

**Community Involvement: The CT WSCC Partnership On-Demand Webinar Series Transcript**

Welcome to the Community Involvement on-demand webinar. There are 10 webinars in this series, each corresponding with one domain of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child model. This webinar will focus on the community involvement domain. Each webinar will begin with an overview of the WSCC model and an introduction to our practice briefs before a deep dive into the WSCC domain of focus.

The CT WSCC Partnership is a joint collaboration between the University of Connecticut’s Collaboratory on School and Child Health and the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health. Before we begin, we want to acknowledge our funding partners and share that the content of this webinar does not necessarily reflect the official views of the CDC or the Department of Health and Human Services.

Our practice briefs draw on the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model, which is the CDC and ASCD’s framework for addressing health in schools. The model is student-centered and stresses the need to coordinate policy, processes, and practice across ten domains of student health and well-being to maximize student success. As can be seen in the outermost ring, the model is situated within the community, and emphasizes drawing upon community context and expertise to use the model in contextually-aligned ways. The model is not a prescriptive program. Instead, it is a framework for organizing a school or district’s efforts to support the whole child, facilitate high quality teaching, and maximize student learning and success.

Today's content comes from our WSCC Practice Brief series. These are freely available on our website at ctwscc.org. If you'd like to learn more about how these briefs were developed and our CDC-funded project, please watch our "Intro to the WSCC Webinar Series" video.

What is community involvement? Let’s hear what one of our community partners has to say about this WSCC domain.

Community involvement in schools, what I feel looks like, is a partnership. It’s a partnership between community businesses, organizations, town departments, all working collaboratively together to meet the needs of our students and families. You know, that’s coordinating efforts around food insecurity or counseling services or trying to increase numbers of participation in our athletic programs, whether it be in the school or in the town for Parks and rec.

Students, when they’re in an academic setting, they’re not here 12 months year round and not all the resources are available in a school system. And through a different lens in the community we can link families, students, to the resources that are available in the community and give families opportunities for successes in food access, healthcare systems, partnering with our local police department, to really bridge that gap for the families.

So, why is community involvement relevant to child outcomes?

The impact on child outcomes when a community and school district work together collaboratively is being able to provide them and their families with more services. And the more services, the wraparound supports that we can give them, the more likelihood of the academic success, because we do know that if a child is physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually healthy, the better chance they are to find academic success.

Now that we know the why behind community involvement, let’s look at some evidence-based strategies that you can use in your practice to build school-community partnerships.

We’ve organized the strategies by the required resource demand to help schools choose appropriate initiatives for their setting.

We begin with strategies that require a low resource demand. The first is to involve community members in existing prevention efforts to promote student physical, social, emotional, and behavioral health. Prevention programs that involve community members are more effective than programs without community involvement. This is because multiple components of community engagement such as establishing representative partnerships and building community capacity, enhance community support, participation, and intervention delivery. This, in turn, helps to improve outcomes.  An example of a prevention program with community involvement is a drug and alcohol education program that involves community members on the data team. Schools can modify existing prevention and intervention initiatives like school wellness teams to increase collaboration with a range of community partners such as universities, government agencies, or neighborhood groups.

Another low resource demand strategy is to evaluate existing community involvement initiatives. Strong family-school-community partnership programs are planned and implemented by a team of teachers, administrators, families, and community members, who collaborate to engage families and the community through activities that map onto school goals and support student achievement. A team of school administrators and staff, family members, and community members can collaboratively evaluate policies and programs to ensure they are matched to the varied needs of students and communities. Evaluations might include surveys or interviews with community members, as well as an audit of existing practices.

Next, we move into moderate resource demand strategies. The first recommendation is for schools to invest in building relationships that reach all families. Examples include investing in relationships with community agencies, or respected community members who can help to establish trust between families and schools while advocating for meaningful participation. This can be particularly helpful in communities where the demographics of school staff do not match those of students and families. Translators can also help to make communication – both verbal and in writing – more accessible to linguistically diverse students and families.

A second moderate resource strategy is to incorporate service-learning activities into curricula. Service learning that incorporates community involvement is associated with improved student academic performance, improved student social skills, and improved student attitudes toward self, school, and learning. Schools can use service learning, including community service and volunteer experiences, to provide students with opportunities to acquire skills and socially responsive behavior. These opportunities can draw from the real-world expertise and experiences of a range of community partners to supplement school curricula.

Another moderate resource strategy is to establish shared-use agreements for school and community spaces. Shared-use agreements outline the terms and conditions of shared or joint use of school grounds and facilities by the school and a city, town, or community group. Districts and community partners can establish shared-use agreements to allow coordinated and collaborative use of indoor and outdoor spaces and increase the use of school grounds and facilities, physical activity, and provide access to healthy foods for students, families, and community members.

Next, we transition to the most resource-intensive strategies. Schools can improve mentoring and volunteer tutoring programs to build positive, caring connections between students and members of the community, including retired adults and college students, who can serve as role models and provide students with social and academic support. Participation in such programs can reduce student absences, decrease discipline referrals and improve student emotional well-being and self-concept.

Our second high-resource strategy is to establish after-school programs in collaboration with community partners. After-school programs can offer a range of activities and be implemented by school staff or community members. These opportunities can improve access to enrichment activities and student attendance, academic achievement, and attitudes toward school and community. Effective after-school programs ensure that specific program elements target desired outcomes, assess fidelity of implementation, monitor student progress to ensure intervention effectiveness, and provide initial and ongoing training and supervision for program staff.

If you are interested in learning about additional resources related to the community involvement domain of the WSCC model, please see the full community involvement WSCC practice brief.

This brief, among the others, can be found on the Tools page of our website: ctwscc.org. After clicking on our tools, scroll down to Best WSCC practices. Here you will find our practice briefs.

Thank you for joining us! We hope you enjoyed today’s webinar. To view the other webinars in our WSCC on-demand webinar series, please visit our website at ctwscc.org. If you have any questions about the Connecticut WSCC Partnership, please feel free to contact us at ctwscc@uconn.edu.