



Buffalo Public Schools

Putting children and families first to ensure high academic achievement for all

Dr. Kriner Cash, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Genelle Morris, Chief Accountability Officer

RESEARCH CAPSULE

Vol. 4
January 2017

Erica J. Boyce, Program Evaluator

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

AT A GLANCE

Community schools were originally created to offer better educational opportunities for children coming from low-income families and neighborhoods. The vision underlying community school development is to provide a more comprehensive package of services to students, parents, and community members. The Buffalo Public School (BPS) District has moved forward with the implementation of various community schools throughout the District during the 2016-2017 school year. This research capsule summarizes the community school model along with previously produced evaluation results. However, continued research is needed to further understand the impact community schools have both on student learning and their surrounding support systems.

Problem Based Learning as an Instructional Approach and Taxonomy

A community school is described by the Coalition for Community Schools, as “a place and a set of partnerships, connecting a school, the families of students, and the surrounding community. A community school is distinguished by an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development” (Heers, 2016, p.1). Community schools aim to build neighborhood-wide social capital and position productive partnerships as an integral component to school and neighborhood improvements (Green, 2014).

Although community schools have recently received more attention within the education field, they have been in existence since the early 1900s. John Dewey, prior educator, was known for his conceptual education model focusing on schools as the social center within communities (Garrett, 2012) For Dewey, education was essential to social change, and schools were primary institutions that existed to support democracy and strong communities (Garrett, 2012). Currently, community

schools exist in 49 states and the District of Columbia totaling approximately 4,000 to 5,000 community schools throughout the United States (Green, 2014). Community schools are not exclusive to the United States. They can also be found in European countries such as Scotland, Sweden, England, and the Netherlands (Heers, 2016).

The vision underlying community school development is to provide a more comprehensive package of services to students, parents, and community members. The term 'community school' refers more to a service model rather than a specific type of school. Martin J. Blank, director of the Coalition for Community Schools and president of the Institute for Educational Leadership describes community schools as being, "built on five pillars including strong early childhood development experiences, comprehensive services, after school and other extended learning opportunities, parent and community involvement, and an engaging, real world curriculum" (Gilroy, 2011; p.2). The community school approach includes partnering with community organizations, making the school a community hub where services are provided during and outside of the school day, and targeting broad student, family, and community outcomes (Houser, 2016). Community schools influence the health and education of neighborhood residents through three pathways: building trust, establishing norms, and linking people to networks and services (Diamond, 2016).

Because community schools respond to the needs of their local residents, these schools vary in the types of services they offer (Biag, 2016). Curriculum typically extends beyond the traditional school-day classroom instruction by offering services before and after regular school hours, on the weekends, and during the summer months. Oftentimes, administrators integrate academic, health, and social supports with youth and community development strategies. The goal is to more efficiently use resources to enhance students' learning, strengthen families, and promote healthy communities (Biag, 2016). Community schools emphasize curriculum and instruction grounded in community life, as well as the delivery of a range of holistic services for students, their families, and neighbors through community partnerships (Haines, 2016). Community schools commonly provide case management, primary health clinics, youth development programs, family resource centers, legal clinics, early childhood development programs, referral systems, and after-school programs (Haines, 2016).

By coordinating various human service resources in a central location, community schools offer increased access to community members and encourage more communication and collaboration among providers and educators (Biag, 2016). Additionally, community schools also improve access to and integration of wraparound services to address barriers to learning and healthy development by linking such services through the school (Houser, 2016). Community schools can also differ in their operating models. In some instances, school district employees are in charge of providing oversight over school-based programs; in others, nonprofit agencies take the lead role and remove the burden and responsibility of coordinating care from the school (Whalen, 2008).

Origin of Community Schools

Community schools were originally created to offer better educational opportunities for children coming from low-income families and neighborhoods (Blank et al., 2012; Biag, 2016). Typically, students associated with lower socio-economic statuses (SES), compared to children from higher

SES, are exposed to difficulties that put them in a disadvantaged position throughout their educational careers (Bower, 2011; Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Evans & Kantrowitz, 2002; McLoyd, 1990; Wilson, 2010).

Poverty has proved to cause adverse effects on the physical, social, and cognitive development of children and youth (Berliner, 2009). Young people from disadvantaged families are more likely to develop chronic health conditions, live with a mental health concern (Fletcher, 2008), and have fewer sources of social and emotional support (Evans, 2004). Growing up poor has also been linked to lower test scores, meager school attendance, higher rates of grade failure, and early high school dropout (Biag, 2016). Moreover, compared to wealthy families, poor families are less able to invest time and resources to aid their children's learning (Biag, 2016)

Urban schools and their communities face multiple challenges, including the impacts of poverty, limited school resources, less qualified teachers, and low levels of social capital in their communities (Evans, 2004; Gilroy, 2011). These urban schools also generally have lower academic achievement and graduation rates than their rural and suburban counterparts (Houser, 2016). The rationale for building community schools is based on the premise that students in many neighborhoods need a wide range of support systems to address factors such as difficult family circumstances, poverty, and health problems. Students often come to school with emotional and physical needs that can affect academic achievement and pose challenges for schools. By supporting community development and engagement, coalition leaders believe that schools can improve student learning, strengthen families, and build healthier communities (Gilroy, 2011).) Part of the strategy for success and closing the achievement gap involves reducing health care disparities. Studies show that healthier students are better learners and that underserved communities can benefit from a system that brings health care to students where they are in school (Gilroy, 2011).

Community schools recognize the critical role parents have in the academic and social-emotional development of their children and do more to initiate parental involvement. Parents are more frequently invited to be physically present in the school, for example, as volunteers helping organize activities or participating in these activities (Heers, 2016). Due to structural constraints, parents from various social classes differ in their attitudes and behaviors toward schools. As a consequence, involving them in the educational process can be difficult in environments where they have not been much involved in traditional school-based forms of parental involvement. This is because they may feel intimidated or detached from schools or have past negative experiences that may prevent them from getting involved (Heers, 2015). Research suggests that parents are more inclined to visit schools when services, such as doctors, psychologists, and social workers, are available (Heers, 2015). Regular communication between parents and the school helps establish a trustworthy relationship between the school and parents and may help parents develop a positive attitude toward their children's school (Heers, 2016).

Prior Research Efforts

The Coalition for Community Schools' overarching vision for community schools is ensuring that students graduate from high school and are ready for college, careers, and citizenship (Coalition of

Community Schools). In order to do this, they strive to ensure that children are ready to learn (Gilroy, 2011). Research is still emerging regarding the effectiveness of community schools in meeting these goals; however initial studies have surfaced some of the following results.

As would be expected, academic achievement was a common performance indicator examined in several studies. Many of the evaluations suggested that community schools may positively affect student achievement and have shown promise across academic indicators such as student performance and attendance (Trujillo, 2014). For example, community schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma, have outperformed their non-community schools counterparts on state exams in math and reading by 32 and 19 points, respectively (Blank et al., 2012). In an evaluation of 20 community schools, Blank et al. (2003) found that community schools demonstrated improvements across several in-school metrics like student grades, student behavior, teacher attitudes, and homework completion percentages (Green, 2014). Research focusing on afterschool program involvement found that community school students participating in such activities scored significantly higher on standardized math tests than students in other city schools and had higher attendance rates than the city average (Gilroy, 2011). In Cincinnati, Ohio, after implementing a community schools reform, a high school significantly transformed an 84% drop-out rate at the 10th-grade level into a 100% school graduation rate in three years (Gilroy, 2011).

Additionally, research reports show community schools are effective in improving academic outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged students. Positive individual level outcomes documented in peer-reviewed publications include improved academic achievement, attendance rates, graduation rates, prosocial behavior, and parent engagement (Diamond, 2016). Biag and Castrechini (2016) conducted a case study on six low income, predominantly Latino community schools, to investigate whether students' participation in community-school programming influenced their attendance and achievement. Results indicated that youth who participated in extended learning programs or whose families were involved in family engagement opportunities exhibited greater attendance rates and achievement in math and English language arts, when compared to their nonparticipating peers (Biag, 2016).

Research studies have also focused outside of community school walls. In their multiyear study of Children's Aid Society Schools, Fordham University researchers, found that parents had increasingly greater presence in community schools relative to comparison schools. Families expressed feeling more welcome in school, and, as such, took advantage of the onsite medical, social, and emotional support services offered to them these services, in turn, helped to stabilize families and build their capacities to be better advocates for their children (Biag, 2016).

Community-level studies have also been conducted and provided evidence to suggest that community school strategies not only provided important school-based services but also represented an expansion of the traditional school model by leveraging and aligning community partners to improve student outcomes (Fehrer, 2016). Warren (2005) argued that community schools have demonstrated "some broader revitalizations to neighborhoods" (p. 145) and built productive connections with parents, community members, and community-based organizations (Green, 2014). Additionally, results from community school students found that a higher percentage of certified teachers and a lower student to staff ratio is associated with lower school

crime. Furthermore, they found that poor academic performance is positively associated with school crime rates. At the same time, neighborhood crime was not significantly associated with school crime. Given these findings, they suggested that school violence prevention should involve school and community partnerships, as both school- and neighborhood-level factors are related to increased crime rates in secondary schools (Heers, 2016).

The community school model suggests that the traditional school model is not sufficient to overcome the role of poverty in equitable access to learning and that improving student achievement requires a holistic service approach. By leveraging community partnerships to address student barriers to learning and shift relationships between schools, families, and community, the community school model represents an expanded vision of what schools are, who they include, and projected student and community-level outcomes (Fehrer, 2016).

Limitation to Research on Community Schools

As with most types of applied research and evaluation, community schools' studies are not without their challenges. Existing research has mostly been cross-sectional, collecting data at only one time point, (Houser, 2016) and focusing only on certain types of programs rather than examining students' engagement in a range of supports and interventions (Biag, 2016). Additionally, since community schools vary in service delivery models specific to their community's needs, it is challenging to compare student outcomes across schools (Biag, 2016). Lastly, student sampling in community school studies may have a level of inherent bias. It is reasonable to believe that students and parents who choose community-school programming are different from nonparticipants in important yet unobserved ways and that these differences better explain the variations seen in outcomes between those who take part in programs and those who do not (Biag, 2016).

Future Directions for Research on Community Schools

Future research should collect additional data longitudinally, over a period of several time points to help assess long-term impact. The effects of community schools are likely to take a while to materialize (Claassen et al., 2008). In addition, community schools are implemented at the school level, but outcomes are primarily measured at the student level. Future research should consider the school as well as the individual level, to help determine at what level change is occurring and to identify student characteristics of individuals who are most successful in community schools (Heers, 2016). Additional research could help us better understand the extent to which a causal relationship exists between community school implementation and student outcomes, as well as the role of the District in supporting community school implementation (Fehrer, 2016).

On a Local Note

Developing strong community schools is one of the priorities outlined in the Buffalo Public Schools (BPS)' New Education Bargain. Twelve schools, either priority or focus, and one charter school in good standing, were selected for the enhanced service delivery model at the beginning of the

2016-2017 school year. Strong educational programs that focus on enriching and expanding core curriculum have been implemented for students and to support parent and community engagement. Additionally, Say Yes and other local resources have started offering extra-curricular, medical, dental, health, and wellness services at these schools. BPS Parent Centers have also been created at four of the community schools to assist parents and families with education and resources. Since launching in the beginning of the school year, thousands of children and their families have benefited from a wide range of educational, cultural, and social programs. The Office of Shared Accountability has developed and implemented an evaluation plan outlining several performance measures to begin assessing the effectiveness of the community schools including academic achievement, school culture, parent involvement, and community perception.

References

- Berliner, D. C. (2009). *Poverty and potential: Out-of-school factors and school success*. Boulder, CO: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit.
- Biag, M. and Castrechini, S. (2016) Coordinated Strategies to Help the Whole Child: Examining the Contributions of Full-Service Community Schools, *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, (21) 3, 157-173.
- Blank, M., Jacobson, R., & Melaville, A. (2012). *How district and community leaders are building effective, sustainable leadership*. Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools.
- Bower, C. B. (2011). Social policy and the achievement gap: What do we know? Where should we head? *Education and Urban Society*, (45) 3–36.
- Brickman, E., Cancelli, A., Sanchez, A., & Rivera, G. (1998). *The Children's Aid Society/Board of education community schools: Second-year evaluation report*. New York, NY: Fordham University Graduate School of Education and Social Services.
- Diamond, C., and N. Freudenberg (2016). Community Schools: a Public Health Opportunity to Reverse Urban Cycles of Disadvantage. *Journal of Urban Health: Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, (93) 6: 923-939.
- Duncan, G. J., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Klebanov, P. K. (1994). Economic deprivation and early childhood development. *Child Development*, (65), 296–318.
- Duncan, G. J., Yeung, W. J., Brooks-Gunn, J., & Smith, J. R. (1998). How much does childhood poverty affect the life chances of children? *American Sociological Review*, (63), 406–423.
- Evans, G. W., & Kantrowitz, E. (2002). Socioeconomic status and health: The potential role of environmental risk exposure. *Annual Review of Public Health*, (23), 303–331.
- Fehrer, K. and J. Leos-Urbel (2016). We're One Team: Examining Community School Implementation Strategies in Oakland. *Education Sciences*, (6) 26, 1-24.
- Garrett, K. (2012). Community Schools: It Takes a Village Pooled resources and efforts support student success and help close the achievement gap. *Published by the California School Boards Association (CSBA), www.csba.org/CASchoolNews.aspx*.
- Gilroy, M. (2011). Community Schools Seek to Improve High School Achievement, College Readiness. *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, (21) 14: 49-52.
- Green, T., and M. Gooden (2014) Transforming Out-of-School Challenges Into Opportunities: Community Schools Reform in the Urban Midwest. *Urban Education*. (49) 8: 930-954.
- Haines, S.J., Gross, J., Blue-Banning, M., Francis, G.L., and A. Turnbull (2015). Fostering Family–School and Community–School Partnerships in Inclusive Schools: Using Practice as a Guide. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, (40) 3: 277-239.

- Heers, M., Van Klaveren, C., Groot, W, and H.M. van den Brink (2014). The impact of community schools on student dropout in pre-vocational education. *Economics of Education Review* (41): 105–119.
- Heers, M., Van Klaveren, C., Groot, W, and H.M. van den Brink (2016). Community Schools: What We Know and What We Need to Know, *Review of Educational Research*, (86) 4: 1016–1051.
- Houser, J. H. (2016). Community- and School-Sponsored Program Participation and Academic Achievement in a Full-Service Community School. *Education and Urban Society*, (48) 4: 324-345.
- McLoyd, V. C. (1990). The impact of economic hardship on Black families and children: Psychological distress, parenting, and socioemotional development. *Child Development*, (61), 311–346.
- Officer, S., Grim J., Medina, M., Bringle, R. and A. Foreman (2013) Strengthening Community Schools Through University Partnerships, *Peabody Journal of Education*, (88) 5, 564-577.
- The Children’s Aid Society. *Building A Community School*. Third Edition.
- Trujillo, T., Hernández, L.E., Jarrell, T, and R. Kissell (2014) Community Schools as Urban District Reform: Analyzing Oakland’s Policy Landscape Through Oral Histories, *Urban Education* (49) 8, 895-929.
- Wilson, W. J. (2010). Why both social structure and culture matter in a holistic analysis of inner-city poverty. *ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, (629) 200–219.
- Valli, L., Stefanski, A, and R. Jacobson (2016) Typologizing School–Community Partnerships: A Framework for Analysis and Action. *Urban Education*. 51(7) 719–747.