

> promising practices

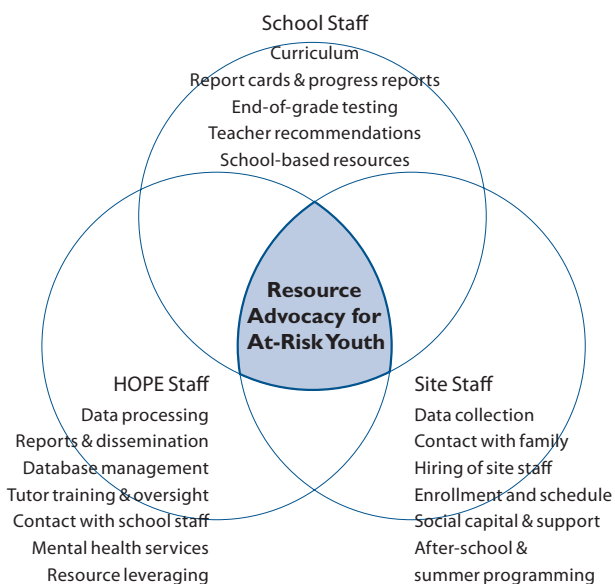
Linkages between the multiple contexts of children's lives—home, school, community, out-of-school time—can be facilitated by a variety of mechanisms, that is, real-world practices that cut across contexts to forge connections that might not otherwise exist. In this issue's Promising Practices section, we feature discussions of several mechanisms being used throughout the country to facilitate linkages: staffing and training, policy, technology, family involvement, and research and evaluation.

Project HOPE: Working Across Multiple Contexts to Support At-Risk Students

Barbara Jentleson and Helen Westmoreland, from Duke University, describe a university–community collaboration targeting the learning and development needs of local youth. This article highlights the mechanism of connecting complementary-learning contexts through staffing patterns and practices.

Since 2002, Project HOPE (Holistic Opportunities Plan for Enrichment) has sponsored after school and summer complementary-learning opportunities through five community centers affiliated with the Duke–Durham Neighborhood Partnership in North Carolina. Funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Project HOPE is designed to improve the academic and social outcomes of Durham's at-risk youth by targeting the resources of Duke University, its community partners, and Durham Public Schools. In bringing together multiple sources of support, Project HOPE has been able to demonstrate improvements in End-of-Grade (EOG) test scores and report card grades, as well as overall positive views of education, for its participants, the majority of whom are ethnic minorities and come from low-income families.

Project HOPE's Collaborative Staffing Model



The Duke–Durham Partnership works with its community partners to prioritize community needs so that Duke is able to leverage its resources toward stated community issues. The community partners served by Project HOPE sought Duke's help in either bringing resources to existing after school programs or in developing new programs for students who could not enroll in existing programs, largely due to financial constraints.

Each of the five community partners operates as an independent nonprofit organization serving the children in its neighborhood. Through caring staff and engaging programs, these organizations offer support and facilitate family involvement for the youth who attend. Sites remain autonomous in their ability to hire staff, create program schedules, and determine preferred enrollment range—some Project HOPE sites are for children in kindergarten through eleventh grade, while others serve a narrower age range. To identify needs and advocate for additional resources, sites also collect information (enrollment, attendance, and report card grades) about the children who attend programs.

The Project's administrative team, made up of Duke faculty, staff, and work-study students, focuses on mediating interactions among the multiple contexts through which children learn; for example, the Project's liaison coordinator meets regularly with teachers to develop and update an individual student plan (ISP) for each student. The ISP is then modified with the community center site coordinator and staff. Project HOPE's tutoring coordinator shares the ISP, along with suggested teaching strategies, with that child's tutor.

Additionally, a part-time Project HOPE social worker conducts regular seminars on safe and healthy living, and counsels students who have been referred by site coordinators or family members for mental health services or screenings. University and community funds and programs—as varied as a student group dealing with adolescent girls' issues to a local theater offering lessons in piano, dance, and acting—are also made available to the sites.

In designing an evaluation model, we determined that an outcomes-based logic model¹ would be most appropriate for our community-based settings and for the complexity created by multiple contexts. For the internal evaluation, data are collected on student [continued on page 19](#)

¹ A logic model illustrates how an initiative's activities connect to the outcomes it is trying to achieve.

5. Appropriate Governance Structure

A partnership's governance structure also matters. While it is difficult to point to any single governance structure as the "right" model—that depends on the partnership's goal—determining whether the governance structure is working is an important factor in evaluating a partnership and its work and corresponding outcomes. We used to put together governance structures that were very democratic, where everyone came together and had their say. But, ultimately, there was very little order, and progress was slow. While inclusiveness is important, the governance structure of any partnership must be examined to determine whether it functions effectively for the purpose at hand.

For ENLACE, different partnership styles and structures have emerged, again depending on the partnership's goal. One model, called the cooperative service provider model, uses a pyramid structure. Higher education is at the top and assumes an important driving role—not because higher education is the most critical partner, but because the partnership's goal is to improve access to postsecondary education institutions. K–12 is in the middle of the pyramid, and community-based organizations comprise the supporting bottom layer.

Another model is called professional collaboration and features higher education, K–12, and community-based organizations all working together, but with intentional points of strategic intersection. A third model is called community-based collaboration and is more community driven. In this case, higher education and K–12 are intimately involved, but the community-based organization drives the work. This is a more grassroots model where community-based organizations are proactive in helping educational institutions reach out to communities in more constructive ways.

6. Mutually Beneficial Interactions

Partnerships, especially those with diverse partners, should feature mutually beneficial relationships. Partners should interact in ways that benefit individuals and their organizations, as well as contribute to the partnership's overall goal. In Latino communities, for example, community-based organizations—which traditionally assume an educational role, often leading after school or mentoring programs—are often challenged with finding adequately trained or credentialed individuals to staff programs. In ENLACE partnerships, the benefit of bringing K–12 and postsecondary educators together with community-based organizations is that educators can contribute to professional development or to training staff and empowering parents and other community leaders.

By way of example, a university, for instance, can propose to a community-based organization a partnership where graduate students at the university would go and help in the organization's after school program. Partnerships should feature this type of strategic intersection.

7. Decision Making Based on Data

Finally, we look to see that partnerships are using data to make strategic decisions and wise investments. In all partnerships, assessment and evaluation are important—not only to measure impact but also to help ensure that partnerships are both sustainable and strategic in reaching their program goals.

We encourage ENLACE grantees to use data not only to improve programs, policies, and practices but also to create messages that will build the public and political will to sustain the effort long-term. Data are critically important in all partnership work, and, to the extent possible, should be at the center of all decision making.

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program attendance, EOG test scores, and report cards. Students, parents, teachers, and staff also complete surveys capturing information about program satisfaction and communication. Twice a year, in January and again in June, a balance card displaying critical data across sites is prepared. The card helps sites evaluate how they are doing in comparison with one another.

These mechanisms provide a consistent feedback loop that allows information to be quickly shared with school and community partners. As a result, Project HOPE community partners have become more active and independent participants in the data collection process. In fact, a long-term goal of this process is to demystify data collection and evaluation procedures for our community partners so that evaluation becomes a more routine part of their program administration.

The external evaluation is conducted in conjunction with North Carolina Central University (NCCU), an historically minority institution, which, like Duke, is studying the university and community engagement process. External reviewers collect monthly reports from each of the community partners and project staff, conduct site observations and interviews, and administer and evaluate a Durham community survey. This information is shared with both Duke and NCCU staff so that the two groups can consult with each other and learn jointly.

As indicated in the diagram, Project HOPE's collaborative process is circular and continuous. With our partners, we are becoming a community that knows each other better and can regard one another with greater trust. As a community, we can send the consistent message, from our multiple contexts, that each child in Durham is valued and expected to achieve academic and social success.

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