

Practice 9: Effective Club/School Partnerships

Building strong partnerships with schools is a very effective way to support young people and enhance the Club Experience. When Clubs collaborate with school systems and school administrators, many opportunities for members, Club professionals and school staff emerge. Not only can such partnerships expand the Club's walls, but they can also serve as a recruitment tool – both for new members (who benefit from the programs and services that Clubs provide) and for new staff/volunteers (who already have a vested interest in young people's success).

Throughout this section you will find a variety of promising practices from the field that you may consider implementing at your Club. Here is a brief summary of practices that are discussed in more detail below.

- **Collaborate with schools to plan complementary programming**
- **Leverage technology to foster a stronger school-Club partnership**
- **Build a part-time staff team made up of high school students**
- **Dedicate a staff member to work on school property**
- **Use relationships with school staff to recruit Club staff/volunteers**
- **Use school-based spaces for Club programs, and vice-versa**

Collaborate with schools to plan complementary programming

Management staff at the Reseda Elementary School Unit of Boys & Girls Clubs of West Valley work to ensure that youth development professionals enjoy and are comfortable with the programs they implement. Club staff work with teachers at the school to plan programming that relates to what the members are learning. Using these strategies, the Club offers a wide range of needs-based and interest-based programs, such as tutoring, early college prep, and cooking, music and photography classes. When members come to the Club during the first week of the program year, program staff encourage them to go to all the programs being offered to try them out. Later, youth have the choice to attend the ones they like best. A month into the program year, members participate in a survey to collect feedback about the programs and what else they would like to see offered. Staff use the survey information to make adjustments to their program offerings.

Leverage technology to foster a stronger school-Club partnership

While many Clubs already use technology to communicate with parents, the same tactic can be applied to the school-Club partnership. The Boys & Girls Club of Cleveland organization uses "Remind," which is an online and app-based tool that connects parents, teachers and Club staff regarding school issues. The tool has varying levels of functionality (it can even be used to communicate with youth), and sends messages privately and directly to mobile devices. The Club and school use this resource for general reminders, such as if schools and/or Clubs are closing early due to inclement weather.



Build a part-time staff team made up of high school students

At many Clubs, teen members strive to become part of a Junior Staff program or a part-

time Club employee. These members are eager to learn and grow their responsibilities as a Club professional. Because these teens have first-hand knowledge of the schools that members attend, they are an excellent built-in resource for establishing and growing partnerships between Clubs and schools. Leverage the relationships that these members already have at their schools and with their peers. At the Andrew Johnson Unit, part-time staff who are still in high school are counted on to alert Club leadership when needs arise and the Club can provide extra support. In addition, part-time staff are asked to attend high school plays and other school-based performances to show encouragement for members.

Dedicate a staff member to work on school property

While there is no doubt that it takes time to build a strong school-Club partnership, it is worth the hard work. Clubs that are integrated into the school building have the added advantages of proximity and visibility. The Mount View Boys & Girls Club was built in conjunction with a new elementary school in 2007. Dedicated space for the Club was carved out, but the Club and school share spaces such as the computer lab and the gym. In addition, a Club professional on the education team is assigned to be in the school on a daily basis. This individual goes from classroom to classroom to build relationships and strengthen the partnership between Club staff, school staff and youth.

Use relationships with school staff to recruit Club staff/volunteers

Because youth already have relationships with their teachers, recruiting school staff to work or volunteer at the Club is a mutually beneficial opportunity. The Tunica County Club has a strong connection with the school, and one staff member is also a teacher. In addition, when Club staff noticed that a member was excelling in Spanish, the unit director asked the teacher to come to the Club. The teacher taught Spanish to members for a month, giving the Club additional program content. Similarly, the Benton Unit has recruited a fourth-grade teacher to volunteer at the Club. The teacher spends her time at the Club tutoring members in her grade.

Use school-based spaces for Club programs, and vice-versa

For Clubs that are based on school property, the summer months present a unique opportunity to use school spaces for programs. The Kailua Clubhouse is on middle school property, and the Club often shares space and resources with the school. For example, the school's science department reached out to the Club for permission to use the Club's facilities for an external presenter. Similarly, a donor approached the Club to create a community garden program, but the school already had a garden. The simple solution was to modify the donor's proposed program to become a summer Club program, using the existing garden at the school.

QUICK WINS!

- *If members are bussed to the Club, use this as an opportunity to keep the lines of communication between the school and Club open.*
- *Invite teachers and school administrators to attend a Club tour.*
- *Encourage staff to have lunch with members at school at least one day each month.*
- *Recruit teachers and school administrators to serve on the Club's board of directors.*