ANTIOCH HIGH SCHOOL: MEETING THE BASIC NEEDS OF STUDENTS SO THEY CAN THRIVE

One of the ideas that is paramount to the concept of community schools is that when you bring in community partners to serve the needs of students, they can focus more on the their academics and less on the hindrances they bring into school each day. A prime example of this concept in action is happening at Antioch High School in Nashville, TN. In terms of ethnic and economic diversity, Antioch is one of highest need schools in the Nashville area. Of the 2,058 students in Antioch, more than 70 percent are from minority backgrounds and 74 percent are economically disadvantaged. Antioch became a community school in 2011 under the Academies of Nashville who received the federal DOE Small Learning Communities grant. Since its inception as a community school, Antioch has been serving the basic needs of its students and families for things such as food, clothing shelter, and basic social and emotional health. The necessity of this new system is apparent to Nicole Hill, Family Resource Center Manager at Antioch. “If you’re hungry, you can’t concentrate. You can feed the body to feed the mind”, stated Nicole. This is an issue being targeted by the Antioch food bank. A food pantry at Antioch that is described as having a “limitless supply of food,” all due to the contributions of community partners. It is a valuable resource for parents, and even in some degrees, more for students who are described as “using [the pantry] more than parents do,” stated Nicole.

Antioch also tackles the issue of shortages in clothing through a pre-existing clothing drive designed by student’s with the help of the schools coordinator through the school’s leadership curriculum. Students have taken it upon to establish partnerships with the thrift mart. For every bin of clothing donated, the neighborhood’s Thrift Mart donates a $25 dollar gift card to be used to provide clothing for families. Collaborations like this are possible because the community schools strategy brings together pre-existing resources from organizations that really know their communities well, and brings them to the school as the hub of the community. “We have partners that have a great awareness among the community about where their needs are”, stated Nicole. “Partners would come to us and say we’re already surveying a dozen members in your community; we know what’s happening. We think on-site counseling is a good service”.

These are programs at Antioch that are having proven results. In the school’s mental health support group for young women, 100% of all participants attended high school regularly. In character building classes, 84% of students maintained or improved their behavior. In a parent life class for students who have children of their own 100% of students who attended still attend high school on a regular basis and 57% maintained or improved their grades. In a system where 49% of teen moms drop out before graduating, these numbers are astounding, but for the Executive Principal of Antioch, these numbers just make sense. “To me, [the community schools strategy], is just common sense”, stated Dr. Koger, Executive Principal of Antioch High School. “We can focus on the deeper supports students need to be successful, without taking away from valuable teaching time”. It is this new change, according to Dr. Koger, that has created a complete turn-around at Antioch. “In 2010, we were designated as a low performing school”, said Dr. Koger. “However, as of this year, we have been designated as a rewards school, and for the past two years, we’ve been designated as a level 5 school for our performance growth”.

While numbers like these are astounding, they only paint one part of the picture of the successes at Antioch. One of Nicole’s personal anecdotes told the story of a young teen mom who faced the threat of being
kicked out of her own home when her parents found out she was pregnant. After overcoming this obstacle, the student began attending the school’s teen mom support group and stated that she had no plans to attend college. “At her high school graduation, I told her that you only graduate once. She told me “Miss Nicole, there are going to be two graduations for me, because I’m going to college”. It is these types of proven results that make the community schools strategy such a powerful resource for students, and so important for school and community leaders to embrace.