Building Strategic Partnerships: MOUs and other Common Agreements

About Strategic Community Partnerships

According to California's Community Schools (CA CS) Framework, community schools are defined as public schools with "**strong and intentional community partnerships ensuring pupil learning and whole child and family development**" (CA CS Framework, p. 2). Strategic community partnerships increase the capacity of community schools to work towards and achieve the aspirational vision of interest-holders by supporting and sustaining a broad continuum of priorities such as integrated student supports, family and community engagement, collaborative leadership, extended learning time and opportunities, etc. They are essential for creating a supportive and resource-rich environment that responds to the assets and the diverse needs of students, fosters community engagement, and promotes equity and sustainability. The work of building and strengthening partnerships is ongoing yet evolving across each phase of community school development as outlined in the Capacity-Building Strategies: A Developmental Rubric.

Overview of Partnership Agreements

A range of written agreements formalize these relationships and are essential tools in community school implementation. They serve several purposes from detailing the exact services to be provided, by whom and when, and associated costs for services to ensuring safety and security. These agreements also outline how the parties will collaborate and share in decision-making, and address legal requirements and liability issues.

Common agreement types include:

- **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).** An MOU is an agreement between two or more parties that clearly articulates goals, expectations, and responsibilities of each party.
- **Data Sharing Agreement.** Sometimes included in a MOU, a data sharing agreement outlines the why, what, when, and how information will be shared between two or more parties, in a manner consistent with federal and state laws.
- **Joint Use Agreement.** Sometimes included in a MOU, a joint use agreement lays out the terms and conditions for sharing the use of school property/facilities to open and or increase community access for a range of purposes. These agreements help spread responsibility for costs, security, supervision, maintenance, repairs, and potential liability associated with expanded facility usage.

Role of the District

Districts typically have an existing process in place to develop and execute formal agreements. These processes are often created/vetted by legal counsel and, as such, schools should adhere to their district's procedures.

Given the critical role of partners in community schools, districts should also create guidance and support for their community schools to help delineate if and when formal agreements are necessary as well as work to remove barriers to partnership and collaboration. Further, districts should consider how to streamline the agreement process so as to not hinder the provision of services and progress towards shared goals. This includes engaging community school coordinators as key leaders throughout the agreement development process.

Agreement Considerations and Inclusions

Remember, the quality and alignment of partners to collective priorities are far more important than the quantity of partners alone. Prior to entering into agreements, schools and districts should determine what services and supports are needed and then align agreed upon commitments and deliverables accordingly; consider long-term sustainability of the partnership and the services provided; and how the effectiveness of the partnership will be monitored and evaluated.

Below are components that are often included in formal agreements:

- Terms of agreement, including detailed commitments and responsibilities of each party
- Expectations and agreements relating to collaboration and shared leadership
- Staffing and supervision expectations, including the role of independent contractors
- Protocols on confidentiality, consent, and sharing of information
- Safety and security protocols, including background checks and mandated reporting
- Use of space requirements and expectations
- Details of each party's financial obligations, including stipulations around costs to students
- Indemnification/hold harmless clause and insurance requirements

Examples of Partnership Agreements

The following examples of partnership agreements, including MOUs, data sharing agreements, and joint use agreements aim to provide CCSPP grantees with guidance in creating their own agreements. The examples highlight the various components mentioned above and illustrate how partner responsibilities can be clearly defined.

Memorandum of Understanding:

- Community School Core Partners - Agreement between the school/district, community based organization, health provider, and university that spells out how the partners will collaborate and share leadership.
- Vision to Learn – Template agreement between a mobile vision service provider and school district to serve students at select schools with sample deliverables/services included

- Alta Med – Template agreement between a health partner and school district. Deliverables/services not included.
- Oral Health Services - Agreement between school district and provider to provide prevention services leveraging existing California funding and programs
- Baby2Baby – Agreement between LACOE and local nonprofit for provision of goods/donations with indemnification clause.
- PIQE – Contract between LACOE and parent training provider for paid services resulting from Request for Proposal (RFP) process.
- Health and Wellness Coordinator – Agreement between district and partner to share costs of funding community school staff position.

Data Sharing Agreement:

- North State Together – Regional information sharing across a Northern California cradle to career collaborative that includes a CBO, COE, school district, and others to track students.
- Northfield Public Schools – Educational data privacy agreement that is part of a MOU between a district and a formal consortium aimed at improving student achievement and well-being.
- Sulphur Springs K-8 Community School – Data sharing between a district and core partners at a single community school site.

Joint Use Agreement:

- Sulphur Springs K-8 Community School – MOU that includes facility usage details.

Other:

- CCSPP Supports – Sample agreement between LACOE and district for the purposes of CCSPP support and opportunities. Includes expectations and responsibilities as well as terms of agreement around data sharing and use of facilities.
- Inter-Department MOU - Agreement between departments to provide mental health services using community schools grant funding

Additional Resources for Building and Strengthening Community Partnerships

- Developing Community Schools in Los Angeles: A Toolkit for School & District Leaders – Toolkit that provides helpful guidance on assessing and strengthening existing partnerships as well as building new partnerships in alignment with vision and identified needs.
- National Center for Community Schools' MOU Samples - Collection of sample MOUs and agreement letters between School/District and Lead Partner
- LACOE RFP for Integrated Student Supports for the CCSPP