

Community Schools Fact Sheet

1. What is a community school?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development along with community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community Schools are centers of the community, open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends. Using public schools as a hub, community schools bring together a wide variety of partners to offer a range of services and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities.

2. What is the difference between a community school, full service community school, extended service schools, etc.?

The term community school offers the broadest definition of the relationship between school and community. Many people use the various terms interchangeably; others use them differently. The concept is purposefully flexible to allow communities to look at their own needs and assets and determine their own vision of school and community relationships. But the goal is always the same – to develop partnerships and strategies that help to achieve better outcomes for students, families and communities.

3. Are community schools public schools?

Absolutely! Any school, public or private can be a community school.

4. What are the conditions that community schools seek to fulfill?

Community school advocates believe in a comprehensive approach to the education of our children and youth. Schools, together with communities, must work to fulfill five conditions that create the optimum chance for every child to succeed. These conditions are:

- **Condition #1:** The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- **Condition #2:** Students are motivated and engaged in learning --both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- **Condition #3:** The basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- **Condition #4:** There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families and school staff.
- **Condition #5:** Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful and connects students to a broader learning community.

5. What are the areas in which community schools offer programs and services?

In a community school, youth, families, and community residents work as equal partners with schools and other community institutions to develop programs and services in five areas:

- **Quality education** -High-caliber curriculum and instruction enable all children to meet challenging academic

standards. The school uses all of the community's assets as resources for learning and involves students in contributing to the solution of community problems.

- **Youth development** -Young people develop their assets and talents, form positive relationships with peers and adults, and serve as resources to their communities.
- **Family support** -Family resource centers, early childhood development programs, coordinated health, mental health and social services, counseling, and other supports enhance family life by building upon individuals' strengths and skills.
- **Family and community engagement** -Family members and other residents actively participate in designing, supporting, monitoring and advocating quality programs and activities in the school and community.
- **Community development** -All participants focus on strengthening the local leadership, social networks, economic viability and physical infrastructure of the surrounding community.

Too many schools have services in these various areas but have no plan for how to integrate those services to achieve specific results. Alignment in these key areas is essential for a successful community school.

6. What is the curriculum like in a community school?

In a community school a quality and integrated curriculum, which taps into the community as a resource, is designed to engage and motivate students to learn at high standards. Real world issues and challenges are addressed inside and outside the classroom setting, and the community is included as part of the classroom.

7. Do community schools work?

In [Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools](#), evaluations of 20 initiatives nationwide confirm that community schools have a positive impact on what matters most to students, parents, communities and schools. The report concludes that:

- Student learning improves.
- Parent and family participation – in their children's education and in the school – increases.
- Principals and teachers have more time for quality instruction because the school's community partners help address non-academic barriers to learning.
- Families have more opportunities and support in caring for and helping to educate their children, and in contributing to their community.

Community schools generate other positive outcomes as well. Improved safety and security, increased community pride, stronger relationships between school and community, and greater utilization of schools and other public services and facilities all reflect the broader "community building" role of community schools. Community schools and their students are seen as valued resources, and communities own accountability for student success.

8. What are key factors that make a community school strategy successful?

The following findings from the publication, *Learning Together: The Developing Field of School-Community Initiatives*, address key factors in the success of community school initiatives.

- Leadership from across the community provides the fuel and direction needed to start and sustain the work.
- Long-term financing taps into a diverse array of funding streams and ensures that existing community resources are used as efficiently and effectively as possible
- The organized and vocal support of constituents – students, parents, and community residents – keeps community and school leaders focused on making sure that community schools have the support they need and get results.

For more information, please visit: www.communityschools.org.