The Gifts of Partnership: Community Engagement Fundamentals

School Advisory Committee Conference

Version Date: December 1, 2025

Presented By:
- Natasha Jackson, Executive Advisor, Inclusive Communities and Systems
- Caroline Hemstock, Senior Corporate Policy Analyst

Department of Municipal Affairs

NOVA SCOTIA

What To Expect

Learn the fundamentals of community engagement and learn why it matters.

Consider how to apply equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) lenses to help you engage your school communities in an inclusive way.

Participate in a hands-on community mapping exercise for your SAC.

Mentimeter

1. What brought you to this session?
2. When it comes to engaging with my school community, I am...
3. The gift that I'd like to share with my school community is...

https://www.menti.com/alo64gtpzw6o

Code: 7743 9018

What brought you to this session?

Most popular

interest 32	community 24	principal 24
sac chair 18		

Also prominent

ideas 17	sac 15	learning 11	curiosity 9
engagement 9	knowledge 9	chair 7	

Other responses

asset mapping 5 · n 5 · networking 5 · community engagement 4 · curious 4

you 4 · car 3 · collaboration 3 · interested 3 · my car 3 · admin 2

change 2 · community involvement 2 · connection 2 · education 2 · ferry 2

funding 2 · gifts 2 · growth 2 · hotel 2 · how different all 2 · impact 2

improvement 2 · inclusion 2 · information 2 · inspiration 2 · k 2 · kids 2

Show less

| this is my passion | 2 | to learn more | 2 | treats | 2 | understanding | 2 | work | 2 |

a 1   advocating 1   always wanting to learn 1   an invitation 1   as work 1

better engagement opps 1   bicycle 1   big big ideas 1   boss 1   care 1

communauté 1   communication 1   community care 1   community minded 1

community partnership 1   community partnerships 1   community wisdom 1

connecting 1   connecting with community 1   connectiojn 1   connections 1

connectivity 1   currious 1   default 1   desire to engage more 1

desire to learn 1   didnt want to move 1   diversity 1   duty 1   eecd team 1

email 1   engagement is important 1   engaging 1   expectation 1   free food 1

friend s 1   full attention 1   fun 1   fundraising 1   gerry 1

get more community 1   gift 1   goals 1   growing our community 1   guidance 1

guilt 1   h 1   help 1   hi 1   i care 1   i like community 1

i want to engqge more 1   ideas to engage community 1   improving school communit 1

influence 1   inspiretoon 1   interest in community 1   interest in involvement 1

interesting topic 1   invited as sac ch Show less jeep 1   job 1   joy 1

leadership 1 learning and development 1 learning is fun 1

learning opportunities 1 lesser of 3 evils 1 lets make change 1 location 1

looking for ideas 1 looking for new ideas 1 looking for tips 1 love for school 1

make a difference 1 meaningful connection 1 missed the questions 1

most comfortable seats 1 movement 1 my child 1 my children 1 my duty 1

my job 1 need 1 need for my school 1 new ideas 1 o 1 only option 1

opportunity to engage 1 out of other options 1 outreach 1 partage 1

partnership 1 partnership ideas 1 partnership is powerful 1 passion 1

peera 1 principal - required 1 priority 1 professional development 1

public education 1 recruitment 1 responsibility 1 role 1

role as an administrator 1 sac chairman 1 sac co-chair 1 sac first year chair 1

sac pd 1 school 1 sharing 1 shoes 1 show me the money 1

sounded interesting 1 stale coffee 1 start with gifts not defi 1 strategies 1

strong 1 struggle for engagement 1 support 1 the need for diversity 1

to engage with community 1 topic Show less 1 um 1

When it comes to engaging with my school community, I am...

A bit lost and unsure where to start

24

Starting out and excited to learn more

142

Well-versed in community engagement. I feel competent and confident

82

20%   40%   60%   80%   100%

The gift that I like to share with my school community is…

Most popular

time	39

Also prominent

kindness	17	positivity	17	support	16

Other responses

experience	11	passion	11	connection	10	collaboration	9	compassion	7
enthusiasm	7	joy	7	knowledge	7	communication	6	engagement	6
charisma	4	empathy	4	humour	4	caring	3	commitment	3	energy	3
growth	3	ideas	3	listening	3	my time	3	advocacy	2	advocating	2
capacity	2	care	2	community	2	connections	2	dedication	2
excitement	2	food	2	involvement	2	leadership	2	mentorship	2
opportunity	2	organization	2	patience	2	relationships	2	willing to learn	2

Show less

a voice　1　action　1　at　　　availability　1　being present　1

What is Community Engagement?

The Government of Nova Scotia defines community engagement as collaborative process aimed at strengthening partnerships and ensuring inclusive, transparent involvement of community members at every stage.
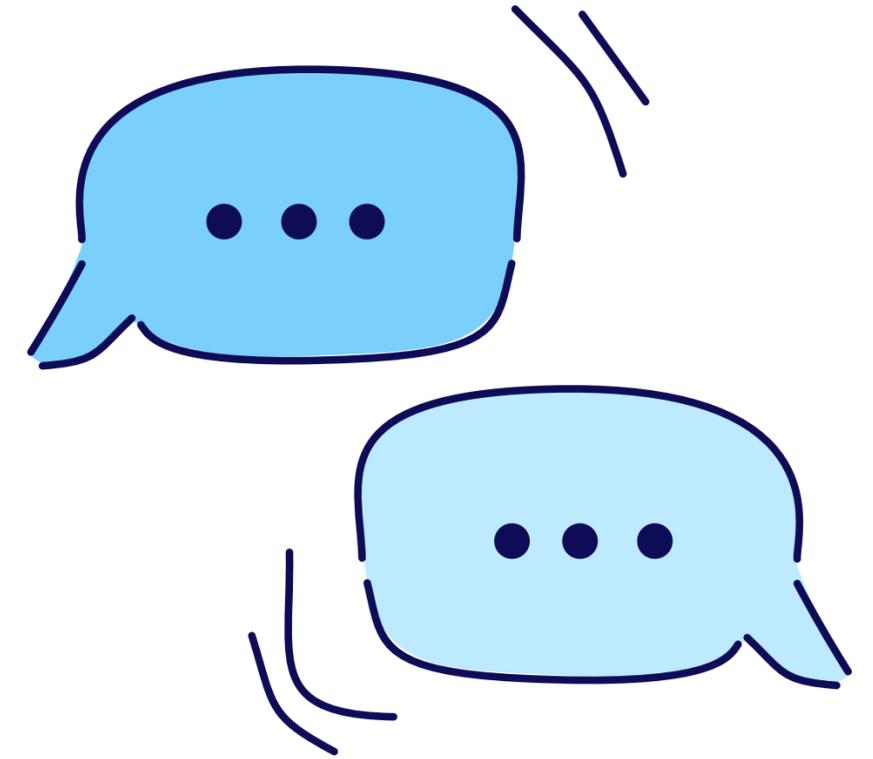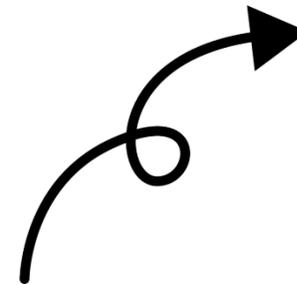
Why it matters now more than ever

- Schools were never homogenous AND demographics are changing rapidly
- Understanding the demographics and self-identification students helps paint an accurate picture of a school community
  - In 2024-25, 6% of students identified as Indigenous, 8.1% as African Descent
  - In 2020, Education integrated a non-binary gender option in the self-identification survey
- It is essential to know who students are and the communities you serve
- Engaging with diverse groups within your school community can help schools better support students

Pair Conversation

- Think about your SAC. Talk to the person next to you about:
    - Who's around the table of your SAC now?
    - Who's missing?
    - What are the barriers to them joining?
    - How will you help reduce these barriers so that they can participate?

Share back

- 2 tables share 1 takeaway from their discussion

Start with Gifts Not Deficits

01 **Everyone has gifts or strengths to contribute to their community**

02 **Focus on aspirations and abilities not what is lacking or wrong with a community** (e.g., incidents of violence, not enough time or money, etc.)

03 **See resources everywhere** - families, communities and schools are full of gifts to be discovered and engaged

04 **Value relationships and partnerships -** Strong and meaningful connections between people are the foundation of change. Collaborate in ways that demonstrate mutual respect and honour self-determination

05 **Speak and behave in an inclusive way** - words and actions shape how we see people, situations, and possibilities

Adapted from Jeder Institute Participatory Community Building Guidebook

Community Asset Mapping

Asset mapping is the process of identifying and documenting the skills, capacities, resources, and priorities within any community.

1. Individual Gifts and Talents
The gifts, skills, and talents of neighbors

2. Associations
Small, voluntary groups led by residents

3. Institutions
Organizations of paid staff (businesses, nonprofits, government)

4. Physical Space
Physical assets such as parks, lakes, etc.

5. Economy and Exchange
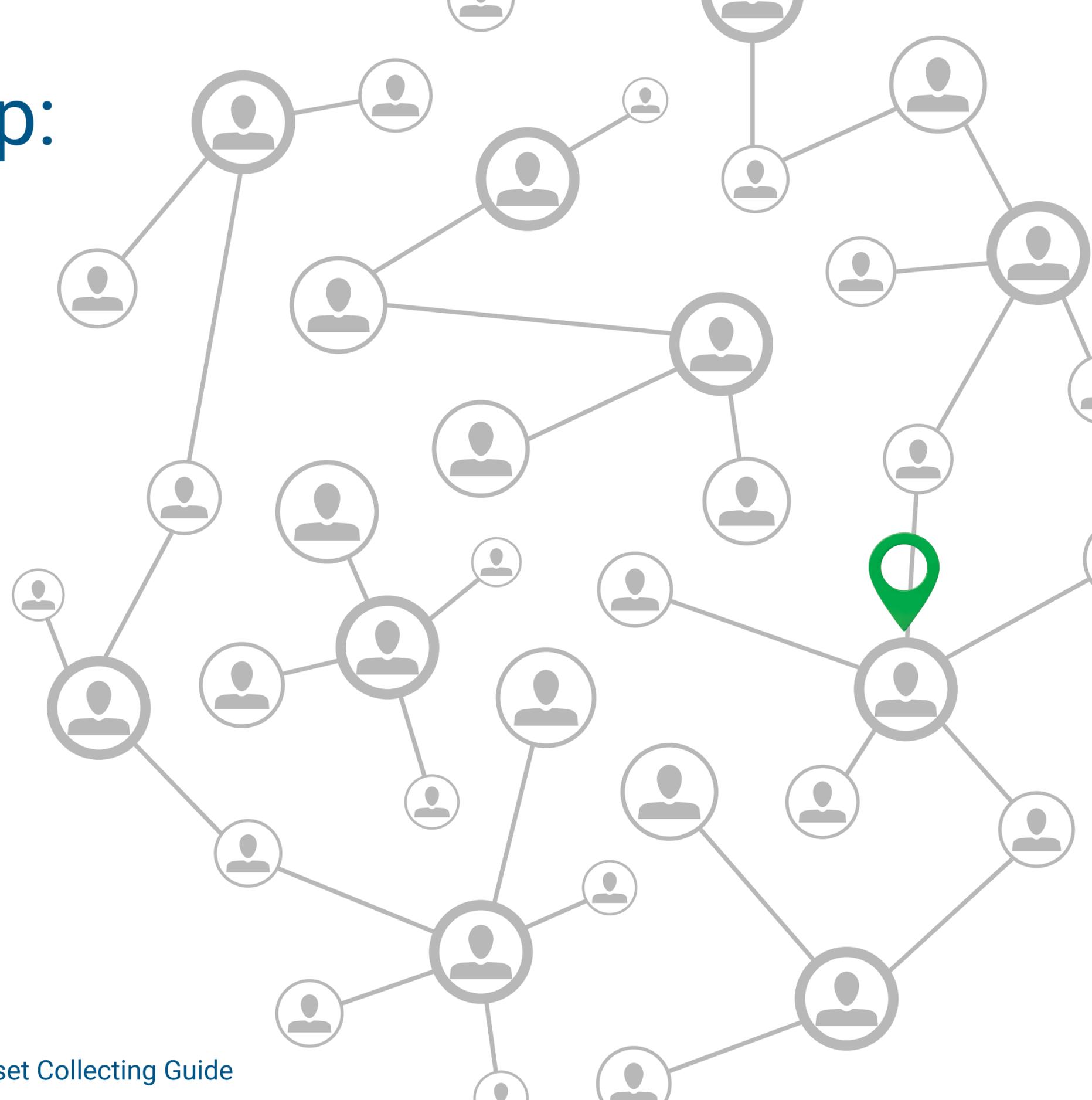*Spaces of exchange, barter, business*

6. Culture and Stories   *Local stories, cultures, and traditions*

Individuals — Associations — Physical Assets — Institutional — Local Economy — Culture / Stories

OUR COMMUNITY ASSETS

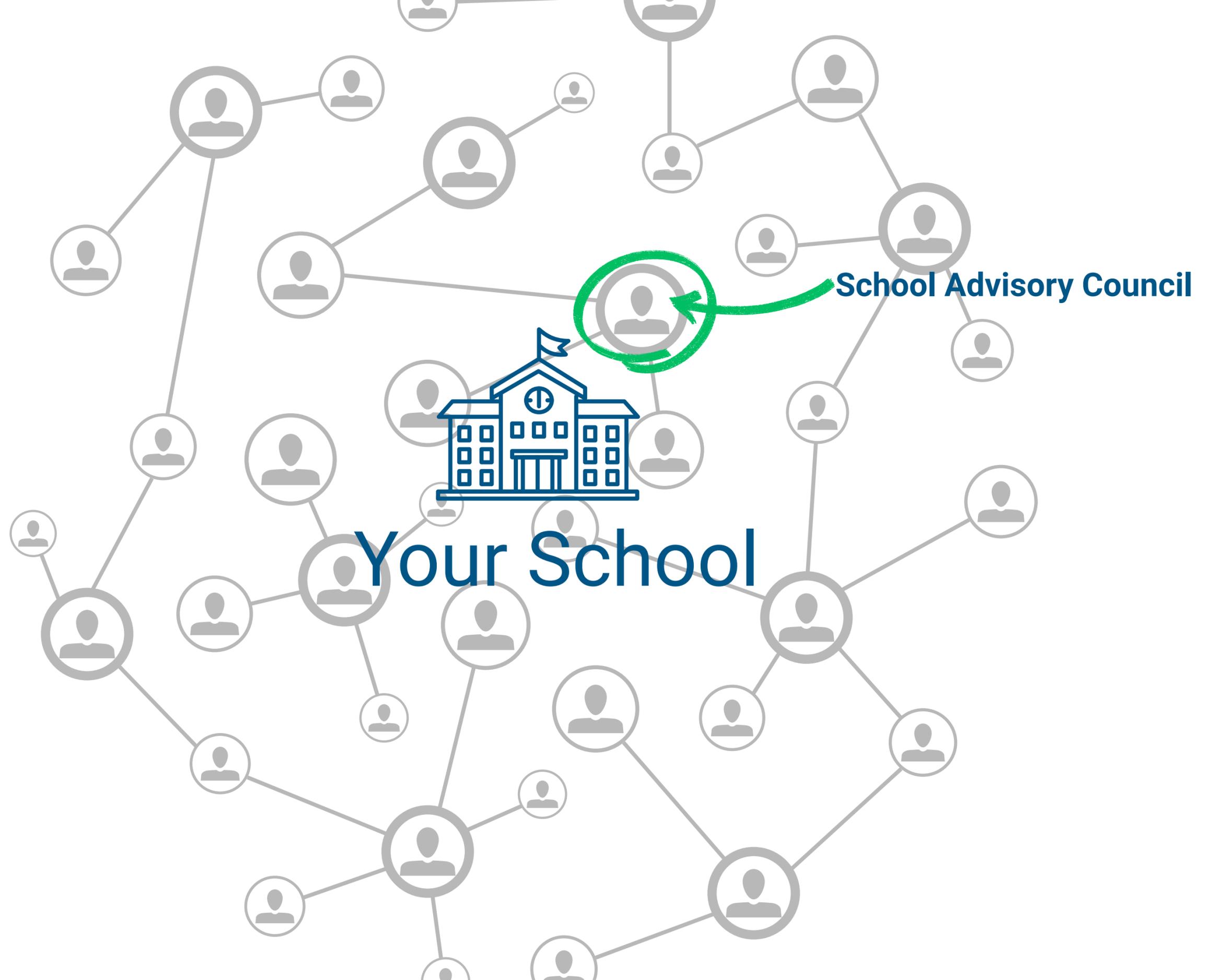Source: Asset Based Community Development Institute

Community Asset Map: Things to consider

- Although a geographic map may be helpful for context, it's not a traditional map
- Asset mapping cannot be done the same in every community (when you have seen one community, you have only seen one community)
- It's about connecting not counting
- Scale is important... the smaller the scale, the easier it is to build trust and relationships and to make connections

Source: City of Calgary - Community Asset Collecting Guide

Mapping Exercise

School Advisory Council

Your School

Individual	Associations	Institutions	Physical Space	Economy, Exchange & Resources	Local Stories and Culture
What individual gifts exist in your school community? Or what gifts would you like to share? Skills, talents, experiences, professional and personal resources, leadership or networks **Your answers**	**What associations exist in your school community?** Examples: Sports associations, resident groups/ ethnocultural or religious association, hobby and interest clubs, cultural and religious groups, home-based enterprises, cooperatives, and non-profits (e.g., cultural and family resource centres)	**What institutions exist in your school community?** Examples: Universities, care facilitates, faith-based organizations, libraries or municipal buildings or community centres	**What physical spaces exist in your school community?** Examples: Municipal and provincial parks, recreation facilities (municipal, provincial and private), modes of transportation, informal gathering places (e.g., gas station, childcare centres)	**What resources are available to your school community?** Examples: Funding for eligible SACs, digital spaces like Facebook groups, donated items, volunteer hours, free adverting in community papers or newsletters, free room rentals, printing, etc.	**What history, cultures, languages, foods, and stories enrich your school community?**

Share back

- 2 tables share 1 takeaway from their discussion

Mentimeter

1. What resonated most with you during the session?
2. What is one association or institution your SAC could partner with this year?
3. Share one action you'll take to engage with your school community this month.

https://www.menti.com/alo64gtpzw6o

Code: 7743 9018

What resonated most with you during the session?

The need for diversity

A collective commitment to doing our best for children and their families

How different all of our schools and community are

SAC 101 for Chairs

SAC policy

Resources persons were able to share

Partners

Engaging with diverse groups within my school community to help better support students.

Community asset mapping

Recognizing the community connections with the school that exist.

Asset- focused approach

The asset map

the gifts available in each community

The collaboration with other people.

Mapping

Here are many avenues for support that we aren't exploring yet.

Asset Mapping

Community engagement

Having hybrid options for in person and virtual

Asset mapping

The mapping exercise. Great way to get thinking about the gifts my school has

Show less

Discussing what others are doing to build their capacity.

Asset Mapping is a great place to start

Asset mapping

Asset mapping

Taking mapping back to my SAC

Taking a genuine intentional look at SAC membership.

Opportunity

Remembering to be actively aware of inclusion

Asset mapping

Reaching out to community businesses and explore what the community has to offer

Accessibility

Systems approach to recognizing community resources

Community mapping

Asset mapping

T

Needing more diverse members.

Community support is so important

Diversity of sacs/schools

Community asset mapping

The importance of recruiting SAC members

Volunteers needed

Representation

We are all different

Show less

Connection

Share one action you'll take to engage with your school community this month.

Most popular

asset mapping 12

Also prominent

reach out 4

Other responses

mapping 3   recruitment 3   asset map 2   asset mapping with sac 2

concert 2   meet 2   reach out to community 2   acadian credit union 1

actively pursuing assets 1   apply for a grant 1   awareness 1   chat with seniors 1

christmas dinner 1   communication 1   community asset mapping 1

community mapping 1   consoder volunteer apprec 1   data review 1

demographic report 1   do the asset map with sac 1   engage with seniors 1

engaging community 1   expand seats on the sac 1   forming stronger ties 1

fundraisers 1   hrm rec 1   impr   Show less   cation 1   increase sources of data 1

demographic report 1

do the asset map with sac 1

engage with seniors 1

engaging community 1

expand seats on the sac 1

forming stronger ties 1

fundraisers 1

hrm rec 1

improve communication 1

increase sources of data 1

integrate cultures 1

k 1

lions club 1

lobbying city government 1

look for grants 1

looking around our commun 1

map out needs 1

mappinh 1

meetings 1

more sac awareness 1

more voices 1

multi culture potluck 1

multicultural potluck 1

outreach 1

parent meeting 1

reach out to individuals 1

reaching out to local bus 1

recruit new members 1

research associations 1

sac 1

share info 1

take mapping back to sac 1

team building 1

town 1

visit senior home 1

volunteer 1

volunteer at school 1

volunteering 1

Show less

Healthy schools partnership	The Youth Project?
NSCC	4H
Feeder schools.	Undercurrent
Municipality	Community association
Unsure	Chebucto minor hockey
Local food / business	Town Council
PTA!	Local youth club
Food banks	Lions Club
Community health board	NSCC
Rec department	Youth Club

Show less

Theatre group	Municipality
Local businesses	Dalhousie
Ministerial advisory councils	Sobeys
Jump Math	Other school
Municipality	Community Req Centre
Citadel High	MSVU
Business Association	Minor Football association
Local business association	Council on African Canadian education
Public Library	Local MLA. B.McGuire
Council on Mi'kmaq Education	Recreation
Lions club	Food bank
Dalhousie	HPS

Show less

Resource List

Online Resources like the Asset-Based Community Development Institute tools

Members of your school community and local school and municipal staff (e.g., community developers, recreation)

SAC Innovation Fund

SAC Handbook

Thank you!