

Lincoln, Nebraska Lincoln Community Learning Centers Initiative



Lincoln's Community Learning Centers (CLC) initiative strives to be a bridge that reconnects neighborhoods with schools and provides opportunities for parents and other neighborhood residents to become more effective partners in the education of all children and youth in the neighborhood.

Community Learning Centers Make the Difference in Lincoln

The story of Lincoln's community school movement begins in 1999, when the notion of "community learning centers" (CLC) synonymous with community schools, peaked the interest of the Foundation for the Lincoln Public Schools (FLPS), a local education fund affiliated with the Public Education Network (PEN). This interest grew with a visit that key Lincoln stakeholders took to the Local Investment Commission in Kansas City to look at their Caring Communities work, another model of community schooling.

Later that same year, the Lincoln Community Foundation awarded a grant to the LPS Foundation to assess community interest in implementing quality afterschool programming with an academic emphasis. They found high support for developing and sustaining neighborhood schools as a resource to meet diverse community human service and educational needs. Thus Lincoln CLCs begin as a public engagement effort, which resulted in part in the passage of a \$250 million facility bond issue by a 67% margin in February 2006. Today, Lincoln, NE has 19 community schools.

Many of the key leaders who initially visited Kansas City have remained committed to this work and are now members of the Lincoln CLC Leadership Council. The Council is a diverse group of community stakeholders whose primary role and responsibility is guiding the development and long term financing of the Initiative. Their goals are to develop Lincoln's capacity to implement shared partnerships and to mobilize resources to ensure Community Learning Centers are a fundamental part of the community fabric.

Each CLC site or pair of sites has an operating School Neighborhood Advisory Committee (SNAC). SNACs are the cornerstone of Community Learning Center (CLC) governance, and are made up of parents, youth, educators and other school personnel, neighborhood residents, concerned citizens, community-based organizations and service providers. Their primary function is to assist with planning, communication, and oversight of the neighborhood CLC.

What makes the CLC initiative unique is the core value that life long learning is a community-wide responsibility and the emphasis on building capacity within community systems to produce sustained improvements and results. "We are building an infrastructure that turns reform work into the new way of doing business everyday," says Cathie Petsch.

About Lincoln

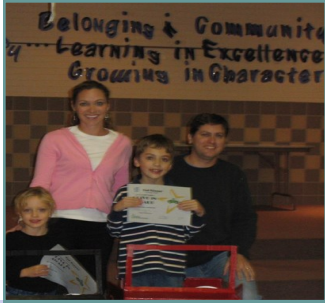
Lincoln, Nebraska, a city of nearly 250,000 residents, is a growing community. Lincoln has experienced substantial growth, not only in population, but also in diversity. The influx of families from around the world has been significant. During the past decade, the Hispanic population in Lincoln has grown 117 percent. Currently, the Lincoln Public Schools enroll 32,505 students; 20 percent are students of color, 32 percent are low income, 16 percent received special education services, and six percent are English Language Learners who speak 52 different languages.

School Profile: Saratoga Elementary School

Neighborhood revitalization and empowerment is a focus of the Community Learning Center at Saratoga. Through a variety of partnerships, students in the after school program, neighborhood residents, and others, a committee has formed that identifies issues and conditions impacting the neighborhood, and works to find ways to address those issues. Not only are students becoming civically engaged, they are able to tie this real-world learning to what they are learning in the classroom.

A great example of this connection between living and learning is found in the school's community garden project. The garden is planted, tended, and harvested by students in the after school and summer programs. Parents and children are introduced to a variety of fresh foods that are grown in the garden, and they can also be taught how to prepare those foods.

According to Kathie Phillips, the community learning center coordinator, "we will never be finished at the Saratoga Community Learning Center. As we attempt new things and our skills become more sophisticated we hope to bring more services to our neighborhood through the Community Learning Center. There are many components to our vision (medical, housing, more partnerships, etc.), and we are always striving to improve."



Results

More than 90% of students had fewer than three school behavior referrals per year.

Noticeable improvement in class participation, class attendance, homework completion, and favorable student interaction.

The Lincoln Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution recognizing the importance of the CLC Initiative to economic development.

Who's Who in Lincoln

Lead Agencies

YMCA
Family Service
Cedars Youth Services
Lincoln Housing Authority
Lincoln Public Schools Title I
Lincoln Parks and Recreation
Heartland Big Brothers Big Sisters

Additional Funders

State 21st Century
Woods Charitable Fund
W. K. Kellogg Foundation
Foundation for Lincoln Public Schools
Nebraska Investment Finance Authority

