



Principals and Community Schools

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New Mandates

Principals in British Columbia today have a greater range of responsibilities than their predecessors of just a few years ago. Not only is society changing, but legislated mandates have also greatly expanded. Early learning initiatives, community literacy plans and personalized learning are just a few examples that require schools to open their doors and minds to a wider range of programs than ever before. We believe that a community school approach is an effective way to enable principals to better address **21st Century expectations** and the needs of children and families.

Many Models of Community Schools

Community schools across BC today are much more varied than in the past. A few examples include:

- **Vancouver**, which implemented the first “hub” community schools model in the province in 2004. All schools in the district are served by teams of Community School Coordinators, Teachers, Youth & Family Workers and Activity Programmers. There are over 200 distinct partnerships across the 12 hubs.
- **Surrey**, BC’s largest district, which has also created “hub” schools and established dynamic, large scale partnerships with city governments and non-profits such as United Way.
- **Burnaby**, which for decades has maintained a city-school district partnership unique in BC.
- **Abbotsford**, which recently expanded long standing community school programming in partnership with active Community School societies.
- **Kootenay-Columbia**, which closed Blueberry Creek as a day school in 2002, but has continued to support community school programming.
- **Hornby and Denman Islands and Likely Elementary Junior Secondary School**, which have exemplary rural community schools, in spite of decreasing student enrolment.

21st Century Learning

Community Schools address community needs from birth to old age, not only meeting legislated requirements, but building community capacity and sustainability.

What are Community Schools?

Community Schools have **extended hours, extended services and extended relationships**. They bring the community into the school and they also serve the community. They are elementary or secondary schools with a special emphasis on the value of community involvement.

Leveraging Core Funding through Partnerships

Multi-ministry funding and partnerships with non-profits and businesses enable community schools to **leverage core funding** – typically by a factor of three or more. The **expanded mandate** of the educational system in recent years has affirmed and strengthened the potential of community schools in British Columbia.

Putting Research into Practice

A community school provides an effective infrastructure to respond to the **research on early childhood development and prevention-based programs** for youth and families. This research shows the overwhelming returns to society that result from investing in prevention and integrating community services. Several of these research reports can be found on the ACEbc website. As principals, you are in a crucial position to transform your school into one that can have a long term impact on your community.

Making the Shift

To transform a regular school into one that has extended hours, extended services and extended relationships requires strong

leadership and staffing support. For many years, most schools depended solely on government ministries — usually the Ministry of Education — for funding. However, for decades **Burnaby** School District has partnered with the City of Burnaby to support their community schools. Over the past few years, **Surrey** School District has partnered with the city, the United Way and other organizations to support their extensive Community-Schools

Partnership initiative. **Vancouver's** district-wide partnerships under the hub structure have created a successful model with twelve integrated teams centered on secondary schools and associated elementary feeder schools.

Gatekeepers of Change

In one of his many articles and books, Michael Fullan wrote in 2002:

The principal is the gatekeeper of change. There is not an improving school without a leader who is good at leading transformational improvement. Successful principals share leadership, they reach out to their parents and community and work hard to expand the professional 'capacity' of the teachers to develop a coherent professional community.

Such leaders are relationship centred, able to develop a clear collegial value framework and individual accountability.

Making a Difference

We encourage principals to check out the resources on the ACEbc web site, to contact ACEbc board members and community schools around the province. If you choose to begin the process of creating an effective community school infrastructure, our association would be pleased to offer support. Research has shown that community schools **can make a difference**, and they have been expanding rapidly in the United States for several years.

Neighbourhood Learning Centres



For the past few years in BC, all new schools and major renovations to existing schools have included community space, planned in consultation with local communities. These schools are designated as Neighbourhood Learning Centres (NLCs), and the community facilities are intended to be used for a variety of purposes, on a year-round basis.

NLCs present great new opportunities for schools and their communities. However, staffing and program coordination will be a challenge, requiring partnerships with municipalities, businesses and non profit organizations. This where a community school model can help.

How Do Community Schools Make a Difference?

Research is limited in Canada, but a major study in the U.S. confirmed that community schools have a positive impact on what matters most to students, parents, communities and schools. Some of the key outcomes reported were:

- Student learning improves;
- Parents and families increase their participation;
- Principals and teachers have more time for quality instruction because partners help address non-academic barriers to learning;
- Community resources support the education agenda — and the school is a resource to the community;
- Communities share accountability for student success.



**Making the Difference:
Research and Practice in Community Schools,**
Coalition for Community Schools, 2003

15 by 15 — A Comprehensive Policy Framework for Early Human Capital Investment in BC

The requisite public policy response is a bold one. BC suffers unnecessarily high early vulnerability across income classes because it is relying on old post-war thinking to address 21st century social and economic issues.

Kershaw, Anderson, Warburton, Hertzman, H.E.L.P., UBC, 2009

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For more information, please go to www.acebc.org
The ACEbc website has many locally developed resources as well as links to organizations in the U.S. and beyond. There is also a Directory that can connect you to community schools across the province.