



NCPIE Update

A Publication of the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education December 2005-January 2006

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A Look at IRE's Efforts to Help Establish 5 New Parent Resource Centers in the District of Columbia



The December 2005 NCPIE meeting was a time of fellowship as the parent involvement community came together for the annual NCPIE Holiday breakfast – a special treat brought to us by our hosts at NEA. It was also a chance to hear from the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE) and their efforts to help the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) on the establishment of parent/family resource centers.

An Overview of the Project

Strategic Goal Three, Strategy Two, of the DCPS Declaration of Education states that DCPS will establish “a new office devoted to parent involvement and five new parent resource centers that will help parents become more active and effective advocates for their children.” This declaration is two-fold: (1) the establishment of an office within DCPS administration devoted to parent involvement and (2) the establishment of parent centers in five district wards.

IRE, located in Cambridge, MA, has more than thirty years experience in building partnerships among schools, families, and communities to enable high quality educational opportunities for all children. They were contracted by DCPS to facilitate the implementation of DCPS' Strategic Goal Three. Specifically, IRE was contracted to:

- Conduct listening conferences with parents, DCPS staff and community members
- Coordinate the planning process and assist DCPS with the convening of a workgroup to oversee the development of the centers
- Facilitate parent, youth, and community generated focus groups
- Facilitate the development of an overall work plan with timelines
- Create a framework for centers based on the desires (hopes & dreams) of parents expressed in focus group sessions

As a part of its methodology for this project, IRE used *action research*. With this approach to the scope of work the individuals who are closest to the children's needs— parents, administrators, teachers, and community members -- work together to increase the effectiveness of partnerships they design. Thus, beginning in July 2005, IRE conducted informal listening sessions with approximately 62 DCPS staff, parents, and community organization representatives. The sessions were a mix of one-on-one and small group sessions at the DCPS central office and in Wards 1, Ward 7 and Ward 8. The purpose of the listening sessions was to identify key stakeholders, review current policies and practices relating to parent/family engagement and to begin to engage stakeholders in the planning process.

In October 2005, formally organized focus groups were conducted in English and Spanish in the three wards with translators to facilitate the participation of Vietnamese- and Amharic-speaking parents. Ninety parents participated in a total of eight focus groups across the three wards over a three day period. The objective of the focus groups was to ascertain what kinds of supports and programming the centers should include and how the centers should be structured. IRE posed three questions:

1. What supports do parents/families need to help children succeed in school?
2. How would you design the centers to serve parents?
3. What are your expectations for DCPS?

A survey was developed and translated into Spanish and Vietnamese as a tool to solicit input from a broader constituency. Surveys were distributed in Ward 1 through community based organizations that serve immigrant families and a random sampling was obtained by surveying parents in the lobby of DCPS central office. A total of 72 surveys were completed.

Armed with this information, IRE then offered DCPS the following recommendations for implementation of this strategic goal at the district level and as it relates to the implementation of parent/family resource centers:

District Level Recommendations

1. ***DCPS must immediately move to formally establish “the office devoted to parent engagement” as described in the Declaration of Education, to coordinate, manage and provide oversight to the district-wide parent engagement initiative with clear policies for implementation and accountability.***

- DCPS must designate a dedicated staff person who is part of the superintendent’s central leadership team to coordinate, manage and provide oversight for the implementation and operation of family engagement initiative. This individual must be experienced in building partnerships with family and community.
 - A task force should be convened to assess the current structures and policies and to develop a detailed action plan for the implementation of the “office devoted to parent engagement,” with timelines and lines of accountability. This task force should also make recommendations for policy to support implementation and accountability for the parent engagement initiative.
- 2. *DCPS must develop a plan that effectively promotes the vision, goals and expectations for parent engagement throughout the district and out to parents, families and the broader community.***
- A comprehensive communications plan must be developed to ensure consistency and fidelity of implementation of the family engagement initiative. All staff at all levels must be able to articulate the vision, goals and expectations for family engagement and have a clear understanding of their role.
 - The communications plan must also include a strategically designed mix of messages and outreach methods that detail the district’s vision and plan to parents and the community at-large.
- 3. *A comprehensive professional development plan aligned with the goals of the district’s parent engagement initiative must be developed for all staff at all levels.***
- Professional development must focus on transforming the culture of DCPS, at all levels, to one which welcomes parents and community and engages them as partners.
 - Professional development must include improving customer service at all levels and provide school staff with the skills and strategies to engage parents as partners.

Recommendations for Parent/Family Resource Centers

In the development of these centers one point must remain prominent: “The primary role of the centers must be to connect parents and families to DCPS in support of their children’s learning.” That being the case, IRE offers one Planning Process Recommendation:

- 4. *Parents must be at the center of the planning process for the centers. Both the central work group and local planning teams in each ward must engage parents as team members.***

Framework Recommendations

- 5. *The parent/family resource centers must be places where parents are welcomed and respected as partners, with staff that reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of the parents, families and communities served.***
- Staff must include advocates that serve parents, assisting them with the resolution of issues and working to empower them to be more effective advocates for their children.
 - Staff must be trained to view their roles as “border crossers” providing connections between families and schools.
 - Proposed Staffing Configuration: 1 Director, 1 Resource Specialist, 2 Advocates, Staff Assistant

- All staff must be cross-trained, to ensure that each staff member has a clear understanding of the basics of each position in order to provide the most effective service for parents.

6. *Programming in every center must minimally focus on three key areas; connecting parents/families to schools, providing support and advocacy for parents and their children, and building parent capacity to support student success.*

- Centers must assist parents in navigating school bureaucracy and serve as advocates to ensure timely and effective resolution of issues.
- Centers must serve as a resource for accurate DCPS information and access to DCPS and community resources.
- Centers must provide services such as workshops, support groups and training that serve to increase parent efficacy. These services should connect parents to teachers and schools in ways that improve outcomes for children.
- Centers should also incorporate learning opportunities that build individual capacity for parents such as adult literacy, ESL, GED and computer literacy.

7. *DCPS must ensure that the centers have locations that have adequate space with the equipment and technology infrastructure needed to support programming. Locations must be located in areas that provide the greatest access for parents.*

- Centers must be multi-purpose spaces located in the neighborhood with access to public transportation. The centers must have access to:

Resource/Reception areas	Classroom Space
Kitchenette (coffee pot, microwave, refrigerator, hotplate)	Computer Lab
Private Conference space with telephone	Meeting Space/childcare areas
Comfortable furniture as well as chairs and tables	Restroom facilities

- Each center must also have:

Staff Computers connected to DCPS	Telephones
Computers for Parent use w/Internet connections	Copiers & Fax Machine
Simultaneous Interpretation Equipment	Audiovisual Equipment

8. *The parent/family resource centers must have a level of autonomy that will ensure that the centers serve the best interest of parents and actively engage parents and the broader community in center governance and oversight.*

- The proposed governance structure must be a partnership between parents and DCPS which includes a “steering committee” of parents, community and DCPS staff will provide joint oversight and responsibility for setting the direction for programming and hiring staff.
- The steering committee will be responsible for engaging parents and community in the planning process and producing an annual report to the parents and community.

IRE will continue to facilitate the planning process for the establishment of the parent/family resource centers in conjunction with DCPS's Office of Communications and Public Information. The goal is to open the first three parent/family resource centers in late spring 2006 with the remaining two centers coming in the fall of 2006.

A central workgroup has been convened with representation from parents and community members from Wards 1, 7 and 8 together with DCPS staff from key departments and the Executive Director of the DC Education Compact. The role of this work group will be to use the recommendations in the report to create a framework for establishing a process for local design teams to develop plans for the first year of operation.

The success of this endeavor will be contingent upon the development of a clear parent engagement agenda by DCPS. To that end, IRE is committed to provide continuing support, facilitation and technical assistance to establish the five parent/family resource centers as described in the DCPS Declaration of Education.

(Source: Report to the Superintendent of the District of Columbia Public Schools on The Establishment of Parent/Family Resource Centers, December 9, 2005)



Spotlight on *The Evidence*

A continuing column highlighting the research from “A NewWave 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 Figure A.*

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

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.

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.

- 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)

Parent Involvement Resources, Upcoming Meetings, & Trainings

January Meeting Presentation: The Respect for All Project

As a program of Women's Educational Media, the Respect for All Project encompasses a series of documentary films, printed curriculum guides and professional diversity training. This three pronged approach aims to create safe schools and communities by giving youth, their educators and service providers the tools they need to address and understand diversity of all kinds. This group creates award-winning documentary films and training on anti-bias education that promotes cultural diversity; and is looking to connect more fully with parent involvement organizations interested in anti-violence and anti-bullying education. Come here more on Wednesday, January 25, 2006 in NEA Conference Room B.

NCPIE's 2006 Meeting and Presentation Schedule

Our year 2006 meetings will be held at the National Education Association, 1201 16th Street, NW, Washington DC, 20036 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. We try to schedule our meeting on the last

Wednesday of each month although as you will note, there are some exceptions. Please note that there is no meeting in July. Please put these dates in your calendar.

Wednesday, January 25, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, February 22, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, March 29, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, April 26, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, May 31, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, June 28, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, August 30, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, September 27, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, October 25, 2006	Conference Room B
Wednesday, December 13, 2006	Conference Room B