



How to Hub Australia

A Framework for Building Schools as Community Hubs



Cleveland, B. (in press). 'A Framework for Building Schools as Community Hubs: If It Were Simpler Would It Happen Everywhere?' In B. Cleveland, S. Backhouse, P. Chandler, I. McShane, C. Newton & J. Clinton (Eds.), *Schools as Community Hubs: Global Perspectives on Building 'More than a School' for Community Benefit*. Springer Nature.

School Context & Culture

The success of each school as community hub is contingent on responding appropriately to its unique context and culture. The adoption of a 'more than a school' mindset should be paired with a clear and well-informed perspective on why enhanced school-community relations should be established. Every school should respond to its unique socioeconomic, geographic, and cultural situation differently.

Principles

Six overarching principles should shape school as community hub initiatives:

Engaging

Maximizing stakeholder engagement is critical to fostering initial interest, connection, and long-term contributions to hub operations. Developing and sustaining partnerships that promote a sense of ownership and belonging is foundational to ongoing success. Stakeholders and partners may typically include both funders and users: education authorities, federal and/or state government departments, local municipalities, philanthropic organisations, service providers, sporting clubs and associations, school principals, school council members, parents, students, teachers, and community members.

Achievable

Maximizing the feasibility of school as community hub initiatives requires due diligence, with a view to the future. Hub initiatives should be tangible, attainable, and based on a clear vision.

Equitable

Maximizing access to hub activities, programs and services means providing equitable and inclusive opportunities for education, health, and wellbeing to all who wish to participate.

Efficient

Maximizing the efficient use of hub resources means ensuring outcomes are assessed relative to the emotional investment, funding, labour, and spatial assets contributed. If intended outcomes change, so should assessment of efficiency.

Responsive

Maximizing alignments between hub offerings and community strengths and needs is essential when initiating new hub projects. Adapting hub models to new locations requires close attention to local needs. Responding to changing contexts, such as demographic changes over time, should keep hub activities, programs, and services relevant.

Impactful

Maximizing the positive and lasting impacts of schools as community hubs depends on regular patronage. This requires attention to the quality and long-term sustainability of activities, programs, services, and facilities. It is critical for hub offerings to reach intended populations and for contact to be maintained.

Factors

Twelve factors help guide those undertaking school as community hub projects:

Community Strengths & Needs Analysis

Every school as community hub is different.

Detailed insights into local community contexts and requirements should inform hub objectives. Place-based approaches that engage community members and other stakeholders in the planning of activities, programs, services, and facilities is important, because one size does not fit all.

Vision & Intentionality

A shared vision with stakeholders is essential to short-and long-term success.

Championing this vision and adopting an intentional approach will attract like-minded partners and collaborators, guide decisions and facilitate action.

Partnerships & Collaboration

Schools can't go it alone.

Schools have limited resources. Partnerships with like-minded community members, organisations and service providers are critical to establishing and operating a school as community hub. Facilitating communication, nurturing relationships, and developing robust partnerships requires significant investment of time and resources, but dramatically expands capacity for lasting impacts.

Leadership & Governance

School principals need support.

Ideally, school leaders will champion hub projects, without becoming overwhelmed by additional hub-related responsibilities. Investing in their capacity to work with the community and external organisations, adopting distributed leadership models, and appointing dedicated hub leaders employed by the school or partners, will help prevent principal burn-out. Clear governance structures and decision processes also reduce stress.

Policy Alignments

Schools as community hubs inhabit fragmented policy environments.

Enacting policy often requires crossing jurisdictions and funding agencies. Early insights into how the policies of stakeholders may influence a hub's development and operations should inform the way forward. Monitoring policy updates and their influence on hub resourcing, facilities and operations is also important. Regular engagement with policy makers enables advocacy for policy changes and fosters ongoing support.

Funding & Resources

Reliable, long-term funding and financial management are essential.

Blending and braiding funding from different sources – often tied to reportable outcomes – is often required to support hub operations. Further, facility construction and management often necessitate contractual agreements between partners. Upfront agreements on who's paying for what helps avoid disputes.

Programs & Services Coordination

Random acts of programming won't deliver impact.

Strategic planning ensures day-to-day activities, programs and services achieve the desired outcomes. This requires effective governance and choosing not to partner with stakeholders whose objectives do not align with the hub vision. Training and retaining skilled coordinators is critical.

Urban Planning & Design

Schools don't exist in isolation.

Planning for hubs must consider their location relative to other infrastructure, plus their physical integration with immediate urban surrounds. The connection of school facilities with social infrastructure networks can enhance community education, health, and wellbeing. Design should boost the neighbourhood aesthetic, with welcoming thresholds between school and public property to foster a sense of belonging and encourage community members to access hub activities, programs, and services – as appropriate at different times of the day (see 'safety & security' below).

Facility Design

Design for learning and community.

Identifying all user-groups is a prerequisite to good facility design. Buildings and outdoor spaces should accommodate core school activities, with flexibility for other uses. Digitally connected facilities should enable multiple modes of communication between program/service providers and users. Spaces should be welcoming and inclusive, designed for all ages and abilities. Shared or co-located facilities can create budget efficiencies through capital and operational cost sharing.

Safety & Security

No school should be a fortress.

Balancing security with an environment that welcomes the community is achievable. Safety is of heightened importance when children mix with adults from the wider community and is best discussed early in design, when both 'hard' and 'soft' security options can be explored. When stakeholders collaborate openly, solutions to security challenges can be found. Well-defined access protocols for different user groups during school times and outside hours should guide security measures.

Facility Management

Sharing facilities means sharing their management too.

Sharing school facilities with the community increases the complexity of school site management. It is important to involve the managers of school facilities early to ensure sustainable arrangements inform the master plan and individual facility designs. Partnering with facility management groups, or outsourcing such services, can improve community access, while reducing the administrative burden on school personnel.

Evaluation & Evidence

High-quality feedback should inform decisions.

Evaluation is vital as new hubs develop and as existing hubs evolve. Lessons from other hubs can help steer new projects in the right direction. Regularly collecting, analysing, and reporting evaluation data helps to sustain hubs. Metrics that go beyond students' academic achievements to assess the impact of hubs on belonging, engagement, satisfaction and tangible benefits to individuals, families and the wider community should be considered. Partnering with trained evaluators can help overcome the challenges this may present.