

Considering School-Community Partnerships Along a Spectrum

This resource:

- is part of the California Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center’s (HETAC) [School-Community Partnerships: A Toolkit for Working Together to Serve Children, Youth, and Families Experiencing Homelessness](#); and
- explores levels of school-community partnerships along a “partnership spectrum”, ranging from informal networking to full collaboration;
- provides examples of school-community partnership levels focused on supporting children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.

Context

Developing school-community partnerships may feel overwhelming initially, particularly for people who are new to their position or community. Considering partnership work as existing along a spectrum may make it easier to “start somewhere,” knowing the partnership can be built into a deeper collaboration as partnership dynamics evolve over time. Factors that may affect partnership levels and may shift over time include an individual partner agency’s or organization’s time and capacity, levels of trust among partners, alignment of purposes and priorities across partners, and evolving community and partner needs.

Partnership levels are shown below along a spectrum, ranging from networking to full collaboration. Each level is explored in terms of

- a summary **description**,
- **purpose**,
- key **features** or characteristics,
- general **activities** that may occur, and
- specific **examples of activities focused on supporting children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness**.

School and community agencies can use the spectrum chart below to consider the current level of their partnership and how they might go about deepening and strengthening it to yield more impactful joint work in support of the children, youth, and families they serve.



A Partnership Spectrum

	Networking	Cooperation	Coordination	Collaboration
Description	Partners share information and communicate for mutual benefit	Partners support one another's activities but have no formal agreement in place	Partners engage in mutual initiatives, modifying their own activities to benefit the whole	With a formal agreement in place, partners work to develop enhanced system capacity
	Purpose	Exchanging information to reach a common understanding	Networking and supporting one another's activities to achieve a common purpose	Altering activities and sharing or merging resources to achieve a common purpose or create something new
Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loosely defined roles Loose/flexible relationship(s), often from "person to person" rather than from "organization to organization" Infrequent communication Minimal decision-making No risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somewhat defined roles Informal and supportive relationships Periodic communication Limited joint decision-making Little to no risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined roles Formalized links, but each group retains autonomy Regular communication Joint decision-making about joint work Low to moderate risk Some resource sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defined and formalized roles Links formalized via written agreement Frequent communication Equally shared ideas and decision-making High risk but also high trust and productivity Pooled resources
	General Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners attend community or interagency meetings and share about their work Partners discuss existing programs, activities, or services Partners contribute to and/or receive each other's newsletters or e-blasts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners publicize one another's programs and services Partners attend one another's meetings and events Partners co-sponsor trainings or professional development Partners share resources, such as technology expertise or meeting space Partners write letters of support for each other's grant applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partners serve together on planning committees and community boards Partners implement programs, services, and events together Partners care about the same issues Partners apply for grants jointly
Homeless-Focused Activity Example 1	The Pleasantown School District homeless liaison provides a monthly education update for the Pleasantown Continuum of Care (CoC) e-blast. The CoC provides a monthly homeless response update	The liaison attends monthly CoC meetings and shares about school-based homeless education supports. A CoC board member attends monthly district school-level homeless education points of contact	The district and CoC formalize and document a cross-systems referral process where school staff refer families and youth experiencing homelessness to CoC homeless response assistance and local	The liaison enters youth and families experiencing homelessness directly into the CoC's homeless response intake system ("coordinated entry") and homeless response case managers enter youth and families

Homeless-Focused Activity Example 2	for the district homeless education e-blast.	meetings and shares about CoC services. The district and CoC develop and regularly update a cross-systems contact list and service directory (“partner inventory”) to facilitate communication between school and community partners. See the sample partner inventory available in the HETAC School-Community Partnerships Toolkit .	homeless response providers refer families and youth to school-based homeless education supports. The district and CoC hold quarterly resource fairs where school and community partners provide a “one-stop shop” where youth and families experiencing homelessness can access a variety of types of assistance.	experiencing homelessness directly into the district’s homeless education intake system. The district and CoC also implement a formal data-sharing agreement. The CoC awards project funds to the district to provide “education case management” for transition-age youth experiencing homelessness. The district awards homeless education funds to the CoC to provide “housing navigation” for youth and families experiencing homelessness.
	The Pleasantown School District homeless liaison meets the director for the Family Place Shelter at a quarterly local homeless coalition meeting. The shelter director and liaison exchange e-mail addresses and agree to meet for coffee in a couple of weeks to share about their work.	The shelter director invites the liaison to present about the educational needs and rights at the shelter’s monthly case manager meeting. The liaison shares about the importance of high school graduation for students experiencing homelessness and the challenges students experience when trying to do homework in a shelter environment. Case managers share that they’ve heard from families staying at the shelter that they have a hard time enrolling students in the local school.	The shelter agrees to create a designated homework room with internet access for students experiencing homelessness who are staying at the shelter. The shelter asks a local faith-based partner to donate tables and school supplies for the homework room. The liaison shares the district’s homeless education program brochure with instructions on how to refer students experiencing homelessness to the program for assistance with immediate school enrollment.	The district and shelter agree on additional ways to coordinate referrals and service delivery for children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness and enter into a joint memorandum of understanding (MOU) for working together. They agree to hold joint training at least annually for the district’s school-level homeless education points of contact and the shelter’s case managers.

Adapted from the Education Development Center’s [Levels of Collaboration](#) and Michigan State University’s [Five Levels of Community Partnerships](#)



A California Homeless Education Technical Assistance Center (HETAC) Resource
Funded by the California Department of Education
May 2023
hetac.org