



Harvard Family
Research Project



Partnerships for Learning: Profiles of Three School-Community Partnership Efforts

Harvard Family Research Project

Prepared for
Atlantic Philanthropies

March 2010

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Partnerships for Learning

The learning landscape for today's children and youth includes a wide range of learning institutions and settings. Grounded in research on the many ways and places that children learn, there is a growing acknowledgement that schools can't do it alone and that increased investment in other learning settings such as afterschool, summer, mental health, and other programs is essential to supporting the learning and success of our nation's children. Furthermore, all of these settings, including schools, can provide more opportunities and benefits for youth when they work together in ways that either integrate or complement one another's strengths. More and more, community-based and national initiatives are creating and supporting efforts to institutionalize this complementary learning approach to support partnerships for learning.

Through a literature review and a series of interviews with national leaders in the movement to build integrated and complementary approaches to learning, Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) identified five core strategies that, together, act as the necessary ingredients for successful partnerships for learning. These strategies are informed by and applicable to a wide range of partnerships for learning, including those based in schools, afterschool programs, and community institutions. The five core strategies identified are as follows:

1. A shared vision for learning
2. Multi-level and active relationships among partners
3. Intentionally blended staffing models
4. Regular and reciprocal data sharing
5. Strong connections with families and other community resources

The site-based profiles in this document provide a snapshot of school–community partnerships in action and illustrate how diverse programs and models take advantage of these five core strategies to effectively build and sustain partnerships for learning. Each profile highlights certain aspects of how the partnerships have been applied in the day-to-day lives of schools and community-based programs. The profiles present three different approaches to partnerships for learning strategies, reflecting the diverse shapes of such partnerships in the field today. The partnerships profiled are

- **After-School All-Stars at August Boeger Middle School, San Jose, CA:** A partnership in which the school and afterschool program complement each other's strengths to achieve common goals.
- **Citizen Schools at Bedichek Middle School, Austin, TX:** An integrated partnership between a school-based afterschool program and the middle school that hosts it.
- **KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) SHINE Prep elementary school, Houston, TX:** A partnership between a charter elementary school and community-based organizations to support learning during the school day and beyond.

While each of these partnerships operates from a unique philosophy and model, the strategies and lessons are applicable to a wide range of sites and types of learning partnerships. Two of the three profiles focus on school–afterschool partnerships for learning, and one focuses on school partnerships with community institutions. We encourage readers to think about applying the lessons learned from all of these approaches to other models, including school-based partnerships with programs and organizations providing health, social service, and other diverse family and student supports.

As evident from this document, some common themes emerged across the three diverse sites. Of particular note, each site highlighted the fact that its out-of-school learning partnership(s) scaffold and support what students learn during the traditional school day. However, the specific strategies each site uses to build this continuity vary. The profiles that follow underscore the importance of using strategies relevant to and tailored to student populations at specific sites, while at the same time leveraging learning from other learning partnerships.

Greater San Jose After-School All-Stars at August Boeger Middle School

“We’ve had an impact [on students], so much to the point where the principal wants to know how we could collaborate and get the kids as involved in school as they are in the afterschool program.”

– Site Supervisor, After-School All-Stars Program (ASAS) Boeger Middle School

The August Boeger Middle School and the After-School All-Stars (ASAS) program that the school hosts have similar goals for their students. Together, the school and the program have found ways to complement each other’s offerings and strengths to promote those goals. August Boeger, serving grades 6–8 in San Jose, California, belongs to one of four school districts served by the San Jose Chapter of ASAS (see program description in the textbox to the right). This chapter was founded in 1997 as part of the Inner-City Games Program through the San Jose Sports Authority, the City of San Jose, and the Division of Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Services. ASAS at Boeger offers the following activities to about 160 participants (2:30–6:00 pm, Monday through Friday) during the school year:

The After-School All-Stars Model

Begun as Inner-City Games in 1993 to bring afterschool sports programs and events to at-risk youth, After-School All-Stars (ASAS) changed its name in 2003. ASAS provides comprehensive afterschool programs that include three elements: Academics, Enrichment, and Health/Fitness. The program’s mission is “to provide comprehensive out-of-school programs that keep children safe and help them achieve in school and in life.” ASAS programs now serve 70,000 youth annually through afterschool and summer programs in 13 cities across the country.

- Homework Center: Time dedicated to homework completion.
- Enrichment Classes: 5–6 week sessions focused on academics.
- Fitness/Health and Wellness: Games that provide exercise but are not necessarily competitive or that require exceptional athletic abilities; the games build skills such as listening, team building, and motor coordination.
- Organized Sports: A variety of sports such as flag football, soccer, lacrosse, tennis, and basketball.

ASAS program staff at Boeger include several program leaders, a site supervisor, and support from district and the ASAS management staff, including a guidance counselor who works in all 13 middle schools in San Jose that have an ASAS program. School staff, including teachers and the custodian, sometimes work as leaders of activities in the afterschool program as well. The school leadership at Boeger fully support ASAS and communicate regularly with ASAS staff to ensure that the program is aligned with the school.

Foundations of the Partnership

Partnerships with schools became a new focus of ASAS’s work in 2003. At that time, the ASAS program underwent a “time of reflection” in an effort to better serve the needs of its youthful participants. As a result, ASAS shifted its focus from offering primarily summer sports programming to a school-based “comprehensive approach” that includes academics and enrichment in addition to sports. (Today, about 75 percent of ASAS programs nationwide are

school-based; the rest are community-based legacy programs focused on sports.) In partnering with schools, ASAS' primary goal is to serve as an intermediary, or bridge, that connects school, afterschool, and family domains for children and youth. A secondary goal is to ensure that children are safe after school. By working with schools, ASAS hopes, ultimately, to offer students the support they need to achieve passing grades and to graduate from high school.

At Boeger, the principal and assistant principal report several major motivations for partnering with ASAS.

First, they feel that the program provides students with a safe place to be after school. They claim that, without ASAS, "Our kids would not have anything to do after school ... Since the school is occupied until 6:00, I think it cuts down on fights, vandalism ... it's great to have people here, supervised, until late hours of the evening." They further noted, "It's a safe place for the students to be when there's no one at home to take care of [them]" and that without the program, "we have students hanging around at school, but with no supervision."

Second, school leaders see ASAS as valuable in providing opportunities that students would not otherwise have, and in generating enthusiasm and excitement in the participants:

They have a culminating activity after each [session]... and I see our kids being able to share their talent, having so much fun, so excited! Things that they've learned that maybe some kids would learn from the parents, or in their neighborhood. Our kids would not have that opportunity. So the added value is all the things that the students get to do. They absolutely love to be there... I wish we could bottle that enthusiasm and get it into the classroom!

Third, they feel that the academic support that students receive through mandatory homework time at ASAS is helpful, especially for those students whose parents do not speak English and thus have difficulty helping their children with their homework.

Last, they appreciate the fact that ASAS does not create extra work for the school: "They don't drag somebody in here and say, 'You guys need to punish these kids because they were naughty in our program.' They take care of their management when this child is in their program." The school leaders added that having 150 students on campus after school did not create more work for them, because ASAS staff "take care of it."

Building and Sustaining the Partnership

A number of factors are especially salient in the ability of ASAS and Boeger to partner successfully with each other.

A shared vision for learning

Aligning school and program goals, curricula, and rules, ASAS works with schools to ensure that their services align with each school's values and needs. As a first step, ASAS surveys potential school partners to determine their specific needs for afterschool programming and to identify how ASAS can best fill those needs. The San Jose ASAS

director noted that the program is attractive to school districts partly because it provides mandatory homework time and assistance through the program’s “Homework Center,” and because it fully funds the sports program for the school. He also felt that the program’s required daily attendance policy (three unexcused absences result in dismissal from the program) demonstrates a sense of accountability to the schools.

Once ASAS has developed and implemented services aligned with the school’s needs, ASAS staff and school staff at each site work together to develop a joint mission, vision, and goals tailored to their specific site. The ASAS site supervisor at Boeger explained that the missions and goals developed for ASAS at the school site level directly connect to the missions and goals of the schools because “We don’t want to be a separate program, outside, so everything the school implements we implement as well.” (See textbox this page for the mission, vision, and goals developed at Boeger.)

With these shared guidelines in place, ASAS and the school work to align their curricula and values in a way that complements, rather than duplicates, efforts. In San Jose, increasing ASAS’ efforts to strengthen and support school day learning is a priority, especially to help “sell” ASAS to schools and other stakeholders. The San Jose ASAS guidance counselor explains that the ASAS staff learn the state education standards: “They’re then aware of what the expectations are in the classroom, during the school day; they’re able to tie in some of those standards into their enrichment classes.” She also notes that ASAS has “credentialed teachers on staff that are able to look through our lesson plans, or help mentor our staff.”

**ASAS at Boeger:
Mission, Vision, and Goals**

Mission: Build trust, respect and responsibility through fairness, caring, and modeled citizenship while providing a safe environment in the community.

Vision: See participation from staff and students, homework completion, engagement, physically fit students, responsible and respectful students and staff.

Goals: Maintain academic excellence (hold children accountable), more parent involvement, make sure program stays engaging, and become a cohesive unit.

Beyond curriculum alignment, ASAS and Boeger build continuity by enforcing the same set of rules. ASAS staff know and follow the school’s handbook and all of the rules it contains. As school leaders explain, “If we don’t allow certain items of clothing, they don’t allow it. If we don’t allow iPods, they don’t allow it. If we don’t allow cell phones to be out, they don’t allow it. So, they know that the kids know that the rules are the rules *all* the time that they’re in school.”

Multi-level relationships: Creating district and school-level relationships to ensure sustainability

ASAS creates strong relationships with schools at various levels among district staff, school leadership, teachers, and support staff. These multi-level relationships help ensure that the partnership is strong and sustainable, and are especially helpful for managing staff turnover in schools and programs.

ASAS' leadership structure builds continuity across multiple programs within a school district, which helps cement partnerships between individual programs and schools. For each school district in San Jose, an ASAS District Manager is responsible for the sites in that district and oversees the site supervisor at each school. Along with the site supervisors, each district manager meets with principals in his or her district to share ideas and program plans. Across the Mt. Pleasant school district in San Jose, ASAS programs work together closely to act as one program, with Boeger (the one middle school in the district) serving as the "glue" for the district's four elementary school programs. The ASAS site supervisor at Boeger also serves as the assistant district supervisor, further connecting programs across the district.

One of the benefits of this cross-district collaboration is building sustained participation in the OST program across age groups, even into middle school when participation often drops off. Students in the Mt. Pleasant district often begin participating in ASAS in elementary school, so afterschool participation becomes part of the school culture and allows for a natural progression from year to year. Thus, participation during middle school is more sustained. As one partner describes,

We started off with real low, low numbers... The reason is, when you give a junior high a program like this, a lot of the kids are too cool to be in a program like this. And I think what made it stronger [is] ...these kids have come up through this program, because the parents put them in the program [when they are in elementary school]. So now they get to junior high, and it's part of their school, it's part of their life now.

Another result, according to the guidance counselor, is that ASAS participants have a smooth transition from elementary to middle school: "Crossing that transition, that's unique. Sometimes, it's hard enough to break the silo of just doing your own thing, much less with schools that your children are either coming from or going to."

Beyond district-level relationships, site-level relationships between the program and the school principal are crucial to ASAS' success. The ASAS-San Jose Executive Director asserted, "No matter what I do with principals, it comes down to how my head supervisor [at the site] interacts in relationship with that principal... The stronger your relationship with the principal, the stronger your program." At Boeger, the ASAS site supervisor had been at that school for only a little over a year, but he had previously worked closely with the principal as part of a mentoring program. He felt that the school leadership at Boeger had "been working together for so long that they know their role and so they work really well together." He also felt that he and the principal: "see eye to eye on almost everything," which created a sense of trust. For example, the principal bent the rules to let a student who had been suspended participate in the ASAS football team. The site supervisor reported that, "Her comfort level with me, and my comfort level with her, she's just like, 'if you work with him and he progresses, then I'll allow him to play football.'" The site supervisor and principal maintain regular communication through informal conversation as well as formal monthly meetings.

Ongoing efforts to sustain positive and open communication between ASAS and teachers also seem to go a long way in promoting strong partnerships. For example, the site supervisor at Boeger felt that ASAS staff who make an effort to interact with teachers greatly help in building the partnerships on the ground: “A simple, ‘Hello. How are you doing? How’s your day?’ It can just change your relationship with them so quick.” One of the ways ASAS staff at Boeger facilitate communication is by leaving a daily “evaluation” card in the classrooms that they use for their activities. The next morning, the teacher in that classroom fills out the card with feedback about the condition in which ASAS left the classroom, and ASAS staff pick it up that afternoon. This method, according to the site supervisor, allows for simple and quick feedback between ASAS and teachers, preventing problems from escalating: “You’re able to correct your problems from the start.” In these simple ways, the site supervisor felt that he was able to set the tone for his staff, and to establish truly reciprocal approachability between ASAS program staff and school staff.

The San Jose ASAS guidance counselor reported that the school custodian is one of the most important allies to the program, but often one of the more difficult to get on board: “As far as the school, obviously, your best friend has to be your custodian. So that’s usually the biggest challenge for the school. It’s an additional 3 hours, and they never banked on custodial work for the next 3 hours.” At Boeger, ASAS successfully recruited the custodian to serve as one of the program leaders, helping with the enrichment, physical activity, and academic components. In this way, ASAS and the school ensure that the school facilities are maintained throughout the school day and after school. In addition, the custodian is able to take on an additional role after school, and has an opportunity to work with students in a manner that is not possible during the school day.

Blended staffing: A consistent presence from the site coordinator

Boeger and ASAS have established structures that allow staffing responsibilities to cross the school and afterschool hours, facilitating continuity between the school and the program. This overlap allows staff to better communicate across these settings, and to have a better sense of what is happening on the school campus both in school and after school.

For example, the ASAS site supervisor’s schedule allows him to be on the school campus in the mornings two days per week. He feels that being on campus during school hours allows him “to be aware of what’s going on, what might go on after school.” This time also gives him the opportunity to check in with the school counselor, the principal, and teachers for updates on what happened with students during the school day. The site supervisor feels that these informal interactions keep the tone light, helping defuse any potential tension that might arise in a more formal setting. In this way, the site supervisor has been able to establish himself as a regular presence at the school, and to foster regular lines of communication between the program and the school.

Data sharing: Using student data to respond to individual needs

Boeger makes student-level school data readily available to ASAS program staff, helping ASAS to better respond to individual students. The school district uses a student data management system called Power School, which provides student data access to select individuals, including school staff, parents, and ASAS staff. These data include not only academic information (e.g., grades and attendance) but also student demographic data, including parents' contact information and behavioral data (as reported by teachers and administrators). ASAS staff are able to access these data to check whether their program participants need support for behavioral problems or failing grades.

Because ASAS has built a strong relationship with the district, the district is willing to trust ASAS with school data. However, the sensitive nature of the data requires that ASAS staff complete a formal process to gain access, including paperwork on confidentiality procedures. The site supervisor describes how he was able to get access to these data:

I've been with this district for 9 years. So I've built a lot of relationships over time, over the years. I'm in the district office all the time, so you just start building relationships with them. And I started off as a youth leader and worked my way up. So I got to know everybody on my way up ... They support you, and they help you out as much as they possibly can, as well as you do the same for them. But now it became such a necessity that we needed to know their grades that they provided all the site supervisors with it in that district.

Reflections on the Partnership

One of the strengths of the ASAS–Boeger Middle School partnership is that all parties benefit. ASAS gains access to credentialed teachers, to students, and to families. The school principal and assistant principal are able to focus on their other duties, confident that students are safe and cared for after school. Students find some continuity in the adults with whom they interact during the day and after school (e.g., the program site coordinator and the custodian). Everyone benefits from the enthusiasm that the program engenders in participants and both school and afterschool staff are actively working to transfer that positive energy into the classroom. As a school leader noted, ASAS “motivates [students] to go to school. They like to be here. They get connected to the leaders, too. I think that’s another adult role model, and another adult that knows them.”

Citizen Schools at Bedichek Middle School

“Afterschool is not an afterthought. You know, we’re all working around the clock, and even into the summer months, to make sure that the program is as rigorous, as engaging, and valuable, time-wise, for the students.”

– Citizen Schools Campus Director at Bedichek Middle School

The learning day at Bedichek Middle School in Austin, Texas looks different from the way it did a few years ago, thanks to a partnership between Bedichek and Citizen Schools. Citizen Schools, a national organization that operates afterschool and extended day programs including two in Austin, works closely with the school to provide afterschool learning opportunities to over 100 (roughly 10 percent) of its students in grades 6–8. Through this close partnership, learning is now more integrated across the school and afterschool hours.

The Citizen Schools program at Bedichek includes four core components based on the Citizen Schools national model (see text box for more detail): youth apprenticeships, exploration opportunities, academic support, and culminating “WOW!” events that showcase student learning. Bedichek’s Citizen Schools program has eight staff who have “team leader” duties, which include leading and tutoring groups of 8–12 students, supporting and coaching community volunteers who teach apprenticeships, and regularly communicating with families, community members, and school staff. Of these eight program staff, three are AmeriCorps-supported teaching fellows who work an extra half-day in partner agencies in addition to their work as Citizen Schools team leaders. One of these half-day assignments is spent teaching at Bedichek during the school day. The Bedichek Citizen Schools program is overseen by a campus director and by a Citizen Schools deputy director at the district level who works with all participating schools from the Austin Independent School District.

The Citizen Schools Model

Citizen Schools is an interactive afterschool program that was founded in Boston in 1995 and currently operates 44 program sites in seven states. Citizen Schools seeks to inspire middle-school students and eventually transform public education by expanding the learning day, providing more relevant learning experiences, and supporting youth with more caring adults. The Citizen Schools model includes

- Apprenticeships taught by community members
- Exploration sessions including community field trips and service opportunities
- Academic support and instruction
- Culminating events, called WOW! projects, that allow students to showcase what they have learned in their apprenticeships to staff, families, educators, and community members.

Foundations of the Partnership

The Citizen Schools national office, which actively seeks partnerships with schools, initially identified and targeted Bedichek Middle School as a potential site in 2005. In addition to Bedichek’s high-need Title I population (which matches Citizen Schools’ target demographic groups), Citizen Schools staff were attracted by the fact that the school had a veteran principal who had led Bedichek for a full six years, had frequently worked with afterschool programs, and was known for being a strong advocate and partner in community schools.

When Citizen Schools staff approached the principal about a potential partnership, she initially hesitated to adopt the program. Having recently completed a long grant-writing process to obtain

21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) funds and committed to working with another afterschool provider, she was not sure Bedichek had sufficient resources to fund and manage another afterschool partner. She was also skeptical about whether there was enough demand for additional afterschool services.

Citizen Schools staff won her over, however. From experience, Citizen Schools staff had identified persistence and patience as essential in developing partnerships with schools. They created as many opportunities as they could to demonstrate—politely and respectfully—how they could add value to Bedichek and how the school’s and program’s values could align and strengthen each other’s work.

One of Citizen Schools’ strategies for winning support from school administrators involves leading site visits for principals and other school leaders to existing Citizen Schools sites. When the executive director of Citizen Schools’ national partnerships led Bedichek’s principal and a district community schools liaison on a site visit to one of Citizen Schools’ Houston campuses, it marked a turning point for the partnership. During the visit, school and district staff toured the school, sat down with the principal to ask how the program was working, and met with school staff, family members, and Citizen Schools staff. They also attended a WOW! event and the principal remembered:

As we went around to the different apprenticeships, the students were dressed nicely and they were explaining what they had learned in their apprenticeship, who they worked under, why they chose the apprenticeship, what they hoped to do with it, and how it might impact them. We were wowed, because we could tell that these children were like our children and that they had evolved to an additional level that we didn’t have our kids at.

Following the site visit, Bedichek’s principal commented, “I was able to come back with [the district community schools liaison] and really articulate to my teachers and my staff what I had seen, and what I was so excited about.” In other words, she was able to communicate with Bedichek’s staff about how Citizen Schools could complement their goals for their students.

The principal ultimately was convinced that Citizen Schools was a good fit for Bedichek for a number of reasons. First, she was impressed with how the program could complement Bedichek’s in-school learning through the use of apprenticeships. Second, she liked the fact that Citizen Schools had a built-in infrastructure that allowed for ongoing, quality offerings, unlike some of the school’s past afterschool programs, which had relied on teacher volunteers and operated on drop-in, rather than sustained, student participation. Finally, she was attracted to the program by the additional 20 hours of in-school support it offered her through a shared teaching fellow, which allowed the school to “connect what we’re doing in the day time to the afterschool program in a much stronger way.”

Building and Sustaining the Partnership

While the foundation for an integrated approach to learning was laid when Citizen Schools and Bedichek selected each other as partners, core strategies have helped to cement a long-term collaborative relationship.

Multi-level relationships: Communication at the core

At the heart of the partnership effort between Citizen Schools and Bedichek is a commitment to communication among all parties involved. Since the initial site visit to Houston, the Citizen Schools' national office has continued to communicate regularly with Bedichek's principal. Although this communication includes a formal Memorandum of Understanding, both program and school staff believe that it is their regular and informal discussions that have "held the partnership together."

In addition to building a strong working relationship with the principal, Citizen Schools staff are in regular contact with school-day staff, particularly teachers. The Austin deputy program director emphasizes how staff approach teachers strategically to let them see how Citizen Schools can help them: "These teachers already have their plates full and are being given so many directives that working with us has to come across as something that takes more off their plate, rather than is more work for them." Similarly, while the principal played a role in helping Citizen Schools gain initial access to teachers, she points out that it is up to the program to continually prove itself:

You can stand up and give a song and dance and say to your staff, 'I want you all to do...' but it's not going to maintain or sustain itself unless the program is truly helping the teachers and following through with what they're saying... [When Citizen Schools staff seek and share information with teachers] the teacher begins to go, 'Whoa!...This is something that is going to directly benefit me.'

Citizen Schools staff and Bedichek teachers engage in a two-way information-sharing loop. Communication happens in multiple forms: by email and written notes, at quarterly breakfast meetings sponsored by Citizen Schools, and through face-to-face conversations before and after school, during transition times, at lunch, and during planning periods. Sometimes this communication is formal and staff set a time and place to touch base about specific students, while at other times the communication is informal and occurs spontaneously because the staff and teachers share space. One of the teaching fellows recommends communication with teachers that is short, goal-oriented, and in-person: "I ask, 'Are they missing assignments? Is it just a matter of them not doing well on tests? Is it a behavior issue?'"

The Citizen Schools staff are committed to strategic advocacy for their program at the school level. "Whenever we do something that has an impact on the school, it's important for our success and our recognition in our partnership at school that the people who see it know who's responsible for it," a teaching fellow emphasizes. Thus getting the new principal "on board" has also entailed cultivating champions among other school staff, particularly other school leaders, who have relationships with the principal. The Austin deputy director says, "[We want] to ensure that those folks know our program inside and out, know us inside and out, work hand in hand with us, so that by the time the principal is hearing about the things that we're doing, we're already aligned to things that the school is working on and moving toward."

This has been a particularly important strategy to help Citizen Schools maintain its focus and credibility in the building when the principal who originally brought Citizen Schools to Bedichek retired and a new principal took over in 2008. Citizen Schools staff note that they are working to adapt their approach to the new principal's style and priorities by asking what the new principal would like to see that would benefit the school community.

Blended staffing: Prioritizing professionalism and seamless scheduling

Among school staff, Citizen Schools has earned a reputation for having a highly professional staff. As a result, school staff respect Citizen Schools program staff and have increased their commitment to the partnership. Citizen Schools staff are seen as more than child care providers and instead are perceived as a group of professionals with their own expertise to offer. For example, when Citizen Schools first started and needed to share classroom space with one of the teachers after school, the teacher recalled “[they] would debrief after a session, and THAT is what initially really impressed me, besides what was going on with the kids. They would be very honest in their evaluations and ask, ‘Okay, well, how did this go?’”

To promote professionalism, Citizen Schools has developed a clear set of expectations for its staff and its program, measures work against these standards, and shares feedback with school-day staff about how the program is doing. The site director explains, “Our standards are really matched to the professional level of the school, from what we wear, to how we communicate, to the hours we work, to being able to have full-time staff members.” During the summer, Citizen Schools staff participate in two weeks of training that emphasize state and local education standards as well as classroom management skills. They also have the unusual opportunity to participate in joint professional development with school faculty. One Citizen Schools administrator explains, “We make sure that we’re able to recognize school-wide goals within our program. For instance, the standardized test improvement goals that the school has are integrated into the elements of our program, so we are building a case for ourselves.” This training helps give afterschool staff some fluency in the pedagogy and issues that school-day teachers address.

Another strategy of Citizen Schools is to make its staff visible within the school building and the school day. In addition to communicating with teachers, staff create bulletin board displays and engage in lesson planning linked to school curricula. A teacher comments, “They are very visible... and always around... I pull in a lot of weekend hours. But, I tell you what, [Citizen Schools staff] put in a lot of weekend hours, too, because they’re always preparing for the next thing.” The school makes this presence and accessibility possible by granting Citizen Schools staff open access to school space, including dedicated office space and use of teacher classrooms for afterschool programming.

Some Citizen Schools staff are especially visible and integrated into the life of the school because they fill professional roles during the school day, and some even cross the traditional boundaries between school-day and afterschool teaching. For example, one of

the teaching fellows teaches a peer mediation class during the school day, which began at the request of an assistant principal who had seen the success of a Citizen Schools apprenticeship around conflict resolution. Some team leaders are also regular substitute teachers. Bedichek has also hired former Citizen Schools staff members as teachers in the school.

Strong connections with families: Building bridges among school, afterschool, and families

Family involvement is an ongoing commitment for Citizen Schools and is a central strategy for partnering with school staff, because school staff value and benefit from the program's ability to connect with families. The Austin deputy program director points out, "We typically bring 150 family members to the school for our events, and that can be on a monthly basis. We had a 98 percent family attendance rate for our WOWs! last Spring. So we're really getting the families to the school at a much higher level than many of the school events that are attended."

One reason for high family attendance at these events is the purposeful relationships that Citizen Schools staff have built with their students' families. Citizen Schools team leaders are responsible for contacting the families of their students at least once every two weeks, and all program staff are evaluated on this communication through parent/guardian surveys at the end of each semester. Because of this regular communication, Citizen Schools staff are able to act as liaisons who connect families with school staff. For example, Citizen Schools staff are often asked to participate in special education and intervention meetings to share their expertise, help coordinate services with other organizations, and act as advocate or facilitator for families. The Austin deputy program director describes one of the most powerful experiences in her work as setting up teacher/family conferences in which she facilitated the communication and scheduling to bring Citizen Schools, families, and teachers together: "We're all sitting there together and, finally, we can talk about how to get this child to engage in his math class, or find ways for the parent to help practice these language arts skills at home."

Citizen Schools staff have begun receiving calls from families of students in their program who want to know how to support their children, and they have connected these families to the appropriate people in the school building—a process that is not always self-evident or easy for families to manage on their own. "It's a big school, and there's about 1,300 students, so it can be really difficult, especially for families for whom English is not their first language. Navigating the whole process of finding your child's teachers can be just daunting," the deputy director points out. Staff members provide families with tips and tools for supporting in-class learning. One of the teaching fellows says that afterschool programs have to

consistently try to reach [families] and, when you do reach them, or even leave a message, talk about actual useful, concrete information about the student's grades— 'Last report card was this and it's ten points lower now. I talked to the teacher and she said she's missing this assignment, this assignment, and that assignment. He has until Friday to make it up. I need your help to make sure that when he's at home, he has finished that assignment.'

Just as Citizen Schools staff help answer questions and make connections from families to schools, their staff also help teachers figure out how to involve families. Often, because of their regular phone calls and check-ins with families, Citizen Schools staff have detailed information about their students' home lives, from knowing the personal factors that may be contributing to behavioral problems, to knowing what time adults are typically available for phone calls from teachers.

Data-sharing: Leveraging both student and program data

Citizen Schools is committed to gathering and using data for continuous program improvement at both the individual student level and the program-wide level. This data-sharing helps strengthen relationships, open avenues for communication, and build good will towards the afterschool program.

Information-sharing about individual students is essential to the school–afterschool–family communication process. Bedichek shares information with Citizen Schools and vice versa through the use of a database that tracks student information, including attendance, class lists, and grades, as well as real-time classroom information such as homework assignments. The campus director recently helped add Citizen Schools' information into the database and trained teachers on how it could be used to facilitate communication. In an email and then in person at a breakfast meeting, she described how Citizen Schools staff can know whether students are on task after school by checking homework assignments and student grades that the teachers had entered in the database against what students said they had to work on during the academic support component of the program. Similarly, the campus director showed how the teachers could view their class lists in the database to see whether any of their students were in the Citizen Schools program and, if so, which staff member should be their primary contact. In other words, the data-sharing process is truly reciprocal—school and program staff each share *and* receive valuable information.

At the program-wide level, evaluation supports Citizen Schools' commitment to partnerships and also helps build a strong organizational capacity that can then unhook other promising practices, from staffing to communication. Each semester, Citizen Schools' national office conducts an evaluation that assesses each campus on a quality rubric, measures gains in academic performance for math and language arts, and surveys parents/guardians, teachers, students, and staff about the impact of the program and suggested improvements. Importantly, both Citizen Schools program staff and school staff are asked to rate their satisfaction with a number of communication and collaboration practices, so partnership is not only an espoused goal of the program, but one on which all campuses are expected to evaluate their success. Citizen Schools staff discuss the impact of their program and share evaluation information with their new principal. The campus director elaborates:

Especially [with] the data on the satisfaction surveys, we can show that students might say, 'I'm more likely to come to school because of Citizen Schools,' or, 'I enjoy doing my math homework,' or, 'I feel that people at my

school care about me.’ And so we can show [the principal that] through participation in Citizen Schools... ‘This is how we’re impacting the greater population,’ as well as by showing him the kind of the projects that we do that benefit the school. Many of our apprenticeships are beautification projects, so we have a couple murals, a couple garden beds that have been built and maintained by Citizen Schools that, just again, demonstrate our commitment to really being a part of this community.

Reflections on the Partnership

Citizen Schools and Bedichek Middle School both benefit from their strong partnership held together by strategies to build and maintain relationships, share a common belief in professionalism, engage families, and share information and data. In 2007–2008 Bedichek was Citizen Schools’ highest performing campus across its national evaluations; school and program staff alike credit their partnership with contributing to this success. For Citizen Schools, working with Bedichek has meant that they are better able to implement their program and meet its goals. School staff point to the many outcomes that the program has helped their students achieve, including increased student achievement, improved confidence, and better attitudes toward school and learning. As the school principal emphasizes, the partnership leads to “quality and sustainability” for all involved.

KIPP SHINE Prep

“We in the school have the responsibility to develop and ensure that the academics and the creativity and the character of our children are all being nourished and nurtured through partnerships. We can provide them opportunities and a different context...to apply everything that they’re learning here and to see that what they’re learning here can be not only applicable to other places, [but] can help them achieve greater and higher results than they ever could imagine.”

– KIPP SHINE Prep founder

At KIPP SHINE Prep, a charter elementary school in Houston, Texas, community partnerships broaden students’ learning experiences both within and outside of the school day. Encompassing a range of strategies and activities both at the school and at community institutions, these partnerships are integrated into the school and intentionally connected to its core values and curriculum. This profile focuses on two of KIPP SHINE’s partnerships, those with the Houston Zoo and Houston Achievement Place. Although they have very different purposes, these two partnerships share the goal of supporting student learning at KIPP SHINE.

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Model

The 66 KIPP schools form a national network of college-prep public charter schools based on the “five pillars”: high expectations, choice and commitment, more time, the power to lead, and a focus on results. KIPP began in 1994 as a fifth-grade program in Houston. Most of the schools now are middle schools, but KIPP is expanding to elementary schools, including KIPP SHINE, as well as high schools. All have a longer school day and year than typical public schools. KIPP brings together parents, students, and teachers through the Commitment to Excellence, a pledge that focuses on support for student learning.

KIPP SHINE, founded as KIPP’s first elementary school and now encompassing PreK–third grade, is built on five values that create the acronym SHINE: Seek, Honor, Imagine, Never give up, and Everyday. To support these values, KIPP SHINE’s founder built community partnerships into his school design plan. Today, the school has a Dean of Culture and Values who oversees the school’s partnership work, including staff who serve as “values coordinators” at each grade level.

Foundations of the Partnership

Community partnerships to support learning were an integral part of SHINE from the beginning. SHINE’s founder, who had previously run a nonprofit arts center in Texas, had seen what community partnerships could offer low-income students and believed that they could foster the five SHINE values for his students. In addition, one of SHINE’s mantras is “leave your mark,” and school staff teach students that what matters most is how they conduct themselves outside of school. SHINE’s partnerships help students do this by connecting with the school’s values and providing opportunities to have a positive influence on their communities.

SHINE’s founder and other school staff believe that the most important benefit of partnerships is providing youth with opportunities such as an introduction to the symphony and ballet, the chance to create a theater production, and field trips to the zoo. SHINE also partners with organizations, including Communities In Schools and Houston Achievement Place, to support the social and behavioral needs of its students. All of these opportunities are particularly important for children who would not otherwise have access to them. As one SHINE staffer

explained, these opportunities can help overcome, for example, the vocabulary deficits with which many children enter SHINE. She and other staff work to “give students life experiences that will give them a rich vocabulary and help them build on experiences from which they can begin to express themselves verbally, in writing, in conversation, in reading.”

The partnerships benefit SHINE, but they also benefit the partners. Organizations are not just providing services to SHINE; the school plays an active role in translating and leveraging partnership work to benefit both partners. With its partners, SHINE wants to communicate that “as a partner in return, [we] will really implement your ideas, your work. Our kids will respectfully honor your community and your environment, and we’ll be able to take what we’ve learned and apply it to other settings.”

Both partnerships highlighted here—with the Houston Zoo and with Houston Achievement Place—began in the first year of KIPP SHINE. From the beginning, the school wanted to find partners who would support students’ academic, social, emotional, and cultural growth and connect to SHINE’s values. Both partnerships are integral to the work of the school, but they represent two different types of organizational relationships. The Houston Zoo partnership, which began with a five-year commitment, developed out of a personal relationship between SHINE’s founder and the Zoo’s Director, but does not have a formal contract. The relationship with Houston Achievement Place (HAP) is contractual, with the school paying for HAP services.

The Houston Zoo. Every February KIPP SHINE students study the H in SHINE: the Honor value. One of the ways they do this is through a partnership with the Houston Zoo, through which students learn ways they can honor the animals at the zoo and in their community. Each grade level studies a different animal (for example, the Atwater Prairie Chicken, frogs, and big cats) with activities at both the school and the zoo, and with both school and zoo staff. School staff structure activities around the chosen animal—writing and learning a song for an endangered bird, for example—and classes talk about conservation and what it means to respect other living creatures. Zoo staff visit the school to teach students about the animals. The animal study culminates in a trip to the zoo to visit with the animal and sometimes present student work. The zoo provides the field trips and zookeeper visits at no cost to KIPP SHINE; the school is responsible only for the students’ transportation on the field trips.

According to zoo and school staff, everyone benefits from the partnership. The Houston Zoo aims to be a “zoo for all.” Working with KIPP SHINE is one way the zoo can act on this goal, and its relationship with KIPP SHINE has in fact been a more feasible way to reach students than would a partnership with the Houston Independent School District, which would require the zoo to work with many more schools that it has the capacity for. The zoo also hopes that through the partnership with SHINE it can continue to “promote connections to the natural world through different learning experiences.” According to SHINE’s school leader (referred to in most traditional schools as the principal), students are more engaged in their learning as they go through the layered process in their animal studies. Students become invested in the animals they study and are able to understand their field trip in a deeper way than they would have without the preparation.

Houston Achievement Place. Mornings at KIPP SHINE might start off with teachers introducing a social skill of the day as part of their partnership with Houston Achievement Place, an organization that runs residential care programs for youth and foster care placements and that has also been running social skills training through Project CLASS since 1997. Staff from Houston Achievement Place work with the KIPP SHINE community to help students develop the social skills that are crucial to students' learning. A HAP staff member is on site two days a week to do trainings with teachers as well as to meet with groups of students to work more intensively on social skills. Staff also conduct parent trainings to help families support children at home. Houston Achievement Place, which works in many schools around Houston, has tailored its teaching to the SHINE values. Its staff are dedicated to making their training applicable to the SHINE community by demonstrating to students how the behaviors they focus on fit with each of the SHINE values.

Working with HAP staff to develop social skills helps SHINE students feel successful in the classroom and gives them a sense of belonging, particularly for children whose behavior has alienated them from their peers. For SHINE's founder, one of the motivations for partnering with Houston Achievement Place was its focus on creating positive behaviors rather than fixing negative behaviors. According to the current school leader, the environment at SHINE would be very different without Houston Achievement Place.

Building and Sustaining the Partnership

Three principles in particular help to explain the strategy and success of the partnerships among KIPP SHINE, the Houston Zoo, and Houston Achievement Place.

A shared vision for learning: The precursor to partnership

Finding the right partners is a top priority for KIPP SHINE. Many organizations have contacted SHINE about partnering, but the school makes sure that the organization's values and vision are in line with its own before embarking on a partnership. According to the school leader, the partner needs to "help us meet our goals in terms of preparing our students for college." In addition, she notes,

I think it's really important for people who are interested in working with us to understand why we built the school, what our goal is, what are the challenges our students face, what are the things we hope for our children...The work that we're trying to do is really [meant to be] a joint venture and not a particular partner trying to get an experience out of a school.

The Houston Zoo partnership works for the school because the partnership supports the school's Honor value. Similarly, the Houston Achievement Place partnership helps student develop skills that support all of the SHINE values.

SHINE's partners also have expectations of the school. Houston Achievement Place (HAP) has a "strong expectation" that teachers will use HAP's language to talk about social skills in the classroom. And Houston Achievement Place staff note that they were

impressed by how KIPP takes the time to develop a behavior plan for students. Each partner has made efforts to integrate its vision with the other's.

Blended staffing: Staff, partners, and students all learning together

SHINE's partnership culture depends largely on the integrated relationships of the staff at the school and its partner organizations. This culture is facilitated, in part, by the Dean of Culture and Values, part of whose job is to determine "how [I] can bring what I know will be amazing into the school while honoring teacher time [and] other components of our program." A significant part of this is working across school and nonschool staffs. As the school's founder notes, "the challenge of partnerships is that they really do depend on the people and the relationships that have been built." With modeling and support from school leadership, school and partner staff respect and see each other as integral to student learning. For instance, according to one school staff member, the Houston Achievement Place trainer/consultant has become "an incredible part of the [SHINE] team... She's not a member of our staff but certainly we think she is." At the same time, school staff also see her independent status as an asset. She can give advice to teachers in a non-threatening way because she is not evaluating teacher work. Teachers, in turn, "understand that she is really invested in the success of our students and in our school, but... she's a very neutral person."

To sustain these relationships and ensure the success of the partnership, communication and feedback are crucial. Strong staff connections allow school and organizational staff to share honest feedback and modify activities and plans accordingly. For example, the school staff's feedback loop with the Zoo and the comfort level of Zoo and school staff with each other has allowed them to talk through which activities were successful and which needed to change, and has ultimately created activities that support student learning by creating engaging, aligned, and complementary experiences.

Preparing staff for partnerships is also key. SHINE's leadership believes that staff and students must all be prepared and goal-oriented in order to make added learning opportunities meaningful. School staff conduct several lessons and activities leading up to field trips to the zoo, visits from members of the local opera company, and other opportunities. Already busy with a full curriculum, teaching staff need support to do this work, and they receive it from SHINE's Dean of Culture and Values. She provides tools and resources, communicates frequently with teachers, solicits their feedback and ideas, and even helps facilitate lessons. She also encourages teachers to suggest new partnership ideas, building on her own experience connecting with the local ballet and opera companies while she was a SHINE teacher. These efforts to prepare staff, she believes, pay off. Among the benefits she reports, teachers enjoy learning something new along with students, and everyone brings a high level of enthusiasm to learning.

In building school-non-profit relationships, some staff have noted that this emphasis on partnership needs to be part of the "mindset" of school staff. The partnership has to operate as a core part of what the school wants to accomplish and school staff need to be comfortable with having other organizations influencing the learning taking place at the

school. This mindset at SHINE has carried through from the founder's early focus on building partnerships to the current SHINE leadership who are very intentional about their choice of partners and design of partnership activities.

Strong connections with families and other community resources: Leveraging support from multiple institutions and stakeholders

KIPP SHINE was founded with the intention of leveraging the many community resources in Houston, in turn educating students to be active and engaged members of that community. SHINE's many partnerships speak to these goals and commitments, which have proven crucial to the success of the partnerships. Organizations that KIPP SHINE partners with, in addition to the Houston Zoo and Houston Achievement Place include

- Communities In Schools
- Fotofest
- Houston Ballet
- Houston Symphony Orchestra
- Houston Grand Opera
- Jump Rope for Heart
- Young Audiences Houston

These partnerships generate interest and support from the community. While SHINE had to go looking for partners in its first year, it now has many more organizations showing interest in partnering than it can accept. The durability of some of its partnerships also deepens support; for example, zoo staff note that, since they have been working with SHINE for so long, they "get to see the success along the way."

Connections to families have also been key to making partnerships work for SHINE. Parents, for example, sign a Commitment to Excellence to show their support for their children's education. Partners build on this connection to families. Zoo staff note that in their work with KIPP SHINE, "by reaching the children, we're also reaching the parents."

SHINE sees the ripple effect of strong connections to the community and multiplied benefits for their students. For example, the zoo has prioritized relationships with SHINE whenever possible. When it sent out a city-wide call for applications for low-income students to attend its summer camp on scholarship and did not receive enough applications to fill all its openings, the zoo went back to their SHINE partners to offer more spaces to them. These strong connections in the community are ultimately helping more of SHINE's students in meaningful ways even beyond the SHINE-sponsored activities, and are thereby supporting the school's goal of expanding learning opportunities for its students.

Reflections on the Partnership

KIPP SHINE staff point out that building partnerships isn't always easy, but it has been worth the effort. One of the challenges—as in any learning partnership—is that, in the words of one SHINE leader, “the status quo is still the preferred path.” It takes work to find the right partners who will develop a shared vision for learning and even more work to sustain this vision across organizations. Partnership needs to be part of the “mindset” of school staff, and school staff need to be comfortable with having other organizations influence the school’s approach to learning. This mindset at SHINE has carried through from the founder’s early focus on building partnerships to the current SHINE leadership who devote significant time and attention to partnerships. The school’s continuing efforts to choose appropriate community-based partners, make partnerships work, and align them to the learning goals of the school helps integrate community strengths into the school program and give students opportunities and experiences they otherwise would not have. The school, the community organizations, and most importantly the students, are all benefiting from these efforts.