

## Defining a Community School

Every community school is different (e.g., Communities in Schools, Beacons, University Assisted, locally developed, and more), but there are some important similarities. Please take some time to read the following descriptions of community schools in order to help you understand what we mean by a community school for this directory.

The Coalition defines a fully developed community school this way:

*Using public schools as hubs, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families and communities. Partners work to achieve a set of results through an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement.*

This definition characterizes a fully developed vision for community schools. However, you may be at some point on a *continuum* of community school development. *We want to capture all types of community schools in this directory.*

Fully developed community schools operate on a set of core principles to achieve results for children, families, and the community. They work with partners to implement aligned opportunities and supports (e.g., expanded learning opportunities, health, and social supports) in order to be successful.

Core **operating elements** of a fully developed community school are:

- a focus on using results and data to meet established goals,
- sustained partners,
- a set of opportunities and supports,
- family and community engagement,
- coordination,
- a coordinator,
- a committed principal, and
- a site-based leadership team.

These core elements create the infrastructure to change institutions to work together more effectively to achieve a set of results.

The **core principles** that drive a community school are:

- **Shared vision and accountability for results.** A clear, mutually agreed-upon vision focused on results drives the work of community schools. Agreements enable partners to hold each other accountable and move beyond "turf battles."
- **Strong partnerships.** Partners share resources and expertise and collaborate to design community schools and make them work.
- **High expectations for all.** Community schools are organized to support learning. Children, youth, and adults are expected to learn to a high standard and to become contributing members of their community.

- **Community strengths.** Community schools marshal the assets of the entire community, including the people who live and work there, local organizations, and the school.
- **Respect for diversity.** Community schools know their communities. They develop respect and a strong, positive identity for people of diverse backgrounds and are committed to the welfare of the whole community.
- **Local decision making.** To unleash the power of local communities, local leaders make decisions about their community schools strategy while people in individual schools respond to their unique circumstances.

**Community schools are focused on results.** Community schools coordinate partners to achieve a core set of results. While results will vary from school-to-school and community-to-community, results typically include:

- Children are ready to enter school.
- Students attend school consistently.
- Students are actively involved in learning and their community.
- Schools are engaged with families and community.
- Families are actively involved in their children's education.
- Students succeed academically.
- Students are healthy: physically, socially and emotionally.
- Students live and learn in stable and supportive environments.
- Communities are desirable places to live.

**Opportunities and supports:** In order to achieve these results, community schools tend to focus around the following **opportunities and supports:**

- Community engagement
- College, career, and citizenship
- Early childhood development
- Engaging instruction
- Expanded learning opportunities
- Family engagement
- Health and social supports
- Youth development activities