

# **AUTHENTIC AND SUSTAINING SCHOOL- COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

How Shared Vision, Structures, and Accountability Fuel High-Quality Partnerships and Student Learning



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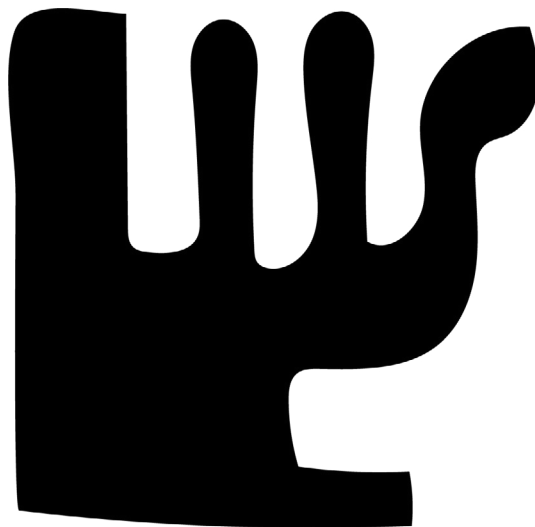
## RESEARCH SAYS...

Research indicates that strong school-community partnerships are an essential feature of robust summer and afterschool programming. Enrichment and culturally specific programming build on and complement academic learning, and provide opportunities for experiential learning beyond the classroom. RAND found that partnerships between schools and community based organizations (CBOs) strengthened summer learning programs in multiple ways. These included: cost sharing and cost reductions; increased attraction for philanthropic funding; and enhanced enrichment and culturally specific opportunities, supporting student attendance and engagement ([McCombs, J. & Augustine, C., et. al., 2011](#)).

When schools and CBOs/youth-serving organizations partner to provide quality programs, they can alleviate funding challenges, especially in resource-limited communities. Nancy Gannon, Director of the District Summer Learning Network, shared: “Through partnerships, organizations can pool their resources and make them go farther with blended staffing. Community groups and schools can work together to expand their individual strengths and offer young people a wide variety of experiences.

Moreover, powerful partnerships can create programs that are sustainable not only during the summer months, but throughout the whole year” ([2025](#)).

Successful partnerships occur by design, with careful attention to shared purpose, roles, outcomes, and funding mechanisms. Intermediary organizations, including state education departments and city agencies, can serve as a bridge, fostering alignment and ensuring shared accountability. In this case study, we look at an authentic and sustaining school-community partnership between Seattle Parks & Recreation and Seattle Public Schools.



# KEY CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY- SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

## SHARED VISION

- Goal alignment: Educators from the CBO and the school work in tandem to advance student learning goals, complementing each other's work.
- Partners hold a shared vision for student success in both academics and social emotional wellbeing, and a shared belief in school as the center of a community.
- Partners have a commitment to dismantling institutional barriers in order to amplify resources, people, and time in service of students and families.

## SUPPORTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

- Funding is granted by an intermediary agency: supports institutional alignment and shared accountability toward high quality student learning.
- Partners commit to coordination on goals, data, outcome monitoring, and financial stewardship.
- Alignment supports return on investment and the school's ability to provide higher quality learning and to achieve outcomes that it would not be able to on its own.

## TRANSPARENT STRUCTURES

- Clear roles and responsibilities: Each member of the partnership has a role-specific and complementary part to play in the planning and implementation of programs.
- Shared physical space: Proximity and presence allow for seamless transitions for students and smooth collaboration for adults.
- Constant communication and continuous improvement: Frequent, consistent check-ins are held to monitor progress and problem solve challenges.

## RESEARCH IN ACTION...

# SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS & SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION AT JAMES BALDWIN COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER

**Community Learning Centers (CLC)** are organized and run by Seattle Parks and Recreation staff, based in five Seattle Public School sites, and offered during out-of-school time, including summer. CLCs provide a robust mix of programming to support students in their unique contexts, including extended academic support and culturally specific enrichment opportunities. [James Baldwin Elementary School](#) in North Seattle is one of the most diverse schools in the city, with over twenty home languages spoken. For more than a decade, the [James Baldwin CLC \(JBCLC\)](#) has served as a model of deep and sustaining partnership between a school and CBO. These two organizations share a vision for student academic success and social emotional wellbeing, alignment on goals and practices to achieve them, and a commitment to dismantling institutional barriers in order to amplify resources, people, and time.

The school's prior principal and a Seattle Parks Coordinator led the vision and initial build of the CLC. The principal saw an opportunity to enhance and enrich students' learning with a trusted community partner and to deepen the power of educational reach by expanding the school day and year. Together, they designed the program to provide academic support in reading and math, as well as enrichment that reflects the interests and diversity of their students, their cultures, and the community. These two organizations share the belief that a school can be a true center of community, especially when the

building's use expands beyond the regular school day to be an inviting center for learning and growth.

The CLC Coordinator, Rebecca Brito, has led the JBCLC since 2022, and has worked at the site since 2016. She is a twelve month employee of Seattle Parks and Recreation, and she works in an office in the school building that is dedicated to the CLC programming. Rebecca oversees the afterschool and summer programming, and she is a known and loved presence in the school. She shared: "Second to the custodian, I am the most consistent person in the building! I believe that students and teachers see me as a core member of the school's ecosystem." Seattle Public Schools' summer learning leaders agreed and say this integration is essential for continuity.

Shared vision and goal alignment are essential, so that the CLC's work is complementary and enhances the work of the regular classroom. Rebecca works closely with the school's principal and the school's reading and math academic interventionists to plan, design, and implement effective and tailored instructional practices, grounded in youth development principles. The reading interventionist is also the school's City levy coordinator who liaisons with the City's Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) and provides grant reporting.

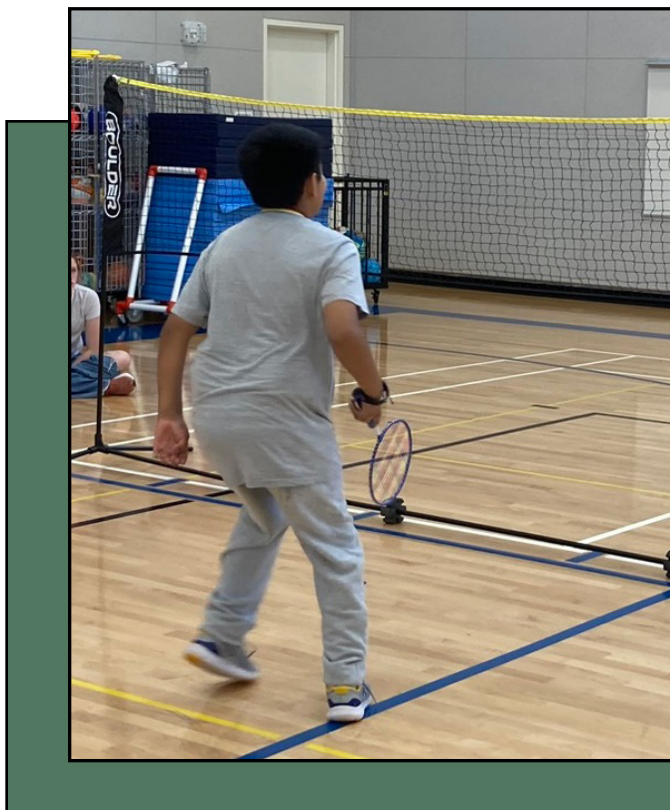
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At the start of each year, Rebecca meets with the academic interventionists to discuss which students might benefit from support based on both quantitative and qualitative data. Those students are then invited to participate, and families have the option to enroll their children in CLC programming. Rebecca continues to meet with the school's educators throughout the year to monitor progress and make improvements.

The CLC provides intervention and enrichment in math and reading for 2nd-5th graders after school, and for K-4th graders during summer. They sub-contract with skilled educators to provide reading interventions, whereby students work nearly 1-1 with adults. The CLC works in a collaborative with The Math Agency for math intervention, and StemPaths Innovation Network (SPIN) to provide

STEM enrichment, including coding, robotics, and 3D printing. Rebecca emphasized the importance of the student centered enrichment activities that bring joy, creativity, and enhance core academics. These include physical activities like Sports Club, CTE-centered activities like Carpentry Club, and even Slime Club for science and fun. The CLC team is trained by [Schools Out Washington](#) in the Weikart Center's [Youth Program Quality Improvement](#) (YPQI) approach and uses the YPQ Rubric for goals and program evaluation.

This model fosters sustainability and a breadth and depth of service to students and families. As Rebecca described: "Basic education is not meant to do it all. A teacher should not need to work a 12 hour day."



# STRUCTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS SUPPORTING HIGH QUALITY PARTNERSHIP

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Staff from Seattle Parks and Recreation and Seattle Public Schools described core structural and organizational elements that have been fundamental to the success of this partnership. Importantly, this was not an overnight success: it reflects thirty years of a city’s efforts to align city-wide entities and provide wrap-around services for students and families.

Interviewees described the power of institutional alignment and shared accountability. The funding structure supports this: CLCs are funded by Seattle Parks and Recreation, the City of Seattle Families and Education Levy, and the King County Best Starts for Kids Grant. The City of Seattle’s Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) oversees the levy funds. As part of that oversight, there are required quarterly meetings between the parties (SPR, SPS, and DEEL) to coordinate on goals, data deliverables, and ongoing monitoring of outcomes, and to ensure the funds are well spent and

students are receiving quality service. The CLC team described this accountability as supportive of partnership as it ensures clarity about roles, responsibilities, and expectations. As Rebecca described: “We share a collective passion for this work! We all want to serve kids well and have a good partnership.”

The CLC team described the program improvement cycle as another structural support: each year, the CLC and School leadership team meet to review the prior year’s contract and goals, discuss strengths and areas for growth, and use that conversation to determine the following year’s contract. Rebecca shared the commitment to continuous improvement. She is currently working with regular classroom teachers to gain knowledge about the curricular scope and sequence in order to further align interventions without being duplicative.

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The suggested citation for this case study is:

Dr. Kimberley Ednie, Ed.L.D. (2025, September). *Authentic and Sustaining School-Community Partnerships: How Shared Vision, Structures, and Accountability Fuel High Quality Partnerships and Student Learning*.

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