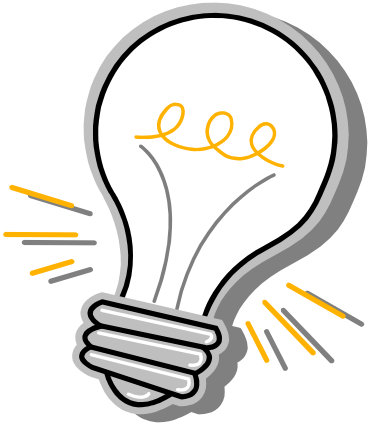




NCPIE Update

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Spotlight on *The Evidence*

A continuing column highlighting the research from “A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement” by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp.

This month we spotlight *Evaluations of Community Schools: Findings to Date* a 2000 review of 49 evaluations of community-school initiatives by Joy Dryfoos. This piece of research can be found on page 103.

The purpose of this review was to summarize data from available evaluations of community school initiatives and to document the impact of community schools in three different areas: Student achievement, Family Well-Being, and Community

Life.

Part One of the review provides a vision of community schools, how they should operate, deliver services to the community, and their orientation to the community. Part One also provides a discussion of the nature and limitations of the existing research, and offers a summary of findings from 49 community school initiatives being implemented across the country. This review will highlight Part One of the research. A look at Part Two can be found online at: <http://www.communityschools.org/evaluation/evalprint.html>.

Community Schools Defined:

'Community school' is an inclusive term, encompassing a growing number of school-community initiatives that feature both common themes and differing approaches. The names of the initiatives suggest some of the varying attributes: Caring Communities, Beacons, Bridges to Success, University-Assisted Schools, Healthy Start, Communities in Schools, School of the 21st Century and many others. Some are broad in scope, promoting widespread replication or adaptation, while others are single entities. Programs are being initiated at the national level (e.g., Children's Aid Society, School of the 21st Century), state level (e.g., New Jersey School-Based Youth Program), local level (e.g., Polk Bros. Foundation Full Services Schools Initiative in Chicago) and in individual schools (Molly Stark Community School, Bennington, Vermont). Community schools also vary in their goals: Some specifically aim to improve academic achievement while others focus primarily on health and behavioral outcomes or enhanced family functioning.

Although the Coalition for Community Schools recognizes that each community school is unique, it has developed a general description of a well-developed community school. *See box.*

Research on the Effectiveness of Community Schools

The author made it clear that it is important to note that community schools provide outcomes and indicators for success beyond academics. Dryfoos and her colleagues believe that in addition to test scores, indicators such as attendance, graduation, and suspension/expulsion are ways in which the effectiveness of these programs can be measured. The author presented research data of 49 different community school program evaluations. In 46 of the reports, positive changes were noted in student achievement, generally in math and reading test scores, student behavior, and parent involvement.

Findings

Outcomes from the programs were organized into four categories:

- **Learning and Achievement:** 36 of the 49 programs, mostly elementary schools, reported academic gains, generally improvements in reading and math test scores over two to three years. In at least eight cases, the outcomes were limited to students who received special services such as case management, mental health, or extended-day sessions. Nineteen programs, including Communities in Schools, reported improvements in school attendance. Eleven programs reported a decline in suspensions. However, there were some instances of school-wide improvement on academic measures. For example:

Charles Drew Elementary School, a participating school in University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia Improvement Corp program, showed more improvement on the state's standardized reading and math tests than any other school in the state in 1999, an increase of 420 points.

At PS 5, a Children's Aid Society Community School in New York City, the percentage of children reading at grade level rose from 28% when they were in grade 4 to 42% by the time they reached grade 6.

- **Improved Social Behavior and Healthy Youth Development:** Eleven programs, including California's Healthy Start, reported reductions in substance abuse. Others also reported drops in teen pregnancy and disruptive behavior.

- **Family Well-Being:** Programs with a strong family focus, including Healthy Start, reported that families improved filling basic needs such as housing, food, finances, and jobs. At least 12 programs reported increases in parent involvement, as measured by volunteer hours. To serve as an additional example of positive findings in this area parents who received School of the 21st Century services were able to improve their child development practices, were less stressed, spent less money on child care, and missed fewer days work.

Vision of a Community School

A community school, operating in a public school building, is open to students, families and the community before, during, and after school, seven days a week, all year long. It is jointly operated through a partnership between the school system and one or more community agencies. Families, youth, principals, teachers and neighborhood residents help design and implement activities that promote high educational achievement and positive youth development.

The school is oriented toward the community, encouraging student learning through community service and service learning. A before and after-school learning component encourages students to build on their classroom experiences, expand their horizons, contribute to their communities, and have fun. A family support center helps families with child rearing, employment, housing, immigration, and other services. Medical, dental, and mental health services are readily available. College faculty and students, business people, youth workers, neighbors, and family members come to support and bolster what schools are working hard to accomplish - ensuring young people's academic, interpersonal, and career success.

Ideally, a full-time community school coordinator works in partnership with the principal. This person is responsible for the delivery of an array of supports provided by local agency partners and participates on the management team for the school. Over time, most community schools consciously integrate activities in several areas to achieve the desired results: quality education; positive youth development; family support; family and community engagement in decision-making; and community development.

- Enhanced Community Life: Programs reported that families and students had better access to such services as health care. Six programs reported lower violence and less street crime. One found a decline in student mobility.

Conclusions

Dryfoos compares these findings to data on the school reform movement, reported in *An Educators' Guide to School Reform*, published by the American Institutes for Research. This review of research on 24 whole school approaches similar to the community schools concept found that: "In general, evidence of positive effects on student achievement—arguably the most important feature of any reform approach—is extremely limited. Even though many of the approaches have been in schools for years, only three provide strong evidence of positive effects on student achievement." Dryfoos concludes that, as a result, educators often consider and made decisions about school reform without vital information and that more rigorous evaluations are needed with broad dissemination of findings. Dryfoos points out that there is a clear overlap between the efforts of the community school initiative and school wide reform and sites work conducted by the American Institutes of Research in the School Development Program, which appears in the *Evaluations of Community School* research review.

It should be noted again that the research on community schools has limitations, yet there is growing evidence that they have positive effects on students, families, and communities. Dryfoos includes statements throughout this piece of research that assert that community schools must be recognized as an important component of the education reform movement and should be seen as important vehicles for education reform.

(Source: Evaluations of Community Schools: Findings to Date, Joy G. Dryfoos, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York, 10706, A New Wave of Evidence-The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement)