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# An Overview: Midwest Region Discusses Transformational Partnerships in First Convening

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## Breakout Sessions: Transformational Partnerships

- 1. Statewide Partnerships**
  - **Lesley Rivers** (she/her), Program Coordinator - ACT Now
  - **Susan Stanton** (she/her) Network Lead - ACT Now
- 2. Rural Partnerships**
  - **Mariella Resendiz Alvarado**, Director of Education Partnership & Support, Nebraska Dept. of Education
  - **Joe DiCostanzo**, Vice President, Education, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
  - **Keely Ihry**, Director of Student Services, South East Education Cooperative, North Dakota
- 3. Communitywide Partnerships**
  - **Autumn Berg** (she/her), Senior Manager, Community Schools Initiative – Chicago Public Schools
  - **Darius R. Parker**, M.A. (He/Him/His), Sustainable Community Schools Professional Development Coordinator - Chicago Public Schools
- 4. School Site-Based Partnerships**
  - **Milwaukee Community Schools Partnership, United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County**
    - **Glenn Carson**, Director
    - **Briana Fox**, So we'll come back in about 10 minutes. And when we do.
    - **Dan Portis**, High School Community Schools Manager
  - **Francisco Sanchez**, K-5 Community Schools Manager

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By Jim Grim, Director of University/Community School Partnerships, IUPUI; Facilitator, Indiana Community Schools Network; & Co-Chair, Statewide Coalitions Network

Community school stakeholders from 10 Midwest states participated in the first regional convening hosted by the Coalition for Community Schools and the Institute for Educational Leadership. A total 146 participants shared experiences and ideas about Transformational Partnerships Feb. 6 via Zoom.

“We know Community Schools are more than a program but a strategy to

mobilize resources and relationships around thriving schools and communities, and the planning team wanted the convening to focus on the topic of transformational partnerships that unify around that vision of systems change,” Ryan Hurley, Deputy Director for the Midwest, said. “As Community Schools continue to grow across the region, we have an incredible opportunity to work together to make a lasting impact. It was powerful to see so many leaders across 10 Midwest states participate in a collaborative learning space that we hope continues to strengthen and grow.”

#### Community Schools are a Collective Responsibility

“Like any type of collaboration, you have an organization who provides the support for that collaboration and coalition to keep going forward,” Jose Munoz, Vice President at IEL and Executive Director of the Coalition for Community Schools, said in kicking off the Midwest convening. “So, the Institute for Educational Leadership is that support for the coalition, but the coalition itself is all of us, and all of you are part of it, and those who partner with you. We’re *all* the coalition, and what we gather for is one vision that we’re trying to fulfill. We see schools as the center for creating communities where everyone really feels like they belong, they’re working together, and that they are thriving.”

Annie Bogenschutz of the Community Learning Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio, moderated the opening panel with Maricela Bautista of Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, Chicago, Deanna Hron of Deer River (Minn.) School District, and Dom Portis, Milwaukee Community Schools.

“Doing community schools *is* a transformational process — this is not a band aid. This is something that is really meant to be transformational by doing things in a different way,” Annie, a 22-year veteran of the work, said upfront. All Cincinnati Public Schools have resource coordinators and are community schools as Community Learning Centers because “community school” is the legal name for charter schools in Ohio, she noted.

#### Trust is Foundational

Panelist Deanna Hron said that with seven years as a coordinator in a rural district, she has begun to see an impact in attendance, truancy reduction, meeting the needs of children and families, and students who have begun to advocate for themselves. “We have to slowly build trust,” she noted, “and that trust becomes transformative.”

“True, deep community engagement requires trust,” Annie added. “And transformation in the community school strategy takes time.”

Maricela Bautista, who oversees an initiative with five elementary and two

high schools in Southwest Chicago, said Community Schools “transform schools into a central hub for positive change through shared leadership and authentic parent engagement, a place at the table with educators (for shared decision making). Transformation means resources for the community at large,” she added.

“It comes down to the willingness to collaborate to fill gaps. How willing are we?” Dom Portis, who works with the United Way of Milwaukee, asked. “To see change over time, multiple voices at the table collaborate with leadership to create the necessary conditions for learning.”

Attention to cultural norms can help to reduce conflict, Dom added. “Peer-to-peer leaning opportunities are important, the process that brings young people together to be seen and heard, and preventative in nature,” he said.

To address gun violence and gang activity in the neighborhood, Maricela said seven to eight parents were paid stipends to provide safe passage to and from school in Southwest Chicago. In a nearby school, shared leadership with youth, parents and educators drew 50 additional parent volunteers to the task, she added.

Deanna reported that children attend her school from a 500-mile radius in rural Minnesota, thus eye care can be 20 miles away. Through arranged transportation, children now can get eye care a couple of mornings each month, and through a new partnership, Public Health pays for it. “Seeing the black board when you come into class is transformational,” she said.

Process is Key

Annie noted that by tracking the seniors in one small high school in Cincinnati (<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/oyley-school>), the graduation rate increased by 20 points.

Dom said an indicator of a good school rests with the question: “Is this a place you’d send your own child to?” Allowing youth to be part of the process “and how you show up, you begin to have a different type of conversation,” he added.

Deanna said she shared her office space to access needed services for children and families, a trust builder. “If you don’t build trust as a foundation, this is not going to work,” she reiterated.

“We’re always asked, ‘what’s the silver bullet?’” Annie added. “The silver bullet is building trust.”

Dom offered “One piece of advice: A Community School model is a collective response, not a hands-off model, but all-hands-on deck. Not one person can

do this work,” he said. “And, you start by asking questions and listening.”

For support, it’s a good idea to find like-minded allies, Deanna suggested. “Start small and build capacity, a strategy for a team and partnerships.” she added.

“It really does take a village,” Maricela said, “a village that takes time to build. Don’t get discouraged. It takes time.”

#### Breakout Discussions

Statewide Partnerships featured Lesley Rivers and Susan Stanton of Network Lead-Act Now in Illinois. Lesley and Susan shared their experiences in setting up statewide partnerships using the state coalitions rubric. Four key network functions and stages were among discussion about statewide partnership:

- *Statewide stakeholders participating*
- *Defined goals and priorities*
- *Need for intermediary facilitation*
- *Shared norms*

Multiple funding streams like Full-Service Community School grants, 21st Century Learning Community Center projects, other federal, state, county and private sources—and lots of United Ways—sustain Community Schools, Susan said.

Joe DiCostanzo of the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Mariella Resendiz Alvarado of the Nebraska Department of Education, and Keely Ihry of Southeast Education Cooperative Rural Partnerships in Nebraska discussed how they sustained implementation strategies across seven regions in the Rural Partnerships breakout. They formed a North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools Consortium based on the premise that “we knew students cannot learn when their basic needs are not met,” Keely said. Among their experiences for securing sustainability has been braided funding.

“Creating space that is safe, throwing glitter not shade, and listening with an open heart” were tips Dariu Parker of Chicago Public Schools presented in the Community-Wide Partnerships discussion. “Tone matters, assume good intent, speak your truth, and establish trust,” he added. Darius’s colleague Autumn Berg participated with him in identifying ways to diversify partnerships.

School-Site Partnerships presenters Glenn Carson, Briana Fox, Dom Portis and Francisco Sanchez, all of the Milwaukee Community Schools Partnership with United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County, shared best

practices. Examples included an Alignment Tool inventory of partners and their services, MOUs, data dashboards with aligned priorities, and ongoing multiple modes of communication. “Lean into community expertise,” participant Josh Davies said.

“To sustain partnerships to address needs that continue, engage the educators,” Wilisha Scaife of Ball State University in Indiana added.

### Role-Alike Sessions

Eight role-specific discussions followed with facilitation from experienced practitioners throughout the region. Participants divided into groups of community partners, community school coordinators, administrators, and individuals new to the work.

As part of the Community Partners from Program to Partnerships discussion, Leigh Ann Martinez, Community Schools Director for the United Way of Racine County, Wis., for example, discussed how new partners secured needed hygiene products, helping to sustain health and wellness services in her school community. Dom Portis, High School Community Schools Manager for the Milwaukee Community Schools Partnership with United Way of Milwaukee and Waukesha County, shared how power struggles between participating organizations can be a challenge—a who’s in charge of the process and procedures issue. “When we are not allowed to do something (needed), it is defeating,” he said.

Craig Sweet, Achievement Plus Partner and Community Liaison, St. Paul, Minn., facilitated Community School Coordinators: Data and Evaluation. Discussion included addressing challenges with data, systems, collection, control, and top-down driven goals.

Staci Boehlke, Family-Community Resource Center Facilitator, Fruit Valley Learning Center, Grand Junction, Colo., facilitated Community School Coordinators: Community Engagement in Decision-Making. Notations included paying attention to cultural differences, hierarchy of stakeholders, long working hours, transportation challenges, parent engagement, communication, events attendance and partner sustainability.

Gianna F.D. Holschbach, Community School Coordinator, Silver Spring Neighborhood Center, Milwaukee, led Community School Coordinators: Telling Your Story. Discussion addressed challenges with being new to the role, defining success, systems change, racism, not feeling safe, sharing space, limited time, funding and slow progress. “Policy-makers need your stories,” Deanna Hron, Deer River (Minn.) School District, said.

Jamie Racine, Community Schools Program Coordinator, Sun Prairie (Wis.) Public Schools, facilitated District Administrators: Alignment and Integration

of Community Schools. Discussion included how needs assessments can help with shared definitions by stakeholders. Nola Derby-Bennett, Director, Community Learning Centers, Lincoln (Neb.) Public Schools, also led discussion on the Alignment and Integration of Community Schools. Suggestions included finding champions, asset mapping, providing community school tours, community visioning, ongoing staff updates, stakeholder study groups, principal coaching and sharing data. Nola said the book, “Community Schools: People and Places Transforming Education and Communities,” by JoAnne Ferrara and Reuben Jacobson, has been a helpful study tool for her school community.

Ken Simon of IEL led the School Staff: Where to Start as a New Community School. Discussion included holding partnership meetings off-campus, the need for early community input and community councils, adult alignment, focusing on student attendance, challenges with transportation and rural isolation. Jillian Lane of Marian University City Connects in Indiana recommended focusing on regional partnerships for school communities in rural areas, “a different dynamic than urban schools,” she said.

In closing reflections, Ryan reminded us of the various Coalition networks to connect with that focus on coordinators, university-assisted models, research practice, leadership, and United Ways among them.

“It’s always good to be surrounded by people that are doing the work that you’re doing, and to be lifted up by their comments to be reminded of solutions that I haven’t thought of, and I think that’s what we’re trying to do as we gather together the coordinators,” Staci Boekhlke, co-chair of the Community School Coordinators Network, said in closing reflections. “We also have been leaning heavily on some of the other networks within their circle of influence to guide us in some discussions to take in their expertise.”

With more than 3,500 attendees last summer in Los Angeles, Ryan closed the convening by reminding participants of the 2023 National Community Schools and Family Engagement Conference in Philadelphia, June 7-9. Go to <https://web.cvent.com/event/0d0abe8e-bf99-4396-b2c2-f2af146abeef/summary> for more information.

The Coalition is thrilled that 95.4% of survey respondents agreed that they gained ideas and/or inspiration from this convening that will support them in their work.

**“this was the best way to start off my Monday and it was fruitful and very good for me. To each and every presenter thank you for your time and the**

## good information to support this work!!!!!!”

Access resources from the convening:

- [Participant Agenda](#)
- [Main Room Recording](#)
- Breakout Session slides:
  - [Statewide Partnerships](#)
  - [Rural Partnerships](#)
  - [Community-wide Partnerships](#)
  - [School Partnerships](#)

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