Indicator Explanation

CORE FUNCTION	EFFECTIVE PRACTICE	INDICATOR
Leadership	Prioritize improvement and communicate its urgency	1A.8 The school maintains documented partnerships with external services that reinforce its ability to address the mental and physical needs of school personnel and students.

Explanation: The school has become a hub for all kinds of services in order to provide students a safe and welcoming environment and to ensure students have all their needs met in order to be able to learn. Staff within the school also need to feel supported, safe, and able to provide the best education possible. The school, however, is not always equipped with professionals who can provide all that students and staff need. Then it becomes important for school leadership or district leadership to seek out partnerships with outside organizations who can provide those "extra" services in order to make the school a place conducive for learning.

Questions: What organizations are available in your community that might be able to provide services to your school? How can you partner with them to provide those services? How will you evaluate their effectiveness? Is there a written procedure for how these partnerships are formed, what your expectations are, and how those services will be evaluated?

Many organizations that are not deemed formal conduits of education nonetheless have a significant influence on informal education. Besides the family and its social networks, a community's libraries and museums, summer camps, parks, 4-H clubs, and community gardens all serv as education resources and, as such, can contribute to the "formal" education of students. Cultural, linguistic, and social gaps often exist between schools and the students and families they serve; community groups or individuals, such as paraprofessionals or teachers from the school's neighborhood, may serve as bridging intermediaries to foster productive relationships (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Reed, 2009; Warren, 2007). In addition, school improvement partners can include large corporations and small businesses, law enforcement, health departments, universities, faith-based and other non-profit organizations, and senior citizens among others. Some schools have formed beneficial alliances with municipal officials and the media (Brooks, 2009). Benefits provided range from providing extra adults who listen to children read (Doiron & Lees, 2009) to donated funds or goods.

Connecting with the community can help high school students engage and see the relevance of their coursework (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007), and evidence shows that students with disabilities benefit greatly from community employment experience during the high school years, e.g., work-study jobs, paid work experiences, and high school vocational education experiences (Stodden et al., 2001). An example of community supports is presented by Sheldon and Epstein (2004) in which a community connects chronically absent students with community mentors and measurably reduced students' chronic absenteeism. In other examples, grants provided funds to hire a school nurse and social worker to attend to students' physical, social, and emotional needs and to help involve parents; church volunteers organized a mentoring program (Tripses & Scroggs, 2009); and rural schools benefited from working with community-based and faith-based organizations who provided tutoring and other after-school programs.

To engage potential community partners, the district or school communicates a sincere desire for partnership, permitting time for development while also promoting community ownership (Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Processes used to develop partnerships, such as networking, meetings in person, and the negotiation of partnership activities themselves create "win-win" relationships for the school and the community partner (Hands, 2005).

A school views the community as a vital partner in the efforts to strengthen the transformation of schools. If a district makes an effort to identify common interests across its schools and the community, and works to remove obstacles that prevent collaborative communication, then it will maximize the role of the community as an asset (Harrison, 2011). Community organizations reflect a unique population that already has a role in the education of its children. Broadening this role through partnership with the district or school results in a more holistic approach and offers an alternative to the narrow focus on formal education within bureaucratic systems (Barker & Robinson, 2011).

The community can also step in and help address barriers that face students. Many districts and schools create directories of services that the community offers to help parents and students find what they need. The 2021 Community Matters report states that "Ensuring equitable conditions for learning requires planning students at the center and surrounding them with a caring community that provides the support for each individual student needs to overcome their particular academic and non-academic obstacles and empowers them to achieve their own success" (p. 9). Maslow stated that all humans have a hierarchy of need that was demonstrated in a pyramid. Each level must be "fulfilled" in order for the next layer to function. The base layer is simply all the physiological needs of a human – water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing – what we would consider basic needs. If these conditions are not met adequately, then nothing else can function. Next comes safety needs. If a student is not in a home environment that feels safe or if school does not feel like a safe place, then learning cannot happen. Love and belonging – once again, the next layer up. Students must feel as if they are personally cared about and that they belong before they can learn. Esteem and self-actualization are the layers in which student learning can now take place because the brain is not preoccupied with simply surviving and feeling safe and people care about me. Creating those conditions within the school. As well as connecting youth and families to services outside the school will enable schools to become the place of learning they are meant to be.

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