

# Supporting Teachers Where They Are: The Community Partnership Schools™ Model

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A community school brings resources from the community into the school to improve student academic achievement and well-being, educational equity, and family and community engagement. The Community Partnership Schools™ model of community school engages four core partners at each school who collaborate to deliver high-quality programs and services to students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 26 Community Partnership Schools across Florida have developed methods to improve student outcomes by addressing the following questions: How can we continue to meet the needs of our students and families virtually? Is there any way we can support teachers as they provide virtual instruction? What potential needs may arise? What ways can we continue to engage with our communities? This paper brief explores the power of partnership in Community Partnership Schools and highlights the innovative strategies core partner staff have implemented to continue delivering academic, medical, and social services using virtual applications and systems.

**Keywords:** collaborative leadership, community schools, Community Partnership Schools, expanded learning, family and community engagement, needs assessment, pillars, teacher support, virtual hub, wellness

## INTRODUCTION

Community schools bring together resources to enhance education and overcome barriers to learning (Dryfoos, 2005). According to the Children's Aid Society (2011), community schools share a common mission "to change the role of education in the lives of students, families, and communities, so that underserved youth may be empowered to overcome obstacles and become happy, healthy and productive adults" (p. 6).

At the epicenter of community school activity is a partnership that unites individuals from schools and communities who share a purpose and vision (Ellis, 2020). The UCF Center for Community Schools promotes the development of community partnerships that include four core partners – a school district, a nonprofit, a healthcare provider, and a college or university. This is called the Community Partnership Schools™ model. Currently, 26 schools across Florida are implementing the model. Core partners at each Community Partnership School (CPS) work together through the CPS central office, or "HUB," to provide academic support; enrichment opportunities; and behavioral, medical, and dental care for students, families, and the local community (UCF Center for Community Schools, 2019).

The Community Partnership Schools™ model has a solid infrastructure that meets the needs of teachers, administrators, students, families, and communities, especially in times of crisis or global pandemic like COVID-19. CPS staff, including directors, extended-learning coordinators, wellness coordinators, and family and community engagement coordinators, are still providing programs and services; however, during school closure, they are supporting teachers and students where they are using virtual applications and processes.

## INNOVATION

Following guidelines recommended by the CDC, the state of Florida closed K-12 public schools in mid-March, posing additional barriers to student success. School closures have prompted the UCF Center for Community Schools staff

and the CPS staff along with teachers and administrators to collaborate on virtual approaches to provide support and access to resources.

The UCF Center for Community Schools has increased its use of Microsoft Teams to collaborate internally on efforts to assist the Community Partnership Schools (CPSs). Through Microsoft Teams, the center has been able to schedule meetings to continue discussions that would typically occur in the office (see Figure 1). The communication/collaboration platform has enabled the center to maintain and, in many cases, increase its productivity. It also has allowed the center to effectively plan trainings for the 26 CPS directors, each of whom is employed by a nonprofit core partner.

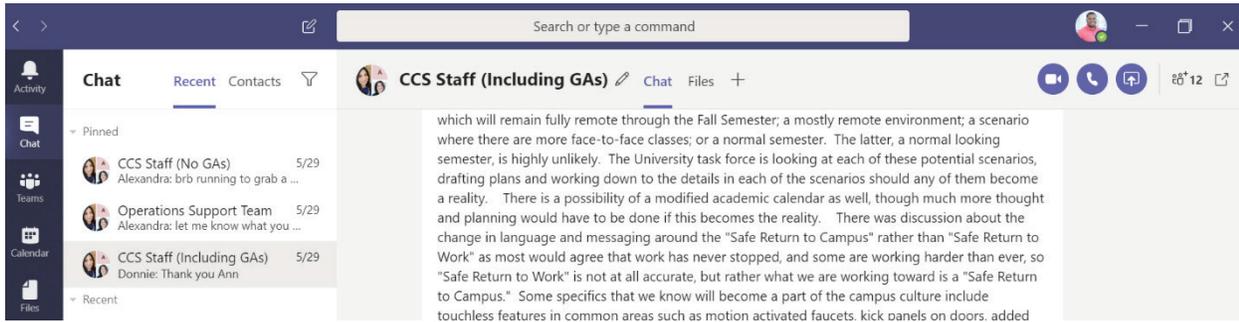


Figure 1. Screenshot of Microsoft Teams.

The center needed a virtual platform that could host multiple attendees and allow for continuous engagement. Through Zoom, the center has hosted a Virtual Town Hall on the impact of COVID-19 on CPSs, Director Network Calls and quarterly learning exchanges, and Technical Assistance Sessions (UCF Community Partnership Schools Network News, 2020, p.2). Zoom has enabled the center to present, discuss and collaborate virtually on topics that directly affect the directors’ ability to serve teachers, students, families and community — an impact that extends well beyond the calls themselves (see Figure 2). Zoom’s videotelephony and online chat services have provided fluid engagement and can be used more broadly. Research has shown that individuals generally do better recalling information when they are able to be active participants during presentations (Dale, 1969). Zoom’s platform can be used by educators as well for professional trainings and virtual classes, as educators can provide free basic Zoom accounts, which currently have no time limit for K-12 users affected by the coronavirus (Zoom, 2020).

**Center Remains Fully Operational**  
 UCF Center for Community Schools' staff members are currently working



*Zoom call with CPS directors*

remotely. However, the center remains fully operational and committed to supporting the state’s Community Partnership Schools. The center uses Zoom to host virtual town halls and network calls with CPS directors to share updates and discuss strategies and experiences. Center staff members have developed and shared a variety of online resources for the directors as well, which they continually update. See Who’s Who at [bit.ly/3ay73Ju](https://bit.ly/3ay73Ju) for current contact information for each staff member.

Figure 2. Screenshot of Zoom Townhall.

The center also has assisted by providing CPS directors with information to share with teachers and parents that is housed in the center’s Director Resource Library and distributed through Dropbox. The information has included updates on expanded-learning resources, organized by academic level and subject area, and a COVID-19 Toolkit with additional web-based resources, all housed in the library which can be accessed by directors here <https://tinyurl.com/y7thl3vk>.

## RESULTS

Many CPS directors have helped lead their school’s transition to a virtual environment as they have felt more empowered within their roles through the support provided by the center. At OCPS Academic Center for Excellence (ACE), the CPS director and staff have modified the delivery of the New City Kids Program, a daily afterschool program targeting all grades, to a virtual format; students were provided access to digital devices. The modified program focuses on academic support, social development, health and wellness and crisis intervention (New Image Youth Center, 2020). The Director Resource Library, with links to virtual expanded learning opportunities and health and wellness resources, has been an added resource for staff to help them collaborate on programming when needed.

Endeavour Elementary was providing in-person Adult Education ESOL classes to non-English speaking families in the community, and these classes are now provided virtually to further ease the language barrier. Recognizing that some families face obstacles gaining internet access, the center has included in the Director Resource Library a section dedicated to technology resources, which provides information on how to receive free internet service.

The most important strategy for CPSs is to create systems and processes that address the needs of the whole child, allowing teachers to focus on instruction. CPSs have become the focal point of resources for students and families through a physical “HUB.” Social distancing measures led Evans High School CPS staff to develop a “Virtual HUB” to increase access to resources, which they routinely update and is available at <https://tinyurl.com/y8hmg33r> (Evans High School, A UCF-Certified Community Partnership School, 2020).

Students find it hard to learn when they do not have a full stomach. One graduating senior wrote that he and his family benefitted from uninterrupted food pantry services because of Evans’ Virtual HUB: “The HUB helped me by providing me with support, encouragement, and food packages, which helped with the situation we were going through. Being a family of 5 in a 1-bedroom apartment, the HUB helped me to stay focus[ed] and not think too much about what was going on in life at times. I am thankful for the support that I received.” (see Appendix A: Do You Need Wellness Support?)

At Keystone Heights Junior/Senior High, CPS staff are leveraging their connection to the community to learn about the household needs of students and families using a private survey. The CPS staff also survey teachers to ensure their needs are met, allowing the teachers to focus on supporting students. The survey is available at <https://tinyurl.com/yc9ge2ay>. In addition, the CPS staff created a form to solicit volunteers to help them communicate with students and families about resources. The form is available at <https://tinyurl.com/ydx9j9fv> (Keystone Heights Junior & Senior High School, A Community Partnership School, 2020).

Teachers at OCPS ACE said they felt supported by CPS staff, volunteers, and community leaders who provided tutoring during the school’s virtual Homework Café, an afterschool program. This support freed up the teachers to pursue professional development by serving as leaders of sessions within the café. The sessions also led to opportunities for extended learning among students. For example, one teacher invited students and families to participate on a field trip in her backyard, an exercise that families could replicate at their own home (see Appendix B: Homework Café: Virtual Edition). One virtual Homework Café had 1,700 views of nine published videos from 200 unduplicated viewers.

Additionally, OCPS ACE created a resource guide through collaborative leadership between the principal, teachers, and CPS staff. The guide has helped students and their families continue to receive resources during the pandemic, including family safety, digital learning, financial assistance, family health, and other family resources. This guide is available at <https://tinyurl.com/yb6gev4e>.

## IMPLICATIONS

Like CPS directors and coordinators, teachers are well-positioned to understand the needs of students and the importance of learning that occurs beyond instructional time. To help students, families and communities in need, as well as to provide professional development opportunities for teachers, schools may leverage teachers as community leaders.

Using a collaborative leadership approach, school administrators and lead teachers can replicate systems that follow a whole-child approach. These include systems integral to the Community Partnership School™ model (<https://ccie.ucf.edu/communityschools/partnership-schools/>) and the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model, which has been recommended by the American Institute of Research (2020).

School administrators can also select lead teachers to coordinate other teachers in developing a virtual toolkit for students, families, and staff. During this process, schools can leverage an administrator (e.g., an assistant principal dedicated to instruction or a curriculum resource teacher) to collaborate with the lead teachers to identify core areas in which academic support is needed such as by grade-level or subject area (see Appendix B: Homework Café: Virtual Edition).

Recommendations to support teacher instruction, in-service and professional development include establishing structured systems and processes. Create a needs assessment for teachers, students, and families to discover the immediate, secondary, and tertiary needs. Develop an asset map to identify current resources — time, talent, treasure for teachers and administrators as well as students and their families. Empower teachers to reach out to partner providers to ask them to support their virtual classroom instruction. Finally, take advantage of free online tools and applications that are accessible and instructor-learner friendly, such as Dropbox, Zoom Basic, and Google Forms, Hangouts, and Meetup.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

As we move forward in this new normal, teachers will require more support than in the past as they work to provide quality virtual instruction to students. One future research avenue is to specifically request data on innovative teacher practices that can be replicated in the field. An additional study would be to create a needs assessment to administer to teachers that would help address their needs in the areas of in-service, teaching and instruction, and professional development.

When assessing all the virtual resources available to support teachers, it is important to consider that the awareness can vary vastly among in-service educators. With this understanding the focus on collaborations among teachers can be the key to unlocking the full potential of currently available resources. Collaboration among staff can strengthen instruction when teachers have coordinated access to virtual instructional resources and a platform to share their knowledge of curricula, educational platforms, technology fluency, and other topics. Effective lessons can be created by integrating resources and tools that extend beyond the classroom to support students and families and to limit any gaps in academic progression during virtual instruction.

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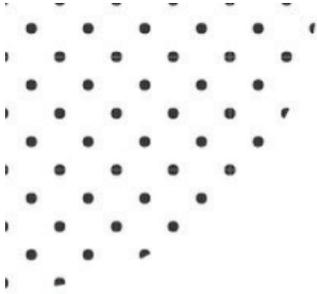
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APPENDIX A

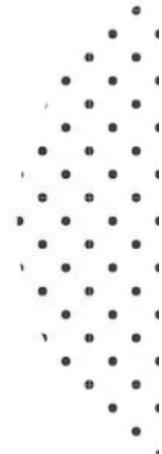
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APPENDIX B

OCPS ACE LIONS VIRTUAL RESOURCE GUIDE:

COVID-19 RESOURCES

**OCPS ACE Lions Virtual Resource Guide: COVID-19 Resources**

**OCPS ACADEMIC CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE**

A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP SCHOOL

Principal, Wendy Ivory

**OCPS Academic Center for Excellence**  
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The OCPS ACE Community Partnership Team has created a virtual resource guide for our families and supporters.

Topics in the resource guide include Family Safety, Digital Learning, Financial Assistance, Family Health, Food Resources, and others.

<https://sites.google.com/view/ocpsacelionsresourceguide/home>

Thanks, Ms. Currie and the Den Team.

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