goals.
- Be clear about the programming/supports your school needs and the supports you're able to provide to the partner.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Research the school's needs and pre-existing resources to determine whether what you have to offer will help advance school goals.
- Think specifically about how your organization can support school needs.
- Share any resources up front that you might need from the school to meet grant requirements, dosage, etc.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- **“Menu” of Needs:** Use [this template](#) to develop a “menu” of supports for your school community to show interested parties how they can address your school's needs.
- **Partner Interest Form:** Create a Partner Interest Form ([sample](#)) on your school website and/or send it to potential partners to streamline inquiries from potential partners and determine whether the partnership meets the needs of the school community.
- **Letter Declining Partnership:** Use [this template](#) to politely decline an offer of support from a community member that does not address your school's priorities.
- **School Partnerships Database:** [Click here](#) to search for registered School Program Providers that might meet your school's needs.

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

- **CSP Snapshots:** Use these [“snapshots” of Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to view the priorities at all DC Public Schools. Use these to guide your decisions regarding which schools to approach for partnership where your organization can directly meet the needs outlined in the CSP snapshot.
- **School Profiles:** Review each DCPS [school profile](#) to learn more about the school's location, demographics, existing partnerships and more.

REQUIREMENTS

- All partner staff and volunteers must obtain a DCPS clearance before working in our school buildings or with DCPS students in-person or virtually. More information about the clearance process is available [here](#).
- Any partner acting as a [School Program Provider](#) must [register with DCPS](#) and secure a Memorandum of Agreement with DCPS

SETTING GOALS AND TRACKING PROGRESS

The most impactful school partnerships are intentional and informed by data and evidence to ensure strategic alignment between schools and programs. The best practices and resources below focus on supporting school and program leaders in their efforts to establish goals and track progress towards meeting those goals.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS AND PARTNERS

- Set specific, measurable goals for the school year and establish a process for monitoring progress towards success. Partners and school leaders should use the [Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to anchor their goal-setting and ensure alignment between partner and school priorities.
- Use data points aligned with those that DCPS uses to track progress towards key goals (e.g., DIBELS, PARCC scores, attendance, enrollment, etc.).
- Review data regularly to evaluate partnership impact and adjust efforts as needed.
- When appropriate, compare student data to a control group (e.g., students not participating in the program) to better assess program impact.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS AND PARTNERS

- **Partnership Action Plan:** Work together to establish shared goals, detail why they are strategically important, outline the strategies needed to meet goals, and the measures you will use to track progress towards success.
- [Sample](#) Partner Action Plan
- Blank Partner Action Plan [Template](#)
- **Comprehensive School Plans:** Use these “snapshots” of [Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to view the priorities at all DC Public Schools.

REQUIREMENTS

To protect student privacy, review the [DCPS Data-Sharing Policy](#) to ensure compliance with District rules and regulations.

COMMUNICATION

Successful partnerships require regular, proactive communication from both school leaders and partners. The best practices and resources below support the establishment of communication norms to ensure that matters related to the partnership are given proper attention, especially as school leaders work to balance competing priorities.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Include partner in important communications to families, students, and staff (e.g., COVID-19 communications).
- Prepare for and attend regular meetings with the partner.
- Establish a clear point of contact at the school and share best methods for contact between meetings. This might not always be the principal.
- Be proactive with communications to ensure partners have the information they need to be successful (e.g., sending regular partner emails or newsletters).
- Apply feedback from the partner, as appropriate, to improve partnership.
- Meet regularly with all school partners to discuss coordination between partners and important school updates.
- Establish communication protocols in the event of an emergency during partner-led programming.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Prepare for and attend regular meetings with the school leader and/or school's partnership point of contact.
- Share best methods for contact between meetings.
- Initiate communication when needed.
- Apply feedback from the school to improve partnership.
- Establish communication protocols in the event of an emergency during partner-led programming.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- Consider a [partner newsletter](#) to share regular updates with partners, including current priorities, program highlights, etc.

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.

SHARING SPACE

School space can be limited but partners often require consistent access to space for storage, programming, and planning to execute their programs successfully. The best practices and resources below aim to support schools and partners in determining which spaces will be available to partners and how to best use that space to the satisfaction of both the partner and the school.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Make appropriate space available for partner that includes agreed upon resources (e.g., storage space, space for programming or office space).
- Ensure school space is clean and in usable condition when available for partners.
- Share safety protocols with partner, including drill routines.
- Support partners' efforts to follow DC Department of Health mandated safety procedures.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Be understanding of space limitations and work with the school to operate within the available space at the school.
- Practice emergency procedures with students and staff.
- After use, leave school spaces in better condition than before use.
- When in the building, follow safety procedures as mandated by the DC Department of Health.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including building use.
- **Partnerships Management Tracker:** Use [this tracker](#) to keep track of where your partners are operating within your building.

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including building use.

REQUIREMENTS

- All outside organizations using DCPS buildings must submit an [application for Facilities Use](#) to DGS at least 20 business days before beginning programming as well as follow all [DCPS COVID-19 safety processes and procedures](#).
- **Beginning November 1, 2021, all adults who are regularly in schools in the District must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. After November 1, there is no longer an option to choose weekly testing instead of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine.** This policy applies to all DCPS partner organizations' staff, volunteers, and employees who regularly work in DCPS schools. For more information about the Mayor's mandate, click [here](#).
- **Partners must complete this [vaccination mandate acknowledgement form](#) by November 1 to indicate your organization's compliance with the updated vaccine mandate. Individuals who choose to opt-out of the vaccine based on religious or medical exemptions must work with their organization internally to have that exemption approved.** These individuals must be tested weekly through a District-operated or private testing location (e.g., not through a DCPS school site) and submit those negative test results to their partner organization for tracking. Organizations should approve exemptions on a case-by-case basis and those must also be tracked internally.

CULTURE AND INCLUSION

Partners are most successful when they feel included in the school community and can align with its cultural norms. Meaningfully integrating partners into the school community also helps program leaders align their offerings with relevant curriculum or classroom management structures used during the school day. The best practices and resources below support school leaders and partners in their efforts to align cultural norms, ensure that partner staff and volunteers feel like a part of the larger school community, and promote cohesion between in-school and out-of-school programming.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Include partner in important communications to families, students, and staff (e.g., COVID-19 communications).
- Invite partners to school-wide events, including assemblies and Back to School Night.
- Attend partner-led events, like student performances or family nights.
- Share school-wide cultural norms and behavior support strategies.
- Invite partners to professional development that is relevant to their work with the school (ex., including literacy tutors in professional development opportunities with English Language Arts teachers).
- Invite partners to join faculty/staff meetings where academic programming is discussed to promote alignment and collaboration.
- Encourage teachers and other school staff to treat partner staff and volunteers as members of the school community; even saying hello in the lounge at lunchtime can make partners feel included.
- Observe programming when possible and share feedback (see The Weikart Center resources linked below).

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Research the school's needs and pre-existing resources to determine whether what you have to offer will help advance school goals.
- Think specifically about how your organization can support school needs.
- Share any resources upfront you might need from the school to meet grant requirements, dosage, etc.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- **Weikart Center's Program Quality Assessments:** Use [these tools](#) to inform observations and continuous improvement efforts to ensure partner offerings are maximized for impact.
- **Sample Newsletter to Partners:** View [this document](#) as an example of how to engage partners through a regular newsletter

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- **Weikart Center's Program Quality Assessments:** Use [these tools](#) to inform observations and continuous improvement efforts to ensure partner offerings are maximized for impact.

CONCLUSION

DCPS believes in the transformative power of school-community collaboration and values the many opportunities that partners provide to DCPS students. The School Partnership Toolkit reflects these values by giving school and partner leaders best practices and resources to help them cultivate high-quality partnerships in support of improved student outcomes. The toolkit can be used to ground conversations as partnerships are just beginning or to inform ongoing efforts to strengthen existing ones. Together, school and partner leaders can use the toolkit to identify high-priority focus areas and ensure that their collaboration efforts are intentional.

The toolkit will be a living document that evolves over time to meet partner and school leaders' needs. As you use it, we hope you will share your feedback about what's working and what further supports you'd like to see. You can share your feedback by e-mailing DCPS.Partnerships@k12.dc.gov.

Thank you for your continued efforts to support DCPS students. We could not do this work without you!

LIBRARY OF RESOURCES

Here is an overview of all the resources linked through the toolkit, organized by topic area.

FINDING THE RIGHT MATCH

Principals

- **“Menu” of Needs:** Use [this template](#) to develop a “menu” of supports for your school community to show interested parties how they can address your school’s needs.
- **Partner Interest Form:** Create a Partner Interest [form](#) on your school website and/or send it to potential partners to streamline inquiries from potential partners and determine whether the partnership meets the needs of the school community.
- **Letter Declining Partnership:** Use [this template](#) to politely decline an offer of support from a community member that does not address your school’s priorities.

Partners

- **CSP Snapshots:** Review these [“snapshots” of Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to view the priorities at all DC Public Schools.
- **School Profiles:** Review each DCPS [school profile](#) to learn more about the school’s location, demographics, existing partnerships and more.
- **School Partnerships Database:** [Click here](#) to search for registered School Program Providers that might meet your school’s needs
- **Steps to become a School Program Provider.**
- [DCPS Clearance Guidance](#)

SETTING GOALS AND TRACKING PROGRESS

- [Sample](#) Partner Action Plan
- Blank Partner Action Plan [Template](#)
- [DCPS Data-Sharing Policy](#)

COMMUNICATION

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- [Sample partner newsletter](#)

SHARING SPACE

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including building use.
- **Partnerships Management Tracker:** Use [this tracker](#) to keep track of where your partners are operating within your building.
- [Application for Facilities Use](#)

CULTURE AND INCLUSION

- **Sample Newsletter to Partners:** View [this document](#) as an example of how to engage partners through a regular newsletter.
- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- **Weikart Center’s Program Quality Assessments:** Use [these tools](#) to inform observations and continuous improvement efforts to ensure partner offerings are maximized for impact