



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP TOOLKIT

Updated August 2024



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A LETTER FROM THE DCPS PARTNERSHIPS TEAM

Dear Partners and School Leaders,

Enclosed you will find the School Partnership Toolkit, a refreshed resource from the DCPS Partnerships Team designed to help build strong partnerships in support of students' academic and social-emotional development. DCPS values our community partners and knows that effective school-community partnerships are key to providing students with the range of opportunities they need and deserve to be successful.

DCPS leaders believe in the transformative power of school-community collaboration, and this core belief is reflected in our theory of action that guides our work every day:

THEORY OF ACTION

If we...

BUILD AND SUSTAIN RELATIONSHIPS between and among DCPS, families, communities, and partners that increase trust;

INCREASE ACCESS TO INFORMATION, resources, and DCPS leadership and staff;

INCREASE TRANSPARENCY and provide stakeholders with timely and equitable opportunities to advise DCPS priorities;

BUILD CAPACITY in schools and Central Services to partner with families and communities to improve student outcomes;

Then, every DCPS student's success will be accelerated by partnerships with families and communities

But we know that building deep and impactful partnerships is not easy, so it is our hope that the School Partnership Toolkit is a first step in helping to grow school leader and partner capacity to effectively work together in support of DCPS students. Thank you for your continued commitment to the DCPS community, we look forward to the work ahead!

Sincerely,

The DCPS Partnerships Team

A CAPITAL COMMITMENT DCPS' 2023-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

CAPITAL COMMITMENT
2023-2028

ONE
EQUITY IMPERATIVE:
All DCPS students have access to the **tools, support, and resources** they need to succeed.

TWO
COMMITMENTS:
Value our people.
Partner with our community.

THREE
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

- SUCCEEDING ACADEMICALLY**
- CONNECTED TO SCHOOLS**
- PREPARED FOR WHAT'S NEXT**

dcpstrong.com/strategic-plan

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER MAYOR

The Capital Commitment is the latest iteration of DCPS' five-year strategic plan. The plan is grounded in our **Equity Imperative**, and its success is rooted in our ability to serve our students furthest from opportunity. The work is guided by three strategic priority areas:

succeeding academically, **connected to school**, and **prepared for what's next**.

Student safety and well-being are paramount to a successful educational environment. To ensure students feel **connected to school**, DCPS will continue to provide safe, supportive, and culturally affirming learning spaces while prioritizing meaningful relationships among students, families, educators, and our greater community.

So what does this look like?

1. DCPS students are safe and have a sense of belonging.
2. DCPS students have equitable access to critical opportunities like expanded out-of-school time programming and experiential learning.

For more information on the work ahead, visit <https://dcpstrong.com/strategic-plan> or scan the QR code at the bottom of the page.



USING THIS RESOURCE

The toolkit is broken up into five topic guides that allow partners and school leaders to focus on the issues most relevant to their work. Each guide includes best practices for schools and partners, relevant resources to support best practice implementation, as well as any required actions (e.g., ensuring all staff and volunteers go through the DCPS clearance process). This resource can be used as new partnerships are developed or to strengthen existing partnerships.

School-community partnerships are an evidence-based strategy that schools can use to support students' academic and social-emotional needs. To ensure an effective and successful partnership, it is essential that partners and school leaders align around shared, student-centered goals and that they have plans to track progress towards success on those goals.

High-quality partnerships take time and investments, requiring coordination across several areas. The School Partnership Toolkit provides a menu of best practices and tools to support schools and partners in this coordination to maximize their impact.

To put this resource into action, partners and school leaders should consider the following next steps:

- Review this resource with your respective teams to identify priority areas.
- Brainstorm questions for the school leaders/partners you work with, informed by your team's discussion.
- Schedule a regular check-in time between the school and program leaders to discuss questions and identify shared priorities for your collaborative work this year.
- Reach out to DCPS.Partnerships@k12.dc.gov with feedback, questions, or requests for additional support using this resource.

Topic Areas

1. Finding the Right Match
2. Setting Goals and Tracking Progress
3. Communication
4. Sharing Space
5. Culture and Inclusion

FINDING THE RIGHT MATCH

High-quality partnerships can be transformative but they require intentional time and effort to develop and maintain. School and partner leaders need to invest time on the front end of relationship-building to ensure that a partner's offering matches the school's needs and that the school can provide the supports the partner needs to be successful. The best practices and resources below highlight key strategies for aligning school and program needs.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Reflect on existing school partnerships. Where are the gaps? How could new partnerships support your school's goals?
- Research and meet with partners to determine whether they can support your school goals.
- Be clear about the programming/supports your school needs and the resources you can provide to the partner.
- Connect with the relevant Central Services content teams to ensure alignment with district goals and program quality.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Research the school's needs and pre-existing resources to determine whether your program can help advance school goals.
- Identify specific ways your organization can support school needs.
- Share any resources up front that you need from the school to meet grant requirements (e.g., dosage, minimum roster size, etc.).

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- ***NEW* Partnerships Success Guide:** Guidance for navigating the various stages of the partnership process from identifying a partner to ongoing relationship management.
- **Partner Interest Form:** Create a Partner Interest Form ([sample](#)) on your school website and/or send it to potential partners to streamline inquiries.
- **Letter Declining Partnership:** Use [this template](#) to politely decline an offer of support from a community member that does not address your school's priorities.
- **School Partnerships Database:** [Click here](#) to search for registered School Program Providers that might meet your school's needs and complete your annual partnerships database update.

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

- **CSP Snapshots:** Use these "[snapshots](#)" of [Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to view the priorities at all DC Public Schools. Use these to guide your decisions about which schools to approach for partnership.
- **School Profiles:** Review each DCPS [school profile](#) to learn more about the school's location, demographics, existing partnerships, and more.

REQUIREMENTS

- All partner staff and volunteers must obtain a DCPS clearance before working with DCPS students in-person or virtually. More information about the clearance process is available [here](#).
- [School Program Providers](#) must [register with DCPS](#) and secure an [official partner agreement](#) with DCPS.
- Both schools and partners are required to update their profiles in the [Partnerships database](#) on an annual basis. This process usually occurs in the summer (for partners) and the fall (for schools). You will receive an email when it's time to renew.

SETTING GOALS AND TRACKING PROGRESS

The most impactful school partnerships are intentional and informed by data to ensure strategic alignment between schools and programs. The best practices and resources below focus on supporting school and program leader goal setting and progress monitoring efforts.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS AND PARTNERS

- Set specific, measurable goals for the school year and establish a process for monitoring progress towards success. Partners and school leaders should use the [Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to anchor their goal-setting and ensure alignment between partner and school priorities.
- Use data points aligned with those that DCPS uses to track progress towards key goals (e.g., DC CAPE scores, Panorama surveys, attendance, enrollment, etc.).
- Review data regularly to evaluate partnership impact and adjust efforts as needed.
- When appropriate, compare student data to a control group (e.g., students not participating in the program) to better assess program impact.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS AND PARTNERS

- **Partnership Action Plan:** Work together to establish shared goals, detail why they are strategically important, outline the strategies needed to meet goals, and the measures you will use to track progress towards success.
 - [Sample](#) Partner Action Plan
 - Blank Partner Action Plan [template](#)
- **Comprehensive School Plans:** Use these “snapshots” of [Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to view the priorities at all DC Public Schools.
- **DCPS Capital Commitment:** Use DCPS’ [five-year strategic plan](#) to inform goal setting and framing of your work.

REQUIREMENTS

To protect student privacy, review information on [requesting and sharing DCPS data](#) to ensure compliance with District rules and regulations.

COMMUNICATION

Successful partnerships require regular, proactive communication from both school leaders and partners. The best practices and resources below support the establishment of communication norms to ensure that matters related to the partnership are given proper attention, especially as school leaders work to balance competing priorities.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Include partner in important communications to families, students, and staff.
- Prepare for and attend regular meetings with the partner.
- Identify a point of contact at the school and share best methods for contact between meetings. This might not always be the principal.
- Be proactive with communications to ensure partners have the information they need to be successful (e.g., school closures, school policy reminders).
- Apply feedback from the partner, as appropriate, to improve partnership.
- Meet regularly with all school partners to discuss coordination between partners and important school updates.
- Establish communication protocols in the event of an emergency during partner-led programming.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Prepare for and attend regular meetings with the school leader and/or school's partnership point of contact.
- Share best methods for contact between meetings.
- Be proactive in your communications with school teams, especially regarding incidents that occur during programming.
- Apply feedback from the school to improve partnership.
- Establish communication protocols in the event of an emergency during partner-led programming.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet**: Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- Consider a [partner newsletter](#) to share regular updates with partners, including current priorities, program highlights, etc.

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet**: Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.

REQUIREMENTS

If an incident regarding the behavior, safety, or health of any DCPS student and/or any provider personnel occurs during programming, an incident report must be submitted.

- Schools must submit a report to the DCPS Incident Reporting Tool (IRT) and work with the relevant Central Services team(s) to resolve.
- Partners must immediately alert their school-based point-of-contact and submit a report via the Partnerships [incident reporting form](#).

SHARING SPACE

School space can be limited but partners often require consistent access to space for storage, programming, and planning to execute their programs successfully. The best practices and resources below aim to support schools and partners in determining which spaces will be available to partners and how to best use that space to the satisfaction of both the partner and the school.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Make appropriate space available for partner that includes agreed upon resources (e.g., storage space, space for programming or office space).
- Ensure school space is clean and in usable condition when available for partners.
- Share safety protocols with partner, including emergency procedures.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Be understanding of space limitations and work with the school to operate within the available space.
- Practice emergency procedures with students and staff.
- After use, leave school spaces in better condition than before.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including building use.
- **Partnerships Management Tracker:** Use [this tracker](#) to keep track of where your partners are operating within your building.

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including building use.

REQUIREMENTS

All organizations using DCPS facilities outside of regular school hours must submit an [Application for Facilities Use](#) to DGS **at least 20 business days** before programming begins. For summer programs, applications must be submitted further in advance, typically in the spring, for approval to operate in DCPS schools. More information about summer facilities use requirements [can be found here](#).

CULTURE AND INCLUSION

Partners are most successful when they feel included in the school community and can align with its cultural norms. Meaningfully integrating partners into the school community also helps program leaders align their offerings with relevant curriculum or classroom management structures used during the school day. The best practices and resources below support school leaders and partners in their efforts to align cultural norms, ensure that partner staff and volunteers feel like a part of the larger school community, and promote cohesion between in-school and out-of-school programming.

BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOLS

- Include partner in important school communications
- Invite partners to school-wide events, including assemblies and Back to School Night.
- Attend partner-led events involving your students
- Share school-wide cultural norms and behavior support strategies.
- Invite partners to relevant professional development opportunities and faculty/staff meetings
- Encourage teachers and other school staff to treat partner staff as members of the school community. Facilitate collaboration as appropriate.
- Observe programming when possible and share feedback (see The Weikart Center resources linked below).

BEST PRACTICES FOR PARTNERS

- Research the school's needs and pre-existing resources to determine whether what you have to offer will help advance school goals.
- Think specifically about how your organization can support school needs.
- Share any resources upfront you might need from the school to meet grant requirements, dosage, etc.
- Request/review school culture document(s), especially related to behavior management practices.

TOOLS FOR SCHOOLS

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- **Weikart Center's Program Quality Assessments:** Use [these tools](#) to inform observations and continuous improvement efforts to ensure partner offerings are maximized for impact.
- **Sample Newsletter to Partners:** View [this document](#) as an example of how to engage partners through a regular newsletter

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- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- **Weikart Center's Program Quality Assessments:** Use [these tools](#) to inform observations and continuous improvement efforts to ensure partner offerings are maximized for impact.

REQUIREMENTS

- All partners must adhere to the [DCPS Language Access Policy](#) and communicate information to parents/guardians with limited/non-English proficiency (LEP/NEP) in a language they can understand about any service or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English. This includes, but is not limited to, information related to registration for programs and services. [See the Partnerships website for training and best practices.](#)
- If a student or family member requests an accommodation, the school principal (or designee) or partner site leader must complete the [DCPS Accommodation Request Form](#).

CONCLUSION

DCPS believes in the transformative power of school-community collaboration and values the many opportunities that partners provide to DCPS students. The School Partnership Toolkit reflects these values by giving school and partner leaders best practices and resources to help them cultivate high-quality partnerships in support of improved student outcomes. The toolkit can be used to ground conversations as partnerships are just beginning or to inform ongoing efforts to strengthen existing ones. Together, school and partner leaders can use the toolkit to identify high-priority focus areas and ensure that their collaboration efforts are intentional.

The toolkit will be a living document that evolves over time to meet partner and school leaders' needs. As you use it, we hope you will share your feedback about what's working and what further supports you'd like to see. You can share your feedback by e-mailing DCPS.Partnerships@k12.dc.gov.

Thank you for your continued efforts to support DCPS students. We could not do this work without you!

LIBRARY OF RESOURCES

Here is an overview of all the resources linked through the toolkit, organized by topic area.

FINDING THE RIGHT MATCH

- ***NEW* Partnerships Success Guide:** Guidance for navigating the various stages of the partnership process from identifying a partner to ongoing relationship management.
 - **Partner Interest Form:** Create a Partner Interest Form ([sample](#)) on your school website and/or send it to potential partners to streamline inquiries from potential partners and determine whether the partnership meets the needs of the school community.
 - **Letter Declining Partnership:** Use [this template](#) to politely decline an offer of support from a community member that does not address your school's priorities.
 - **School Partnerships Database:** [Click here](#) to search for registered School Program Providers that might meet your school's needs.
 - **CSP Snapshots:** Review these "[snapshots](#)" of [Comprehensive School Plans \(CSP\)](#) to view the priorities at all DC Public Schools.
 - **School Profiles:** Review each DCPS [school profile](#) to learn more about the school's location, demographics, existing partnerships and more.
 - [Steps to registering as a School Program Provider](#)
 - [Steps for obtaining an official agreement with DCPS](#)
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SETTING GOALS AND TRACKING PROGRESS

- [Sample](#) Partner Action Plan
 - Blank Partner Action Plan [Template](#)
 - [DCPS Data-Sharing Policy](#)
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COMMUNICATION

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
 - **Sample Newsletter to Partners:** View [this document](#) as an example of how to engage partners through a regular newsletter.
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SHARING SPACE

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including building use.
 - **Partnerships Management Tracker:** Use [this tracker](#) to keep track of where your partners are operating within your building.
 - [Application for Facilities Use](#)
-

CULTURE AND INCLUSION

- **School and Partner Expectations Worksheet:** Use [this worksheet](#) to norm on school-based aspects of your partnership, including establishing communication norms.
- **Weikart Center's Program Quality Assessments:** Use [these tools](#) to inform observations and continuous improvement efforts to ensure partner offerings are maximized for impact
- **Sample Newsletter to Partners:** View [this document](#) as an example of how to engage partners through a regular newsletter.
- **DCPS Language Access Policy:** See the [Partnerships website](#) for training and best practices on serving multilingual learners and their families.
- **DCPS Accommodation Request Form:** If a student or family member requests an accommodation, the school principal (or designee) or partner site leader must complete the [DCPS Accommodation Request Form](#).