Action Guide for Community-Based Organizations

As we learned in *The Opportunity Makers*, trajectory-changing schools invest in belonging, consistency, and coherence to create a powerful baseline experience for all young people. This guide helps leaders in community-based organizations partner with school leaders to support these three focus areas.

The Case for Community Support

Young people's lives are shaped by more than what happens at school. Each school serves a local community with its own assets and expectations, and trusted community-based organizations often have unique knowledge of young people's gifts and needs. Research shows that when both families and community partners are engaged in schools, students learn more. Educators and community stakeholders must work together to advance trajectory-changing practices and support the whole child.

- **Belonging:** Schools create an emotional climate for learning, activating students' ability to excel.
- **Consistency:** Schools deliver consistently good teaching and grade-level content for all students.
- **Coherence:** Schools build a unified instructional program and set priorities that are clear to all.

Reorient to the Student Experience

Leaders of community-based organizations (CBOs) often start with a deep knowledge of young people and their families but lack access to meaningful partnerships with schools or struggle to see how their work intersects with K–12 education. CBOs and school leaders must work together to understand how young people and their caregivers experience belonging, consistency, and coherence at school.

One approach is to bring together CBOs, school leaders, families, and students together to discuss existing data (like district survey data) and share their lived experiences from all perspectives. This is also a chance to ask young people about their aspirations beyond K–12 education: What knowledge, skills, and opportunities do they need in their school years to thrive later in life?

Resource:
Community Conversation Planning Guide (TNTP)

Pick a Narrow Entry Point

Leaders of CBOs often have their own goals and vision for the services they provide, which may or may not align with the school's focus area. To start, CBO leaders should seek to understand the school's focus areas that relate to belonging, consistency, and coherence. In some cases, this might look like co-creating a shared focus with the school. In others, it might be working from the school's annual priorities.

Identify where you can add the most value.

Now, use the school priorities and input from students and families to reflect on how your existing programming might enhance or detract from belonging, consistency, and coherence. It can be powerful to build on an existing area of strength—say, tweaking the structure or measurement of an existing program to align with school goals—to create quick wins and build buy-in.

It is also important to assess your organization's capacity for partnership. Can you provide more intensive wraparound support and individualized services? Or are you looking to provide lighter-touch access to tools and resources? Sample reflection questions might include:

- What assets, tools, and resources can my organization bring to a school partnership in support of belonging, consistency, and coherence?
- How can we leverage our organizational capacity to build the capacity of students, families, and school leaders?
- What are realistic outcomes for this partnership, and how will we measure them?

CBOs may not have unique value to add in all three areas—and that's OK. A community organization that's focused on health or sports, for example, doesn't need to be an expert on curriculum. The idea is to be intentional about looking for areas of overlap, set explicit priorities in the areas that do align, and make sure that any programming works in support of school priorities rather than detracting from them.

Here are a few examples of potential alignment:

- **Belonging:** To meet young people's needs, we must know them as learners and individuals. CBOs can document and share what they learn about young people outside of school so that knowledge of each individual student builds over time and is acted on consistently. CBOs can also help organize events and activities that support connectedness to the community and that attend to cultural responsiveness.
- **Consistency:** Organizations that touch on academics, like tutoring or aftercare programs, should provide support that is directly aligned with grade-level standards, school curricula, learning methods, and academic goals. For example, a reading tutor should work with the partner school to draw from the same books as the core reading curriculum, use the same approach to learning phonics, and support the student's reading goal.
- **Coherence:** Caregivers are an indispensable part of a coherent school community. Organizations that work with parents and families can provide an extra layer of support to caregivers as they engage with their students' learning, help with homework, or advocate for their students' needs. For example, this could mean helping caregivers read report cards and other assessment data to understand if their student is performing at grade level and has access to grade-level materials.

Resource:
Leveraging Community Partnerships for Integrated Student Support (EdResearch for Action)

Manage Ongoing Change

Building belonging, consistency, and coherence takes time and an ongoing improvement cycle. School and CBO leaders should build structures for consistent collaboration and iteration.

Pick shared trajectory-changing metrics.

How will you measure the impact of your initiative? Pick two to three data points that align with your focus area to measure progress over time. These would ideally align with metrics used at the school level. For example, a tutoring program might track the same reading goals that students use at school. An initiative that's building belonging might track students' survey responses on how well they're known at school.

Questions to consider: If we had access to school data, what could we use to measure the impact of our collaboration? If we can't get access to school data, what could we collect on our own?

Regularly align with school leadership.

Collaboration is most effective when there are standing touchpoints rather than one-off partnerships with individual teachers or participation in events. It can be difficult to get on a school leader's calendar, but alignment does not have to be overly time-intensive. Since a principal's time is limited, it can be best to

use their time up front to align on the vision and goals for the partnership, and then to designate a school point person for ongoing coordination.

Measure and adapt.

With regular data and leadership touchpoints, CBOs can constantly monitor their progress and adapt as they go. Impact data is not just for the CBO's leadership and board; it is a tool for alignment with the school. As school needs and programming evolve, collaboration should too. CBOs should start small, lean into practices that support the school's focus area, and drop the ones that don't.

About TNTP

As a leading education nonprofit, TNTP works side by side with educators, system leaders, and communities across 39 states and more than 6,000 districts nationwide to reach ambitious goals for student success. Our vision pushes beyond school walls, catalyzing cross-sector collaboration to create pathways for young people to achieve academic, economic, and social mobility. Read more at tntp.org/makers-connect