

The Coalition for Community Schools

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An alliance of more than 160 national, state and local organizations including: education (e.g. AFT, NEA, American Assn. of School Administration; National Schools Boards Association), parents (National PTA); family support and human services (e.g. Child Welfare League of America); government (National League of Cities); community building/development (e.g. American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees); youth development (e.g. YMCA of the USA).

Some key principles

1. Public schools are fundamental to our *democratic values* and must not be isolated from their communities.
-*The school is the center of the community.* While educating students remains its primary focus, the school also offers resources to adult community members to better their lives. These could include organizing adults for community improvement, offering classes in computers and other tech capability, reducing energy costs, growing gardens and so on.
2. We must recognize that *community issues*—poverty, violence, family stability and substance abuse—are school issues.
-This means that schools can offer health, dental and mental health services.
3. Our children, young people and their families need more connections, more support, more opportunities and more learning time to be successful. We must create effective schools that have *robust relationships with families*. Children do better when their families do better.
-Schools are the catalyst for support programs from infancy on up.
4. *Communities and schools are fundamentally and positively interconnected.* Engaged communities build strong schools; effective schools are essential to strong communities.
-As adults in the community come in to the school for a variety of reasons, we are likely to see student behavior improving.
5. The *quality of schools* matters. High academic standards, rigorous curricula, high-quality teachers, effective schools leadership, aligned tests, accountability, and strong professional development are important for student success.
6. The *development of the whole child* is a critical factor for student success. This includes instructional opportunities in school and out of school, by exploring the child's talents and interests through experiences that stretch his/her aspirations.
-Schools might offer extensive day education through, which could include academic and enrichment activities, along with recreational and opportunities to serve their communities.

Strategies that work

1. *High expectations* focused on high achievement encourage students to move forward. Every adult in the community acts on the belief that all students can learn, succeed, and contribute to society.
2. A focus on *real-world learning* engages students. Students apply their learning through service learning, civic and environmental education, and see the relevance of their coursework in their lives. Moreover, youth and the school itself help to solve problems in their own community.

3. *Bridging school and community resources* helps students broaden their skills and aspirations, such as through mentoring relationships with caring adults, internship and job training opportunities, conflict resolution training.
4. *Building social and emotional competencies* nurtures life skills.
5. Welcoming and engaging schools facilitate school-community-family relationships. Schools are open to students, families, and community members—spanning the generations—for learning and recreation, before and after traditional schools hours, into the evenings, on weekends, and during the summers. *Families and residents participate in the life of the school* and the school is a center for community dialogue and problem solving. The school staff works collaboratively with the partner community agency and community members.

For example, in Chicago each of the 150 Community Public Schools:

- *Partners with at least one non-profit organization (NPO)* with a minimum of three years experience implementing after school programs and/or a demonstrated track record of providing successful educational and related activities that enhance academic performance and positive youth development of CPS students
- Hires a *full-time resource/site coordinator* at the local level to oversee programs, help identify and engage additional resource providers, coordinates with the NPO partner and Advisory Group, and supervises student and/or community workers.
- Establishes an *advisory committee* that includes teachers, parents, the school principal, community members, a representative from the NPO partner and other key school and community stakeholders. It leads in a needs assessment or asset mapping to determine the types of programs and services that are needed and identify resources that currently exist.
- Ensures that *all out-of-school time programs relate to and support the school's academic program*. Whether a school is running a culinary course, creating a school newspaper, or offering an arts integration activity, the programs intentionally include both academic and social outcomes for a minimum of 75 students.

Community schools offer a minimum of 12 hours per week of after school activities, including parent programming, health and social services. Most CPS Community Schools have programming until 5 pm or 6 pm, and many have Saturday and summer program offerings.

Some results

Improved student performance, including on standardized tests, quality of homework, class participation and class behavior

Much lower numbers of serious disciplinary incidents

Stronger parent-teacher relationships

Increased teacher satisfaction

Greater community support, security, pride and rapport among students and residents