

School-Community Partnerships in Maine

REPORT ON A MEPRI STUDY CONDUCTED IN 2020-21

JANET FAIRMAN

CATHARINE BIDDLE

MING TSO-CHIEN



Impetus and Context of the Study

- To identify examples of successful school district-community partnerships in Maine
- Our focus: Partnerships supporting student and family wellness (social, emotional, mental, physical health)
- On-going concern about these challenges for Maine schools and communities
- Covid-19 increased these challenges
- Importance of student health for academic learning

Background

- MDOE / legislative encouragement of “community schools,” concept, and partnerships
 - Seed Grants in 2016: MSAD 17 (Oxford Hills), RSU 34 (Old Town)
 - Federal grant supporting wrap-around services for PreK expansion program
- Frameworks to guide school-community partnerships

“Community Schools” Concept

- No single, preferred model or definition, “whole child” view
- One definition: “Public schools that partner with families and community organizations to provide well-rounded educational opportunities and supports for students’ school success”
(Coalition of Community Schools)
- Two models of “Community Schools”:
 - Single school as hub for community services
 - Entire school district

Framework for “Community Schools”

- Schools with partnerships may not have a framework
- **Framework:** (Partnership for the Future of Learning 2018)
 - 1. Integrated student supports
 - 2. Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities
 - 3. Active family and community engagement
 - 4. Collaborative leadership and practices
- MEPRI study collected data on the first three elements

Research on “Community Schools” and Partnerships

- Less research/ evaluation conducted in rural settings
- Evidence from 20+ studies found positive impacts for students, families, schools, and communities
- Improved student outcomes:
 - Math & reading achievement
 - Attitudes about school/ behavior/ attendance
 - Self-esteem

Improved Family Outcomes

- Communication with schools
- Family stability and meeting basic needs
- Family engagement/ attendance in school meetings
- Sense of responsibility for a child's education

MEPRI Study: Multiple Case Studies

- Six diverse (urban/ rural, large/ small) district cases with successful partnerships supporting student and family health and wellness
- MDOE encouraging partnerships through PreK programs
- Fall 2020 interviews—second school year of COVID
- District Supt. or other admin., 1-2 partner representatives

District Cases:

- Urban/ small city: Portland and Lewiston
- Suburban/ rural fringe: RSU34 (Old Town)
- Distant rural: MSAD17 (Oxford Hills), RSU25 (Bucksport)
- Remote town: Calais
- % free/ reduced lunch eligibility: 51% - 63%
- % ELL students: 0.3% - 28%
- % non-White students: 7% - 47%
- District Enrollment: 614 – 6,522

Focus of the Research Study

- Describe range of partners, how and why they partner
- Describe specific strategies to support and sustain partnerships
- Describe challenges that districts and partners experience
- Perceptions of benefits from partnerships

Motivation for Partnering

- Challenges associated with family poverty: food, housing, health and mental health needs, supporting early child development and school readiness
- Strengthen school-family relationships, communication
- Support for ELL and immigrant students, equity, culturally responsive practices, engagement of families
- Expansion of enrichment opportunities, college & career readiness

Examples of Some Partners

- Local and regional health centers/ hospitals and coalitions
- Community food pantries, programs, & Good Shepherd
- Youth development programs, community rec programs
- CTE programs provided students to staff programs
- Federally funded Community Action Programs (CAP)
- Head Start programs, local libraries
- YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, Foster Grandparents
- Business groups

Challenges with Partnerships

- Identifying potential partners
- Fewer partners in rural settings
- Identifying funding sources to sustain programs
- Technical assistance or evaluation needs (PreK programs)
- Need for staffing to coordinate partnerships and parent/
community outreach
- Cultural/ language diversity impacting communication

Successful Strategies for Partnerships

- Supt./ district leadership to initiate partnerships
- Identifying shared goals and community concerns
- Aligning partnerships with district goals, priorities
- Broad-based stakeholder input/ team to guide efforts
- Leveraging local, regional, state and federal funding
- Staff position to coordinate partnerships and programs

Perceptions of Partnership Benefits

- Supporting basic needs of students and families by leveraging resources, staffing, programs beyond the school
- Building positive relationships between school & families
- Supporting students' school readiness
- Supporting academic success
- Preparing students for college and careers

Conclusions from Study

- Lack of evaluation of programs and partnerships
- Need for guidance, technical support and professional development to support partnerships
 - Identifying potential partners and funding
 - Implementing with an evidence-based framework
 - Evaluating programs and partnerships
- On-going funding needed beyond seed grants (EPS?)
- Regional collaboration can be encouraged elsewhere

Questions?

