

The Importance of School and Community Collaboration

In the face of such overwhelming need, what does collaborative action offer? Most people would agree that it is considerably easier for children to develop and learn with the support of strong families who in turn enjoy the support of individuals and institutions in their surrounding communities. However, the increase in single-parent and dual-income families -- coupled with the gradual disappearance of village-like communities -- leaves a growing number of children and families woefully isolated from helping relationships, peer and emotional support, and access to referral services ([Weiss, Woodrum, Lopez, & Kraemer, 1993](#)).

When families, schools, and community institutions (e.g., local businesses, community colleges, and health agencies) collectively agree upon their goals and decide how to reach them, everyone benefits. Schools enjoy the informed support of families and community members, families experience many opportunities to contribute to their children's education, and communities look forward to an educated, responsible workforce. Benefits accrue to the staff of schools and community agencies as well: they can observe boosts in morale, heightened engagement in their work, and a feeling that their work will net results.

Researchers and practitioners have documented for some time how schools and communities working toward common goals can be beneficial. Communities can provide schools with a context and environment that can either complement and reinforce the values, culture, and learning the schools provide for their students or negate everything the schools strive to accomplish ([Ada, 1994](#); [Bricker, 1989](#); [Niето, 1992](#)). Communities also can furnish schools -- and the students in them -- with crucial financial support systems as well as the social and cultural values necessary for success and survival in contemporary society ([Mattessich & Monsey, 1993](#); [MDC, Inc., 1991](#); [Miller, 1991](#)). Finally, communities have the potential to extend a variety of opportunities to students and to their families -- social, cultural, and vocational ([Bell & Sigsworth, 1987](#); [Hull, 1994](#)).

Schools, in turn, offer communities a focal point of educational services for children. Symbolically, schools are seen by many as the last enduring public institutions in many communities ([Lockwood, forthcoming](#)). Instruction typically includes lessons in social and cultural skills -- particularly in the elementary grades -- in addition to acculturation into mainstream values and ethics. Schools frequently provide employment for community residents and, in some cases, offer community services. Most important, schools have the potential to build well-educated citizens ready to take on responsibilities as contributing community members.

By working together, schools, families, and communities can prepare for a more promising future. In urban communities struggling against violence, unemployment, and deteriorating institutions, school-community collaboration offers hope for those who may have given up on the social institutions in their neighborhoods and cities. Rural communities searching for opportunities to revitalize themselves in a technologically sophisticated society can discover ways to bring themselves into the information age by intertwining school and community improvement initiatives.



Source: