

Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS?

Community partnerships refers to how schools develop, honor, and sustain meaningful interactive relationships with their diverse communities to ensure that all members understand, contribute, and partner with each other to support students. Community partnerships extend the values, culture, and learning opportunities provided by school for their unique students. These partnerships aim to extend the values, culture, and the learning opportunities occurring in school settings. Lastly, these lasting partnerships provide community members with a sense of belonging, ultimately creating systems of support for students and their families.

WHY ARE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IMPORTANT?

Community partnerships are important because fostering strong relationships between schools, families, and community members positively affect learner achievement, family support, and creates a sense of ongoing collaboration. Vast research indicates that in addition to learning in a classroom setting, opportunities for learning are constantly occurring. These community partnerships present numerous opportunities for families to collaborate and coordinate between school and community contexts, increasing learning outside of the classroom and ultimately promoting generalization of skills and behaviors.

OUTCOMES OF STRONG COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Enhance student skills that are helpful to future workforce practices
- Increase of student enrollment, attendance, and grade improvement
- Increases impact by pooling resources; decreases
- Encourages sharing of strengths and expertise
- Bridges gaps in knowledge, expertise, and understanding
- Creates a sense of support for families and community partners

*IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Important to ensure students have multiple opportunities to voice concerns, ideas, and goals.
- Create a plan for effective coordination and collaboration with important stakeholders from both school and community settings.
- Develop a shared vision that includes all important school and community members.
- Engage in joint professional development that intentionally aligns with school goals and values
- Blend school and community staff to address the specific needs of the schools

CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Kodiak Cubs Preschool

Developing an inclusive preschool program takes time and support. Kodiak Cubs Preschool started this journey about ten years ago. This journey began with a conversation of staff and faculty with leadership to identify their primary goal and develop a quality preschool program for all. It was apparent to the teachers that there was an issue of equity in the district with many students attending Kindergarten unprepared. The Kodiak Cubs Preschool explored why this was happening and what they could do to help. What they found was that the vast majority of students were not eligible for Head Start, but also could not afford private pay preschool. Ultimately, a large population of their community were unable to access early childhood education. The next question then became, “why can’t we provide preschool for these students?”

Next, the faculty and staff of Kodiak Cubs present reached out to their district leaders to share the research on the importance of inclusive early childhood education and the wide reaching benefits over the long term for students of all abilities. The district approved a commitment to provide preschool to all students. A unifying motto of “All means all, you all!” was developed and became words to work toward. The Kodiak Cubs Preschool were excited, but knew that in order to accomplish this task they would have to reach out to families as well as community partners. Further, Kodiak Cubs knew that because a limited number of children could access preschool, numerous community providers existed that offered day services to their community. In order to continue to build the inclusive community culture, Kodiak Cubs worked to partner and learn from these community providers

Initially, when asked to collaborate, community and private preschool and day settings worried that public preschool would take over and their businesses would not survive.

Although this was not the intention, Kodiak Cubs preschool knew they shared a common mission with these smaller providers- to serve and support their larger community. Kodiak Cubs also knew that students who would need longer care outside of the school day would still be in need of community and private child care. This emphasized the importance of collaboration to support students as they accessed multiple educational settings.

This collaboration was essential in reaching students across the community. Those who qualified for Head Start or an Individualized Education Program would be included in the program. Collaboration with Head Start and related service providers was critical to ensure that all students needs were met. Staff were asked to collaborate on the logistics of transportation, food services, as well as with support in the classroom and school. Through this process it became apparent that relationship building with community partners was crucial to program success. Currently, there are approximately 100 children attending preschool. The community has come together to make sure all students can access preschool.

Next steps for the Kodiak Cubs Preschool are to find a more permanent physical space in the community where they can be a “one stop shop”, providing everything that is needed in one space and serve as many children as possible. The space would be one location for families to access services such as child care, preschool, health care, dental, basic needs, etc. It would be dedicated to young children and show children and families that they are the priority. More community outreach will be necessary for this to take place.

In the meantime, the staff and faculty at Kodiak Cubs Preschool continue to work with their community to support ALL their students across multiple settings.

RESOURCES

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