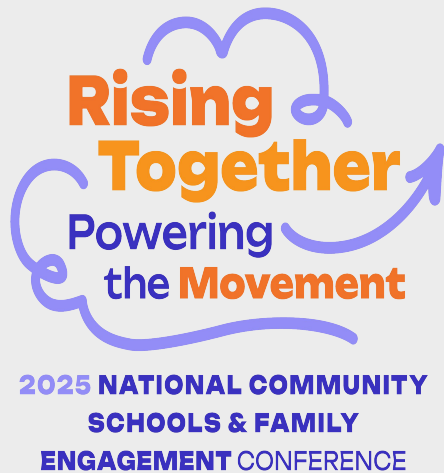




Belonging Through Student and Family Engagement: Building Safe Spaces in Rural and Urban Community Schools

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University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) Strategy



- Universities serve as the lead partner in providing sustained support
- Schools as comprehensive neighborhood centers built on partnerships that serve students, their families and other members of the community
- Democratic, participatory approach
- Serve educational, health, recreational, and social service needs of students, families and community
- Link school day and after school curriculum to solving local, real-world issues



THE NETTER CENTER FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Founded in 1992, the Netter Center develops and helps implement democratic, mutually transformative, place-based partnerships between Penn and West Philadelphia that advance research, teaching, learning, practice, and service and improve the quality of life on campus and in the community.

- Academically Based Community Service (ABCS)
- University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS)
- ABCS & UACS as core to a comprehensive Democratic Anchor Institution approach

These strategies are shared across the country and around the world, serving as a model for democratic university-community engagement.

Approaches to Cultivating Safe Spaces and Inclusivity in UACS

- Democratic Partnerships
 - ex. Restorative Practice at Penn
- Collaborative, Community Problem Solving
- Ongoing Education, Training, Professional Development, and Reflection
- Netter Center's Anti-Racism Working Group
 - Development of Safe Space Norms
- Family Engagement (Family Dinners, UACS Nights, Workshops)
- Cross-Grade and Cross-Generational Engagement
 - Cross-Grade Safe Space
- UACS Programming
 - OurSpace (LGBTQ+) Program
 - Youth-Driven Anti-Violence Program



Suggested Norms FOR SAFE SPACES



- All viewpoints are able to be heard and seen
- This is a respectful, safe place for sharing
- Use I/My statements
- Use Person First Language
- Thank others for sharing
- Be present when others share
- You may disagree with others, and that is ok
- Listen non-judgmentally
- Listen and participate with compassion and curiosity
- We will not offer our opinions to shared, lived experiences
- This is an inclusive space
- Respect culture, names, pronouns, identities
- Accept non-closure. The discussion will not feel “complete” upon its ending.
- What happens here, stays here

Case: OurSpace

OurSpace, Netter Center's LGBTQIA+ programming, is collaborating with the community to help solve the issue of the limited safe spaces for queer youth, the challenges of fostering inclusivity within Philadelphia schools, and the lack of queer-inclusive and comprehensive health education to improve Philadelphia LGBTQ+ youths' quality of life.

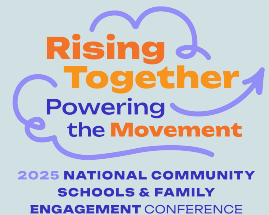


OurSpace Programming

- OurSpace is an initiative of the Netter Center that collaborates with Penn's LGBT Center to provide a safe and inclusive space for queer youth and allies across the Philadelphia District.
- Throughout the academic year and summer, the organization hosts events and workshops on college access and career readiness, financial literacy, health, community building, and many other topics to empower and support queer youth and allies.
- In OurSpace's Sexual Health Education Program (OSHEP), Penn and high school students receive queer-inclusive and comprehensive sexual health education, develop their own curricula, and teach sexual health education to youth within Gender-Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) in Philadelphia. This after-school program educates students about sexual health using a peer-assisted/near-peer learning model.



Institute for
Educational
Leadership **60+**
Years Strong



OurSpace Partners/Collaborators

- School District of Philadelphia
- Penn LGBT Center
- The Mazzoni Center
- Attic Youth Center
- Penn Reproductive Justice (Menstrual Health Education Program)
- Dr. Andy Tan, Annenberg School for Communications (Project Smart)
- Dr. Gwendolyn Beetham, School of Arts & Sciences - Program in Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies (ABCS Course Collaboration)



Youth-Participatory Action Research

- An approach to research that involves equitable collaboration between adult researchers and youth throughout the research process.
- Youth identify and analyze problems relevant to their lives, conduct research, and advocate for change based on evidence.

Youth-Participatory Action Research

QUEERNESS IN CLASSICAL MONSTER MOVIES



NAME: RAKI GAMBRELL
PRONOUNS: THEY/HE/SHE
HIGH SCHOOL: PAUL ROBESON HIGH
SCHOOL
GRADE: 12TH GRADE
LOCATION: THE GOODHAND ROOM

THE "COMING OUT" EXPERIENCE FOR THE TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY



NAME: LEYONIE WARREN-PINDER
PRONOUNS: SHE/HER
HIGH SCHOOL: MOTIVATION HIGH SCHOOL
GRADE: 9TH GRADE
LOCATION: THE GOODHAND ROOM

CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER IN WESTERN FASHION



NAME: MIKAH PARKINSON
PRONOUNS: SHE/HER
HIGH SCHOOL: PARKWAY CENTER CITY MIDDLE
COLLEGE
GRADE: 12TH GRADE
LOCATION: THE KAPLAN-PERRY READING ROOM

THE QUEER COMMUNITY: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE



NAME: WALLE BYFIELD
PRONOUNS: SHE/HER
HIGH SCHOOL: PARKWAY CENTER CITY MIDDLE
COLLEGE
GRADE: 12TH GRADE
LOCATION: THE KAPLAN-PERRY READING ROOM

BLACK QUEER REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIA



NAME: ALLEN CALEB (LEFT) AND
MAKAYLA SCHOFIELD (RIGHT)
PRONOUNS: THEY/THEM AND SHE/HER
HIGH SCHOOL: CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL AND
WEST CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL
GRADE: 9TH GRADE AND 12TH GRADE
LOCATION: THE CYBER CENTER

CONGRATULATIONS SENIORS! THE OURSPACE FAMILY
IS WISHING YOU ALL THE BEST!
RAKI WILL ATTEND DREXEL UNIVERSITY MAJORING IN
GRAPHIC DESIGN!
MIKAH WILL ATTEND JUNIATA COLLEGE MAJORING IN
WILDLIFE CONSERVATION!
WALLE WILL ATTEND JUNIATA COLLEGE AND IS
CURRENTLY UNDECIDED ON HER MAJOR!
MAKAYLA WILL ATTEND SAINT JOSEPH'S UNIVERSITY
MAJORING IN MEDICAL LABORATORY SCIENCE!



OurSpace Program Feedback (High School Students)

- “I enjoyed it very much, i looked forward to going when i did and it was a safe space for me and i always felt more comfortable there than other places”
- “The program was educational and a safe space to share thoughts and emotions.”
- “Affirmative sex Ed is awesome, I wish I learned this stuff earlier.”
- “Nobody is closed-minded, and everybody talked comfortably. Even though everybody was of different ages, we all still shared a common understanding and respect for one another.”
- “I honestly enjoyed the program because it was a space were people can comfortably talk about sexual health. It is a topic that society keeps quiet when there is a high need for discussions on sexual health because too many have and carry out false notions about it.”

Youth-Driven Anti-Violence Program (YAVP)

Goals:

- Reduce youth violence for West Philadelphia students in all University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) and their neighborhoods by expanding Netter's youth-driven anti-violence initiative that cultivates and supports a culture of anti-violence, safety, and peace
- Collaboratively solve problems of youth and community violence WITH the voices and actions of youth
- Create cultures of anti-violence and peace
- Help youth develop attitudes and skills that will create cultures of anti-violence, safety, and peace that will reduce violence in their schools and communities
- Further mobilize and connect a comprehensive array of partners and help aggregate and integrate their efforts into specific University-Assisted Community Schools to achieve greater impact

YAVP

- Create more safe spaces for youth. Safe spaces are places and programs where youth and staff actively deploy anti-violence skills and more specifically create and celebrate cultures of anti-violence, safety, and peace.
- Use a youth-driven approach: engaging youth in reducing violence is a necessary and effective strategy to prevent violence in the community.
- Youth learn skills so that their own interactions do not escalate to violence or threats of violence.
- Aggregate, integrate, and mobilize a comprehensive array of partners to achieve greater impact.

Near-Peer Learning Model

- Student-led programming
- Cross-grade Engagement Model
- Penn/HS student engagement and learning





BINGHAMTON
UNIVERSITY | COLLEGE OF COMMUNITY
AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Community Schools Program

Academics

Binghamton University Center for Community Schools

Faculty

Courses

Community Schools Advanced
Certificate

Undergraduate Course:
Reimagining Schools

Research & Evaluation

Multidisciplinary Research Affiliates

Research Grants & Support

Reimagining Schools Research Lab

Binghamton University Community Schools (BUCS)

Technical Assistance

C/W CSTAC

21st Century TARC

UACS Expansion

Local Implementation

Family Engagement Institute

Mental Health Grants

HOW WE STARTED!

2010 - Safe Schools/Healthy Students = SHARE Project

Rural School Identified Need for Family Engagement

- ★ **Team of four social work interns and Community School Coordinator**
 - ★ Outreach via home visits and informal gatherings
 - ★ Connections focused on building relationships
 - ★ Trust was earned by “passing” tests from families who had been harmed by other attempts

- ★ **Invited families to come to school for lunch**
 - ★ Families said no to school setting
 - ★ Held our first cafe in a daycare center that was seen as welcoming

- ★ **First meetings were asking families what got in the way of success**
 - ★ Began a series of meetings
 - ★ Ended with a 20 hour leadership training and graduation

Engaged Families!



DOE Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grants - Leveraging Social Work Interns

Rural Mental Health in Schools Expansion Initiative

GOALS:

- Expand access for youth and families to high-quality, equitable, and evidence-based mental health services in high-needs schools
- Increase engagement of youth and families in the educational process showing improved academic outcomes
- Diversify the number of trained social work candidates in partner schools
- Strengthen the school culture through trauma-informed, culturally responsive training for school leaders and staff to ensure the environment promotes diversity, equity, and inclusion for all members.

Family Partner Program

GOALS:

- Diversify the number of social work candidates providing school-based mental health services
- Build family confidence and capacity to engage as partners to school-based mental health providers

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

Family Engagement - The CHALLENGE

For Educators

- Have not been exposed to strong examples of family engagement
- Have received minimal training
- May not see partnership as an essential practice
- May have developed deficit mindset

For Families

- Have not been exposed to strong examples of family engagement
- Have had negative past experiences with schools and educators
- May not feel invited to contribute to their children's education
- May feel disrespected, unheard, and unvalued

Mapp, K. L. & Bergman, E. (2019). Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2).

STRENGTHENING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

■ WORKING DEFINITIONS

- **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT** is an equitable, strengths-based collaborative partnership among families, schools, and communities. It emphasizes shared responsibility for learning and development from birth through adulthood and is a cornerstone of the Community Schools strategy.
- **FAMILY CAFES** are nonjudgmental, brave spaces for families and caregivers to build relationships and strengthen connections between families, schools, and communities to support student success.

■ BUILT ON FOUR CORE BELIEFS (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007).:

- All families have dreams for their children and want the best for them
- All families have the capacity to support their children's learning
- Families and school staff are equal partners
- The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home and community rests primarily with the school staff, especially school leaders.

What Is Family Engagement?

Often we use family involvement and family engagement interchangeably.

Family Involvement

- Ideas and energy come from institution with emphasis on supporting children by supporting institutional goals.
- Programs, priorities, and schedules defined by institution
- One way information process

Involvement is when you are invited to the party.

Family Engagement

- Ideas and energy are generated in partnership with families building reciprocal relationships to support children.
- Families are included in decisions around programs, priorities, and schedules.
- Processes are developed to promote two way communication and authentic engagement.

Engagement is when you are a part of planning the party!

Impact of Family-School-Community Partnerships on Student Learning

COMPLIANCE

Enrollment Paperwork
Health Records
Immunization
Kindergarten Registration
Residency
Birth Records
Custody Paperwork
Physicals
Sports Paperwork
Report Cards
FAFSA Forms
College Applications
Permission Slips
Schedules and Pickup
Procedures



INVOLVEMENT

Celebrations
Fundraisers
Potlucks
Performances
Showcases
Family Help with Administrative
Tasks
Parent Resource Rooms
Family Support Services
Generic School Newsletters
Movie Nights
Parent Training Events
Back to School Night
Interactive Homework

ENGAGEMENT

Goal-setting talks
Regular, personalized
communication
Positive phone calls home
Data Sharing
Relationship building
Academic partnering
Home visits
Family Cafes
Ongoing Communication
Modeling of learning
support strategies



COMPLIANCE asks families and community partners to support the rules and regulations determined by lawmakers, school leaders, and educators.

INVOLVEMENT provides opportunities for families and agencies to take part in and support activities determined by the school.

ENGAGEMENT is when families and community partners become equitable partners and often takes part in the school's decision-making process.

FAMILY CAFES

- School data provides starting point
- Personal outreach to families
- Invite to a cafe
- At the cafe - shared agreements
 - This is a private meeting; what happens here stays here with the reminder that the facilitator is a mandated reporter.
 - This is a brave space, not a safe space
 - Stay engaged
 - “One Mic Policy” - Don’t Interrupt Others and Wait Your Turn to Speak
 - Actively Listen and Participate
 - Be Respectful of Everyone's Ideas and Views
 - Take Turns Speaking
 - Speak Loud Enough for Everyone to Hear
 - Be Attentive to Non-Verbal Cues
 - Put Away Technology
 - Take title hats off



FAMILY CAFES

Sample Questions for First Cafes

1. What is it like to raise a child in this community?
1. Can you share one interaction that you had with the school that went really well?
1. Can you share one challenge that you had with the school?
1. Describe a time when you or your child(ren) felt connected to school. If not, describe what it would look like to be connected to the school?
1. What issues do I/we need to explore to create a place where parents, students and staff feel connected?



Binghamton University Community Schools Leadership Institute for Family Engagement BUCS LIFE OVERVIEW

- **2024-2025 Pilot Year** - Seven 1 ½ - hour sessions and a celebration
- **2 Districts Participated** - 2 School Teams - 12 participants per team
- **Team participants included:** *District-level administrators, principals, teachers, teacher leaders, parents, BOE members, community-based organizations, students, support staff, community school coordinators, site supervisors, MHG supervisor*
- **We got to the ❤️ of Family and Community Engagement!**
 - ☆ Shift from Activities/Involvement to Engagement
 - ☆ Core Beliefs
 - ☆ Vision Statement
 - ☆ Two Dimensions (building trusting relationships and connection to student outcomes)
 - ☆ Assessing current data, policies, and practices
 - ☆ Applying learning to develop a project plan
- **Each team planned and shared a research-based family engagement project to be implemented in 2025 - 2026**

BUCS LIFE INSTITUTE GOALS

Establish a cohort of *Family Engagement Leaders* who are ambassadors for family engagement and promote student and school success by increasing family engagement and creating authentic, effective family, school, and community partnerships.

Create equity-focused school-wide research-based projects that promote student and school success that will be implemented the following year.

Develop Sustainability by sharing BUCS LIFE outcomes with all constituents and support the continued growth of *Family Engagement Leaders* in their role as ambassadors for family engagement.

The Four Essential Core Beliefs of Family Engagement

1. All families have dreams for their children and want what is best for them.
2. All families have the capacity to support their children's learning.
3. Family and school staff are equal partners.
4. The responsibility for cultivating and sustaining partnerships among school, home, and community rests primarily with the school staff, especially school leaders.

The Two Critical Dimensions of Family Engagement

- ★ *Trusting relationships* between educators and families.
- ★ *The connections* of family engagement activities and efforts (strategies) to *student learning*.

[family-engagement Toolkit \(CA\).pdf](#)



Voices From BUCS LIFE

★ *The most important thing I've learned...*

- ✱ Family engagement should be linked to learning and development
- ✱ ALL families have goals for their students
- ✱ The CORE BELIEFS and reflecting on each
- ✱ The Importance of families and school partnerships
- ✱ The difference between involvement and engagement
- ✱ There are other forms of support families can show that teachers may not see as “support”

★ *I see our team...*

- ✱ Creating something powerful
- ✱ As strong advocates
- ✱ Working together on the same wavelength
- ✱ As a well-rounded team with a lot to offer
- ✱ Taking our existing events and rethinking how we can support families
- ✱ Reevaluating what is currently in place and what steps need to be taken to improve/change

Q&A

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