



Best Starts for Kids School Partnerships Evaluation: Year 2 Summary

Best Starts for Kids' (BSK) School Partnerships strategies support partnerships among schools, school districts, community-based organizations (CBOs), young people, and families to ensure students feel safe, respected, and supported at school. To understand how these partners are working together, BSK engaged the Puget Sound Educational Service District's (PSESD) [Strategy, Evaluation and Learning team](#).

This summary highlights findings from Year 2 of a three-year evaluation (August 2018 through December 2021) that explores the following questions:

- 1) What do equitable school partnerships look like, and what are the factors that support them?
- 2) What is the relationship between equitable partnerships and lasting practice, policy, system and environment changes and changes in student well-being?
- 3) How do King County processes and systems support equitable partnerships?

WHAT WE LEARNED

COVID-19 has shifted, and in many cases strengthened, how partners work together.

- In response to the pandemic, partners worked together more than ever to ensure students' and families' basic needs, such as food and housing security, were met. In the strongest partnerships, schools and CBOs worked together to plan and implement a response to address these needs.
- Many partners reported improved systems of coordination to connect students to supports as well as expanded access to supports, including for mental and socio-emotional health and addressing technology barriers.
- BSK's flexible funding was essential for these rapid, community-led responses to address student and family needs.

Partnerships are helping build student and family leadership in schools.

- Partners focus on empowering students and families; many have created spaces for student leadership and family engagement. In the strongest partnerships, schools and CBOs actively work together to involve families.
- However, CBOs and schools are seeking more ways to collaborate with families. Partners would like more technical and financial support from BSK to expand and strengthen these efforts.

Partnerships thrive when there are people who ensure that connections and collaborations occur.

- Having school and district leaders who welcome and pave the way for CBOs is critical to developing equitable partnerships.
- A designated coordinator role helps facilitate strong, cross-strategy partnerships; many CBOs, families and schools asked for a coordinator to ensure that organizations are aligned and working together effectively.
- BSK awardee organizations also value forming connections with each other. BSK has provided convening and learning spaces within BSK strategy areas, such as the TIRP (Trauma-Informed and Restorative Practices) Village, that have helped awardees to implement their programs and build relationships.

How partners share power with each other impacts the strength of their partnership.

- In the strongest partnerships, schools help CBOs navigate institutional barriers such as data sharing and access to resources. Some CBO partners experienced gatekeeping (such as limiting CBOs’ access to student information or not providing space for their programming) from school leadership, making it difficult to carry out their work.
- Although all partners understand systemic barriers that students face, such as racism and access to resources, the strongest partnerships focus their work explicitly on empowering institutionally marginalized students.
- Strong partnerships result in students and families feeling more welcome and connected with their school. All partners recognize the importance of engaging families; however, most struggle with how to engage them.

BSK awardees are contributing to a wide range of changes in schools and districts.

- Many partnerships report lasting changes in schools, most commonly in the areas of school climate, coordination of student supports and access to services. The strongest partnerships, particularly those focused on restorative justice, report a wide range of practice, policy, systems, and environment changes. While many of these changes were achieved before COVID-19 and school closures, identifying if and how changes have been sustained in the 2020-21 school year will be a focus of Year 3 of the evaluation.
- In schools with fewer BSK-supported partnerships, partners are more likely to report similar types of change (e.g., improved school climate). There is particularly strong alignment in the types of changes achieved by TIRP and Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral To Services (SBIRT) partnerships.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

These findings point to a number of actions schools and districts, CBOs, and BSK can take to strengthen partnerships.

School and District Leaders	CBOs & Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that supporting students fully and with care and justice requires partners from the community • Create an environment that is open to community presence • Provide district office support for ongoing school-community work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share knowledge and resources • Have deep knowledge of which partner has which sets of skills, knowledge, and capacity • Co-create structures and utilize multiple types of regular communication • Participate actively in school-based governance and events

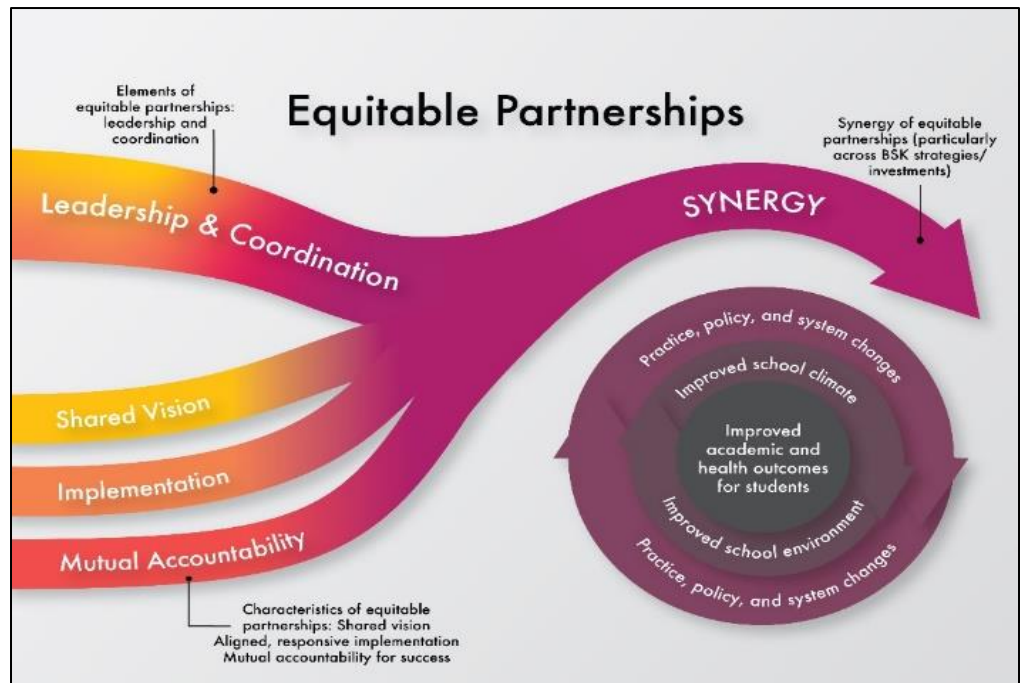
School and District Leaders	CBOs & Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and cocreate through dialogue with partners a shared vision that identifies not only what work needs to be done, but how work can be done together • Recognize each other’s strengths, capacities, and contributions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in courageous conversations with one another • Ensure direct communication lines to families • Work on ways to build capacity for data sharing
<p>These actions are mutually dependent on each other. Schools, districts, CBOs and partners rely on each other to create strong partnerships.</p>	

Implications for BSK relate to supports for innovation, coordination, organizational capacity, family engagement, co-design, and accountability. The complete set of implications can be found in the full Year 2 report.

FRAMEWORK AND PROCESS

Thanks to the work of those who came before us, like the [Youth Development Executives of King County \(YDEKC\)](#), we have some understanding of **what equitable partnerships look like**, and how they **support greater change than would be possible with one organization**. Shared leadership and effective coordination support partnerships to have a shared vision, aligned implementation and mutual accountability. With this foundation, partnerships can positively impact student, school, and system changes. (See Exhibit.)

Since the start of this evaluation, we have identified attributes of equitable partnerships, including the critical role of trust and built relationships. Using these attributes, developed from the YDEKC framework and several practice-oriented studies on partnerships, we categorized



partnerships as Cooperative, Collaborative, or Integrated. This approach helped us understand in what ways partnerships were similar, how they differed, and what factors contribute to the successes and challenges of each.

To help us continue to learn how equitable partnerships are developing within BSK strategies, in Year 2 we...

1. **Identified 11 sites across six districts:** Auburn, Bellevue, Kent, Seattle, Snoqualmie Valley and Tukwila. Each site has more than one BSK-funded partnership, typically across multiple strategy areas.
2. **Interviewed CBO, school, and district staff, as well as families,** listening for evidence of attributes essential to equitable partnerships. We also reviewed secondary documents, such as narrative reports, to complement what we learned from the interviews.

3. **Categorized each partnership as Cooperative, Collaborative, or Integrated** based on evidence of equitable partnership attributes.
4. **Analyzed each grouping of partnerships** (Cooperative, Collaborative, and Integrated) to understand **what factors support and inhibit equitable partnerships from forming** and how they are contributing to changes in schools, systems, and for students.
5. **Shared our preliminary findings** with Advisors and BSK School Partnership Leads. We incorporated their feedback into the final key findings. In addition, we hosted meaning-making sessions to share and interpret Year 2 findings with evaluation participants.

WHAT'S NEXT?

In the third year of the BSK School Partnerships evaluation, we are prioritizing student and family perspective. Specifically, we are hosting student and family focus groups across some of the 11 sites to better understand how partners impact student and family leadership and empowerment and the changes they are experiencing in their schools. Additionally, we will continue exploring how mutual accountability contributes to success and sustainability, and how partnerships have impacted students, schools and systems. We will also identify and name contributions of individual School Partnership strategies in terms of cross-strategy work, changes in schools, and BSK supports.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the contributions of many to the BSK School Partnerships evaluation:

- **BSK School Partnerships Evaluation Advisors** continue to guide this work through all phases. Advisors' guidance has supported an evaluation that is relevant and helpful to those doing partnership work in schools.
- **Staff from BSK and dozens of awardee and partner organizations** participated in interviews about the BSK-supported work in their organizations and schools. Many King County and Best Starts for Kids staff also provided helpful background and introductions to awardees and offered feedback on the evaluation.
- Other **BSK School Partnership Evaluators** collaborated across evaluation and measurement activities for BSK School Partnerships to support the alignment of our work.
- **Members of the PSESD Strategy, Evaluation, and Learning team** conducted this evaluation and authored this summary and accompanying Year 2 report.

For more information about the Year 2 evaluation, please access the full Year 2 report at <https://strategy.psesd.org/current-evaluation-projects/best-starts-for-kids>.

This work is made possible by the Best Starts for Kids levy. Best Starts for Kids builds on the strengths of families and communities so that babies are born healthy, children thrive and establish a strong foundation for life, and young people grow into happy, healthy adults. For more information on the Best Starts for Kids levy, go to www.kingcounty.gov/beststarts.