

## Research into Practice. Building Partnerships

Article

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by Michelle Maniaci Folk and Lucy Santos Green , March 2019

Kindergarteners visiting the fire station, middle school music students performing at a nursing home, and an aspiring mechanic shadowing the owner of a local body shop are all examples of school-community partnerships. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center, community partnerships are helpful in improving attendance rates as well as math and reading scores. These partnerships also help decrease the number of students who get suspended and/or drop out of school (National Dropout Prevention Center). We've heard it takes a village, and we recognize the value in cultivating relationships with community members and providing opportunities for students to learn outside the school walls.

Safety is also a consideration. When the school day ends, many parents are still at work and need viable alternatives to leaving kids home alone. Parents are staunch supporters of after-school programs for a wide range of reasons. Parents believe these programs not only help them keep their jobs but also result in better student behavior and higher school attendance rates. They also see the programs as an opportunity for their children to get exercise, receive homework help, and participate in reading, writing, and STEM activities. And, 83% of parents with a child in an after-school program believe it reduces the chance of their child being involved in a crime, using drugs, or facing teen pregnancy. Even so, data from 2004 to 2014 indicates that despite increased participation in after-school activities, there are still close to 11 million kids who end the school day alone or unsupervised ("America after 3pm").

If you're looking for an instructional connection, look no further than the Guided Inquiry Design® approach. Developed by Carol Kuhlthau, Leslie Maniotes, and Ann Caspari, it partners teachers and librarians with outside experts to design and implement inquiry learning in K-12 settings (2012). Rutgers University maintains a great starter page with an excellent overview of this model (<http://wp.comminfo.rutgers.edu/ckuhlthau/guided-inquiry-design/>). During Guided Inquiry projects, the outside experts are meaningfully involved in every step of the learning process, giving students an authentic audience and the opportunity to explore concepts from an authentic and professional point of view. If you're looking for a Future Ready connection, the Future Ready Librarian Framework encourages school librarians to "[cultivate] partnerships within the school and local community (including families and caregivers, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, public and higher education libraries, businesses) to promote engagement and a community of readers" (Alliance for Excellence in Education 2018).

Any school librarian can create community partnerships regardless of the budget available or the amount of time they have. One option is reaching out to your local public librarian to partner in hosting a weekly or monthly after-school club focused on books, coding, writing, or any topic you think will capture students' interest. Working in conjunction with the public library, your club has more options for meeting locations, potentially more money for its budget, and access to a larger group of students. You can also invite parents or community members who have an interest or expertise in your club's topic to come in as guest speakers or to be a third partner in facilitating the club.

If you're looking for an opportunity to involve a large number of community members, consider planning a One Book, One Community event. This entails choosing a book that will appeal to a wide audience and encouraging everyone to read it together. While this is another opportunity to partner with your public library, you can also seek out your chamber of commerce or a bookstore to help reach as wide an audience as possible. The underlying benefit is people of different ages and backgrounds are brought together by reading a common book.

Starry eyed for a go-big-or-go-home idea? Consider partnering with your public library system to set up automatic student access to materials. In cities as large as Kansas City, Boston, and Nashville, public-school students gain access to materials from their public library the instant they're registered for school. It often involves students' being able to use their school ID number at the public library or receiving a public library card without having to physically visit a branch to fill out application forms. Some cities even include extra services such as entry to museums, parks, and recreation centers as well as access to mass transit, thus expanding the community partnerships even further (Davis 2017). School library-community partnerships benefit students, parents, teachers, and community members. They enrich student learning by connecting the academic content students must tackle in school with the immediate and relatable community experiences present outside of the school walls.

### Works Cited

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