



Because Every Child Deserves Every Chance

Community Schools **09**

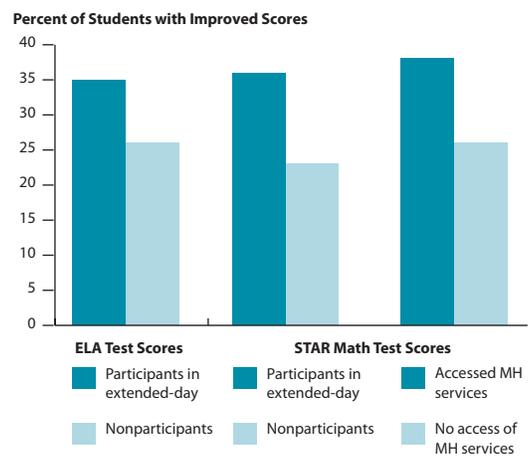
RESEARCH BRIEF

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS? WHERE ARE THEY?

In the last decade, community school initiatives have spread to localities in 49 states and the District of Columbia. The concept of community school is growing in part because it represents a vehicle for aligning the assets of students, families, teachers, and the community around a common goal—improving the success of our young people. Community schools purposefully integrate academic, health, and social services; youth and community development; and community engagement—drawing in school partners with resources to improve student and adult learning, strengthen families, and promote healthy communities.

DO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WORK? WHAT DO WE KNOW?

A growing body of research suggests that fidelity to the community school strategy yields compounding benefits for students, families, and community. Community school students show significant gains in academic achievement and in essential areas of nonacademic development. Families of community school students show increased family stability, communication with teachers, school involvement, and a greater sense of responsibility for their children’s learning. Community schools enjoy stronger parent-teacher relationships, increased teacher satisfaction, a more positive school environment, and greater community support. The community school model promotes more efficient use of school buildings and, as a result, neighborhoods enjoy increased security, heightened community pride, and better rapport among students and residents.¹ Evaluations demonstrate positive outcomes in a variety of areas.



Results of San Mateo County Community Schools study comparing 2006–07 test scores between students who participated in community school programs and nonparticipants

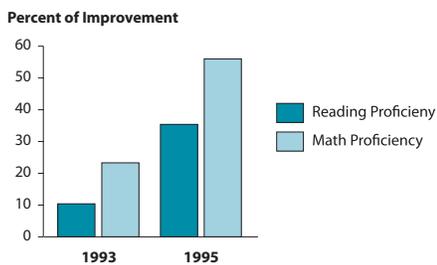
Improved Academic Performance—Reading and Math

Improvement in student academic performance is significant among community schools. An independent review of the national community school initiative, Communities in Schools, has reported that students in their schools excelled significantly in math and reading scores over students in other schools.²

The 150 schools in the Chicago Community School Initiative (CSI) have delivered standardized test results from 2001 to 2007 that show a steady closing of the achievement gap with other CPS schools. Out-of-school time, a key feature of the initiative, is linked to increased reading and math scores.³

In New York City, where the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) has shepherded their leading community school initiative, students participating in CAS after-school programs from 2004 to 2007 scored significantly higher on their math tests than students in other city schools. In the period from 2006 to 2007, 42.1 percent of students who spent more than half their time in a CAS community school met the Level 3 standard (i.e., proficient) on the state math test. From 1993 to 1995, the number of third-grade students at a CAS community school improved by 25 percentage points in reading proficiency—from 10.4 percent to 35.4 percent—and 33 percentage points in math proficiency—from 23.3 percent to 56 percent—by the fifth grade. From 2004 to 2005, middle-school youth were significantly more likely to achieve proficiency on standardized test scores if they participated regularly in community school after-school programs. Students who participated for two years were even more likely to achieve proficiency. During the 2004–05 school year, seventh- and eighth-grade students who participated in community school after-school programs performed significantly better than non-participants on reading and math tests.⁴

A study of San Mateo County Community Schools found that their most seasoned community schools had students who regularly reached Academic Performance Index standards and achieved advanced scores on the state’s English Language Arts (ELA) assessment (STAR). Compared with the previous year, student participation in extended-day activities, student and/or parent participation in mental health services, and parent participation in school programs and activities were associated with higher STAR test scores in 2006–07. Specifically, over one-third (35 percent) of youth who participated in extended-day activities improved their scores on the ELA test, while only 26 percent of non-participants improved. Over 36 percent of participants improved their scores



Early reports from the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) community school initiative showed that third-graders improved in both reading and math proficiency by fifth grade.

on the STAR math test, while only 23 percent of non-participants improved. Thirty-eight percent of students who accessed mental health services and/or whose families accessed mental health services improved their scores on the STAR math test, while just 26 percent improved if neither accessed services.

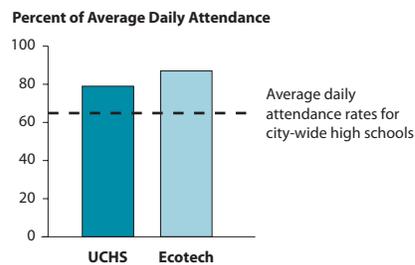
Dropout Rates Reduced—Attendance Improved

Community schools have a significant impact on reducing the dropout rate.

- ▶ Compared to dropout prevention programs with scientifically based evidence and listed in the U.S. Department of Education’s What Works Clearinghouse, Communities in Schools is one of a small number of programs to prove it keeps students in school and is the only one in the country to prove that it increases graduation rates, graduating students on time with a regular diploma.
- ▶ In Tukwila, Washington, Community Schools Collaboration’s on-time graduation rate has increased annually since 2001; the rate of absentee and drop-outs for middle and high school students also has dropped.⁵

Higher attendance in community schools contributes to improved achievement. Children in community schools want to come to school and as a result they learn more.

- ▶ In 2003–2004, findings for the Los Angeles’s BEST After School Enrichment Program showed that higher levels of participation led to better subsequent school attendance, which in turn related to higher academic achievement.⁶
- ▶ In New York City, the Children’s Aid Society students who participated in after-school programs for three or four years had better school attendance than students who participated for less time or not time at all (statistically significant).
- ▶ Nationwide, Communities in Schools found net increases in elementary, middle, and high school attendance for community schools over their matched comparison group.⁷



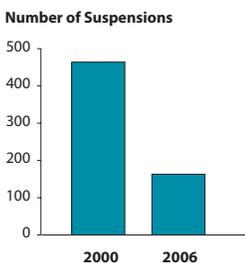
The Netter Center for Community Partnership’s two CCP partner schools—University City High Schools (UCHS) and Echotech—increased average daily attendance rates compared to average citywide high school daily attendance rates.

- ▶ In Iowa, the Eisenhower Full-Service Community School model demonstrated a significant reduction in absences for participants compared to non-participants.
- ▶ In the Cincinnati Public Schools' Community Learning Centers (CLCs), eight of nine community school sites reached their benchmark of 93 percent of students who attend daily.
- ▶ The Netter Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) at the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia) reported that CCP partner schools University City High School (UCHS) and Ecotech had average daily attendance rates of 79 percent and 87 percent respectively compared to the citywide high school average daily attendance of 65 percent.
- ▶ In Arkansas, the Schools of the 21st Century model saw a 2.2 percent decrease in absenteeism rates.

Improved Behavior and Youth Development

There are beneficial shifts in the actions, attitudes, interests, motivations, and relationships of children and youth who attend a community school.

- ▶ Chicago CSI students have consistently demonstrated significantly lower numbers of serious disciplinary incidents compared to schools with similar demographics.⁸
- ▶ Shaw Middle School, which partnered with the University of Pennsylvania, saw suspensions decrease from 464 to 163 from 2000 to 2006.
- ▶ A study of the Children's Aid Community Schools found significant increases in self-esteem and career/other aspirations for all surveyed students and decreased reports of problems with communication across all three study years.
- ▶ Results demonstrate that the quality of youth-development approaches embedded in the New York City Beacons centers helped youth learn leadership skills; youth reported that they were less likely to intentionally hurt someone physically, damage other people's property, steal money, or get into a fight.⁹



Shaw Middle School partnered with the University of Pennsylvania and saw the number of student suspensions decrease from 464 in 2000 to only 163 in 2006.

Greater Parent Involvement

When families are supported in their parenting role, involvement in their children's learning increases and student performance is strengthened. Consistent parental involvement—at home and school, at every grade level, and throughout the year—is important for students' sustained academic success.¹⁰

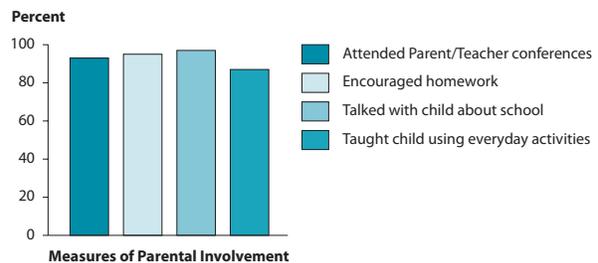
Parents of community school students are more engaged in their children's learning and are more involved in their school. In the San Mateo County Community School study, parent skills and capacities saw statistically significant improvements. Results show that 93 percent of parents attended parent/teacher conferences and a high percentage of parents encouraged their child to complete their homework (95 percent "more frequently" than "occasionally"), talked to their child about school (97 percent "more frequently" than "occasionally"), and used everyday activities to teach their child (87 percent "more frequently" than "occasionally").

Parents who receive services from the community school that their children attend are more likely to be engaged in their children's education. For example, in Carlin Springs Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, 95 percent of the adults taking ESL classes attended parent-teacher conferences.

In two other community schools—Sayre High School in Philadelphia and Independence School District in Independence, Missouri—90 percent of Family Fitness Night participants reported that they are eating healthier and exercising more. Family School liaisons conducted 17,170 home visits from 2004 to 2007.

Benefits to the Community

Community schools promote better use of school buildings and neighborhoods enjoy increased security, heightened community pride, and better rapport among students and residents. Benefits to families—such as increased physical, economic, and emotional stability—contribute to the stability of their communities. So do more and better relationships among community agencies, businesses, and civic organizations, accompanied by a greater awareness of the services they offer.¹¹



San Mateo County Community School results show that 93 percent of parents attended parent/teacher conferences, 95 percent of parents frequently encouraged their child to complete homework, 97 percent of parents frequently talked with their child about school, and 87 percent of parents frequently used everyday activities to teach their child.

Results from the Coalition's community schools national award for excellence in 2006 and 2007 revealed that in the community school initiative of Bedford Township, Michigan, over 1,400 adults participated in more than 250 adult evening-enrichment classes. Also, over 14,000 meals per year were prepared and served at the Senior Center, over 40 adults received their GED diploma, and health vans provided transportation to and from non-emergency medical appointments 365 days per year.

Community schools promote healthy relationships between youth and adults and with youth peers in their community. In SUN Community Schools in Multnomah County, Oregon, 93 percent of students reported having at least one adult they can turn to for help. SUN Community Schools collaborate with 350 business and community partners. In the 2005–06 school year, 2,163 community and business volunteers contributed 33,000 volunteer hours to SUN Community Schools. In that same school year, 16,315 children and youth and 3,142 adults were served through SUN classes and activities. In Lincoln Community Learning Centers in Lincoln, Nebraska, the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution recognizing the importance of the CLC initiative to economic development.¹²

Next Steps—An Evaluation Toolkit

Evidence is mounting in support of the community school strategy as being one of the best ways to improve outcomes for children, families, schools, and communities. Over 20 community school initiatives are conducting formative and summative evaluations to monitor their progress. In an effort to build the field, both in quantity and quality, the Coalition for Community Schools is partnering with the John Gardner Center at Stanford in 2008–09 to develop a toolkit for individual community school practitioners and community school initiatives for evaluating and modifying their practice as they continue to develop more and more effective community schools.

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ENDNOTES

- Blank, M., Melaville, A., & Shah, B. (2003). *Making the difference: Research and practice in community schools*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.
- A study of Communities in Schools, a national community school model found: net increases of +6.0% in grade 8 math and +5.1% in grade 8 reading scores for high-implementing community schools over their matched comparison group. Net increases in math scores for all grades over their comparison groups (+2.5% urban, +3.3% rural). Net increases in math for schools predominantly serving traditionally-low performing populations.
- For example, gains were recorded on the state achievement test in 2005–06 school year; "In 2001, the average CSI school had 12% fewer students meeting or exceeding expectations in reading while in 2007 CSI schools averaged only 6.9% fewer students, representing a reduction of 43% not meeting reading expectations."; "In 2001, the average CSI school had half as many students meeting or exceeding math expectations as non-CSI schools (14% versus 28%), while in 2007 the difference was only 5.1 percentage points (64.2% versus 69.3%)."
- Summary of the *Children's Aid Society community schools: Results to date*; Referenced from *21st Century Community Learning Centers at six New York City middle schools: Year one findings*, prepared by K. Krenichyn, H. Clark, N. Schaefer-McDaniel, & L. Benitez of Actknowledge, September 2005. See also *Summary of Fordham University research findings 1992–99*, prepared by Actknowledge.
- Results from the Community Schools National Award Winners for Excellence, 2006 & 2007, Coalition for Community Schools.
- Blank, M., Melaville, A., & Shah, B. (2003). *Making the difference: Research and practice in community schools*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.
- Communities in Schools found net increases of +0.2% in elementary, +0.1% in middle, and +0.3% in high school for high-implementing community schools over their matched comparison group.
- The average number of serious disciplinary incidents is consistently lower by 5 to 10 incidents annually as reported from 2002 to 2006. Chicago Public Schools, Community Schools Initiative, Office of Extended Learning Opportunities, 2008.
- Blank, M., Melaville, A., & Shah, B. (2003). *Making the difference: Research and practice in community schools*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.
- Ibid.
- Ibid.
- Results from the Community Schools National Award Winners for Excellence, 2006 & 2007, Coalition for Community Schools.



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