



Community Schools Online
Strengthening schools, families and communities

In Depth: Evansville School Community Council

December 22, 2003 Vol. III, No. 5

Message from Marty

2003 has been a good year for community schools -- despite the challenges that all of us know so well. From our vantage point more and more people are beginning to understand that schools and communities must work together to educate all of our children and to build strong families and communities. Convergence around the vision of the community school is happening, and with all of our efforts will continue to grow and deepen. Best wishes for the holiday season and the New Year to you, your families and friends, and to all community schools advocates. 2004 will be even better.



Marty Blank, Coalition Staff Director

Special Focus Newsletters

As we usher in the new year, we want to begin to bring greater focus to community school work at the local level in our newsletter. Starting here, we will feature occasional newsletters that will go in-depth on local community school initiatives, demonstrating what makes them tick. We begin today with Evansville, Indiana. These newsletters are by design much more detailed, and thus longer. We would like your feedback about this approach: Is it useful? Too much information? What else did you want to know? Send us feedback at heifetso@iel.org. And happy 2004!



Olga Heifets, Research Associate

Evansville School Community Council

I. INTRODUCTION

This newsletter brings the community school vision to life in southwestern Indiana's [Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation \(EVSC\)](#). The district has 23,000 students in 20 elementary schools, 10 middle schools, 5 high schools, and 3 alternative schools. According to the [2000 Census](#), the community is predominantly Caucasian with 8.2% African American, and 1% Hispanic individuals. In 2000, the county's poverty rate was 11.2%. 45% of district students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch.

Evansville shows how, a unique school corporation organizational arrangement, a structured approach to community school development, the active participation and engagement of community partners and a strong communications strategy can grow community schools district-wide. The melding of school and community assets is yielding better outcomes for the student and families.

If you would like to dig deeper, we have included hyperlinks to further resources throughout the newsletter; these links are summarized at the end of the newsletter.

II. THE EVANSVILLE JOURNEY

Starting at Cedar Hall Elementary



In 1991, a group convened by the [United Way of Southwestern Indiana](#) noticed the results of a community needs assessment indicated the community's needs unchanged when compared to a similar 1988 assessment: support for families leaving welfare, and drug and alcohol abuse, were top concerns for the Evansville community. Research indicated after school programs had proven to be a successful response to these problems. The group identified four high-risk, high poverty EVSC schools: Cedar Hall Elementary, Lincoln Elementary, Delaware Elementary, and Culver Elementary, with which to work. In partnership with United Way, and with additional funding from the Lilly Endowment, each school began to develop afterschool programs.

As these programs developed, United Way funds also helped to create a community Family Resource Center at Cedar Hall Elementary and to build other community collaborations. In 1994, seeing the success of these collaborative efforts, Cedar Hall principal, Cathy Gray, began to create a chart of what a full-service school infrastructure would look like based on the work of [Joy Dryfoos](#). Soon, community collaborations at Cedar Hall included GED programs, pre-school, counseling and in-house therapy, social work services, and community beautification programs, as well as after school programming run by the YMCA, YWCA, 4-H, and Girl Scouts.

In 1995, the principal took a decisive step to elevate this work into the community, convening a meeting of community members and potential partners to form what became the district's first school-based Site Council. Meeting weekly, the Cedar Hall group comprehensively surveyed the community's existing assets using Kretzmann & McKnight's [Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Towards finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets](#), and identified its challenges. Formal partnerships took shape, focused around a central goal: to efficiently and effectively meet the needs of Cedar Hall students and families. Some of the early Site Council members included the United Way, Southwest Indiana Mental Health Center, the local neighborhood association, the Salvation Army, the Evansville Coalition for the Homeless, St. Mary's Hospital, the Boys & Girls Club, the state Division of Family & Children, and Lampion, a family and child service agency.

Expansion Begins

In 2000, a US Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant enabled five district schools, including Cedar Hall, to hire Site Coordinators to grow the after hours activities into year-round academic achievement programs, offering activities after school, weekends and during the summers. These sites begin to form their own Site Councils with the support of the Site Coordinators, mirroring the approach taken at Cedar Hall. In addition to the year-round programming, a special feature of the grant allowed the schools to institute school social work services through St. Mary's Healthcare Services, whose Mobile Outreach Health and Dental Clinics had already been successfully working with the schools.

The success of the full-service model at Cedar Hall was becoming increasingly evident. A state-funded program evaluation of the Cedar Hall site found that test scores increased by nearly 15% in the school year immediately after the full-service model was implemented at the school (Diehl, Daniel. "Program Evaluation: Cedar Hall Elementary Full-Service Model of School Reform, *Evaluation period August 1999 to August 2003*" Evansville, IN. August 2003. p19).

Moving forward with Superintendent Leadership

Determined to find a better way to maximize community resources, and seeing the success of the collaborative approach at Cedar Hall, then-superintendent Dr. Phil Schoffstall envisioned developing a community-wide meeting place for organizations concerned with children and families. He promoted Principal Gray to the Central Office as the Director of Title I and gave her the task of systematically expanding the full service community school model across all EVSC schools.

Alongside the school-based 21CCLC site councils, EVSC worked with its community partners to create a district-wide [School-Community Council](#), lovingly called the "Big Table." The Council's mission statement directed its 50+ community representatives "to establish school sites as places of community to enhance youth and family development." Council members developed a detailed plan to move forward, which included specific goals, objectives, and outcomes. Subcommittees, or "Strategic Goal Teams," began to working around targeted areas like

cultural diversity, access to services & programs, health & wellness, and evaluation. The community schools approach was taking root in the EVSC.

The Welborn Foundation, having made full-service schooling a priority area, provided EVSC a grant in 2001. These funds support the School-Community Council process and infrastructure, including staff dedicated to the collaborative work. Additional financial support for programs and services comes from the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program, [Title I](#), [Title V](#) (federal funds intended to support innovative programs around education reform), and state and local monies.

Bart McCandless was appointed Superintendent in 2002 after two years in the district, first as the Personnel Director, then as Executive Director. In one of his earliest decisions, McCandless elevated Evansville's School-Community Council initiatives to a new level by creating the position of Assistant Superintendent of Federal Projects. This position has responsibility for all school-financed health and social services, after school programs and related activities as well as the coordination of federal, state and other monies. This organizational shift bundles the funding and coordination of school-managed resources under one individual, allowing the school district to more effectively and strategically use its funds and coordinate its efforts with those of its community partners. The creation of this Assistant Superintendent position, and the appointment of Cathy Gray to the post, was a milestone in the history of the Evansville community schools work.

Evansville Status Today

Ten schools (7 elementary, 3 middle) currently have Site Councils, and several others are starting to develop their infrastructure. By the end of the 2004 school year, there are plans to more fully expand community involvement in another five EVSC schools. The end-goal is the systematic adoption of the partnership approach in all district schools. Says Cathy Gray, "We want to change the way we do business as a corporation and change how we think about communities and schools working together. This is about a process, about collaboration. Each school has its own identity, so it's important to create an infrastructure where we open the doors to community collaboration and see what comes up at each site."

III. EVANSVILLE IN-DEPTH

In this section we identify three specific factors that make community schooling work in Evansville.



- Evansville's Full Service Community School Components, which include school-based Site Councils and coordinators, the district's "Big Table", and district organization,
- Community partnerships further the work in Evansville, and
- Communication mechanisms that keep things flowing.

A. Full Service Community School Components

Three major components connect to make up the infrastructure for full-service community schools in Evansville: Site coordinators and Site Councils in the schools, the district's School-Community Council ("Big Table"), and school district organization.

Site Councils & Coordinators: School-based Site Councils made up of parents, school staff, and representatives from community agencies meet monthly to discuss needs specific to each school. The Principal and and/or a facilitator lead strategic planning process to identify assets, determine needs and identify next steps for each school site. A [Needs Assessment Scale](#) provides schools with a standard instrument to assess the needs of their school community, while a [Programs Matrix](#) provides a picture of what's going on at schools. A sub-group of the Big Table, the Site Council Support Group exists to [help new Councils get started](#), and strengthen their capacity.

At 21st Century funded schools, Site Coordinators work with the school's Site Councils to create and run appropriate programming for each school's population. "She makes sure programs run smoothly, transportation is taken care of, handles disruptive children...She's like a principal, only after school hours," says Lincoln principal Kim Johnson of the school's Site Coordinator.

Schools that are not 21st Century funded pull together staff within the building to do this coordination work. Some EVSC schools create teams that resemble start-up stages of school-based site councils. These teams, called Student Services Teams, are comprised of principals, counselors, nurses, and teachers. They gather to begin talking about how to grow the idea at their school site, and as they develop begin to bring in community partners around the work.

"Ultimately it has to do with education and children," says Big Table Project Director Ginny O'Connor. "They find a way to pull it together somehow, which is sometimes difficult in initial phase...you just use your imagination and pull together the resources."

Says Dr. McCandless, "Each one of our school buildings offer different ways to meet the needs of each community, and our Site Councils are the means to get things done." Site Council partnerships bring in community resources to create programs at all hours of the day, for learners of all ages.

School-Community Council: The "Big Table" works in three areas: prevention, intervention, and family involvement. It is a central forum for the discussion of issues that reach beyond individual school sites. A [School-Community Council Evaluation Protocol](#) helps the Big Table track progress towards reaching school-related outcomes like academic achievement, as well as community-wide results and impacts like a reduction in transience. Issues that individual Site Councils cannot resolve, like multi-school programming or when existent partnerships cannot provide appropriate resources, are brought to the Big Table. Its 65+ current members include district staff, community members, parents, businesses, political leaders, universities, civic groups, and representatives from community agencies. A Steering Committee and Strategic Goal Teams guide its work. Subcommittees of the Big Table address particular needs, including:

- Communication Team, which works with local media groups to present the full service community school work in the best light,
- Evaluation Team, which develops a process to track indicators,
- Health & Wellness Team, which address physical, mental and emotional needs of students and families in the district,
- After-School Team, which works with volunteers, transportation, staff development, and funding.

District Organization: Superintendent McCandless' reorganization established three Assistant-Superintendent-level positions. Cathy Gray's new role, the Assistant Superintendent of Federal Projects, is vital to the Evansville model. Coordination of all district health and human services, including funding (federal or otherwise), is pulled under one umbrella. Responsibilities include serving as the Project Director for the Big Table, keeping the school district connected to the community's needs and resources, braiding together funding streams, and coordination of services. Management of the main forum where student, family and community needs are discussed maximizes school and partner resources and diminishes duplication of services.

To support the work of the Big Table exclusively, an Assistant Project Director, a half-time research assistant, and an administrative staff person were added to Central Office. Says Assistant Superintendent Gray, "It has become how we do business, and allows us to sustain and grow."

A second Assistant Superintendent focuses on curriculum across the district. This includes professional development for teachers and school staff, as well as resources needed for instruction. The third Assistant Superintendent role is responsible for focusing on all district business and finance, including the physical plant of district schools and staffing needs.

B. Communication - Selling the Idea:

In order to get buy-in and gain further support for this directional shift in their system, the district works to educate government, the community, families, and school staff on full-service community schooling. Research and studies are provided to interested parties. The Communications Team works with communication outlets to coordinate appropriate messaging about goings-on at school sites. Summer of 2003 brought the first quarterly "E-VSC School Community Council Communicator" newsletter, which informs readers on Big Table and school happenings.

Additional updates are provided by 21CCLC newsletters and school-based newsletters. All of this spreads the word and builds interest, and buy-in, around the full-service idea in Evansville.

C. Community Partnerships:

EVSC's community partnerships are what really bring the full service model to life. Community agencies and organizations, hospitals and businesses, citizens and school staff now comprise the Big Table. All of them are doing work to support community through EVSC schools.

Partnerships like those with the United Way of Southwestern Indiana, and the City of Evansville Parks & Recreation illustrate how the structure is mutually beneficial for both sides. "A lot of the agencies at the Table are receiving more from [us], so we are indirect enablers," says Carol Brayden-Clark, Executive Director of the United Way, "Our mission is to improve lives in the community, so this partnership is a perfect fit. It allows us to support families and kids outside the classroom to make them successful inside the classroom, where they're comfortable and the school is a familiar place."

Coupling the Department of Parks & Recreation's program with EVSC's summer school offerings boosted enrollment each. Last summer, the cooperatively staffed Summer Programs drew 1,300 students into 7 inner city target schools, with funding from the City, the Welborn Foundation, and Title I.

IV. LESSONS



The success of Evansville's full-service community schooling model comes from several key aspects of its structure. The below lessons create the framework for their success, and can be applied in other communities looking to do similar work:

LESSON 1: Build and Nurture A Big Table. *The district identified the collaborations taking place at the Big Table as key-driving factors in increased support for students and families and community engagement.*

LESSON 2: Organize the District to Facilitate Partnership. *EVSC recognized the importance of restructuring staff at the district level with the intent of growing the full service community schools model. This eventually led to comprehensive, systemic changes in the district's way of doing business.*

LESSON 3: Focus on Community Needs and Assets. *Orienting partners around working collaboratively to meet community needs and mobilizing community assets, elevates the approach from a narrow program to a comprehensive strategy, and is essential for sustainability.*

LESSON 4: Make School-based Site Councils a Priority. *School-based Site Councils keep the collaborative work relevant to the needs of each school's immediate community. Council members live and work in the community and are better informed about what is needed, what assets exist and what will help.*

"People would ask 'How can I help?' and before, we'd get back to them and interest would fade. Now, if an interested person is three blocks away from a school, we give them the number of the Site Council Coordinator immediately. Once someone says they'd like to help, you have to just grab them and go." -Superintendent Bart McCandless

LESSON 5: Organize Management and Coordination Mechanisms at the School Site. *Site management for district schools includes principals, 21CCLC Site Coordinators, Site Council members and other staff who all engage the work in some way.*

LESSON 6: Keep the Lines of Communication Open and Flowing. *Various newsletters that exist across the district, offer families, community agencies, Site Councils, government, and schools a chance to communicate recent events. Connections with the mainstream media through a formal entity like a Media Committee help increase buy-in, dedication to, and investment in, the model from the entire community.*

LESSON 7: Nurture Superintendent Leadership. *A superintendent interested and invested in furthering full service community schools is an integral piece in the model's successful growth in Evansville. Not every Superintendent will take the view that Bart McCandless and his predecessor did. However, an honest assessment of school and community needs, the voices of families and community residents, and engagement of community partners, will enable advocates of community schools to encourage, more and more out-of-the-box thinking.*

LESSON 8: Learn to Operate in a Dynamic Environment. *The E-VSC's model is in a state of constant improvement. Responsibilities of district-level staff are refined. The Big Table continues to identify outcomes and find new partnerships. Additional schools begin the development of their own Site Councils as established Site Councils mature their processes. No Child Left Behind has introduced the need to more strongly re-orient afterschool and summer programs around academics. Working together people can build the capacity to respond to continuous change.*

Web Resources



Indiana's Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) <http://www.evsc.k12.in.us/>

Vanderburgh County http://www.stats.indiana.edu/uspr/a/usprofiles/18/us_over_sub_pr18163.html

United Way of Southwestern Indiana <http://www.unitedwayswi.org/>

Joy Dryfoos <http://www.corwinpress.com/prINTERfriendly.aspx?pid=7421&ptype=B>

Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets (Kretzmann & McKnight) <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>

School-Community Council <http://www.evsc.k12.in.us/schoolzone/schcomm/schcomm.htm>

Title I <http://www.pta.org/ptawashington/issues/titleone.asp>

Title V <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg57.html>

EVSC Needs Assessment Scale <http://www.communityschools.org/Evansville/NeedsAssesmentScale.doc>

EVSC Programs Evaluation Matrix <http://www.communityschools.org/EVSCMatrix.doc>

EVSC Guide for New Site Councils <http://www.communityschools.org/Evansville/Site%20council%20brochure.doc>

EVSC School-Community Council Evaluation Protocol
<http://www.communityschools.org/SCcouncilavalprotocol.doc>

Additional Information

Check out <http://www.communityschools.org/> for more information on the Coalition's work and progress.

To subscribe to Community Schools Online, register at <http://www.communityschools.org/about.html#email>.

To unsubscribe, send an email to ccs-l-off@lists.iel.org.

