



Full Service Schools

The Future of the T.D.S.B.

**C. Spence
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FULL SERVICE SCHOOLS AT THE TDSB

The Integration of Quality Education with Services

The community schools movement is part of a growing revolution against a fragmented approach to the challenges presented by children seen as at-risk. Community schools integrate the delivery of quality education with whatever health and social services are required in a specific community. These institutions draw on both school resources and outside community agencies that come into the schools and join forces to provide seamless programs (Dryfoos 1998, 73).

The Coalition for Community Schools identifies five areas for program and service development in community schools:

1. quality educational services
2. youth-development programs
3. family-support activities
4. family and community engagement
5. community development

The full-service community school integrates services for families under one roof. This approach supports the teaching and learning mission of the school, while making services such as health screening, mental health, recreation, after-school programs, group counselling, cultural events, parent education, and welfare readily available for families. It is consistent with the wraparound model, where services are fitted to the needs of children rather than slotting children into programs.

Characterstics of an effective community school

Six traits characterize what Shaw and Replogle (1996, 9) term as “school-linked services”:

A holistic approach to children

Holism means that the relationship between health, familial adjustment and emotional well-being, and learning is recognized. Programs are set up to address all factors supporting learning in a non-fragmented manner.

Joint planning

To enjoy the status of full-service school, school officials, parents and community personnel must plan together for the well-being of their children and families. It is essential that the views of parents be elicited and considered in decision making.

Shared service delivery

In full-service schools, social services are either co-located or integrated with the administration.

Collaboration and/or coordination

To be truly effective, schools, social service agencies and health providers must move beyond joint planning to, if not directly sharing resources, then cooperating in their delivery. In the future, this may extend to joint use of facilities.

Focus on child outcomes

Assessment of full-service school programs is predicated on measures of the well-being and achievement of students, rather than on mere “procedural compliance with rules and regulations.”

Shifts in professional roles

True collaboration requires eliminating professional turf battles in the interest of children. This blending of professional roles does not imply a complete merger, such as recasting teachers as mental-health providers. Yet educators, social workers, counsellors and health professionals will ultimately learn from one another as they serve youngsters.

Inventive, Enduring Partnerships

Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers, and community partners. Families, youth, and residents join with educators and community partners to articulate shared goals for students and to help design, implement, and evaluate activities. Participation by these stakeholders in decision making helps ensure that community schools meet local needs and show measurable progress.

These partnerships are organized around two common goals (Blank, Melaville, and Shaw 2003):

- (1) helping students learn and succeed
- (2) strengthening families and communities

By sharing expertise and resources, schools and communities act in concert to transform traditional schools into permanent partnerships for excellence. Schools value the resources and involvement of community partners, and communities understand that strong schools are at the heart of strong neighbourhoods. Health and social service agencies, family-support groups, youth-development organizations, institutions of higher education, community organizations, businesses, and civic and faith-based groups all play a part.

Community schools promote both youth and adult development. They provide leadership-training programs and offer students ongoing opportunities to hold decision-making roles, to speak out in school and community forums, and to work with others on school and community projects. Parents and community residents support their children's learning while developing their own knowledge and skills. Literacy classes, adult and parent education, employment training, family support, and leadership development all are part of the community school vision.

Community schools recognize that students who are physically, socially, and emotionally competent tend to succeed academically. Autonomy, awareness of others, responsibility, and rational optimism all inform academic achievement. In traditional schools, students who lack these essential, non-academic skills are, for the most part, left to acquire them outside school. That is not the case in community schools, where students have abundant opportunities for learning and exploration in school, after school, and in the community.

The linking of school and community also gives community schools other distinct advantages over traditional schools. First, it garners additional resources and reduces non-instructional demands on school staff. By providing services and supports that address the varied broader needs of students, partnerships with the community enable educators to concentrate on curriculum and instruction. Second, drawing on community resources provides learning opportunities that enhance students' social, emotional, and physical development as well as academic skills.

Finally, community partnerships connect young people and their families to positive role models and make them more aware of life options. They offer students a source of social capital — the networks

and relationships that create a sense of belonging, and communicate the importance of education and belief in the future (Blank, Melaville, and Shah 2003).

Community school students show significant and widely evident gains in essential areas of non-academic development. As documented in *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools* (Blank et al. 2003), they benefit from stronger parent–teacher relationships, increased teacher satisfaction, a more positive school environment, greater community support, and better use of school buildings. Partly as a result of the latter, the neighbourhoods of community schools enjoy increased security, heightened community pride, and better rapport among students and residents.

Other research underscores these connections among school, home, family, community, and student achievement. Barton (2003) identifies 14 factors that correlate with student achievement. Six of these relate to the school environment, such as school curriculum, teacher preparation, and school safety. The remaining eight factors speak to the importance of family and community to student success. Among these are parent availability and support, student mobility, television watching, and parental involvement. Barton concludes that, “the education system cannot succeed in greatly reducing the gaps by going it alone” (37).

Open Access Schools

In community schools, children engage in creative educational projects and cultural enrichment from early in the morning until evening, and all summer long. Examples of school-wide service projects include sponsoring a Seniors Day, undertaking a beautification project, sponsoring a luncheon for new students, organizing noontime intramural sports, and providing a luncheon for volunteer parents. Parents are welcome in community schools. Children also take active part in community service. Projects might include organizing canned food drives; adopting a family during the holiday season; visiting a senior citizens’ centre; helping with Special Olympics; taking part in a community cleanup day; volunteering at local elementary schools, daycare centres, or nursery schools; offering child care to parents attending school functions; planning a blood drive; and offering computer training.

Community schools fall on a continuum: some have one-item add-ons such as after-school enrichment programs, while others constitute a fully realized and comprehensive alternative model. Almost all are built on partnerships between the school and such groups as community services, universities, businesses, churches, libraries, museums, the police, and youth agencies. All extend the school hours and all are child-centred.

Community leaders, school staff, school leaders, and parents at the local level are enthusiastic about such schools — they *want* their school buildings open as much as possible. Keeping schools open longer before and after school, and during the summer, can turn them into community learning hubs. By leaving school doors open during non-traditional school hours, schools provide students, parents, and the community with access to valuable educational resources and a haven for children; learning takes place in a building removed from the violence, drugs, and lack of supervision that permeate some communities.

Schools that are hubs in the community can serve as a critical resource to meet the growing need for children to have safe and productive activities during the hours outside the school day. Before- and after-school and summer programs help children stay on the right track from the beginning: these programs can provide reading tutors to younger children, mentors to guide older children, and so on. Working parents, too, want more access to extended learning opportunities.

Public schools are uniquely suited to meet these formidable challenges, providing low-cost, accessible locations to extend learning. They can offer children and youth long-term mentoring to help them master basic skills; at the same time, they can provide enrichment activities that often have the potential to develop into lifelong interests. They allow all partners in a child's education to become involved, utilizing their diverse talents and resources. For example, science professionals can act as mentors and, in so doing, both share their expertise and serve as role models for the importance of education. Extending the hours that schools are open is a cost-effective means of allowing students to learn and develop in an enriching, safe, and drug-free environment.

How the School Needs to Work with the Community

In attempts to open schools to the outside world, a great deal of energy has been wasted through a lack of consensus. Staff, students, trustees, and community have to share a common interest in developing a community school. Yet even if all these players are highly motivated, that can quickly wane when it seems that a community school merely means more work, when increased commitment is not connected with incentives and results, and when financial, structural, and personnel support are not forthcoming.

The success of community use of a school is dependent on the school working with the community to achieve the following:

- Integrate school and adult education. School classes and adult education should both take place on community school premises, functioning together with regard to content and context. Adults should be welcomed as students in the morning classes, while in the afternoons and evenings, age-specific and mixed-age activities and courses should be offered.
- Make the school not only a learning venue, but also a cultural and leisure-time facility for community groups.
- Put its available resources (e.g., workshops, specialty rooms, sports facilities, classrooms, kitchen, and library) at the disposal of its new clientele. The physical school has multiple functions throughout the week, not only on weekends.
- Become a self-help hub for neighbours, unemployed youth, and people who wish to qualify themselves and upgrade their skills.
- Network with other external learning venues, and work on projects with other non-school groups and institutions.
- Build a sense of belonging, of community, thereby counteracting and reducing the alienation that so many young people feel at school.
- Make significant contributions to social development by promoting good neighbourly relations and self-reliance.

Further criteria for a successful community school are set out below:

- A community school will need the leadership and management capacity to ensure that no additional burden is put on school staff, and the school remains able to operate its programs without being distracted from its education agenda.
- Provision of activities and services should not have a negative impact on the main duty of the school — that is, to educate its students.
- A community school is expected to cooperate with board and provincial evaluation of its programs, activities, and standards.
- A community school must ensure that it has consulted with other board schools and the local community, and that demand exists for the core services it intends to offer.
- School facilities will need to be open outside school hours, including weekends and holidays.
- When developing proposals, a community school should keep in mind how those proposals will build positive links between people from different backgrounds within the community.

- All groups, including students, families, and the local community, should have access to a range of services and facilities at the school.
- All services should be accessible to as many local community groups as possible, taking account of relevant legislation and regulations — a community school should be welcoming, open, and accessible to all users.

Making Health and Social Services Available

In addition to offering lifelong-learning programs, a community school could make available health and social services, including health promotion and education; special education activities; teen counseling centres; drug-prevention and early intervention/treatment services; preventive health services such as immunization; nutrition/obesity-related services and support; mental health services; parenting classes; family support; and first-aid training.

To be part of a community school, programs and services must meet certain conditions, such as being available throughout the calendar year and being characterized by a wide range. Examples of specific criteria are identified below:

- **Lifelong learning:** Open to all the community; wide range of programs covering many levels and abilities (e.g., college/university, continuing education); qualification- and non-qualification-based programs.
- **Childcare:** Open longer hours (e.g., 8 a.m.–6 p.m.); open for use by school staff and all local families, not just those with students at the school, and by all family members, not just parents.
- **Health and social services:** Open to some or all students in the school, including students with special educational needs and disabilities, and, wherever appropriate, students from other schools, families, and the local community.
- **Family learning:** Open to all local families, not just those with students at the school, and all family members, not just parents.
- **Parenting support:** Open to all local families, not just those with students at the school and all family members, not just parents.
- **Study support:** Wide range of study-support and holiday activities;
- **Sports and arts:** Wide range of sports and arts activities; open to all members of the community, including local sports clubs.
- **Information technology:** Available for at least 10 hours per week; open to all members of the community.

Finally, a community school must take into the account the extra costs associated with this type of education and extended building use. The development of partnerships to cover these costs is critical. Specific costs include:

- staff to plan, develop, and operate the extended services, including the management of relationships between different agencies and the raising of funds from other sources;
- extra caretaking or volunteers' expenses;
- additional heating, lighting, and other incidental costs arising from extended school activities;
- capital adjustments, such as refurbishment, additional equipment, and enhanced security; and

- transportation to enable children and other users to make use of the extended services.

Lessons Distilled from Experience with Community Schools

A number of lessons have been learned through the community school experience to date, and these can be summarized as follows:

- **Build consensus and partnership**

Extending learning time at a school through programs such as tutoring in reading, homework centres, mentoring, or drug prevention will require collaboration among diverse partners. Not only parents and educators, but also community residents, service providers, and public officials will need — and want — to be involved in the process. Programs should draw on all of the community's resources while also addressing the concerns of all who are affected as partners.

- **Conduct a community assessment of needs and resources**

A community assessment helps a partnership turn a shared vision for continuous learning and safety into strategies that use resources efficiently to address local conditions. Assessment information can come from interviews, surveys, focus groups, and community forums. All local stakeholders can contribute to the process so that the resulting strategies address real concerns and consider all possible resources.

- **Design programs with care**

Successful partnerships have concluded that every school and community must choose its own combination of opportunities to address local conditions and concerns. Nevertheless, effective programs establish vision and focus, address needs in an appropriate manner, coordinate efforts, and from the beginning create a system of accountability.

- **Consider the details**

School governance, liability, and building-maintenance issues are paramount in making a community school work. Strong leadership, collaborative decision making, and a clear understanding of management and organization procedures and policies such as liability, along with managed, mutually acceptable arrangements for physical space, are critical elements of successful programs.

- **Provide effective staff**

Staff for after-school or summer learning can come from the school, a partner agency, or the community, but should have appropriate experience, realistic expectations, and a true interest in caring for children. Paid professionals and teachers can be supplemented with volunteers and parents.

- **Evaluate a program's accomplishments**

Community school programs are by nature complex and, no matter how well designed, will evolve through experience. Continuous monitoring of a program's progress — in addition to a shared understanding of its goals — can help leaders and staff maintain their focus, improve effectiveness and accountability, ensure parent and participant satisfaction, and identify changes that need to be made. Continuous monitoring allows a program's director to assess whether its key features are working as intended, and helps the program to improve.