

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS

A Rationale and Results Framework



ABOUT THE COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

An alliance of more than 170 national, state, and local organizations, the Coalition represents organizations engaged in community development and community building; education; family support and human services; government; health and mental health services; policy, training, and advocacy; philanthropy; school facilities planning; and youth development as well as local, state, and national networks of community schools.

The Coalition's mission is to mobilize the assets of schools, families, and communities to create a united movement for community schools. Community schools strengthen schools, families, and communities to improve student learning.

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ORDERING INFORMATION

The full report is available for download free of charge at www.communityschools.org. Contact:

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PURPOSE

- The purpose of this document is twofold:
- ◆ To outline a rationale for the community school as a primary vehicle for increasing student success and strengthening families and community
 - ◆ To define specific results that community schools seek—both in terms of how they function and in relationship to the well being of students, families and communities.

The information in this document reflects the work of community school advocates and practitioners at the national, state, and local levels. It is intended as a resource for local policymakers and practitioners who wish to explore or implement a community school strategy. *It is not a prescription; each community school initiative and individual community school must define and explain the results it is seeking to its constituency in terms that reflect its unique conditions and circumstances.*

The Community School Vision

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between school and community. It has an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. Its curriculum emphasizes real-world learning through community problem solving and service. By extending the school day and week, it reaches families and community residents. The community school is uniquely equipped to develop an educated citizenry, to strengthen family and community, and to nurture democracy in the twenty-first century.

R A T I O N A L E

There is a tendency in education reform to disregard the role of family and community. In recent years, the focus of education reform has been predominantly inside the school, focused on standards, testing, and teacher quality. It has all but ignored the external factors that influence student achievement such as family circumstances, poverty, health, cultural differences, student engagement, and others.

THE PROBLEM

While the public recognizes the importance of these non-school factors, school reform efforts have ignored them. The recent 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools indicates that 70 percent of Americans blame societal factors for the achievement gap and high dropout rates while only 22 percent fault the schools. Public Agenda's June "Reality Check 2006," a set of public opinion tracking surveys on key public education issues, showed that:

"key segments of the public increasingly see standards and testing as a 'Johnny-one-note approach.' They are concerned about...school climate, family support, and social problems that are seeping into the school."

Research published by the Educational Testing Service confirms these public perceptions. *Parsing the Achievement Gap* by Paul Barton identified eight factors before and beyond school that influence the achievement gap; among them are parent participation, student mobility, hunger and nutrition, lead poisoning, low birth weight, and television watching.

THE SOLUTION

Community schools recognize that many factors influence the education of our children. This is why they work to mobilize the assets of the school and the entire community to improve educational, health, social, family, economic, and related results.

Community schools function as active agents of change in the lives of students, families and their communities. Leaders of community school initiatives know that success in school, strong families, and healthy communities are intertwined.

Partners pursue a balanced approach that recognizes the importance of academic and non-academic factors and the value of developing social capital to support young people.

Community schools achieve this balance by creating the Conditions for Learning. These conditions, based on research from multiple fields, describe the comprehensive and supportive environment necessary to educate all students to high standards.

The experience of the Coalition for Community Schools suggests that fulfilling these conditions will enable public schools and their communities to more readily achieve the multiple purposes of public education—to help students develop the academic and social competencies to succeed in life and to prepare them to be productive participants in our democracy. The collective presence of these conditions, and the interaction among them, increases the likelihood of success for all.

The Conditions for Learning

- ◆ Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.
- ◆ The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- ◆ Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- ◆ The basic physical, social, emotional, and economic needs of young people and their families are met.
- ◆ There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents and school staff.
- ◆ The community is engaged in the school and promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.

To learn more about the conditions for learning, go to:
<http://www.communityschools.org/mtdhomepage.html>

Partnership is one of the most important principles of effective community schools. No single entity can create all of these conditions, so community schools build partnerships between the school and other organizations and institutions, both public and private. Often, a lead organization coordinates the relationship between the school and its community partners, bringing new expertise to the school and reducing the burden on school staff. The lead organization can be a community-based organization, a public agency, or the school itself.

Community schools intentionally align resources and relationships toward specific results for students, families, schools, and the community. School and community set priorities for action together.

Guiding Principles for Community Schools

- ◆ **Foster strong partnerships:** Partners share their resources and expertise and work together to design community schools and make them work.
- ◆ **Share accountability for results:** Clear, mutually agreed-upon results drive the work of community schools. Data helps partners measure progress toward results.
- ◆ **Set high expectations for all:** Community schools are organized to support learning. Children, youth, and adults are expected to learn at high standards and to be contributing members of their community.
- ◆ **Build on the community's strengths:** Community schools marshal the assets of the entire community—including the people who live and work there, local organizations, and the school.
- ◆ **Embrace diversity:** Community schools know their communities. They work to develop respect and a strong, positive identity for people of diverse backgrounds and are committed to the welfare of the whole community.

RESULTS FRAMEWORK

The Community Schools results framework is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the specific results related to the learning and well-being of students, as well as their families and communities, and includes specific indicators for measuring progress toward these results.

The second part addresses the capacity of a community school to attain the results it desires, and how to measure that capacity. The greater the capacity of the community school, the more likely it is to achieve its desired results for students, family, and community.

PART 1. STUDENTS ARE SUCCESSFUL IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE

Exhibit 1 outlines seven results that are essential for student success.

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

The reader will note the figure suggests that the interaction between the conditions for learning contributes to more than one result.

Specific indicators for measuring progress toward each result are proposed. They represent a comprehensive list of the most important indicators being used currently by various community schools. The Coalition anticipates that local community school leaders will use this framework as a starting point for defining results and indicators that are responsive to their own challenges and circumstances.

The Coalition has prepared two additional documents to support this results framework.

- ◆ *Research Rationale:* This research document provides evidence that the indicators chosen provide important tracking information for achieving a particular result.

This document is available on the Coalition’s website: www.communityschools.org/resultshome.html.

- ◆ *Data Sources:* In many instances the data source is self-evident (e.g., school attendance, family participation in parent-teacher conferences). To obtain different types of data, surveys of parents, teachers, and others will be required. Surveys that have demonstrated both validity and reliability for these purposes are available for public use on the Coalition’s website: www.communityschools.org/resultshome.html.

Finally, a future resource is planned for suggesting specific, evidence-based programs that are most likely to move particular indicators forward. This resource would tap the experience of local community school initiatives with particular programs and services.

PART 2. SCHOOLS FUNCTION FULLY AS COMMUNITY HUBS

Student success relies on the effective operation of community schools—interpersonally and organizationally. Strong leadership and management, alignment of resources to achieve specific results, and strong relationships among students, parents and families, school personnel, and community partners are all pivotal. Together they create a solid infrastructure and the capacity to build student success.

Exhibit 2 includes a set of indicators for determining whether the community school has the capacity to function effectively as a hub of the community. These indicators reflect the operating experience of community school practitioners and advocates. Use the form as a tool for measuring the opinions of key actors at individual community schools to assess progress against each of the indicators. Dialogue about the results shown by the assessment data is vital for improving performance.

Exhibit 1. Community Schools Framework for Student Success
“Students Succeeding at School and in Life”

CONDITIONS FOR LEARNING	RESULTS	INDICATORS
Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.	Children Are Ready To Enter School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Immunization rates ◆ Blood lead levels ◆ Parents read to children* ◆ Children attend early childhood programs* ◆ Receptive vocabulary level ◆ Families connected to support networks/services
The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.	Students Succeed Academically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Standardized test scores ◆ Students demonstrate competencies via multiple modes ◆ Graduation rates ◆ Dropout rates ◆ Teacher attendance rates
Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.	Students Are Actively Involved in Learning and the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Attendance rates ◆ Suspension rates ◆ Truancy rates ◆ Students reporting feeling connected to the school* ◆ Percent of students engaged in and contributing to community* ◆ Homework completion rates*
The basic physical, social, emotional, and economic needs of young people and their families are met.	Students Are Healthy Physically, Socially, and Emotionally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Percent of students demonstrating social and personal competencies* ◆ Percent of students demonstrating well-being on a range of health indices (e.g., immunizations, obesity, vision, hearing, asthma, STDs, pregnancy, substance abuse)* ◆ Students have access to good nutrition*
	Students Live and Learn In Stable and Supportive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Percent of families whose basic needs are met* ◆ Student mobility rates ◆ Percent of students reporting relationship with caring adults* ◆ Incidence of bullying* ◆ Incidence of school vandalism*
There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families, and school staff.	Families Are Actively Involved in Children’s Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Percent of families who report involvement with children’s education* ◆ Percent of families who participate in parent teacher conferences* ◆ Percent of families who report positive interactions with school* ◆ Percent of teachers who report positive interaction with families*
The community is engaged in the school and promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.	Communities Are Desirable Places to Live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Employment/employability rates* ◆ Rate of participation in adult education programs* ◆ Rate of participation at school events* ◆ Percent of residents with health insurance ◆ Neighborhood crime rates

* Denotes indicator that may need to be assessed using surveys or other self-report measures.

Exhibit 2. Indicators of Capacity “Schools Function Fully as Community Hubs”

DIRECTIONS: Rate each of the following statements by circling the number that best represents your opinion.

KEY: 0=No opinion/information at this time; 1=Strongly disagree; 2= Disagree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4= Neither agree/disagree; 5=Somewhat agree; 6=Agree; 7=Strongly agree

	No opinion/ information	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Leadership and Management								
1. Our principal provides supportive leadership.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. A community school coordinator is present on a full-time basis.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Our coordinator facilitates close communication between the principal, school staff, and community partners.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The community school coordinator is an active participant on the school leadership team.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Key stakeholders have agreed upon a clear vision and guiding principles for our community school.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Teachers view the efforts of community partners as supporting their work.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Trust is present among school administrators, teachers, parents, family members, and community partners.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Results and Data								
1. Working with staff, families, and community partners, our community school has identified desired results.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Our community school has identified baseline indicators for measuring students, family, and community progress.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Our community school uses data-based methods to determine its priorities and assess progress regularly.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Our community school analyses data and reviews the results to adjust implementation strategies when appropriate.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Relationships with Partners								
1. Community partners see our school as an inviting and productive place to provide programs and services.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Effective communications mechanisms are in place between school staff and community partners.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Effective communications mechanisms are used regularly to inform parents, families, and residents, as well as community leaders and the public about the accomplishments and needs of our community school.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Planning and Decision Making								
1. A plan is in place for aligning and coordinating supports and opportunities from the school and the community in order to achieve specific results.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The plan demonstrates clear linkages between in-school and after-school curriculum.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. A flexible, decision-making group guides the work of the community school.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. The decision-making group's members represent all key stakeholders, including parents or family members, community residents, school staff, and community partners.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Parent and Community Participation								
1. Our community school welcomes diversity.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. The leaders of our community school facilitate honest conversations among students, families, and residents from different ethnic and racial groups.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Parents, family members, and community residents play active and effective roles in our community school.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Community residents use the school as a focal point for addressing community issues and challenges and for celebration.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sustainability								
1. Our community school has developed a long-range plan for financial sustainability.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Our community school is in the early stages of implementing a long-range financial plan.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Mission Statement

The Coalition's mission is to mobilize the assets of schools, families, and communities to create a united movement for community schools. Community schools strengthen schools, families, and communities to improve student learning.

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