



# Building a Coherent Community Hub School Strategy in Boston

*Key Components to Align for School  
Improvement*

Research by Kelly M. Hung, Ed.D.



## At a Glance

The purpose of this resource is to help Community Hub School Coordinators, school leaders, and others implementing a full-service community school model reflect on key components to align a Community Hub School strategy with a school's improvement goals. Five components are presented with examples and visuals, and template documents are linked for future use and adaptation. In addition, recommendations are provided with a range of entry points, recognizing that each school has a unique context to consider.

## Introduction

Each fall, the School on the Move Prize spotlights the most notable school-wide improvement efforts happening across Boston Public Schools. Through the Prize, EdVestors seeks to shine a light on schools, leaders, and teachers who create and continuously improve learning environments where all students thrive, demonstrated through significantly improved outcomes for students. By sharing the stories of how schools improve, we hope to help more schools make significant progress for their students.

Gardner Pilot Academy (GPA) was the winner of the 2022 School on the Move Prize. GPA is a Boston Community Hub school located in the neighborhood



of Allston. Their Hub School model, which they have been implementing and refining for over 30 years, leverages partnerships to remove non-academic barriers to learning. GPA works with 30+ community partners during school day, after-school, and in the summer to provide over half of students with thousands of hours of extended learning time.

This report seeks to highlight the structures, practices, and tools that have helped GPA realize the vision of a Community Hub School in support of student and family outcomes. It draws on insights from national research on community schools as well as decades of learning and refinement. It also includes work from two recent retreats focused on defining overall Hub Team goals and naming individual strategies and actions for each Hub Team member.

### ***What is a Community Hub School?***

The Community Hub School strategy focuses on academics, enrichment, health and social supports, youth and community development and family engagement with the goal of student success, strong families and healthy communities. Using schools as hubs, the strategy brings educators, families, and other stakeholders together to offer a range of opportunities, supports, and services to children as well as their families and communities. Learn more [here](#).

## Five Components

Gardner Pilot Academy (GPA) is a Boston Community Hub School that has been implementing extended services for students and families for nearly 30 years. A large part of their success has been their ability to create strong alignment between their Hub School strategy and their overall school improvement plan. Five components of the work have supported alignment and success at GPA.

### Five Components to Create Community Hub School Strategy Alignment to School Improvement Goals

1. **Organizational structures to empower the Hub Team** and ensure direct communication between the Hub Team and the administrative team.
2. **Clearly defined roles and responsibilities**, regardless of the size of the team.
3. **Designated time for Hub Team members to meet** for individual and group support to learn, solve problems, and build their capacity.
4. **Direct alignment between Gardner Pilot Academy goals and school improvement goals** to create coherence across the school.
5. **A cadence of accountability**<sup>1</sup> through weekly goal tracking.

## COMPONENT 1: Create Organizational Structures to Empower the Hub Team

Before a team can get to the work of implementing systemic support and extended services for students and families, organizational structures to empower the Hub Team must be in place. A Hub Team is composed of school staff members and school partners who play a direct role in student support services (e.g., school nurse, a school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, family liaison, after school director, school resource officer, and others). Team members who are leading the Hub School strategy will experience stronger alignment when they have direct access to the school leader and members of the administrative team.

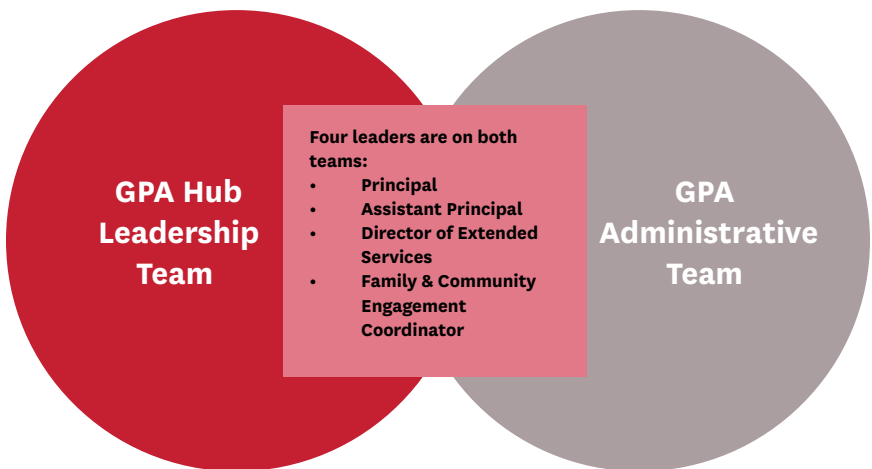
<sup>1</sup>Cadence of Accountability taken from McChesney, C., Covey, S., & Huling, J. (2012). *The 4 disciplines of execution: Achieving your wildly important goals*. Simon and Schuster.

## GPA HUB TEAM MEMBERS & THE PRINCIPAL WORK HAND-IN-HAND

At the Gardner Pilot Academy, the Hub Team is large and has been built over time. The team consists of the Director of Extended Services, an Out of School Time Director, an Adult Education Director, a Boston Public School Hub School Coordinator, a Family and Community Engagement Coordinator, and a Family Liaison. In addition, both the Principal and the Assistant Principal sit on the Hub Team.

Hub Team members work hand-in-hand with the Principal and the administrative team through a crossover meeting structure. There are four leaders at GPA who sit on both the Hub Team and the administrative team (Visual 1). This structure allows Hub Team members to develop a clear understanding of school-wide priorities and be proactive around connecting and integrating support toward areas of need.

**Visual 1: GPA Leadership Teams Overlap**



In addition, the Director of Extended Services meets every two weeks with the Principal to ensure that big picture decisions for the school are collaboratively discussed, including those related to staffing, partnerships, and supervision. Together, these leadership and organizational structures lay the foundation for deep collaboration and truly integrated support structures at GPA.

## COMPONENT 2: Clearly Define Roles and Responsibilities

When undertaking the complex task of building, advancing, and sustaining your community school model, it is important to clearly define the roles and responsibilities for each team member.

### GPA HUB TEAM MEMBERS DEFINE THEIR CORE WORK

At the Gardner Pilot Academy, each member of the Hub Team has clearly defined big picture responsibilities as well as core areas of work that uniquely contribute to the team. The GPA Hub Team began with one position (Director of Extended Services), funded in partnership with the YMCA. As the team grew to six, each new position had to be defined on its own and in relation to existing positions.

#### Visual 2: Gardner Pilot Academy Roles and Responsibilities

Director of Extended Services	Family & Community Engagement Coordinator	Family Liaison
<p><b>Big Picture Responsibilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversee implementation of hub model</li> <li>Leverage funds and partners to meet the needs of students and families</li> <li>Ensure relationships, mission and vision stay at center of day to day work through supervision, regular meeting attendance and consistent feedback loop with staff, partners and funders.</li> </ul> <p><b>Unique Characteristics to Compliment the Team:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Take a big picture view of the work (extended services, partners, family engagement etc.) on a regular basis and connect the pieces to identify strengths, needs, next steps (financial, programmatically etc.)</li> <li>Build and maintain deep and committed relationships with partners, vendors and other GPA stakeholders to identify new ways to get needs met</li> </ul>	<p><b>Big Picture Responsibilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate communication between families, and school, (i.e. faculty, and, staff)</li> <li>Create an environment where everyone feels welcome and accepted</li> <li>Connect families with the most needed resources ( i.e., housing, financial assistance, health services, legal services, immigration, mental health, food access, etc.)</li> <li>Enhance and support parent involvement initiatives that focus on improving student achievement ( i.e., Parenting workshops: <i>Mind Matter, Family Team Up Together</i> and Computer classes: <i>Technology Goes Home</i>, etc.)</li> <li>Work in partnership with faculty and staff to make positive and lasting connections with parents and families,</li> <li>Oversee multilingual communication (English/Spanish) to improve the effectiveness of the communication between school and home</li> <li>Oversight of family/parent involvement and governance</li> </ul> <p><b>Unique Characteristics to Compliment the Team:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Knowledge of the community we served and their needs</li> <li>Ability to work with different teams in order to provide families and their children with the resources they need</li> <li>Knowledge of community resources</li> </ul>	<p><b>Big Picture Responsibilities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote the Boston Public Schools' vision for family and student engagement within BPS and the greater Boston community</li> <li>Connect with teachers and staff to build and strengthen the inter-relationship of all stakeholders.</li> <li>Plan and implement family/students workshops with educational intentions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Unique Characteristics to Compliment the Team:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present individualized family cases to the hub team in order to provide meaningful support and resources</li> <li>Support the school develop a plan that ensures consistent, effective, timely, and accessible communication with families in a variety of ways including the home languages of families.</li> </ul>

## COMPONENT 3: Dedicate Time to Collaborate

Once the organizational structures are in place, schools need to carve out the time to communicate and collaborate.

## GPA HUB TEAM MEMBERS INVEST IN TIME

At the Gardner Pilot Academy, there is time scheduled for both one-on-one support and full Hub Team collaboration and learning time. These meetings allow space for strategy alignment, team learning, capacity building, goal monitoring, and problem solving.

**Table 1: Gardner Pilot Academy Hub Team Meeting Structures**

Type of Meeting	Frequency	Purpose	Hub Team Members Present
1-1 Meetings with Principal	Every two weeks	<p>Ensure budget is aligned to community school priorities as determined by Governing Board.</p> <p>Ensure that big picture decisions for school (e.g., staffing for community school model, effective supervision of staff and larger impact partnership decisions) are collaboratively discussed.</p> <p>Ongoing discussion of school logistics, including scheduling, events, and programming.</p> <p>Ongoing goal review and supervision support.</p>	Director of Extended Services + Principal
1-1 Supervision Meetings	Weekly & every two weeks	Ongoing goal review and supervision support.	Director of Extended Services + Each Hub Team Member
Hub Team Meetings	Weekly	<p>Ensure consistency and alignment between all system level supports.</p> <p>Small doses of professional learning (e.g., “Street Data”: How do we collect and use street data? What is the street data we already have?).</p> <p>Focused updates and problem solving.</p>	All Hub Team Members Principal Assistant Principal
Targeted Goal Consultancy Reviews	Six times per year	Team members present progress and challenges regarding their high impact focus goals with opportunity for feedback.	Each Hub Team member presents once
Hub Team Retreats	Three times per year: Fall, Winter, and Spring	Extended time to focus on full team capacity building.	All Hub Team Members Principal Assistant Principal

# COMPONENT 4: Create Alignment Between Hub Goals and School Improvement Goals

The work of Community Hub Schools should be fully integrated with the work of school improvement. When schools are able to make clear connections from the Hub work to their school improvement plan, then the work of the Hub Team can serve the objective of whole school progress and improvement.

## GPA HUB TEAM MEMBERS ALIGN THEIR HUB TEAM GOALS TO THE QUALITY SCHOOL PLAN (QSP) GOALS

At the Gardner Pilot Academy, the administrative team and the Instructional Leadership Team created Quality School Plan (QSP) goals based on BPS district priorities. Following that, the principal and the Director of Extended Services defined the Hub Team goals, ensuring that the work of the Hub Team and Gardner’s Instructional Leadership Team are directly aligned.

**Visual 3: Gardner Pilot Academy SY23-24 Hub Team Goals and SY23-24 QSP Goals**

### Hub Team High Priority Goals

**Decrease Chronic Absenteeism**

**Increase Proficiency Rates of Marginalized Students**

**Increase Community Voice (Families, Students & Teachers)**

### Gardner QSP Priorities

**Decrease Chronic Absenteeism**

**Equitable Literacy**

**Culture & Climate: Warm Demander<sup>2</sup> with Colleagues & Scholars**

During GPA’s spring and fall Hub Team retreat, team members determined how they would each support the high priority goals set forth by the Instructional Leadership Team. To support these goals, the team identified strategies from the [Six Key Practices](#), outlined by Community Schools Forward’s *Framework: Essentials for Community Schools Transformation*. Each person was asked to determine measures and actions to implement those strategies based on their role. This process aligned each team member’s actions and measures to overarching Hub Team goals.

<sup>2</sup>Hammond, Z. (2014). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin Press.



## Template 1: Gardner Pilot Academy High Impact Measures Work Plan

<b>Goal 3: Increase Community Voice (Families, Students and Teachers)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will promote a safe, inclusive and anti-racist learning community by acting as warm demanders of each other. We will hold all members of our community to high expectations and standards for learning. Staff and students will feel they have a voice and will be listened to in a safe and supportive learning environment.</li> <li>Measured by: Percent favorable student responses on the Student Climate Survey around sense of belonging (students), school safety (students) and school climate (teachers and families).</li> </ul>					
Strategies <i>What will we do to accomplish it?</i>	Measure(s) <i>What is our evidence? Data or Product</i>	Action steps <i>What is it that we want to do?</i>	Responsibility <i>Who will be primarily responsible? What will be the collaboration between positions</i>	Timeline <i>What are the benchmarks? When is it due?</i>	Why do this? <i>What will happen if we are successful?</i>
<b>Summative Data</b>					
<b>90-Day Reviews</b>					
Culture of Belonging Safety & Care	Students & families will report increased sense of safety on GPA campus - as measured by a interim survey pulled from targeted School Climate Survey questions (RE: school safety)	*Create a campaign around what makes our school safe. (Flyers, Videos) *Share at first open house *Have student & family greeters at the front door during the first week of school	Coordinator with support from Family Engagement Liaison	September Launch - December 2023  Open house (Sept X)  First day of School (Sept 7th & 11th)  Interim Survey Week of October 23rd	If we create more awareness around safety in our school vs. safety across all schools - then families will report feeling increased safety on targeted measures
<b>Pick one of the Six Practices</b>		<b>Not all interim measures will be new</b>		<b>Key dates before 90 day mark</b>	

## COMPONENT 5: Create a Cadence of Accountability<sup>2</sup>

Setting clear goals and building a plan to achieve them are important initial steps, but the real movement happens when schools create a “cadence of accountability,” a regular check-in to measure progress toward goals and name discrete next steps<sup>3</sup>.

### GPA HUB TEAM MEMBERS TRACK THEIR GOALS WEEKLY

At Gardner Pilot Academy, the Director of Extended Services uses the weekly and bi-weekly 1-1 meeting time to help Hub Team members track progress toward their goals. Typically, each 1-1 meeting time is 60 minutes. Of that time block, 15-20 minutes are reserved to ask three key questions:

- ▶ What did you accomplish this week?
- ▶ How well are you moving your key measures? What is the specific data you are trying to impact and what is the evidence that you have made an impact so far?
- ▶ What are the 1-2 things you can do in the coming week that will have the biggest impact on this strategy?

<sup>3</sup>Cadence of Accountability adapted from McChesney, C., Covey, S., & Huling, J. (2012). *The 4 disciplines of execution: Achieving your wildly important goals*. Simon and Schuster.

The Director of Extended Services tracks progress of these questions and progress toward goals overtime in a spreadsheet. Each Hub Team member has their own tab, formatted week-by-week, for a 90-day review. This process also supports the Director to monitor and collect data throughout the year for end of year impact reports, versus having to pull it together all at one time on her own.

**Template 2: Goal Tracking**

A		B		C	D	E
Goal	Strategies/Practices we will focus on to impact our goal?	How will we measure success?	Initial Actions What is it that we want to do?	Responsibility Who will be primarily responsible? What will be the collaboration between positions?		
<b>Goal 1. Increase Chronic Absenteeism</b> By June 2024, the GPA chronic absenteeism rate from the 19-21.7% of 21% will decrease by 50% to be 11% or less across the school and all subgroups.						
<b>Goal 2. Increase Proficiency Rates of Marginalized Students</b> Ensure 50% of students or higher are meeting expectations within identified subgroups (ELL, 1 & 2, students who are homeless and students with disabilities) with impact on MAP growth, MAP Fluency and report card data.						
<b>Goal 3. Increase Community voice (Parents, Students and Teachers)</b> We will promote a safe, inclusive and attractive learning community by acting on needs/demands of each other. We will treat all members of our						

# Recommendations for Entry Points

These entry points are meant to serve as reflection questions and considerations for Community Hub School Coordinators and for school leaders. As with any initiative, you may not be able to tackle everything at one time. Start where it feels right for you and your school and build from there.

## WHAT IF MY PRINCIPAL IS REALLY BUSY AND WE DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME TO CONNECT?

Often, principals would love to meet with everyone, but there are competing demands that make that very challenging.

### CONSIDER:

- ▶ Have you asked your principal for a dedicated time to check in so they are aware that this is a priority? If weekly is too much, can you start with bi-weekly check-ins? Is there another school leader with decision-making authority who can provide guidance?
- ▶ Are there other ways you can communicate with school leaders? Can you provide a quick bulleted email update of your week's work and questions you have?
- ▶ Are there ways you can communicate with other school level teams and share your work with school staff, families, and the broader community? Is there a weekly staff memo and/or a monthly family newsletter that you can use to highlight the current work you are doing to help build awareness and interest? Do you have access to the meeting minutes from other teams, and can you share your team's meeting minutes with other relevant teams?



## WHAT IF WE DO NOT YET HAVE A HUB TEAM AND I AM JUST ONE PERSON DOING THIS WORK?

Hub Teams do not typically begin with six team members! GPA began with a single position to formally support the work. It can take time to build and expand a formal team.



### CONSIDER:

- ▶ Start by defining your own roles and responsibilities in your school's Hub work, and consider that work in relation to other positions in your building to identify potential overlaps and synergies.
- ▶ You might have a Hub Team and not know it! Think about all of the folks in your building who might be supporting the [Six Key Practices](#) in some way. This may include your school nurse, a school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, your family liaison, after school director, school resource officer, or others. Begin connecting with each of these people and mapping their contributions to the key practices.
- ▶ Do a similar mapping exercise with your current partners outside of the school who can be part of your Hub Team.
- ▶ GPA has a close relationship with the [YMCA](#), which acts as a lead partner in four of the community schools within Boston Public Schools. As a lead partner, the YMCA co-finances and co-supervises the work being done by those community schools. You and your principal might consider approaching the YMCA or a similar organization that could more deeply partner with you in the work.

## WHAT IF I DO NOT HAVE STANDING MEETING TIME WITH SCHOOL LEADERS AND OTHER HUB TEAM MEMBERS?

Nobody wants to meet just to meet! Begin with defining a clear purpose for meeting, then design the meeting structures accordingly.



### **CONSIDER:**

- ▶ If you are new to the building, start by actively reaching out to others. Learn about the work that they do. Where do they feel successful? What do they feel is most challenging about their work? This will help you build relationships.
- ▶ Once you define your roles and responsibilities, identify areas of overlapping work with other staff and consider setting up a regular check-in meeting.
- ▶ Think about other meetings that are already happening in the building. Ask if you can join. You may be able to make use of existing structures.

## WHAT IF I DO NOT KNOW OUR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PRIORITIES?

The process for developing a school improvement plan typically starts in the spring by reflecting on the work of the year and setting some initial priorities about where a school wants to focus next. In Massachusetts, priorities are typically set in August and early September when the previous year's state testing data is released (ideally prior to the start of the school year). Below is a process to begin aligning Community Hub School goals with school improvement goals. **This process is best done in collaboration with the school principal.** If that is not possible, you can still do this on your own and share back with the principal for review.



### CONSIDER:

- ▶ Ask for a copy of the school improvement plan. If you cannot get access to a full copy of the improvement plan, ask for a copy of the school improvement goals for the school year.
- ▶ Ask for the data that is being used to track school improvement goals (this can be summative data or data points that signify trends).
- ▶ If the district has named targeted impact areas for community schools, review those and look for areas of overlap with your school's improvement goals for the year. For example, BPS has identified [specific impact areas for the 2023-24 school year](#).
  - ▶ How will the work that you do as a Community Hub School Coordinator and as a Hub Team impact school improvement goals?
  - ▶ Through conversations with other Hub Team members about the challenging areas of their work and by looking at relevant data (e.g., highest areas of need), determine the Hub goals that best align with the school's improvement goals.

## WHAT IF I DO NOT HAVE EXPERIENCE SETTING AND TRACKING GOALS?

Setting goals and tracking data does not have to be complicated! Often when we think of data, we think of complex numbers, tables, spreadsheets, and graphs. At its core, this process is about setting a goal, keeping track of action steps, and documenting impact.



### CONSIDER:

- ▶ Following the above process, name 1-3 goals for the Community Hub School work for the year. Write the goals down in a format that works for you, such as a [Google spreadsheet](#) or a [Google doc](#).
- ▶ Once you have goals clearly stated, name how you will measure progress toward those goals. In other words, what data will you collect to let you know you are making progress? Then identify some initial actions.
- ▶ Each week thereafter (for a period of approximately 90 days), ask yourself (and others) the following questions, and write down your answers:
  - ▶ What did you accomplish this week?
  - ▶ How well are you moving your key measures? What is the specific data you are trying to impact and what is the evidence that you have made an impact so far?
  - ▶ What are the 1-2 things you can do in the coming week that will have the biggest impact on this strategy?
- ▶ At the end of the 90-day period, adjust. Ask yourself:
  - ▶ What are the 1-2 most important strategies or actions I can take in the next 90 days to impact our goals?

# Learn More

## COMMUNITY SCHOOLS RESOURCES

- ▶ [National Center for Community Schools](#)
- ▶ [Coalition for Community Schools](#)
- ▶ [Framework: Essentials for Community School Transformation](#)
- ▶ [Outcomes and Indicators for Community Schools: A Guide for Implementers and Evaluators](#)

## BOSTON COMMUNITY HUB SCHOOLS

- ▶ [Gardner Pilot Academy](#)
- ▶ [Boston Public Schools: Boston Community Hub School Strategy](#)
- ▶ [YMCA & the Boston Community Hub Schools](#)

## About EdVestors

EdVestors is a school improvement organization that combines strategic investments, content expertise, and collaborative implementation to drive system-level impact in Boston schools. Our mission is to advance equitable, meaningful education that prepares every Boston student to activate their power and shape their future. We drive toward our mission by activating people and resources, learning and iterating in context, and influencing system change. We believe that continuously attending to all three of our drivers ensures our activities will create impact.

## ABOUT THE SCHOOL ON THE MOVE PRIZE

Each fall, the School on the Move Prize recognizes some of the most improving Boston Public Schools. EdVestors seeks to shine a light on the schools, leaders, and teachers who create and continuously improve learning environments where all students thrive. By sharing the stories of how schools improve, we hope to help more schools make significant progress for their students.

## REFERENCES

Community Schools Forward. (2023). Framework: Essentials for community school transformation. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>

McChesney, C., Covey, S., & Huling, J. (2012). *The 4 disciplines of execution: Achieving your wildly important goals*. Simon and Schuster.

Hammond, Z. (2014). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin Press.



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- ▶ Nicolasa Lopez, Family and Community Engagement Coordinator, GPA and YMCA of Greater Boston
- ▶ Joe Sara, Assistant Principal, GPA
- ▶ Nereida Tejeda, Family Liaison, GPA

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Together, we bring you this resource and hope that it will support other Community Hub School Coordinators and principals to further establish and build out their own Community Hub School strategy for alignment.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Kelly M. Hung, Ed.D.](#), is a lifelong educator and former Assistant Superintendent in Boston Public Schools. She is an experienced school leader and led the initial launch of Boston Community Hub Schools for the district. Her areas of focus include creating access and equity for students and families, increasing system coherence, educational leadership development, and community-driven school design.