



A Frequency Analysis of the Research Practice Network Clearinghouse: The Community Schools Research and Evaluations

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Acknowledgments

This report was produced by the Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc. (IEL's) Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) Research Practice Network (RPN) to analyze the CCS RPN's Clearinghouse of publications to understand how the current body of research aligns with the agenda and where there are opportunities for further inquiry. The Clearinghouse organization and analysis were supported by three groups of graduate students from the American University who were enrolled in a pro-seminar designed to partner with nonprofit organizations on various projects. The groups supported the Clearinghouse organization and initial analysis of 352 resources across three semester periods in 2021, 2022, and 2023. They are (in alphabetical order by last name): Schebania Cantave, Andrea M. Conway, Larissa Gurrola, Viktor Tenojaik Ling, Leya Mohsin, Jada Ray, Breyana Rolon, Alexandra Roy, Rebecca K. Snider, and Rayne Thomas-Kuehn. The author also wishes to thank Dr. Helen Janc Malone, José Muñoz, and Mia Perry for their quality reviews of the report drafts and support for this work.

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Executive Summary

The Institute for Educational Leadership's (IEL's) Coalition for Community Schools Research Practice Network (CCS RPN) serves as a clearinghouse for research and practices of Community Schools. As the Community Schools scholarships has significantly expanded over the past decade, CCS RPN also leads its network members to create, maintain, and execute a research agenda focused on improving implementation and outcomes for students, Community Schools, families, and community members. This report analyzed all resources (about 400 resources) in the RPN Clearinghouse, including journal articles, book chapters, professional reports, and resources and tools of Community Schools. The study compared the frequency of the topics to RPN research agenda topics (launched in 2020) to understand the cross-cutting themes, research methodologies, and implications for future research and evaluation of Community Schools.

Based on the analysis, the most frequently studied research topics about Community Schools are measuring outcomes, organizing, and racial equity and social justice. In the past decade, more and more research and evaluation focused on understanding the Community Schools' impact on non-academic outcomes for students, such as students' mental development and behavioral changes. Organizing focused on showing evidence of how Community Schools organize community resources to address issues in the local context, and to lift up the importance of the Community School Coordinator's responsibility in organizing community resources and establishing partnerships. The topic of racial equity and social justice addressed Community Schools' strategies for serving at-risk families and low-income communities.

The commonly used research methods are qualitative methods, including comprehensive literature review, qualitative study approaches, and case studies. Most resources focused on schools in urban or suburban regions, and less than ten percent addressed the three topics in rural areas.

Moving forward, we hope to see more evidence and practices that show Community Schools' impact on students, families, and community development and how Community Schools organize all the community resources to do so. We expect to see more research and practices to support marginalized groups, including disadvantaged groups of social-economic status, diverse gender groups, and racial/ethnic groups.

To better explore the research agenda topics, the research and evaluation designs need to be diversified as well. As for the methods, we expect to see more research and assessments of longitudinal studies, quantitative methods, culturally responsive studies, and participatory designs. Also more studies and assessment of rural schools are also needed to advance our understanding of Community Schools' strategies.

Introduction

The Community Schools scholarship has significantly expanded over the past decade, drawing on qualitative and quantitative methodologies to understand various aspects of the strategy, from the role families, communities, and youth play in Community Schools to ways to measure the quality of Community Schools implementation in diverse contexts. This professional report paper offers a state of the Community Schools scholarship through a typology of prevailing areas of inquiry, measuring the frequency of methodologies, research topics, and common theoretical and practical applications. The paper first introduces the purpose and methods of the analysis and then addresses the top three frequently discussed research agenda topics based on the analysis. The commonly used methods and cross-study themes are examined for each research topic. This paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for future studies, practices, and policy.

Defining a Community School

A Community School “is a local engagement strategy that creates and coordinates opportunities with its public school to accelerate student success. It serves as a vehicle for hyper-local decision-making that responds to the unique needs of each community” (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.-a). Community schools have been a part of the public education ecosystem for over a century (Rogers, 1998). They are poised to grow significantly in the incoming years due to federal investment in the Full-Service Community Schools grant and other state-level investments. Full-Service Community School means a public elementary school or secondary school that participates in an effort to coordinate and integrate all community services through various partnerships (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Meanwhile, Full-Service Community School also provides access to community services in school to students, families, and the community (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018, p. 5).

Community Schools strategy is supported by intentional partnerships between schools and community-based partners coordinated by a Community Schools coordinator. A Community Schools coordinator is a key broker between community-based organizations, afterschool programs, community services, and the school, often hired by the school district or by direct-service providers like United Ways or YMCA.

About the Coalition for Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools is an alliance of diverse groups working together to grow quality and sustainable Community Schools. The Coalition is dedicated to advancing this mission through a shared set of principles: to build on community strengths, invest in trusting relationships, and commit to continuous improvement (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.-c). The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is the home of the Coalition for Community Schools. The Coalition is comprised of seven active networks, the majority of their role- and initiative-based groups. IEL's Coalition for Community Schools Research Practice Network (CCS RPN) is one of the networks of the Coalition and is designed to be a learning network that brings together researchers and practitioners to improve implementation and outcomes for students, schools, families, and community members through knowledge sharing and collaborations of various research and knowledge transition activities. In 2020, CCS RPN engaged its network to co-design a national Community Schools Research Agenda (RPN Agenda) for the field. Alongside it, it launched a Clearinghouse of research and evaluations, as submitted by its members. This paper analyzes the CCS RPN's Clearinghouse to understand how the current body of research aligns with the agenda and where there are opportunities for further inquiry.

Background

The Institute for Educational Leadership's (IEL's) Coalition for Community Schools Research Practice Network (CCS RPN) is a group of over 1,000 Community School researchers and practitioners who together create, maintain, and execute a research agenda focused on improving implementation and outcomes for students, Community Schools, families, and community members (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.-d). CCS RPN also serves as a Clearinghouse for research and best practices, convenes Community School partners around areas for collaboration and joint research, and identifies new funding streams to support high-quality research on Community Schools. The RPN Clearinghouse is a growing database of network participants-submitted publications and tools. At the time of this publication, the Clearinghouse has over 400 resources, including journal articles, white papers, online tools, and other publications.

In July 2020, IEL's CCS RPN, in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships, hosted a three-day virtual convening to develop a national Community Schools Research Agenda. More than 60 multi-disciplinary researchers and practitioners who have contributed to the Community Schools' knowledge base

participated in the discussion. After the virtual convening, CCS RPN conducted three rounds of research agenda validations and collected feedback from convening participants, (Institute for Educational Leadership, the Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). The finalized Community Schools Research Agenda was published in November 2020, and it includes 11 themes, which are grouped into two categories:

Category 1. Approaching Community Schools Research and Impact

- Theme 1. Measuring outcomes
- Theme 2. Elevating student, family, and educator voices in research
- Theme 3. Translating research into practices

Category 2. Themes for further research and study of Community Schools

- Theme 4. Defining and adopting the Community Schools model
- Theme 5. Collaborative leadership and relational trust
- Theme 6. Defining and supporting staff, family, administrator, and partner roles
- Theme 7. Racial equity and social justice
- Theme 8. Organizing
- Theme 9. Sustainability
- Theme 10. The impact of COVID
- Theme 11. Teaching and learning in Community Schools (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.).

In addition to leading the development of the Community Schools Research Agenda, RPN also serves as a Clearinghouse for research and best practices (Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.-d). The RPN Clearinghouse includes about 400 resources, including books, book chapters, journal articles, policy briefs, and other publications.

Method

This paper draws on 352 resources, publications ranging from peer-reviewed journal articles, white papers, and online tools, as submitted to the CCS RPN Clearinghouse by scholars and practitioners from across the country. The publications are part of a growing scholarship repository within a national network launched in 2019 to bridge Community Schools' research and practice.

This paper uses frequency analysis to examine common research topics, questions, methodologies, and cross-cutting recommendations for further scholarship. Resources were marked for their publication type, research questions, methodology, sample size, context, alignment with Community Schools' field standards, and connection to the Community Schools' Research Agenda launched in 2020 through CCS RPN. Once categorized, each section (e.g., publication type) was examined for frequency of diverse types of publications to gain a sense of mediums used to publish scholarship about Community Schools.

Examining research questions and findings offered themes and throughlines of the most commonly examined areas, including prevailing theoretical frameworks that inform the research inquiries. Comparing the themes addressed by the existing resources to the RPN research agenda topics increases our awareness of the frequently discussed topics and topics that need more attention. Meanwhile, methodological designs were examined to understand the balance of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies and to identify emerging methodological considerations, such as participatory action research and longitudinal methods, for understanding the long-term impact. The analysis also includes the geographic location of the resources to understand whether the Community School related issues addressed in each resource were in urban or rural areas.

Analysis

RPN analyzed 352 resources. About 85% are research articles and book chapters, and 10% are professional reports. These resources are published from 1992 to 2021, and over 53% are from 2011 to 2021. The top three themes are:

- Measuring outcomes (39%)
- Organizing (38%)
- Racial equity and social justice (35%)

The following sections discuss these top three research agenda themes regarding their definitions, grouping concepts, commonly used methodologies, and emerging theories.

Measuring Outcomes

The first frequently addressed research agenda theme topic is measuring outcomes. RPN Clearinghouse includes approximately 137 resources addressing Community Schools'

impact on students, family engagement, and community. This research theme speaks to the need “to collect leading, lagging, and process measures to understand Community Schools’ success” (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d., p. 4). The measures often include student academic performance and the non-academic factors (including attendance, health, wellness, and social/emotional benefits) to understand Community Schools outcomes (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). The impact of the Community Schools on the entire community, such as local economy, community development, career and adult education, family economic mobility, community health, and school staffing are also considered. Moreover, RPN’s research agenda emphasizes the use of longitudinal and community-based participatory research and evaluation methods for understanding Community School strategy’s long-term impact on students’ overall outcomes, including postsecondary enrollment, persistence, attainment, and career development (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.)

As the first frequently discussed research topics in RPN’s Clearinghouse, about 39% of the resources are about measuring outcomes. Qualitative methods, such as case studies and mixed-methods evaluation, are the most commonly applied methodology for understanding Community School outcomes. Only a few used quasi-experimental designs. For instance, Johnston et al. (2020) assessed the impact of the New York City Community Schools initiatives by using a quasi-experimental design comparing outcomes of students in Community Schools with those of their peers in similar comparison schools along seven domains: attendance, educational attainment, academic performance, disciplinary incidents, teachers' shared responsibility for student success, student connectedness to adults and peers, and family empowerment opportunities.

Research and evaluations explore the Community Schools’ outcomes by using various theoretical frameworks. There is no one prevalent framework among all the guiding theories. Anderson et al. (2019) and Bronstein et al. (2016) used ecological systems theory based on Bronfenbrenner (1979) explored the Community Schools outcomes through different lenses. Comparative qualitative framework was being frequently used in research review papers to examine Community Schools’ outcomes through various lenses (Maier et al., 2017; Min et al., 2017). Meanwhile, Full-Service Community School (FSCS) was a commonly used concept/framework when studying the overall Community Schools’ impact on students, families, communities, and the sustainability of the Community Schools (Adams, 2010; Biag & Castrechini, 2016; Houser, 2010; Lubell, 2011).

Studies and research explored school success through various lenses. More than half of the Clearinghouse resources address the Community Schools outcomes assessment by exploring non-academic performance measures. For instance, studies showed evidence that Community Schools initiatives or interventions could increase students' school attendance (Durham et al., 2019; Johnston et al., 2020; Sanders & Galindo, 2020). In addition to school attendance outcomes, students' well-being and social competency were also explored as the Community School outcomes. Several resources presented the impact of Community Schools on reducing students' mental health and problematic behavioral issues (Kang-Yi et al., 2018; Lewallen et al., 2015; Olubiyi et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2019). Also, some studies addressed the contribution of Full-Service Community Schools to local community development and the family-school partnership (Davidson & Case, 2018; Galindo et al., 2017; Min et al., 2017; Holme et al., 2020).

Organizing

Community organizing is defined as engaging and empowering community residents and groups to identify and solve their needs (Beckwith & Lopez, n.d.). Based on the RPN research agenda, "more research is needed to understand the value of community organizing for sustaining and supporting Community School implementation" (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d., p. 7). The RPN research agenda expects to see more research and practices to understand the organizing work of Community Schools in grassroots communities. Community School Coordinators' role in community organizing regarding service provision and partnership development is another area that needs to be explored. Community Schools need to understand the issues that families and communities are facing and how to respond to these issues in local contexts (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.).

Based on the existing resources in the RPN Clearinghouse, about 38% of them (134 resources) either address community-organizing issues or mention Community School organizing issues in their findings. These resources published range from 1992 to 2021. As for the commonly used methodology, more than half of the resources on this research topic used qualitative methods, such as case studies, literature reviews, and secondary data reviews. Also, most of the studies were conducted in urban or suburban regions, such as Durham, Shiller, and Connolly (2019)'s study of the impact of the Full-Service Community Schools movement in Baltimore's public school district on school attendance. Several resources discussed the essential elements of effective Community Schools in different

cities and regions. Jenkins and Duffy (2016) explored the common elements of Community Schools and provided policy implications for state and local education leaders regarding creating, implementing, and sustaining Community Schools. Sanders (2016) explored the components of effectiveness in Full-Service Community Schools, specifically leadership, partnership, and organizational development. In the RPN Clearinghouse, only a few studies discussed how Community Schools could solve the issues in rural communities. Lyson (2002) studied the social and economic benefits of schools to rural villages in New York. Williams (2010) published a research study about how Community Schools can reinvigorate rural education. To inform the design and implementation of the Full Service Community Schools in rural areas, Voyles (2012) examined the planning and implementation of a needs assessment for a rural school serving at-risk families. Witte and Sheridan (2011) emphasized the unique characteristics of family-school partnership in rural areas and provided actional principles for organizing community resources to advance the families-school partnership.

Some resources mentioned that building partnerships among different stakeholders were at the heart of the Community School strategy, requiring real dedication and an asset-based approach (Frankovich & Lewke-Brady, 2019; Jacobson, 2016). They examined the role of Community Schools in building community partnerships and the impact of the partnerships on various community issues, including healthy neighborhoods and academic outcomes. Meanwhile, studies emphasized the importance of Community Schools in community organizing, not only about the services they provide but also their dedication to organizing the entire community to reach better education and workforce outcomes (Walker & Hackmann, 1999). Sophisticated leadership is essential for this kind of collaboration, meaning that the leader of Community Schools needs specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be effective (Purinton et al., 2018). Also, Community Schools leader's time to create deep relationships with families, community members, and partner organizations cannot be underestimated (Durham et al., 2019; Valli et al., 2016).

Racial Equity and Social Justice

Advancing racial equity and social justice is about dismantling structural racism and reducing and ultimately eliminating racial and other disparities experienced by people of color. Community Schools play an essential role in addressing racial equity and social justice issues in schools and communities. The resources in RPN's Clearinghouse include studies on the various equity issues for marginalized students and families and on Community Schools work in marginalized communities.

RPN's Research Agenda addresses racial equity and social justice as the core component of Community Schools. There is a constant “need to understand the connection between community schooling and racial equity and social justice” (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d., p. 7). RPN research agenda expects to see research and assessments on how Community Schools address equity issues, including practices of culturally responsive education, practices of supporting minoritized groups, and the engagement of minoritized families and communities in decision-makings (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.).

Thirty-five percent of the RPN Clearinghouse resources (123 resources) either address equity in education related to Community Schools or explore other emerging education issues among minoritized populations and communities. More than half of these resources were published within the past ten years. The most used qualitative approaches (about 50% of the resources), including case studies, interviews, document reviews, literature reviews, and observations (Quinn & Blank, 2021). A comparative case study conducted by McKinney de Royston and Madkins (2019) explores how Full-Service Community Schools support Black students' well-being and academic success. Among Clearinghouse resources related to the racial equity and social justice topic, only less than ten percent of the resources used quantitative methods, including quasi-experimental design and comparative analysis. For instance, Dearing et al. (2016) conducted a quasi-experimental study that used data on within-school changes in the implementation of the intervention to understand the effects of a student support intervention for the academic achievement of first-generation immigrant children attending high-poverty, urban elementary schools.

The frequently discussed themes include understanding Community Schools' impact on academic outcomes and community support in high-poverty communities or rural communities. For instance, Zetlin et al. (2001) presented two comparative case studies of schools in low-income Latinx and Southeast Asian communities to explore the impact of schools on family self-sufficiency and growth. Walsh et al. (2014) studied the effects of out-of-school factors on academic outcomes in high-poverty urban elementary schools. Durham et al. (2019) studied the Full-Service Community Schools in Baltimore. They addressed that attendance in schools with high poverty has proved more resistant to Full-Service Community Schools approaches than attendance in more economically advantaged contexts.

Some resources specifically consider the impact of Community Schools on addressing racial and socioeconomic inequalities (Sanders & Galindo, 2020). School and community

partnerships effectively promoted equity in education and health outcomes for students, families, and communities (Bronstein et al., 2016; Green, 2016; Knopf et al., 2016). Jacobson et al. (2016) presented the importance of family engagement in the decision-making process to children's success, especially the engagement of low-income families and families of color. Ishimaru (2019) indicated the need for family engagement practice and policy in equitable collaboration. And Montoya-Ávila et al. (2018) addressed the impact of the partnership between families and schools on the educational outcomes of Black and Latinx students. Some resources tagged racial equity and social justice address the need for Community Schools to support the whole child, provide a culturally relevant curriculum, and collaborate with parents and the local community (Biag & Castrechini, 2016; The Center for Popular for Democracy et al., 2016; Witte & Sheridan, 2011).

Findings

The findings show that most RPN Clearinghouse resources focus on Community Schools' research topics of measuring outcomes, organizing, and racial equity and social justice. Throughout these three research foci, the most frequently explored themes include school and community partnerships, family engagement, collaborative leadership, and equitable approaches. The prevailing methodologies are qualitative, including literature reviews and mixed methods. Research findings offer a deeper examination of Community Schools implementation in a place, the role of strategy in systems building, service coordination, and access to learning and developmental opportunities. The roles of various actors within and outside Community Schools are examined across the studies, highlighting the importance of equitable collaboration.

Theory and Further Studies

Based on the existing resources in the RPN Clearinghouse, we found that research topics and theories used in exploring these topics are getting more diverse, specifically over the past decade. Researchers examined Community Schools through various lenses and provided more possible approaches to understanding Community Schools.

Based on the RPN Research Agenda and existing RPN Clearinghouse resources, there is a need for further scholarship. For the most frequently discussed topic: measuring outcomes of Community Schools, existing studies examined student outcomes through various lenses, including academic outcomes, school attendance, and whole-child development. In

addition, current literature explores the impact of Community Schools on the entire community. The most frequently discussed topics are limited to partnership and family engagement to support student development. The Community Schools Research Agenda calls for additional research on non-academic factors (Institute for Educational Leadership, Netter Center, & Coalition for Community Schools, n.d.). Therefore, more studies are needed to address the impact of Community Schools on the non-academic aspects of community development, such as economic development, healthy school and community, social-economic status, and the diverse set of outcomes in the COVID-19 context, which significantly impacted student development.

Community organizing remains an important area of inquiry for the field. Additional research is needed to understand the interplay between community organizing and Community Schools and the role of the Community School coordinator in the school's community organizing. Meanwhile, further studies are needed to explore the practical Community Schools approaches of organizing community resources to address emerging community issues, such as healthy schools and community during the post-pandemic. Also, it would be important to learn more about Community School organizing in rural communities as most of the existing resources explore the issues in urban and suburban areas.

As for racial equity and social justice, the existing resource addressed inequity issues focusing on racial (specific inequities of Black and Latinx students) and poverty problems. The existing resources miss a consideration of how Community Schools are equipped to support students with disabilities, learning differences, gender differences, and students in the LGBTQ community and how those identities intersect with race and poverty. More research is needed on how Community Schools serve students outside of the subgroups of white and non-white. Meanwhile, more studies are needed to lift effective practices and strategies of Community Schools to engage minoritized families and communities.

Implications for Methods

The most frequently used research methods across the three topics are qualitative approaches. Qualitative methods, such as document reviews, literature reviews, interviews, observations, and case studies, are the most commonly applied methodologies. When studying racial equity and social justice in schools, mixed methods and comparative analysis are used. A few studies used quasi-experimental methods as well. About one-third of the resources for measuring outcomes reviewed secondary data. Less than 15% of the

research studies use quantitative components. There is a need for diversifying the methods of studying key issues in Community Schools, such as using participatory design or culturally responsive methods, which might provide an understanding of Community Schools through various lenses. Meanwhile, longitudinal studies are needed as well. Most of the studies addressed the short-term impact and outcomes of Community Schools. Still, few provide an understanding of the long-term impact of Community Schools on students, schools, and communities.

Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice

CCS RPN serves as a Clearinghouse for research and practices. It convenes Community School stakeholders around areas for collaboration and joint research. There is a consistently growing need for collaboration between researchers and practitioners. Practitioners will benefit from timely research and evaluations. Researchers need to know about the emerging issues from practitioners' perspectives based on the rapidly changing social-economic local environment. This calls for resources to support new ways of communicating evidence of success in schools and communities. We also acknowledge that there may be a window of greater receptivity to more diverse outcomes in the COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 context. More studies are needed to address the practical strategies and practices dealing with the impact of COVID-19 so that practitioners can apply them to advance their work in schools and communities. Meanwhile, the need for longitudinal studies requires the sustainability of the efforts and support, specifically for human resource and funding sustainability.

Conclusion

Based on the RPN Clearinghouse resources analysis, this paper illuminates the emerging trends in Community Schools research, frequently discussed themes in the past two decades (more than half of the resources are published in the last decade), and presents areas and topics for further exploration. In the past decade, Community Schools and their impact on student outcomes received more attention and discussions. The themes and topics are growing from understanding student development to a more comprehensive discussion of the impact of Community Schools on the entire community. This paper reviewed part of the Clearinghouse resources and offered a deeper understanding of the existing Community Schools resources, specifically the resources published in the past

decade. This paper also sheds light on future studies and Community Schools strategies based on analyzing existing resources. The RPN Clearinghouse is a living library for the Community Schools' resources moving forward, and we will see more emerging resources to deepen our collective knowledge of Community Schools.

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