**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Creating Developmentally Appropriate Learning Environments for**

**Young Children, Preschool to Grade 3**

July 2021

# Brief 1: Collaboration with Community Based Partners

The following early childhood brief was created as companion document for the [Elements of High Quality Kindergarten](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/hq-kindergarten.docx), [Elements of High Quality Elementary Classrooms](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/hq-elementary.docx) and the [joint position statement on play as an instructional strategy](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/play-statement.docx). The brief contains a summary of this topic along with strategies and approaches that reflect high quality early childhood practices. Each brief is followed by a list of related resources and references that were used to develop the brief.

The full set of briefs can be found on the [Department’s Early Learning webpage](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/).

* **Brief 1: Collaboration with Community Based Partners**
* [**Brief 2**](#_Section_2:_Culturally)**: Culturally Responsive Family Engagement**
* [**Brief 3**](#_Section_3:_Supporting)**: Supporting Social-Emotional Learning and Well-Being in Culturally Responsive Ways**
* [**Brief 4**](#_Section_4:_Creating)**: Creating Antiracist Environments for Young Children**
* [**Brief 5: Planning for Developmentally Appropriate Practices**](#_Section_5:_Planning)

While the topics of these briefs are relevant to all grades, Preschool to 12th Grade, they are written with a particular focus on our youngest students, Preschool to 3rd grade.

**Collaboration with Community Based Partners**

Ongoing collaboration between public schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) is the foundation to building supports that ensure:

* the successful transition of all children to learning;
* equitable access to high quality learning opportunities for all children and youth;
* student and family wellbeing; and
* families’ (re)engagement in the workforce.

“Education leaders and policy makers[[1]](#endnote-2) contend that “schools alone” cannot achieve true equity - the policy goal of ‘all means all’” (Preface, page xv). Leaders and policy makers also maintain that widespread collaboration across many organizations and sectors, including business, healthcare, social services, and more, has the power to transform educational outcomes toward equity in the ways we have unsuccessfully sought for decades[[2]](#endnote-3). As schools transition all students to in-person learning and families explore their options, early childhood and out-of-school time (OST) programs as well as other community-based organizations (e.g., cultural, faith-based, health, mental health, housing and other human service agencies, etc.) continue to serve a critical need for students, families and educators.

*Establish or enhance collaborative structures.*Community-based organizations have many unique strengths that are beneficial and supportive of schools. Given the mutual goals of supporting students and families, communities are encouraged to develop or expand upon existing collaborations, which may go by many names. Such local workgroups are typically charged with making recommendations to address current concerns.

Local coordination of such workgroups can start with leadership, the gathering of information about needs, and proceed with framing strategies to address needs with informed recommendations and the development of coordinated plans. Members of such workgroups may collaborate in asset mapping to address changing/shifting needs of the community as it relates to program space, staffing, transportation, technology funding, and equitable access for the current school year. Workgroup members and partnerships may include, but not be limited to: school and district administrators, families, community-based and public preschool and OST programs, Coordinated Family and Community Engagement Grant Coordinators, Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, public health officials, business leaders, families and students, and other community organizations (e.g., libraries and museums, health, mental health, housing).

*Strategies to use in developing and expanding collaboration.* Schools and districts are encouraged to provide a point person within each district who can collaborate with community-based partners to:

* Engage in dialogue to share expertise, to extend learning and offer programming/support such as summer learning, extended learning through OST programs during the school year, supports for social-emotional development and well-being, enrichment activities, and increase family engagement;
* Actively share in communication strategies/efforts so the partners can assist in communicating information, help answer questions and share information back with schools;
* Co-design and conduct surveys and needs assessment to gather input from families and community organizations to inform development of family- and community-centered programming;
* Consider blended funding options to support organizations and districts/schools to address needs in the community; and
* Where appropriate, engage in joint professional development.

In working together towards mutually agreed upon goals, the benefits CBOs offer may include but are not limited to:

* Offering full day programming options when students are not in school, including school breaks and summer;
* Providing virtual programming for students outside or during school hours (e.g,, virtual internships, arts programming, STEAM, etc.);
* Attending professional development offered by the district to align best practices;
* Offering training in a particular area of expertise (.e.g., outreach to a specific population or community, effects of trauma on the developing brain, etc.)
* Serving as a cultural broker between schools and families to better understanding cultures and customs, expand access to services and/or support families in guiding learning for their student(s);
* Providing a point person within each organization to answer district questions as they emerge;
* Sharing information on specialized population support; and
* Developing programming that is aligned to a specific need identified by the district/school.

The successful transition of all students ready to engage in learning is dependent on collaboration between district, schools, families and community-based organizations. Appendix A: Resources provides additional examples, models, research findings, and articles about ways in which these collaborations can be effectively developed and enhanced.

For any questions, more information, or to speak with a member of DESE’s Early Learning team about this document or the work in your community, please email [achievement@doe.mass.edu](mailto:achievement@doe.mass.edu).

## **Appendix A: Resources for Collaborating with Community Based Organizations**

* DESE, the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) and the Executive Office of Education (EOE) Webinar: *Building Strong Collaborations Between Public Schools and Community-Based Programs to Support Young Students and their Families*

Webinar Description: This webinar focuses on the importance of building strong partnerships between districts, schools and community-based partners in supporting the remote learning needs of young students and their families. Topics may include but not be limited to: scheduling flexibility; coordinated distribution of free and reduced lunches; liaisons and other approaches for enhanced communication; technology access; leveraging adult supervision; addressing screen fatigue; and attendance. Includes collaboration examples from several MA communities.

[Recorded session](https://youtu.be/Awb99grAQUw)

[Presentation slides](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/webinar2-presentation.pdf)

* [Building Strong Partnerships: Additional Community Spotlights](https://www.doe.mass.edu/sfs/earlylearning/resources/community-spotlights.docx). Describes examples of collaborations in five additional MA communities from the pandemic year.
* TOOLKIT: National Education Association ([NEA’s) Community Conversations Project.](https://www.nea.org/resource-library/community-conversations-project) A tool for helping nurture family-community-school collaborations.
* [Handbook on Family and Community Engagement](https://www.schoolcommunitynetwork.org/downloads/FACEHandbook.pdf), from the Academic Development Institute.
* [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: Family-School-Community Partnerships](https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/training-technical-assistance/education-level/early-learning/family-school-community-partnerships)
* Edutopia: [5 Steps to Better School/Community Collaboration](https://www.edutopia.org/blog/school-community-collaboration-brendan-okeefe)
* Case studies and examples of collaborations:
  + The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has sponsored in depth research into strategies to foster cross-sector collaboration, and has reported on the [collaborative experiences of 30 “Sentinal” communities](https://www.rwjf.org/en/cultureofhealth/what-were-learning/sentinel-communities.html) across the U.S., with overall health and well-being as the focus’
  + Houston, TX, with [*Communities in Schools*](https://www.communitiesinschools.org/) *(*CIS: a collaborative model in 25 states, with at least 15 national partners)
  + The six cities who participated in [*Building Citywide Systems*](https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/edredesign/files/building-city-wide-systems-of-opportunity-for-children-overview_0.pdf)(Sacks & Boyle, 2018)
* [Resource Mapping tool](https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-educators/resource-mapping-strategy) from the Making Caring Common Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College. Communities working to focus their collaborative efforts may want to conduct stakeholder surveys, or use tools such as this to identify where needs are greatest. Designed for Secondary level, can be adapted for elementary.
* [School-Community Partnerships for Students During COVID-19.](https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/ncase-resource-library/school-community-partnerships-students-during-covid-19) (2020) A toolkit and planning tool created by School’s Out, Washington, the WA Department of Children, Youth and Families and dozens of community organizations across WA state. Includes partnership inventory tool with potential funding sources partnership examples; and other resources. NCASE Resource Library: National Center on Afterschool and Summer Enrichment.
* [*Community Schools Playbook: A Practical Guide to Advancing Community Schools Strategies*](https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org/)*.*. Washington, DC: Partnership for the Future of Learning. Partners include: Learning Policy Institute, Coalition for Community Schools, National Education Policy Center, Research for Action, and the Public Leadership Institute. Fourth pillar: Collaborative Leadership and Practices (pages 61-68)
* [Collective Impact Forum: Case Study: The Roadmap Project](https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/resources/case-study-road-map-project).

**Appendix B: References on Collaboration with Community Based Organizations**

Abrams, L.S. & Gibb, J.T. (2000). PLANNING FORSCHOOL CHANGE School-Community Collaboration in a Full-Service Elementary School. *URBAN EDUCATION*, 35(1), March. Corwin Press.

Blank, M. J., Jacobson, R., & Melaville, A. (2012). Achieving results through community school partnerships: How district and community leaders are building effective, sustainable relationships. Washington DC: Center for American Progress.

[COVID-19 Community Response: Emerging Themes Across Sentinel Communities](https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/interactives/covid-19-community-response--emerging-themes-across-sentinel-communities.html): What can we learn at the intersection of resilience, well-being, and equity?, Robert Woods Johnson Foundation.

Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., and Kramer, M. “Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, January 26, 2012.

Reville, P. & Sacks, L. (2021). *Collaborative Action for Equity and Opportunity: A Practical Guide for School and Community Leaders.* Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Sacks, L. & Boyle, J. (April 2020). “[Building City-Wide Systems of Opportunity for Children: Initial Lessons from the By All Means Consortium](https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/edredesign/files/building-city-wide-systems-of-opportunity-for-children-overview_0.pdf)”.Education Redesign Lab, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Turner Lee, N. (September, 2020). “[How courageous schools partnering with local communities can overcome digital inequalities during COVID-19”.](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2020/09/17/how-courageous-schools-partnering-with-local-communities-can-overcome-digital-inequalities-during-covid-19/) TECHTANK: Brookings Institution.

ENDNOTES

1. See Reville & Sacks, 2021. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. See Sack & Boyle, 2020; Blank, Jacobsen & Melville, 2012; Abrams & Gibb (2000);. and [Communities in Schools](https://www.communitiesinschools.org/). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)