

# APEC Education Officials Dialogue: Schools as Community Hubs Project Summary Report



APEC Human Resources  
Development Working Group  
March 2024



**Asia-Pacific  
Economic Cooperation**





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# **APEC Education Officials Dialogue: Schools as Community Hubs**

## **Project Summary Report**

**Detroit, USA | 14-15 May 2023**

**APEC Human Resources Development Working Group**

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## I. Introduction

The APEC Education Officials Dialogue: Schools as Community Hubs project implemented a dialogue event with education officials from APEC member economies in attendance to discuss community-driven strategies that help schools build the capacity to address local problems affecting student educational access and achievement. The event provided additional resources to stakeholders to help students receive an equitable and quality education, position schools to better meet the needs of the whole child, and make plans for additional community engagement. The project team outlined three key outcomes for the project:

- Increased resources for education officials to initiate and/or strengthen relationships with community partners.
- Increased resources to help schools meet the holistic needs of students by offering additional extracurricular opportunities and promoting additional family and teacher engagement.
- Increased participant knowledge of community engagement strategies from around the region so that they can better determine what may work best in their local context.

The Dialogue was held 14-15 May 2023 in Michigan, Detroit, United States on the margins of the APEC Second Senior Officials' Meeting, convening delegates from fifteen (15) member economies and UNESCO, including officials from education ministries, other government agencies, community organizations, and nonprofit organizations who work to develop or implement community hubs programs in local schools. The Dialogue was led by subject matter experts and policymakers who highlighted key pillars of the community schools strategy developed by the Partnership for the Future of Learning (a group of 300+ nonprofit education and social justice organizations).

The Dialogue agenda incorporated keynote speeches, panel presentations, small group discussions, and a field trip to a local community school. Specific objectives for the event were for the participants to understand the key pillars of the community schools strategy and how it can address educational inequities. Additionally, attendees learned about the U.S. Department of Education's approach to full-service community schools and explored other economies' approaches to schools as community hubs. Participants were encouraged to develop initial ideas of how to incorporate elements of the community schools strategy in their economies during the discussion sessions.

## II. Steering Committee Formation and Outcomes

To help ensure that discussions during the Dialogue were relevant to APEC economies, the project team put together a steering committee of representatives from economies to help inform the planning of the Dialogue. APEC delegations were encouraged to nominate individuals to join the committee voluntarily. Thirteen (13) individuals from eleven (11) APEC member economies indicated that they would join the committee.

Committee members advised the project team on their economies' priorities as they related to the Dialogue session focuses by recommending event speakers, proposing ideas for briefing materials for event attendees, and providing feedback on the event framework and two-day schedule. The steering committee met twice in the months leading up to the Dialogue event to discuss these activities. Committee members were also briefed on the progress made by the project team in planning the event.

The steering committee's work was not only critical for planning the event but also helped generate buy-in among economy delegates. Steering committee members were able to share insight with other representatives from their economies about the project's objectives and goals.

Steering committee meeting outcomes included:

- A finalized event framework, with topics selected and agreed upon by members
- Eight (8) in-person speaker nominations
- Sections of the briefing materials, including:
  - Ten (10) economy summaries of their past and current efforts related to schools as community hubs
  - Background materials on topics related to schools as community hubs

### *Briefing Materials*

In consultation with the steering committee, the project team developed a briefing materials packet for Dialogue participants to use before and during the event. The briefing materials included the final agenda, additional background on session topics, speaker biographies, summaries that reviewed economies' work related to schools as community hubs, and additional background materials on economic contexts. In total, the briefing materials packet was sixty-nine (69) pages.

Economy summaries were developed to be useful beyond the context of the Dialogue and provide further insight into the schools as community hubs landscape across the Asia-Pacific region. Each summary outlines an economy's approach to community engagement and its administration of education policy. Economies then provided examples of how they promote the four pillars of the community schools

framework, which are: 1) integrated student supports; 2) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities; 3) active family and community engagement; and 4) collaborative leadership and practices. Examples generally focused on economy-level interventions, but some economies chose to focus on how specific programs at the regional or local level are addressing each of the pillars. The summaries introduced some key takeaways that would become more apparent during the event:

- Despite the differences between education systems in APEC economies, education agencies in the Asia-Pacific generally seek to promote greater parental and/or community involvement in schools and provide wraparound services to students and sometimes families.
- During and after the coronavirus pandemic, economies have embraced innovative strategies to address inequities in academic achievement and access to education, such as the schools as community hubs framework.

### III. Summary of Event

Participants of the Dialogue engaged in constructive conversations around how to build and promote schools as community hubs, including informative panels and illuminating keynote presentations from the project team and stakeholders from across the Asia-Pacific Region.

The event started with a recorded keynote speech from U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten, during which she welcomed participants to the Dialogue and noted the importance of providing holistic supports for students and their communities.



The **“Why Community Hub Schools?”** panel focused on how participating economies across the APEC region are using the community hub strategy to support students, families, and communities, especially how the model can promote recovery following the global pandemic and other disruptions to educational and social support systems. The panel was moderated by Hayin Kimner of the Community Schools Learning Exchange, who shared her experiences as an education policy researcher. Panelists, including Huong Le-Thu, Education Program Specialist in the Education Policy Section of UNESCO, Steven McCullough, Chief Operating and Equity Officer for Communities in Schools, and José Muñoz, Director of the Coalition for Community Schools, discussed how the community schools strategy is being used as a vehicle towards creating more equitable education systems in the United States and across the globe.



The **“Policies and Practices Promoting Schools as Community Hubs”** panel discussed the policy and funding structures at the federal, state, district, and school levels in the United States and opportunities to coordinate evidence-based practices. Tiffany Miller, Director of Federal Policy for the Learning Policy Institute, moderated, with panelists Dr. Natalie Rodriguez-Quintana, Clinical Psychologist at the University of Michigan’s Transforming Research into Action to Improve the Lives of Students (TRAILS) program, and Dr. Naorah Rimkunas, Assistant Professor of Community Schools at the State University of New York (SUNY) Binghamton.



The **“Panel and Small Group Reflection: Developing a Community Hub Strategy – High Level Panel Conversation on the Four Pillars”** was moderated by Jonathan Hui, Senior Program Officer at the Kresge Foundation, and focused on how schools make data-driven decisions to identify community needs and then engage with stakeholders. Panelists included Mike Jackson, Director of the Connected Beginnings Program at the Australian Department of Education, who shared his experience with successful interventions to support First Nations and other underserved communities, and Dr. Alena Zachery-Ross, superintendent of the Ypsilanti (Michigan) Community Schools District, who provided a practitioner’s perspective from her experience as a school administrator, teacher, and mental health services provider.

Following the High-Level Panel Conversation on the Four Pillars of Community Schools, attendees ate lunch and then reconvened for a series of panel presentations dedicated to each of the four community schools framework pillars:

The **“Pillar #1: Integrating Student Supports”** panel featured Thira Bhawangkanan, Deputy Secretary-General of the Office of the Basic Education Commission at the Thai Ministry of Education, discussing integrated supports being implemented for Thai students, and Lawrence Poon, from the Uplift Programme Office (UPO) at the Singapore Ministry of Education, sharing methods for coordinating inter-agency partnerships to support underserved students and communities drawing on his experience as a secondary school teacher.

The **“Pillar #2: Promoting Enrichment Activities”** panel included specialists in enrichment activities and supports for students outside the classroom, with Dr. Faizulizami Osmin, Principal Assistant Director at the Sports, Co-Curricular & Arts Division of the Malaysia Ministry of Education, discussing student development in extracurricular and co-curricular programs in the areas of second language learning and STEM topics, and Siu-Fung “Pablo” Hon, Senior Inspector in the Hong Kong

Education Bureau, specializing in humanities, social education, and monitoring student learning and teacher quality.

The “**Pillar #3: Generating Family and Community Engagement**” panel featured presentations from Wendy Hart, Chief Advisor for International Engagement and Cooperation of the Aotearoa (New Zealand) Ministry of Education, sharing perspectives and strategies on engaging with family and community stakeholders, and Dr. Jun Teng, professor of education at Beijing Normal University, whose research focuses include education policy, international organizations, and skills and competency development.



To begin the second day, dialogue participants traveled by bus from the dialogue venue to **East English Village Preparatory Academy at Finney** in Detroit, Michigan, a local secondary school that has incorporated the community schools strategy. During the visit, participants met with administrators from both the school and the local education agency, toured the school’s unique facility, learned about the school’s innovative approaches to student and family supports, and heard from student leaders on the role that the school’s community resources benefit their lives and education.

While at the East English Village Preparatory Academy at Finney, participants heard from the final panel on “**Pillar #4: Encouraging Collaborative, Stakeholder-Driven Leadership**” with moderator Dr. Angelita Jacobs, Detroit (Michigan) Public Community School District, sharing her background as an administrator and resource provider in the very school district from which she graduated, with panelists Eliana Chamizo, senior advisor for international affairs at the Chile Ministry of Education, offering strategies for ensuring strong leadership in her economy’s educational system, as well as Autumn Berg, coordinator of the Community Schools Initiative Program in Chicago Public Schools, and Sarah Rankin, director of the Community Schools Program in the Skokie School District 69, two leading practitioners in the U.S. State of Illinois who provided informative presentation on how their successful programs collaborate with key stakeholders in the communities.

Following the panel on Pillar #4: Encouraging Collaborative, Stakeholder-Driven Leaderships, EDNET Co-Chair Rafael Nevárez and program staff provided closing remarks on-site, before the Dialogue event adjourned.

## IV. Group Reflections on the Dialogue

Both days of the Dialogue concluded with group reflection sessions, where participants, speakers, and the project team could reflect on earlier discussions and consider what could be done in their economies and around the region to promote schools as community hubs. At the beginning of these reflection sessions, Dialogue facilitators presented prompts, which were displayed on the projector screen for all to see. Participants and speakers were split into groups of eight (8) or fewer people and then had at least ten (10) minutes of deliberative time to discuss the prompts before reporting their reflections to the wider group.

Participant reflections largely raised the potential benefits of schools as community hubs when applied to their local contexts. Many also highlighted examples of interventions discussed during sessions that would be particularly salient in their economies. For example, an Indonesian participant noted that mental health supports highlighted by the University of Michigan-TRAILS and Ypsilanti (Michigan) Community School District were relevant in their context, as they hoped to address bullying and sexual assault occurring in Indonesian schools.



Delegates reiterated the importance of strong collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, especially those outside of the academic sphere, including service providers, local government and security forces, social and religious leaders, health and mental health facilities, and in particular, students and families. This collaboration is crucial in maintaining sustained parent and family engagement, developing partnerships with local governments and service providers to improve the provision of wraparound supports, and securing community schools-specific funding. To build trusting and sustainable relationships with external partners, some participants suggested working closely with a few organizations first before establishing other potential partnerships.

After the visit to East English Village Preparatory Academy at Finney, participants noted that community schools provided a different perspective on how wraparound supports can be implemented in an academic setting. One speaker noted that their economy expanded access to mental health supports during the pandemic after only making them available to students with documented mental health issues previously. This policy change proved effective in boosting student morale generally and promoting a sense of belonging at school. Another participant noted that increasing access to extracurricular academic activities such as tutoring and student clubs had

the potential to increase the academic performance of “average performers,” instead of just “low performers” and “high performers.”

Groups remarked on the importance of strong, “bottom-up” approaches to community schools, emphasizing the need to engage and empower teachers, building staff and administration, and students and families themselves to ensure adequate resources are allocated to address priority needs. In the East English Village context, participants noted that students were consulted as part of administrators’ decision-making, and this helped foster a school environment that prioritized children’s needs and valued young voices.

Some delegates raised additional questions about positioning schools as community hubs that would be worth examining as part of any future work on the topic. One speaker asked whether schools should establish criteria to determine the expected impact of collaboration with different stakeholders. They noted that trying to work with all organizations in a community may not be sustainable, and some organizations might not be as committed to school cooperation as others.

## V. Takeaways from Post-Event Survey

After the Dialogue ended, the project team sent out a modified version of the APEC Project Evaluation Survey. Fifteen (15) participants submitted responses, indicating their agreement with various statements regarding the dialogue and responding to various questions gauging its impact. The survey questions are included in the appendix of this report for reference.

Respondents generally felt that the event was effective and established a foundation for future discussions within APEC related to schools as community hubs. All fifteen (15) respondents either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the following statements, with no “disagreed” responses recorded:

- The objectives of the dialogue were clearly defined.
- The project achieved its intended objectives.
- The agenda items and topics covered were relevant.
- The content was well-organized and easy to follow.
  
- The experts were well-prepared and knowledgeable about the topic.
- The materials distributed were useful.
- The time allotted for the dialogue was sufficient.

Three (3) out of the fifteen (15) respondents “disagreed” with the following statement:

- Gender issues were sufficiently addressed during implementation.

All respondents also indicated that their level of knowledge of community school strategies increased after participating in the event.

In response to open-ended questions, respondents emphasized that APEC economies face shared challenges when it comes to supporting students, despite different demographics/contexts shaping their approaches. They noted that the diversity of experiences highlighted from around the region allowed them to better understand how to implement foundational concepts related to schools as community hubs. They recommended that APEC economies pursue follow-up projects and increase information sharing related to schools as community hubs.

Some respondents indicated that they wished the event was longer so that participants could talk more in-depth about the session topics. An attendee noted that terms used to describe the community hubs strategy were not defined during the event, and a glossary would have helped ensure that participants had a shared understanding of the strategy.

## VI. Next Steps

During the U.S. APEC 2023 host year, which highlighted how equality and inclusion contribute to sustainable economic development, the APEC Education Officials Dialogue reinforced that meeting students, families, and communities' holistic needs in the education sector helps to ensure that individuals meet their potential and are well-prepared to join the workforce.

There are a couple of major insights that APEC economies can take away from this event:

*1. Schools as community hubs approaches are one promising intervention that can help education systems throughout the education system recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and provide for citizens' welfare.*

Education systems worldwide are implementing innovative reforms to address the achievement gaps widened by the pandemic. These efforts build upon substantial evidence which suggests that education plays a major role in not only promoting sustainable economic development by preparing students to meet workforce needs, but also social wellbeing, resiliency, citizenship, and improved health outcomes. Holistic-centered education reforms are a wise investment for economies.

However, evidence also shows that reforms must be focused to enable real change. Barriers to educational access are often highly context-dependent, and interventions that are too prescriptive risk neglecting different student demographic groups. Community schools empower local stakeholders – including those traditionally active outside the school setting – to become more engaged in schools' operations. These stakeholders often have valuable local knowledge that can help school administrators implement programs that bring all students up to grade level. Examples of community interventions

highlighted during the Dialogue included vaccination clinics in areas with limited healthcare access, supplementary tutoring programs, school pantries for food insecure students, and counseling programs. Active local stakeholders contributing to community schools include education nonprofits, social service-focused government agencies, and hospital services.

*2. Leveraging schools as accessible third spaces helps promote community belonging in a time increasingly defined by loneliness, isolation, and rising mental health challenges.*

Recent OECD research noted that there is a correlation between students' sense of belonging at school and their academic achievement. Since the schools as community hubs approach prioritizes students' needs and achievement as part of its framework, this focus seeps into the interpersonal relationships among faculty, staff, and students. Students speaking during the Dialogue field trip to East English Village Preparatory Academy at Finney mentioned that they felt that their teachers cared about their lives, and that support pushed them to succeed. In some communities, schools may be one of the only public facilities open to all citizens, regardless of background and income. By broadening schools' community outreach by providing supports to all community members in addition to just students, individuals can get easier access to essential services, and learn about public programs from which they can benefit.

Based on what we have learned from the Dialogue, the project team recommends that APEC take two (2) steps to further this work down the line:

*1. Collect information on promising practices that reduce barriers to achievement from around the region.*

An initial database has been developed, which includes presentations and briefing materials from event speakers. Officials and experts from APEC economies are encouraged to reference these materials. They can also post their economies' materials on community-hubs-related topics in the database for others' review.

[Click here to access the database.](#)

*2. Pursue additional work and projects on best practices related to supplementary academic interventions and extracurricular activities.*

Studies have shown that supplementary academic interventions, like high-dosage tutoring, after-school programs, and summer learning opportunities, can help students improve in specific subjects and gain months or years in achievement. Extracurricular activities, such as clubs and sports leagues, can also promote students' sense of belonging and improve their academic performance. In the past, APEC economies have undertaken projects that

focused on the potential for extracurricular activities to foster cross-cultural understanding in the region. However, more work needs to be done in the HRDWG to examine how these opportunities enhance learning and development.

Although schools may have limited capacity to offer these interventions and activities, community stakeholders can be promising partners and collaborate on program implementation. In the APEC context, it is worth discussing how private sector firms can support capacity building for these initiatives in ways that more directly contribute to economic growth.

## Appendix: APEC Project Evaluation Survey for the APEC Education Officials' Dialogue on Schools as Community Hubs

Thank you for participating in the APEC Education Officials Dialogue: Schools as Community Hubs project. As a participant, your feedback on the design and implementation of the project and the dialogue event, held 14-15 May 2023 in Detroit, will be invaluable to our evaluation of the project's impact and planning for future APEC work in the field of community schools.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements listed in the following table and respond to the questions below, providing comments and explanations where possible.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Comments
The objectives of the dialogue were clearly defined				
The project achieved its intended objectives				
The agenda items and topics covered were relevant				
The content was well organized and easy to follow				
Gender issues were sufficiently addressed during implementation				
The experts were well prepared and knowledgeable about the topic				
The materials distributed were useful				
The time allotted for the dialogue was sufficient				



1. Please rate the quality of the keynote address, panel discussions, and group reflection and share-out on Day 1 of the Dialogue, 14 May?

5	4	3	2	1	
very high	high	medium	low	very low	N/A – did not attend

2. Please rate the quality of the field trip to the East English Village Preparatory Academy at Finney, the panel discussion, and group reflection and share-out on Day 2 of the Dialogue, 15 May?

5	4	3	2	1	
very high	high	medium	low	very low	N/A – did not attend

3. How relevant was this project to you and your economy?

5	4	3	2	1
very high	high	medium	low	very low

4. In your view what were the project's results/achievements?

5. What new skills and knowledge did you gain from this event?

6. Rate your level of knowledge of and skills in the topic prior to participating in the event:

5	4	3	2	1
very high	high	medium	low	very low

7. Rate your level of knowledge of and skills in the topic after participating in the event:

5	4	3	2	1
very high	high	medium	low	very low

8. How will you apply the project's content and knowledge gained at your workplace? Please provide examples (e.g., develop new policy initiatives, organise trainings, develop work plans/strategies, draft regulations, develop new procedures/tools etc.).
9. What needs to be done next by APEC? Are there plans to link the project's outcomes to subsequent collective actions by fora or individual actions by economies?
10. How could this project have been improved? Please provide comments on how to improve the project, if relevant.

Participant information (identifying information is optional):

Name:

Email:

Organization/Economy (*required*):

Gender (*required*): M / F / Other/Prefer not to answer