

DRAFT MESSAGE POINTS AND TALKING POINTS

Making the Difference Report

An effective message is one that sticks and provokes action. To that end, we formulated the following messages based on the current political and social environment, and distinctions more likely to generate news coverage. You will see that each message is followed by supporting evidence. We suggest adding classroom examples to this section to provide both the qualitative and quantitative support required to speak with authority.

Message:

At a time of tight budgets and increased accountability, Community Schools deliver increased student achievement, civic engagement, and healthier families. This approach goes beyond the narrow tests and accountability in No Child Left Behind, marshalling the support necessary for students to achieve. Schools can work smarter, not just harder.

Support/evidence:

Community schools get these results with an effective strategy of educating all children to their full potential that taps resources outside the classroom walls. A community school has high standards and expectations for students, qualified teachers and rigorous curriculum. To achieve at higher levels, community schools use the community as a resource to engage students in learning and service, and help them become problem-solvers.

In a typical community school, before-and after-school programs build on classroom experiences and help students expand their horizons, contribute to their communities and have fun. Family support centers with childcare and housing assistance, medical, dental and mental health services are readily available. Parents and community residents participate in adult education and job training programs, and use the school as a place for community problem solving.

Message:

It is urgent that policymakers recognize the powerful force that community, when organized to work effectively with schools through a community schools strategy, can be in improving student and school performance.

Support/evidence:

Community schools have the capacity to do more of what's needed to ensure young people's success. Unlike traditional public schools, community schools weld school *and* community, making them part of their design and operation. As a result, community schools have three major advantages that schools acting alone do not.

- Garner additional resources and lessen the demands on school staff.
- Provide learning opportunities that develop both academic and nonacademic competencies.

- Build social capital — the networks and relationships that support learning and create opportunity for young people while strengthening their communities.

Message:

Community schools not only increase student achievement, they strengthen civic engagement, democracy and shared responsibility for results in education.

Support/evidence:

Community Schools forge partnerships dedicated to getting better results in education. Teachers, principals and other school leaders can't and shouldn't have to do it all alone. To ignore the resources outside classroom walls simply ignores the reality in children's lives and fails to recognize that children need multiple opportunities for success. Students in community schools also have a deeper appreciation for democracy, freedom and civic responsibility. Building a nation of citizens committed to civic participation will create a stronger, more resilient nation. There is great concern about the declining state of democracy and civic engagement in America. Community Schools can be part of the solution. We want our students not only to be well versed in the three R's—they also need to understand what it means to be an American.

Message:

Community Schools truly serve their communities and children, providing one-stop services for students, adults, neighbors and family, all in one place. They make the schools the centers of a vibrant neighborhood and connect family, school and community.

Support/evidence:

Community Schools are more efficient and cost-effective, providing families with health, social and academic services. They avoid duplicative services by multiple government bureaucracies—with parks and recreation doing their own thing, schools doing their thing, health services doing their thing—lots of waste and inefficiency. If government bureaucracies behaved rationally and cost-effectively, community schools is the approach they'd choose. They also build real-life parental involvement in schools, which surveys repeatedly show is a top priority, but which is very rarely accomplished in most school districts.

Message:

The No Child Left Behind Act and civic engagement around the war in Iraq provide a confluence of opportunity for community schools.

Support/evidence:

The report shows that raising student achievement and enriching civic life are inextricably linked. Current conflicts and crises like the war in Iraq and September 11 often act as a crucible for tighter communities that support students and schools. Adults and community leaders become more attuned to the needs of children and how they are coping with often complex and trying issues. Community schools are a vehicle for sustaining that support and involvement when the external crisis ends.

The findings of the *Making the Difference* report demonstrate that this community support for students and schools will improve student learning *and* strengthen communities. Community support for learning will make it more likely that students and schools will meet the rigorous new mandates imposed by the federal No Child Left Behind Act.