



Remarks made by Ira Harkavy, Director, Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania; Coalition Chair

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Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*

I'm here with you today as chair of the Coalition for Community Schools. The Coalition is the largest alliance of its kind in the country concerned with the success of young people, their families, and communities. It includes leaders from more than 160 organizations in education, youth development, health and human services, family support, community development, government and philanthropy. The Coalition knows and believes firmly that schools have a primary role in educating all of our children. We believe, however, that schools do not, indeed they cannot, educate all children by themselves. Community has a major role to play. The community school is the best vehicle for effectively mobilizing community assets to support student learning. We hear too little about the role and responsibility of the community or the institutions of the community in the current debate about education.

The purpose of this briefing is to share the Coalition's new report on community schools, *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools* and to bring you living, breathing proof through our panelists of the effectiveness of community schools. We believe, and this report and our discussions today will show, that community schools can make the major difference in the success of all of America's children.

Let me acknowledge before going further, the leadership that many people have provided to the Coalition of Community Schools and to community school developments across the country. A number of the members of the steering committee are here today. We also have representatives from a number of the national community school model builders, including the Beacon Schools Network, Children's Aid Society of New York, Communities in Schools, the National Community Education Association, the Schools of the 21st Century at Yale, and the University-Assisted Community School Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

I'm a historian. So, therefore, I want to provide a brief history – it has to be brief, I was told. (Chuckles.) The idea of community schools is not new, it is as American as apple pie. It is deeply embedded in the history of this country. It can be found in John Dewey's powerful, "Schools as Social Centers," delivered to the National Education Association. Dewey actually developed his idea, as he himself acknowledged, from the settlers, particularly from Jane Addams, and her work at Hull House in Chicago; and from Lillian Wald and her work at Henry Street Settlement in New York. Addams and Wald believed that although every neighborhood did not have a settlement house, every neighborhood had a public school, and those schools could and should be centers of the community.

Community schools also have roots in the important work that developed out of Flint, Michigan, and the Mott Foundation's work. Since the 1930s, Mott has played an ongoing and critical role in helping schools function as anchors of their communities, involving adults as well as young people in lifelong learning and in democratic community-building. And there have been other examples, examples from rural communities –Arthurdale, West Virginia and Ballard,

Kentucky -- and the work of Elsie Clapp, and urban communities, such as East Harlem and the work of Leonard Covello at Benjamin Franklin High School in the 1930s and 40s. Since the late 1980s, community schools have grown and become more and more widespread, mobilizing the assets of communities to address barriers to learning, barriers resulting from poverty, from changing demographics, and the other issues that necessarily arrive at the schoolhouse door.

And, since the 1980s, there have been new partnerships formed across the country, forged with local schools-- partnerships with community-based organizations, social service organizations, universities, cities and state governments. These partners are working with schools to create community schools as centers of learning, growth and development of the entire population of that community. And community schools, of course, received a major boost in recent years from the 21st Century Learning Centers Program, which focus on providing safe places with opportunities for successful development and learning in the critical after-school hours. The 21st Century Learning Centers Program has been a catalyst for community education and community school development. And with the passage in 2002 of No Child Left Behind, an act that makes the statement that all -- all -- children have to succeed educationally, we face new challenges and opportunities. The education legislation certainly incorporates many elements that are essential components of community schools, but they have not been emphasized nearly as much as issues of accountability, testing, and choice. The community school approach, I want to emphasize, goes beyond testing and accountability, to marshal the support necessary for all students to learn and succeed, and does this in a comprehensive way.

The Coalition for Community Schools sees community schools in the following way:

First, it's a place. It is a place built on partnerships, partnerships that mobilize the vast array of community resources to support children's learning and development. Those resources include family support services, such as crisis intervention, parent leadership development, programs that enhance family stability and reduce student mobility. They also include health and mental health services for the children in the communities.

It addresses problems that affect children in an array of areas.. You may have seen in The New York Times a piece that reported that 26 percent of students have asthma in a 24-square-block area of Harlem -- 26 percent. And it's not just a pressing health problem, but it's an education problem. That chronic ailment is significantly -- in fact, most-- responsible for school absences of low-income children

It also provides programs in the after-school hours, after-school development opportunities that involve young people in constructive activities that enrich learning opportunities during the peak hours for juvenile crime. Half of all schoolteachers cite isolation in non-school hours as a primary reason for students' academic struggles.

And community schools provide parenting and adult education and employment training that enable adults to enhance their skills and income, to improve their positions so that they can support the education of their children more effectively.

The community school is also a resource. It's a resource and a curriculum-enhancing resource itself. It is a resource for student civic engagement, for the democratic development of democratic citizens. The issues and the problems of the community become a focus of children's learning. The children learn as they serve and serve as they learn, and the school itself becomes a center for democratic deliberation. It becomes a center for the education of young people to be contributing, creative, democratic citizens of a democratic society.

Community schools, simply put, then, recognize that multiple supports, multiple resources – physical, emotional, social, as well as academic -- are required for all children, all students to succeed. Those resources are required to strengthen families and strengthen communities to contribute to student success, to contribute to the community, and to contribute to society. Community schools help to overcome the isolation of too many schools from their communities, and it returns schools essentially to their rightful central place as centers of the community, as institutions which nurture our future citizens and build our democracy. Strengthening citizenship and democracy could not be more important in these difficult times. For education is not only key to individual success, it is key to societal success, it is key to our nation's future, it is key to the future of the world. Community schools are crucial if America is to fulfill the democratic promise of America for all Americans – for all Americans. For us to fulfill our democratic promise as a nation requires community schools for all of our children..

And the polling data shows that American people support the idea of community schools and schools as centers of community. Data from Knowledge Works Foundation of Ohio, demonstrates that the American people support the idea of community schools, and that schools necessarily should be centers of communities. Ninety-one percent of those surveyed favor comprehensive after-school programs. Eighty-four percent favor community members using school facilities in after-school hours. Sixty-two percent favor local communities locating social services in schools for children and communities. And sixty-five percent favor locating community programs for adults on school grounds.

The data shows, experience shows, and the research shows, that the need is evident. The vision is clear and the public's support is in place for community schools to become the norm for American schooling and education. And now we have the research that demonstrates the impact of community schools on students, families, and community members.

And for a view of that very important research, let me introduce Marty Blank. Marty is the staff director for the Coalition of Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership. Marty has been an inspirational leader to this most important work and, with his wonderful colleagues at the Coalition, have put "Making the Difference" together. Marty Blank.

(Applause.)

Closing:

MR. HARKAVY: No benedictions, no benedictions. First of all, I want to thank these extraordinary panelists. You want to know what community schools are about? It's about people like this working together to make a difference. So I just want to thank the panelists.

(Applause.) I also want to thank Marty Blank and Noelani Schneider and Bela Shah, and the entire staff of the Coalition for Community Schools.. And I want to thank Bela Shah, Tia Melaville and Marty Blank for this landmark report. It makes the case that community schools make the difference in student learning, and I want to thank them for their good and hard work – (inaudible, applause).

Mayor Cicillini remarked that we you cannot afford not to have community schools. Why is it too expensive not to have community schools? It's too expensive not to have them because we cannot afford the conditions facing young people, we cannot afford the inadequate, substandard learning experiences that young people have in this country. We all know how devastating the statistics are: the number of young people who drop out of school, the number of young people in prisons, the health conditions facing the young, and the abysmal achievement of young people in schools. The chasm of separation between the haves and have-nots in America's "Tale of Two Cities," that was described, gets wider every single day.

We must provide for all young people in this society what is provided for middle and upper-middle-class children by their families and their communities.. If America is to be a genuine democracy for all, it has to be society with good democratic schooling for all. Our schools must do their job well and do their job well for all children. Community schools help to create strong schools and strong communities.

Why do we have to afford community schools? Because they help in all the ways that have been described. It helps by allowing time for learning. It helps by providing additional resources and by providing the services that young people in communities need. It helps by providing a resource for learning, where young people are able to focus on the issues and needs in their communities to better develop their skills.

Why do we have to afford community schools? We have to afford community schools because without community schools, the very agencies and organizations that support these schools will not be able to do their job well. And why do we have to afford community schools? Because it is the best way to assure that no child is left behind.

(Applause.)