



Every School a Community School

There are 16.4 million children living in poverty in the United States. More than one million children fell into poverty between 2009 and 2010; almost a half million fell into extreme poverty.

Schools are charged with helping these, and all children, gain the tools needed to become successful, contributing members of society. Dramatic challenges – the persisting achievement gap, high early chronic absenteeism and dropout rates, poor health and family instability are barriers to learning that prevent far too many children, particularly children living in poverty, from reaching their potential. Schools, by themselves, cannot address all the needs of today’s students. All across the country, teachers and school administrators observe that they “cannot do it alone.” Partners are required to help provide the supports, opportunities and services needed by students and their families, in an integrated and coordinated way, to dramatically improve student outcomes.

Community schools are a strategic response to these realities. Community schools do not use poverty or other barriers to learning as an excuse for children not succeeding in school; instead they leverage community resources – resources that schools on their own wouldn’t be able to access – to effectively and efficiently remove barriers so that children are *prepared to learn*. No two community schools are exactly alike; however all community schools share some core principles. They:

- Operate jointly through a partnership between schools and community organizations – schools and their community partners share accountability for a vision and set of outcomes;
- Are open most of the time and integrate the core instructional program with expanded learning opportunities after-school, weekends and during the summer;
- Provide school-based or school-linked medical, dental and mental health services through a lead partner or other service providers; and
- Provide opportunities for families to be engaged in the school and offer educational and social services for families and community members.

Results from all over the country have demonstrated that community schools increase attendance (both student and teacher), engage parents and improve student achievement.ⁱ Additionally, the evaluations of individual wrap-around supports have shown that school-based health clinics result in the provision of cost-effective medical careⁱⁱ, asthma initiatives are correlated with reductions in asthma symptoms and improved asthma management and attendance by asthmatic studentsⁱⁱⁱ, and afterschool programs improve student achievement and aspirations^{iv}. In addition, community schools are being proven effective as a school turnaround strategy in districts across the country.

Community Schools in a National Context

Over the past two decades—as policymakers, educators and human service leaders became acutely aware of the achievement and opportunity gaps—community schools have become an educational reform strategy across the United States. Several nationally recognized models emerged, including one developed by The Children’s Aid Society in New York City. Cities such as Chicago, Portland (OR), Boston, Salt Lake City and Kent County (MI) have adapted the Children’s Aid model, often

with a child welfare or family service organization as the lead partner. For example, in Chicago, the Children's Home + Aid in Illinois played a major role in assisting then-Chicago Public Schools CEO, Arne Duncan, in transforming 150 Chicago Public Schools into community schools. And, currently, more and more districts, such as Oakland, CA, Evansville, IN, Cincinnati, OH and Hartford, CT are adopting community schools as a district-wide school reform strategy.

Since Mr. Duncan became the U.S. Secretary of Education in January, 2009, he has publicly supported community schools. Some guidelines released by USDOE have included the community schools strategy (sometimes called community-oriented schools), as well as programmatic components of community schools, as allowable uses of new and existing federal funding streams.^v There has been movement in the right direction; however we have a long way to go to get these ideas into the water supply of every school district around the country.

However, just as schools can't do it alone, the USDOE can't do it alone either. Alignment between federal agencies to coordinate federal policies relating to children is essential. The Fostering Connections to Success Act (2008) intends to improve positive educational outcomes for foster children – a group of young people who too often fall through the cracks. The goals of this law will only be fully realized with strong collaboration between the child welfare and education systems. Community schools offer an ideal platform for effectively addressing newly mandated requirements. In addition, there are other federal opportunities aligned with the community schools strategy such as: Promise Neighborhoods, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and the inclusion of school-based health centers in CHIP reauthorization and in Health Care Reform. These examples illustrate the importance of a strong relationship between the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services and other federal agencies that provide funding for children's services.

Community Schools as a Policy Priority for Children's Home Society of America

The Children's Home Society of America (CHSA) has identified community schools as a key policy priority because CHSA member agencies have considerable experience effectively addressing barriers to learning, particularly in the areas of mental health, family services and family engagement – often named by school principals as the top unmet needs of their students. CHSA believes that if we don't leverage the human and financial resources of both the education and human service sectors at a much larger scale, we will miss a critical opportunity. CHSA agencies are committed to building relationships at the state and local levels to better integrate and coordinate services and opportunities for children. Community schools are a vehicle for realizing this vision.

Recommendations

1. Support the inclusion of community schools in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) through the Promise Neighborhoods Act of 2011, which authorizes grants to incentivize partnerships between schools, parents, business leaders, higher education institutions, and community-based organizations in order to ensure the success of our nation's youth. In addition, CHSA supports making community schools an allowable turnaround model and the inclusion throughout the bill of partnerships between schools and high-quality community-based organizations designed to improve student outcomes.
2. Encourage states and localities, through clear language and incentives, to include comprehensive approaches to school reform, such as community schools, in applications for federal funding including 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Parent and Family Information and Resource Centers, Race to the Top, i3, Promise Neighborhoods and School Improvement Grants.^{vi}
3. Build bridges and align resources among federal departments charged with supporting children and youth using community schools as an organizing vehicle – place-based strategy – to drive the

alignment of vision, policy and funding streams. Federal agencies that should be involved include, but are not limited to DOE, HHS, HUD, Labor, DOJ, USDA and the Corporation for National and Community Service and the White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative.

ⁱ Coalition for Community Schools Research Brief: http://communityschools.org/CCSDocuments/CCS_Research_Report2009.pdf. See also The Children's Aid Society/Board of Education Community Schools: Third-Year Evaluation Report, 1999, by Anthony Cancelli (Fordham University Graduate School of Education) and Ellen Brickman, Arturo Sanchez and Glenda Rivera (Fordham University Graduate School of Social Service).

ⁱⁱ Larsen, C, et al 2009. "A Comparison of Urban School-and Community-Based Dental Clinics" American School Health Association: Journal of School Health Vol. 79, No. 3.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nicholas, SW, et al 2005. "Reducing Childhood Asthma through Community-Based Service Delivery – New York City, 2001-2004, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report" *Washington, DC: Center on Disease Control Vol. 54, No. 1.*

^{iv} Children's Aid Society 21st Century Community Learning Centers Afterschool Programs at Six Middle Schools: Final Report of a Three-Year Evaluation, 2004-2007, prepared by Kira Krenichyn, Helene Clark, Lymari Benitez of ActKnowledge July 2008.

^v American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009: Using ARRA Funds to Drive School Reform and Improvement and Department of Education guidelines for the Race to the Top Fund (Federal Register)

^{vi} With a portion of its Race to the Top award, New York State released a competitive funding stream called the School Innovation Fund. The grant targets low-performing schools (but not PLA at the time of award). LEAs can only be funded if they are engaged in high quality partnerships with organizations that have a proven track record of improving student outcomes. Grants will fund one of six design frameworks. One of these frameworks is called Full-Service (wrap-around service) Design. This strategy defines a full service school as a community school that is jointly operated and financed through a partnership between the school system and one or more community agencies. The schools must expand learning time through academic enrichment activities; provide meaningful opportunities for parent and community engagement; and offer services and programs that remove barriers to learning, such as medical and mental health care and full-service schools. New York State's School Innovation Fund is an example of advancing and incentivizing innovation through high-quality partnerships to meet the diverse and complex needs of students and their families to ensure they succeed.