



We know that strong communities create strong schools ---and strong schools create strong communities.

Collaboration between a local community and its surrounding school communities offers hope when struggling to address issues such as unemployment and poverty. Aligning families, schools, and communities behind a common goal is vital in addressing and overcoming these hurdles.

This is where effective community models and strategies play an important role in aligning communities and strengthening collaboration. One model is Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), which is a model designed to strengthen communities by helping people learn to identify, manage, and leverage local resources to the benefit of their locality¹.

Leveraging local resources involves building social ties or capital with local banks, businesses, churches, and organizations. It becomes mutually beneficial when schools and local community organizations collaborate. The ABCD Model addresses community concerns with the goal of building stronger communities.

Let's review three strategies to promote collaboration between families, communities and schools:

1. Map Out Local Community Assets - The primary goal of this strategy is to identify untapped talent and assets in the local community to empower residents and organizations to share those talents/assets with others in the community. This will build a stronger, safer, and more vibrant neighborhood for themselves and for future generations. Here are some examples of how the local community can discover their own talents and assets:

- Conduct neighborhood surveys and interviews to collect information on local citizens' talents. Many people have awesome talents they would love to share if someone asked them to.
- Create a list of neighborhood resources to support local schools and enrich children's learning (i.e. library, museums, YMCA, after school care). Then share this information with all residents.
- Some local churches offer discounted or free health care services for the community--- seek them out.
- Schools have formed partnerships with social services such as day care centers, hospitals, clinics, counseling programs, and family resource centers to provide social and

emotional assistance to families. Many of these assets are available, but many families are not aware of them. Promotion of these services are important.

2. Build Relationships for Mutually Beneficial Problem-Solving -Once you have identified various talents/assets in your community, you can then collaborate on ways to share them in mutually beneficial ways. The goal is to empower local families and organizations to address and problem-solve their community concerns.

Here are some examples of how a small culturally diverse neighborhood in Omaha, NE collaborated and shared their talents to help others. All of the following events occurred after local leaders conducted a neighborhood survey with every household in their community. As a result, they discovered these special talents:

- The survey found a resident who had received her GED years ago and wanted to give back to the community. Now conducts free GED classes for local residents at the community center.
- A retired Spanish teacher was asked if she would conduct ESL classes at the center on a voluntary basis. She now teaches ESL classes once a week and is excited to have a reason to leave her house, teach others, and make new friends.
- Some neighbors have established agreements to be strong supporters of local businesses, and the owners in turn hire local citizens.
- A Zumba instructor gives back by offering free/reduced fee Zumba classes. Now any family has the ability to attend these classes.
- Neighbors donate and trade clothes and food at a local church. You can drop off, trade, or just select items when you arrive.

3. Have Schools Involve Families- When schools and families collaborate; communities are more likely to become more resilient. Here are a few strategies that Barrera and Warner suggest that schools implement:

- **Have parents help when teachers are absent.** Ask parents to serve as classroom ambassadors/helpers when teachers are absent. (Parents would be assisting substitute teachers.)

Demonstrate sensitivity to family values, cultural differences, and characteristics. Send out a family survey to learn about parents' origins and school experiences.

- **Respect parents' work schedules.** Find out where parents work and develop conference or workshop sessions at times that are convenient for them. Consider connecting parents to school websites to obtain school information if they are unable to attend.

Send home calendars showing knowledge and skills being introduced during the month. Most parents would like to know what their children's school expectations are.

- **Invite parent participation.** Invite parent volunteers to complete a specific task for the school (such as painting the parent workroom). Participation increases opportunities for parent-school communication and collaboration.

Effective community collaboration allows for neighbors and organizations to empower each other, and give back to others within the community.

¹ McKnight, John; Kretzmann, John (1996). Mapping Community Capacity (PDF) (Report) (Revised ed.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research.