



## How Do Connections with the Community Strengthen Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships?

### NNPS Annual Report Spring 2024

**Joyce L. Epstein, Co-Director NNPS**  
**Steven B. Sheldon, Co-Director NNPS**  
**Zhe Zhao, NNPS Coordinator**  
With Daisy Aviles-Reyes, NNPS Assistant



**Book Parade Thru the Community**



**Celebrate Our Talented Community**

**ATP Radio Update**  
Gracie Valle-Chimal: Community Outreach Supervisor  
ATP Radio Spot [gvalle@psd1.org](mailto:gvalle@psd1.org)  
Ext 7412

**ATP Radio Spots:**

- \*English recorded by Jason O'Leary-RHS & Christopher Bekinski-Cufe
- \*Spanish recorded by Martha Rioscoe-Langfellow & Kendra Hernandez-Pasos High

**FACTS:**

- \*Pasco Phone lines March 20-April 15
- \*All Radio spots will air from April 12-18
- \*La Raza 100.1 FM, Fire 104.9 FM, KDHN 92.5 FM, & 98.3 Key

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*Promising Partnership Practices, 2023*

Books on Parade, Western Hills Elementary School  
Little Rock School District, AR (pp. 2-3)

Celebrating, Empowering, and Engaging our Hispanic Families,  
Ladson Elementary School  
Charleston County School District, SC (pp. 32-33)

Enhanced Communication: Kick It Up a Notch  
Pasco School District, WA (pp. 44-45)

# How Do Connections with the Community Strengthen Programs of School, Family, and Community Partnerships?

## Annual Report

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with Daisy Aviles-Reyes

Spring 2024

## Introduction

In all of its work since 1996, the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University has emphasized the importance of the 3-way partnership of home, school, and community for student learning and development. These connections are represented in our theoretical model of *Overlapping Spheres of Influence* (Epstein, 1987). They are the basis of our research-based framework of *Six Types of Involvement* (i.e., Type 1-Parenting, Type 1-Communicating, Type 1-Volunteering, Type 1-Learning at Home, Type 1-Decision Making, and Type 1-Collaborating with the Community) (Epstein et al., 2019; Sanders, 2019). The three contexts—home, school and community—are featured in the activities shared by schools, districts, and organizations in books of *Promising Partnership Practices* (Thomas, et al., 2023, [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)).

In the past decade, more school, district, organization, region, and state leaders for partnerships have named their programs *Family and Parent Engagement*. This title matches the language in *Title I* legislation that provides federal funds for school improvement and student success [Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 2015].

Also, some school districts created departments of *Family and Community Engagement (FACE)*. That friendly moniker may help to improve partnership programs by recognizing the three important contexts for student learning and development—home, school, and community.

In recent years, numerous states and districts have encouraged and funded *Community Schools*. In 2023, the U.S. Department of Education announced an investment of \$74 million to support Community Schools (U.S. Department of Education, November 28, 2023). Although this level of funding is unprecedented, the concept is not new. Building on Dewey's (1902) early work and the development of "full service schools" (Dryfoos, 1994), Community Schools set a broad agenda to meet the needs of children and adults. Researchers identified four common features of Community Schools: integrated student support, expanded learning time and opportunities, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices (Dryfoos, 2002; Oakes et al., 2017; Sanders & Galindo, 2020). Programs and services may meet family and community needs in health, occupational training, afterschool programs for talent development, physical fitness, and other basic qualities of life (Coalition of Community Schools, 2003).

Given the growing number of *FACE* offices and the emergence of Community Schools in many districts, NNPS posed the following question on our 2023 *UPDATE* surveys of schools, districts, and organizations:

*How do connections with the community contribute to the quality and equity of programs of school, family, and community partnerships?*

**District Demographics.** Fifteen district leaders for partnerships in highly diverse communities across six states submitted data on their work and progress on school, family, and community partnerships for the 2022-23 school year.<sup>1</sup>

- The districts were in central cities (29%), small cities (14%), suburbs (43%), and rural (14%) areas. They varied in size from 2 schools to 46 schools in the number of schools working with NNPS.
- On average across districts, about 66% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, ranging from 30% to 100%.
- The districts served populations of students and families who spoke from 1 to 100 languages and dialects at home, with an average of 26 languages spoken by students and their families across districts. On average, about 8% of students were English Language Learners (ELL), ranging from under 1% to 36% of students across districts.
- Taken together, district leaders facilitated over 270 schools in the 2022-23 school year. About 70% of the schools were reportedly “making good progress.” They estimated that these schools engaged over 63,000 families.
- Most district leaders for partnerships (93%) expected to continue in their positions in 2023-24. This kind of stability is important for continuous progress on partnerships in districts and schools (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011).

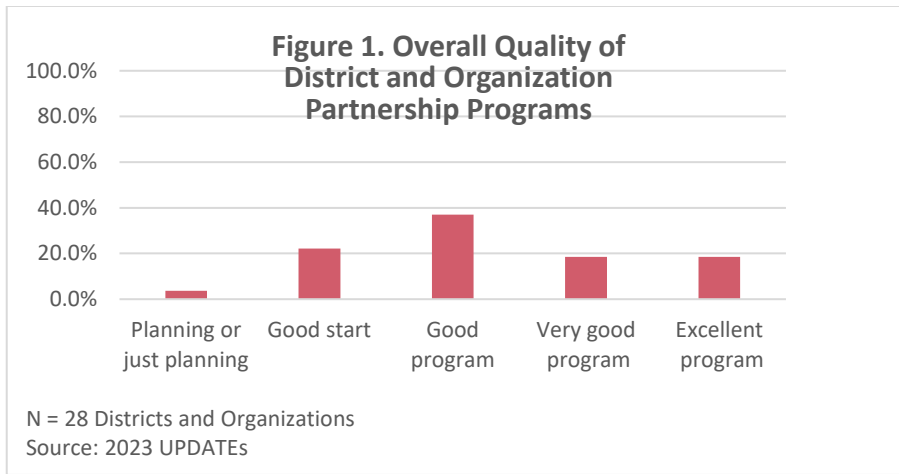
**School Demographics.** About 250 school-based Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) participated in the 2023 *UPDATE* evaluation (N=248). They were located in highly diverse communities in 9 states.<sup>1</sup> The sample included about 70 preschools (29%), 122 elementary schools (50%), 51 middle and high schools (21%). A few schools combined grade levels or omitted the information. We report some results for the full sample of schools and some separately for elementary and secondary schools.

- Schools were located in central cities (33%), small cities (26%), suburban (24%), and rural (17%) areas.
- Schools included students and families who spoke from 1 to 28 languages and dialects at home, with an average of 4 languages across schools. On average, about 15% of students were English Language Learners (ELL).
- On average across schools, 78% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price meals, ranging from 0% to 100% of students.

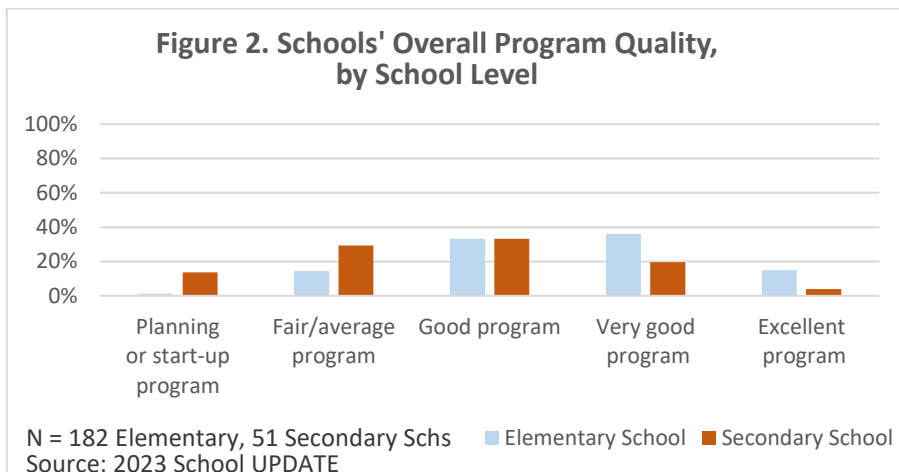
**Summary.** Districts and schools in NNPS in 2023 served economically, racially, linguistically, culturally, and geographically diverse students and families. Large percentages of students received free or reduced-price meals at school. Some districts and schools have been members of NNPS for many years and have worked to continually improve outreach to all parents to support student learning and development. Other districts and schools—new to NNPS—are just starting to use research-based structures and processes to organize and strengthen their programs and practices of family and community engagement. This variation in time working with NNPS permits us to explore whether and how district and school partnership programs change with systematic support and communications from our “homebase” at Johns Hopkins University.

## **Overall Quality of Partnership Programs**

On the 2023 *UPDATE* survey, each district, organization, and school painted a portrait of the status and progress of its partnership program ranging from *Start Up*, to *Good Start*, *Good*, *Very Good*, and *Excellent* programs. They also provided details about how they are implementing research-based structures and processes to organize strong partnership programs. Figures 1 and 2 report the *Overall Quality* of district, organization, and school partnership programs in the 2022-23 school year.



About 1/5 of leaders in districts and organizations reported making a good start in the 2022-23 school year (2%). Most of these locations joined NNPS in the past year. The others reported good, very good, and excellent leadership on partnerships. The data reproduce a near-normal curve, as we have seen in most prior school years. The pattern suggests that partnership programs improve over time as district and organization leaders become more confident leaders.

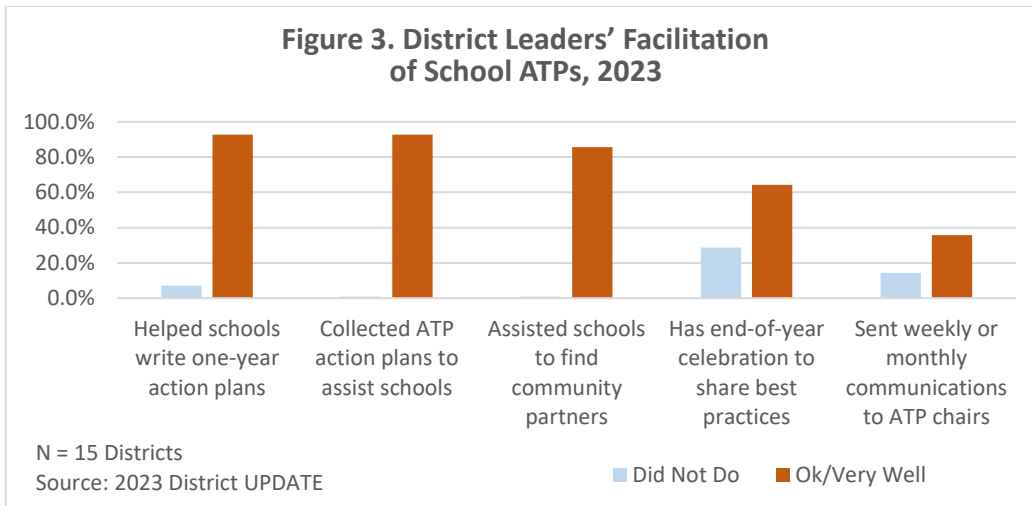


Overall, school programs range across a similar curve with startup (5%), average (18%), good (34%), very good (31%) and excellent (13%) programs. Elementary schools report more advanced partnership programs than do secondary schools. Other data indicate that middle and high schools in NNPS improve their plans and practices of family and community engagement from year to year.

Note that an “excellent” rating requires district leaders and school teams to report that they are conducting a *permanent partnership program that is likely to continue even if leaders changed*. Program sustainability is the ultimate goal in NNPS for all districts and schools.

### District Leadership and School Implementation

District leaders reported whether and how extensively they guided their schools to implement their partnership programs. Figure 3 shows that most district leaders in NNPS take their responsibilities seriously.



- More than 80% of district leaders conducted three basic leadership activities:
  - Help schools write their action plans for partnerships
  - Collect schools' plans to keep track of progress and to help school teams fulfill their plans
  - Work to identify community partners to enrich the schools' programs
- Over 60% of district leaders conducted an end-of-year celebration to share best practices and recognize progress.
- Fewer than 40% reported communicating weekly (or on a regular schedule) with all school teams. NNPS advises all district leaders to add this communication to their schedules to have systematic connections with school-based partnership teams throughout the next school year.

Schools' Action Teams for Partnerships (ATPs) reported their progress on key implementation activities.

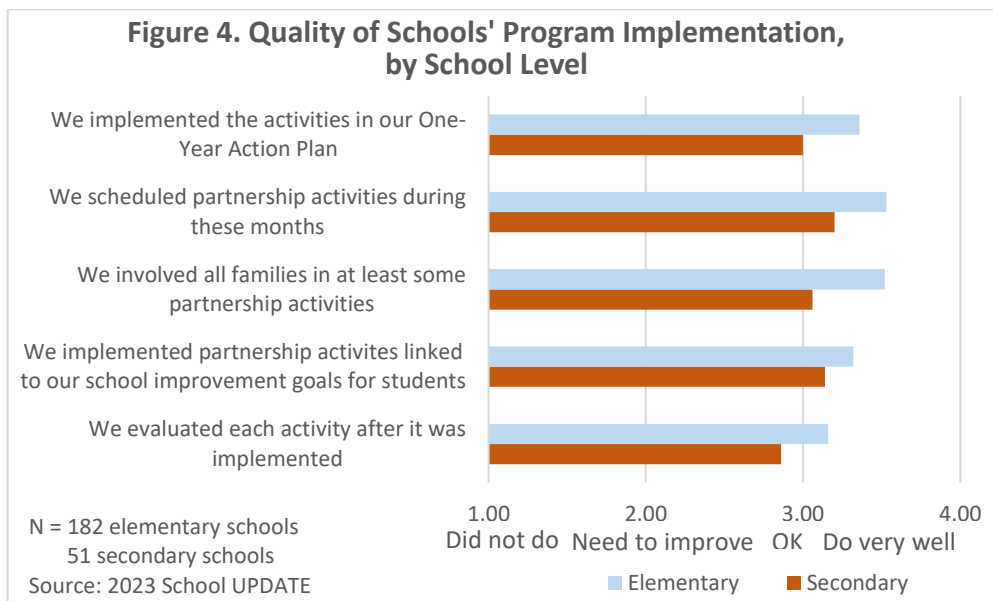


Figure 4 shows that elementary schools are further along than middle and high schools in planning and conducting goal-linked family engagement activities throughout the school year and engaging *all* families at least some of the time. Secondary schools, with more students and families, complex schedules, and multiple teachers for each student are moving more slowly than elementary schools in organizing and implementing comprehensive partnership programs.

**Summary.** Reports from district leaders and school ATPs suggest that partnership programs develop as a continuous improvement process. Over time, district leaders and school-based teams improve action plans for family and community engagement, implement planned activities, and evaluate the quality of their programs. Our studies indicate that districts and schools in NNPS are working to engage more families—indeed, all families—in ways that contribute to student success in school (Epstein et al., 2019; Epstein & Sheldon, 2016).

### SPECIAL TOPIC 2023: CONNECTIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

The special topic in the 2023 *UPDATE* asked if and how districts and schools were collaborating with the community to support students, families, and teachers. Some schools are officially labeled *Community Schools*, but ALL schools in NNPS are guided to implement Type 6 activities—*Collaborating with the Community*. We asked 3 questions to identify schools’ basic conditions, as shown in Figure 5.

**1. Does your school plan include Type 6 Activities—Collaborating with the Community?**

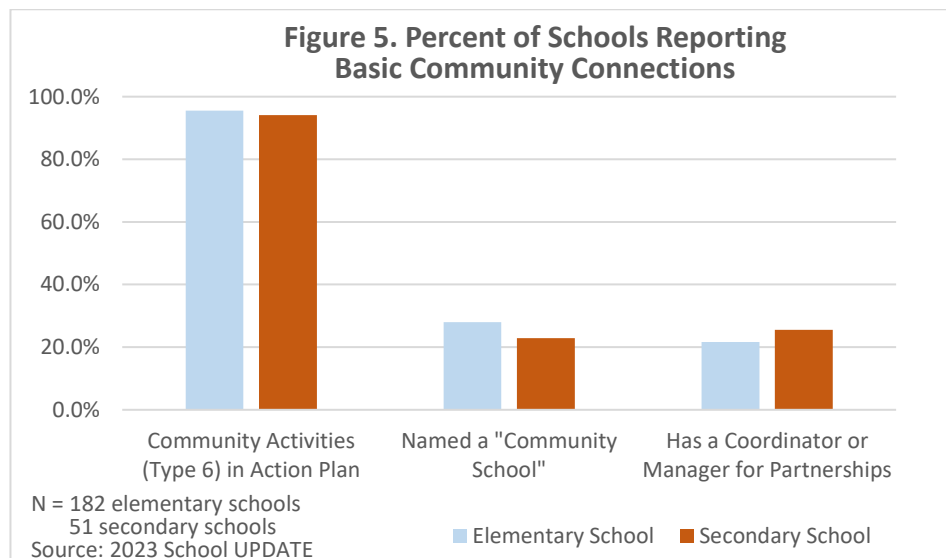
95.5% of elementary schools and 94.1% of secondary schools reported that their *One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships* included Type 6 activities—*Collaborating with the Community*

**2. Is your school designated, officially, as a *Community School*?**

28% of elementary schools and 22.9% of secondary schools reported that they were officially designated as *Community Schools*

**3. Does your school have a paid Coordinator or Manager for Community Engagement?**

20% of elementary schools and 25.5% of secondary schools reported that they had a paid Manager or Coordinator on staff. Official Community Schools typically receive federal or state funds for a manager to arrange formal contracts with community partners for services for students and/or families (e.g., health service providers; adult education programs).



We also delved deeply into the specific programs and services that schools conducted with community partners and support.

**What community connections does your school offer to students, families, and teachers?**

We asked school teams and district and organization leaders if they conducted the following programs and services to support students, families, and teachers.

## Community Partnerships in NNPS Schools, 2023

<p><b>Community services for students</b></p> <p>a) Academic tutoring for students</p> <p>b) Health services for students (e.g., vision, hearing, dental, medical)</p> <p>c) After-school programs on:</p> <p>1) Sports</p> <p>2) Art, music, drama, chess, etc.</p> <p>3) Academics (e.g., tutoring, homework, science/computer clubs, etc.)</p> <p>d) Summer school programs</p> <p>e) Mentors for students</p> <p><b>Services for students scale <math>\alpha = .8</math></b></p>	<p><b>Community services for parents/families</b></p> <p>f) Adult education classes (e.g., GED, ESL, job training)</p> <p>g) Health services for families</p> <p>h) Food pantry for families</p> <p>i) Mental health services for students and families</p> <p><b>Services for families scale <math>\alpha = .6</math></b></p>	<p><b>Community services for teachers/school programs</b></p> <p>j) Business or organization partners for teachers</p> <p>k) Mental health services for teachers and staff</p> <p>l) School safety program, security arrangements for the school.</p> <p><b>Services for teachers/school scale <math>\alpha = .6</math></b></p>
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### What resources do community partners provide or donate to support your school’s partnership program?

#### Community Resources/Donations

- In-kind contributions (e.g., door prizes, refreshments for family engagement activities)
- Incentives for students (e.g., for attendance, report card grades, other accomplishments)
- Coupons or gift cards for families from stores, restaurants, businesses
- Opportunities for students to earn service learning hours or credits

**Community contributions scale  $\alpha = .65$**

**We explored the extent to which schools implemented community connections that supported students, families, and the schools. Responses ranged from no implementation, to serving some students, to serving most or all students, as shown in Figure 6.**

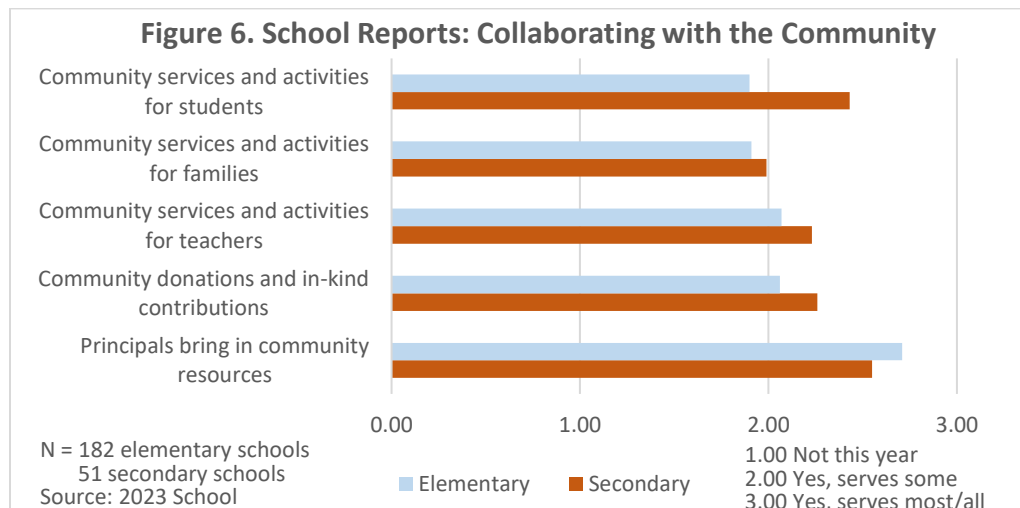


Figure 6 shows that secondary schools reported that their connections with the community served more students, families, and teachers than in elementary schools. Middle and high schools also noted that they received more contributions and donated services from community partners that helped their programs serve more students, families, and teachers. The exception to this pattern is that elementary school ATPs were more likely to report that their principals reach out to the community to obtain resources for the school.



The 2023 *UPDATE* asked ATPs for examples of activities they conducted to connect with their communities. Over 90% of school teams reported at least one successful connection with the community in the past school year. School teams and district leaders listed more than 220 activities with connections to community groups, organizations, and individuals to strengthen their partnership programs. The connections included services to increase and expand student learning, establish stronger connections with and for families, and improve the quality and outreach of school programs, as listed below.

### **Foci of Community Connections, 2023**

#### **Enrich Student Experiences**

Career Exploration  
Enrichment Activities in STEM, Reading, Art, Music, Music Therapy, Dance  
Financial Literacy  
Kindergarten Transition Programs/Support  
Library and Museum Partnerships  
Mentoring Programs

#### **Expand Family Services**

Affinity Group Gatherings/Meetings/Projects  
Family Appreciation/Celebrations  
Food and Clothing Drives and Provisions  
(e.g., backpacks for students, weekend meals, food banks)  
Health and Wellness Services  
Safety Services (e.g., fire safety, internet safety)

#### **Improve School Programs**

After school programs, sports, arts, help with homework  
Community Service Projects  
e.g., clothing drives, entertainment in centers for senior citizens, neighborhood cleanups  
Connections with faith-based partners for donations, food for families in need  
Cultural Fairs  
District-wide and in-school family and community gatherings (e.g., carnivals, back-to-school bashes, picnics, etc.)  
Literacy or math days or nights to introduce new curricular programs  
Outreach to affinity groups (military families, racial/linguistic/cultural groups)  
Transitions to new school levels (PreK-Elem, Elementary to Middle, Middle to High School)  
Volunteers and mentors (organized by district or by each school)

Chart 1 lists a few specific examples of connections with the community conducted last year by schools in NNPS. Readers may find that these activities suggest ways to adopt or adapt connections with the community that link to goals in their own school improvement plans.

**Chart 1: School Reports of Connections with the Community,  
2022-23 School Year**

<b>Community Connection</b>	<b>Examples of Activities with Observed Benefits to Students, Families, Teachers</b>
<b>Enrich the Curriculum—e.g., Improve Reading, Science Skills and Attitudes</b>	<p>Local business hosted pizza parties for the grades with the greatest growth in reading levels each 9 weeks.</p> <p>BUGs (Bringing Up Grades) recognized students who improved report card grades from one marking period to the next.</p> <p>Reading Resources: Family time with library staff; Picnic-Reading Days with community volunteers and families.</p> <p>Echo Explorers: Park rangers took educational materials to conduct a lesson in each class about various animals and plants found in the park.</p>
<b>Explore Careers</b>	<p>Career Fair. Community partners provided students with information about different career paths and the education needed to enter these careers.</p> <p>Mock Interviews. Community partners offered feedback for career readiness, and donated a closet-full of professional clothing for students and families.</p>
<b>Collect and Distribute Food, Clothing, and Other Goods</b>	<p>Donated goods and funds for student and family needs: Community partners donated warm clothes for the winter and school uniforms for students. They also filled our nurses' station with emergency supplies.</p>
<b>Support and Experience the Arts</b>	<p>Community Art Walk. Students created and displayed their artwork throughout the school. Students, parents, teachers, and community members came to view and celebrate the students' work. Many left positive feedback.</p> <p>Traveling Art. Students displayed and discussed their art work at a senior-citizen's center.</p> <p>Learning Through the Arts. Our community partners include the Cleveland Orchestra's Rainbow Series, Playhouse Squares PreK-1st grade production, a Yoga Lab, dance instruction, and many museums provide tickets, passes, and learning opportunities for children, parents, and teachers to meet and work with the professionals in these locations.</p> <p>Students showcase their talents at the mall, nursing home, senior citizen clubs, and other community groups.</p>
<b>Provide Mental Health Services; Improve Student Behavior, Attendance</b>	<p>Community counseling services are provided for students dealing with trauma.</p> <p>Bully Walk raised awareness to eliminate bullying. Students learned skills to speak up for themselves and others.</p> <p>Rotary Early ACTS Club gave 2<sup>nd</sup> graders an opportunity to organize and conduct service oriented activities in the school and community. Students developed an understanding of the value of working together to benefit the community.</p>
<b>Celebrate Diversity in the Community</b>	<p>Group Heritage Services and Celebrations—e.g., Celebrating Our Hispanic Families. Families met community leaders and each other. They were offered resources to meet their needs and guided to become more involved in their children's schools and learning.</p> <p>Mi Casa Su Casa. Our ELL community, parents, and guardian meet and join teachers and staff to build a better understanding of each other and children's needs in school. Last year, these meetings and activities opened communications between home and school for almost all Hispanic families. in school and this helped close the gap b/w communication and school by 50%.</p>

These examples illustrate how Type 6 activities—*Collaborating with the Community*—may improve school programs by (1) supporting student learning and experiences; (2) providing services to families; and (3) enriching the school curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

School teams noted the benefits they observed by implementing the reported Type 6 activities. The benefits emphasized improving the welcoming climate of the school; recognizing and honoring parents for their ongoing efforts to support their children as students in school; and—interestingly—increasing students’ roles in advancing their education through their direct connections with community partners.

Whether or not a school is designated as a *Community School*, all schools are *in and of their communities*. The responses from school-based ATPs indicated ways that students, families, and teachers benefitted from goal-linked community engagement activities. See many other examples at [www.partnershipschoools.org](http://www.partnershipschoools.org) in the section Success Stories, click books of *Promising Partnership Practices*.

**Partnership Program Correlates**

Other analyses examined the association of the quality of partnership programs with schools’ attention to community programs and services. Table 1 shows that schools with higher quality partnership programs were more likely than weaker programs to include Type 6-Collaborating with the Community Activities in their One-Year Action Plans for Partnerships.

As in prior studies of NNPS schools’ program development, high quality partnership programs are significantly more strongly supported by the school principal, district leaders, teachers and parents. These programs also are significantly more likely to use NNPS resources, and report that more families are partners by participating in engagement activities at home and at school. As noted above, elementary schools are significantly more likely to have more advanced partnership programs than secondary schools ( $r = -.317, p < .001$ ).

It is important to note that the quality of schools’ partnership programs is not significantly associated with demographics at the school. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price meals and number of languages spoken by families at home are unrelated to the quality of schools’ partnership programs. This tells us that schools in any community serving diverse students and families can conduct high-quality partnership programs using research-based structures and processes.

**Table 1. Correlates of Schools’ Connections with the Community**

	Have Type 6 Activities in Plans	Principal Support for SFCP	Collegial Support	District Support	Use of NNPS Resources	Strong Family Participation	# Family Languages	% Free Lunch	School Level Elem(-) / Sec (+)
<b>Overall Quality of School’s Program of Family and community Engagement</b>	.291***	.535***	.482***	.354***	.235***	.381***	NS	NS	-.317***

Source: 2023 SCHOOL UPDATE, N=242  
 Zero-order correlations: \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Table 2 shows that being named a *Community School* does not ensure a high-quality partnership program. That requires the kinds of support and leadership noted in Table 1. However, *Community Schools* at both elementary and secondary levels offer significantly more community services and programs for their students, families, and teachers. They also receive more donations and contributions of resources from their communities. These connections with the community are likely arranged by paid managers that are significantly more prominent in *Community Schools*.

**Table 2. Correlates of Designation as a *Community School***

	Overall Program Quality	Have Paid Manager	Have Type 6 Activities in Plans	Provides Comm. Services to Students	Provides Comm. Services to Families	Provides Comm. Services to Teachers	Receives Resources from the Comm.	% Free Lunch	School Level
Officially Designated a Community School	NS	.368***	.148***	.198***	.161***	.144***	.143***	.141**	NS

Source: 2023 SCHOOL UPDATE, N=242

Zero-order correlations: \*\*\*p<.001, \*\*p<.01, \*p<.05.

## Summary and Conclusions

Data from the 2023 *UPDATE* surveys revealed that almost all schools, districts, and organizations in NNPS planned and implemented engagement activities that connected students, families, and teachers with partners in the community. However, only about ¼ of the schools—elementary and secondary—were named Community Schools.

Two sets of results are of interest. First, elementary schools reported higher quality partnership programs, overall, with strong principal, collegial, and family support. These positive features of strong partnership programs were unrelated to the percentage of students receiving free lunch or the number of different languages of families served.

By contrast, Community Schools were not more likely than other schools to have high-quality family engagement programs, overall. They were more likely to provide more community services for students, families, teachers, and the school. Community Schools served more students who received free or reduced-price meals. With more economically-stressed families, these schools qualified for the federal or state funds reserved for Community Schools.

Recent studies on the implementation and effects of Community Schools extend our understanding of Community Schools. For example, having the Manager serve as a member or lead on a school team and committee (e.g., ATP, attendance team, or the school Leadership Team) was important for the strong implementation of the program, and students who have been served by school-community partnerships have higher rates of attendance than their peers (Hine, Sheldon, & Abel, 2023; Sheldon, Abel, & Hine, 2023).

It should be noted that one of the four standards for Community Schools is a strong family engagement program. The bottom line, then, is that there is more work to be done. All schools—whether labeled a Community School or not—can make important connections with community partners to meet the needs of students, parents, and teachers. And Community Schools—as all schools—must continuously improve their programs and practices of family engagement for student success in school.

## NOTES

1) In 2023, data are from NNPS districts and organizations in 6 states: AZ, LA, MN, OH, SC, and WA, plus an organization partner in Ireland.

Data are from NNPS schools in 9 states: check AR, AZ, CA, CT, LA, MI, OH, SC, and WA.

2) (r) refers to a correlation coefficient that reports the strength of relationships between two variables.

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## HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

- Review each section of this report and reflect on how *your* program compares with the data from districts and schools across the country.
- Share this report with your colleagues and supervisors to show that you are working with NNPS to evaluate your work and to improve your plans and practices of family and community engagement.
- District and organization leaders continue to work with NNPS as Professional Development Partners to strengthen leadership on partnerships and to ensure research-based programs of family and community engagement in *all* schools. See the NNPS *Preliminary Agreement* for the 2024-25 school year at [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) in the section Join NNPS.
- Contact NNPS with questions about this report or to discuss your next steps to improve leadership and programs of partnerships.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM NNPS

Members of NNPS have many options for professional development to continually improve their programs of school, family, and community partnerships.

- **Visit the NNPS website:** [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org).
- **Use the NNPS *Handbook for Action, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition*, as your guide to continually improve your leadership and program of family and community engagement.**
- District, organization, and state leaders: Complete and return the *Preliminary Agreement* to NNPS to participate in Leadership Workshops, Team Training, quarterly facilitation meetings (Let's Talk about Partnerships) and quarterly knowledge-building meetings (Let's Learn More about Partnerships) throughout the 2024-25 school year. Follow the link to the *Preliminary Agreement*, from the homepage, [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org).
- See hundreds of good ideas for family and community engagement activities in the NNPS annual books of *Promising Partnership Practices* on the website, [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) in the section *Success Stories*.
- E-mail NNPS Facilitator—Brenda Thomas, [bthomas@jhu.edu](mailto:bthomas@jhu.edu)—with YOUR questions about your next steps at the district level to strengthen your program and assist your schools.
- Does your program need on-site or online professional development? Contract with NNPS for keynote addresses, presentations, and workshops to support your work and to prepare your schools' ATPs. Contact us by email at [nnps@jhu.edu](mailto:nnps@jhu.edu) for more information.



2800 North Charles Street, Suite 420 Baltimore, MD 21218 Tel: 410-516-2318

Visit the NNPS website:  
[www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org)

Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, Co-Director, NNPS  
[jepstein@jhu.edu](mailto:jepstein@jhu.edu)

Dr. Steven B. Sheldon, Co-Director, NNPS  
[ssheldon@jhu.edu](mailto:ssheldon@jhu.edu)

Brenda G. Thomas, NNPS Senior Program Facilitator  
[bthomas@jhu.edu](mailto:bthomas@jhu.edu)