

EPIC paper provides roadmap to expand full-service community schools

Every child deserves a high-quality public education in his or her own neighborhood. Unfortunately, we know too often children of color, and those from under-resourced families, don't realize the same educational benefits and outcomes as their peers.

Minnesota has tried top-down models that rely heavily on standardized tests, narrowing curriculum and placing schools in competition. This has failed to produce widespread improvement. Education Minnesota's Educator Policy Innovation Center has written a report suggesting full-service community schools offer a better path to equity and excellence. By welcoming community members as partners in school improvement, bringing community services into the school, and empowering the people closest to students to examine disparities, racial and economic opportunity gaps close.

The nine advisers on this report found communities across the nation using this model see results. More of their students are graduating and going to college. Student absenteeism and discipline are down. And parents are getting support they need and becoming more engaged in their schools.

Full-service community schools put social, medical and supplemental academic services and enrichment activities where they are most accessible—at the school. Instead of treating a range of educational “problems” as separate issues, community schools work to find ways to unite them and solve them together.

HOW FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WORK:

They engage families, teachers and other community members to identify the strengths and needs that affect student success. A community schools strategy creates the structure and culture needed to fulfill the following six conditions:

- Early childhood programs are available to nurture growth and development.
- The school offers core instruction delivered by qualified teachers and organized around a challenging curriculum built with high standards and expectations for students.
- Students are motivated and engaged in learning—in both school and community settings—before, during and after school and in the summer.
- The basic physical, mental and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- Parents, families and school staff demonstrate mutual respect and collaborate effectively.
- Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a safe, supportive and respectful environment and connects students to a broader learning community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The state increase funding for site coordinators and encourage co-location of state services.
- School district leaders recruit community partners, dedicate district resources and support partners. Local leaders identify opportunities to locate appropriate services in schools.
- Communities rally for the necessary changes to create a community school in their city.

