

# BC COMMUNITY SCHOOL RESEARCH PROJECT

## BACKGROUNDER

SEPTEMBER 2004

### About the Project:

In the fall of 2003, the Association for Community Education in British Columbia (ACEbc), with support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, engaged John Talbot & Associates Inc. to conduct a research project involving all community schools in British Columbia.

As part of the initial discussions, ACEbc decided that this research project should incorporate the following two phases:

The first phase, which is now complete, involved:

- compiling baseline information about community schools;
- identifying key elements of successful community schools;
- identifying opportunities for and challenges facing community schools;
- describing strategies to address identified challenges;
- describing best practices in the areas of community development and community partnerships.

The second phase, co-sponsored by the British Columbia School Trustees Association and scheduled to begin in the fall of 2004, will involve:

- raising awareness about community schools and their benefits;
- developing a competency framework for community school principals, coordinators and teachers;
- examining the current funding policies and guidelines, and, where appropriate, making recommendations to improve them;
- examining the development of a continuous improvement framework to enable community schools to assess and improve their effectiveness.



*The community school can become the neighbourhood hub; a centre where staff, students, families, residents, agencies and businesses, work together to build strong and caring communities. The community school is an accessible place to make new friends, exchange ideas and find support. The school strives to involve local residents in a variety of ways.*

*(The Association for Community Education in British Columbia, 2004)*



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### About the Methodology:

The methodology for the first phase consisted of:

- Compiling an up-to-date listing of all community schools and surveying them. Of the 80 community schools who received a questionnaire, 64 or 80% returned it.
- Conducting site visits and a combination of both personal and telephone interviews. In total, nine site visits were conducted and eleven community schools were examined in detail.
- Conducting a review of the community school literature in Canada and the United States.
- Interviewing key informants, including government officials, researchers and other influential practitioners.

### Profile of Community Schools in BC:

Based on the questionnaire:

- 85.9% of respondents reported that their school is an officially designated community school. With regard to date of designation, of those respondents who specified a date, 70.4% reported that their school was designated between 1994 and 1999.
- 96.7% of respondents reported that their school has a community school coordinator. In most cases (67.3%), the coordinator is a full-time position. Additionally, in most cases (70.7%), the coordinator is responsible for only one school.
- 94.8% of respondents reported that their school has a community school advisory council or similar type body. Regarding this body, membership ranged from 6 to 30 members, with the average being 11.
- 53.1% of respondents reported that their school raised additional funding through such means as donations, fundraising, gaming, grants, program fees and rentals. Of the 29 respondents who reported an amount, most raised between \$10,000 and \$70,000, with a few schools raising in excess of \$100,000.

### Benefits of Community Schools:

Some of the benefits of community school include but are not limited to:

- contributing to improved learning outcomes and student success;
- encouraging parental and community involvement;
- fostering healthy youth development and social behaviour;
- coordinating and integrating community services;
- increasing the utilization of local school facilities;
- maximizing communication between school and community;
- reinforcing a sense of community and contributing to quality of life.

#### Reference #1:

Dr. Clyde Hertzman, who is currently mapping early child development in BC, recently spoke on the effectiveness of school-based programs. As part of his presentation, he spoke to the need to place greater emphasis on the relationship between school and community. More specifically, he noted that as one moves down the socio-economic spectrum, the greater the influence of community schools. As evidence, he reported that the lowest 25% of the socio-economic spectrum showed better performance in community than in non-community schools.

(Dr. Clyde Hertzman, "There's More to School than Schooling Symposium," March 5, 2004)

*Ensure the continuation of community schools, as this is one model that is both preventative and proactive. It is also an effective model given that it relies on partnerships and volunteerism.*

*(Questionnaire Respondent)*

**Organizational Models:**

The majority of community schools in BC operate under the leadership and direction of a non-profit association or society. With regard to membership, it typically includes the school principal, the coordinator, one or more teachers, several parents and at least one (non-parent) community member. It also often includes business and community agency representation.

A number of community schools operate under the leadership and direction of a community school advisory council, which typically has a similar membership to that described above. Far fewer schools operate as a family of community schools (see profile #1) or under the leadership and direction of a steering committee.

One School District contracts with a non-profit agency to provide support and consultation to a number of community schools within its jurisdiction.

Most community schools have partnership arrangements with their Municipality (often through a Parks and Recreation Department), their Regional District and/or one or more local non-profit or community serving agencies. Many also have partnership arrangements with First Nations.

For more information about the above models, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each, consult the phase one report.

*My vision is for every school to have some attributes of a community school; certainly all will be used by the community in off-hours. Each neighbourhood will have a designated community learning administrator and staff that work in the schools to ensure that the principles and values are embedded in all school activities. All community schools will become neighbourhood gathering places and learning will involve the whole community - i.e., citizens of all ages will be involved in meaningful, positive and relevant learning experiences as teachers and students.*

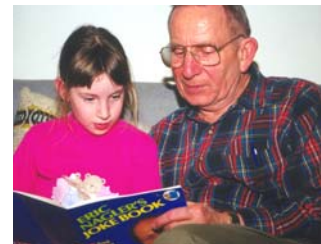
*(Questionnaire Respondent)*

**Phase One Project Findings:**

Based on the research, six key themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Leadership
- Theme 2: Student, Parent and Community Involvement
- Theme 3: Community Education and Curriculum Enrichment
- Theme 4: Facility Use, Program Delivery and Community Development
- Theme 5: Community Partnerships
- Theme 6: Accountability

The following pages highlight some of the major findings for each of the six themes. For more information, consult the phase one report.



**Profile #1:**

The Harewood Family of Community Schools in Nanaimo comprises two elementary and two secondary schools. As part of the key informant interviews, it was noted that there are several advantages of this model, including but not limited to: the linking of elementary and secondary education, thus bridging the transition period; the sharing of expertise and resources between community schools; and the ability to conduct community education and community development work on a neighbourhood-wide basis.

(Bob Cook, Principal, Fairview Community School, Feb. 19, 2004)



### Theme 1: Leadership

Questionnaire respondents felt that leadership at both the Provincial government and School District levels was crucial to the success of community schools. More specifically, they felt that the Province needed to develop a long-term vision for community schools and provide adequate, sustainable funding to implement it. They also felt that School Districts needed to champion community education and support community schools in their community development work.

At the school level, respondents noted that there are many dedicated and talented people but that there are few strong leaders. As such, they felt that there needed to be supports and training in place to nurture leadership capacities.

### Theme 2: Student, Parent and Community Involvement

Questionnaire respondents emphasized the important role that students, parents and community members play in the delivery of community school programs. Based on the questionnaire responses,

- 46.9% felt that students played a very effective or an effective role;
- 51.5% felt that parents played a very effective or an effective role;
- 56.3% felt that community members played a very effective or an effective role.

With regard to facilitating involvement, those community schools which are most successful employ one or more of the following strategies:

- they are proactive, with some actively recruiting volunteers themselves;
- they work with volunteer agencies;
- they designate people to coordinate involvement and volunteerism;
- they define specific roles for involvement;
- they provide supervision and training to facilitate involvement;
- they recognize the contributions of funders and volunteers.

### Theme 3: Community Education and Curriculum Enrichment

Questionnaire respondents reported that they are actively involved in facilitating community education and learning. Many, through their community development work and partnerships, reported that they are also working to address barriers which may be inhibiting community education and learning from occurring.

This focus on community education and learning not only benefits the community by increasing literacy levels, improving employability and enabling personal development; it also enriches the school's curriculum, which contributes to academic success.

*The community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, services, supports and opportunities leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Schools become centres of the community and are open to everyone - all day, every day, evening and weekends.*

*(US Coalition of Community Schools, 2004)*



#### Reference #2:

David Hay recently compiled an extensive literature review on the effectiveness of school-based services for the Management Services Division of the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development. As part of this review, he found that "community schools, where education and learning are connected to the broader community, and sometimes to other programs and services, are the most successful of the school-based service programs."

(David Hay, [A Literature Review on the Effectiveness of School-Based Services](#), Sept. 26, 2002).

#### Theme 4: Facility Use, Program Delivery and Community Development

Based on the research, a continuum ranging from facility use, to program delivery to community development emerged.

All questionnaire respondents reported that their school accommodates or encourages community use of its facilities and spaces outside of regular school hours and most respondents reported that their school is involved in program delivery, either directly or in partnership with others. Based on the questionnaire responses, over 50 different types of programs were identified, targeting all ages, both genders and different ethnic groups, among others. Regarding effectiveness, most participants felt that their school was very effective or effective in these two areas.

Unlike facility use and program delivery, respondents were less sure as to their effectiveness in the area of community development or their ability to encourage or facilitate it.

When asked to define community development, there were as many definitions as there were respondents. Nevertheless, there were a number of common concepts and terms used, including:

- being inclusive;
- building community capacity and enhancing social capital;
- building the community from the inside out;
- empowering others to meet their own needs;
- enabling grassroots community-based organization;
- ensuring an inclusive and participatory decision-making process;
- facilitating asset-based community development;
- facilitating partnerships.

Respondents identified a number of challenges related to doing community development work, including: difficulty in maintaining partnership arrangements; lack of experience or time on behalf of the community school coordinator; lack of money or resources; lack of staff buy-in; limited parental and community involvement; and limited support by the business community and social service agencies.

Of significance, 45.9% of questionnaire respondents reported that there was broad acceptance and support for community development work within their school; while only 31.3% reported that there was broad acceptance and support for this work within their School District.

Regarding effectiveness, 40.7% of respondents felt that their school is very effective or effective in facilitating community development work.

#### Profile #2:

Hornby Island Community School is operated by the Hornby Island Educational Society, which goes back to 1980. The community school operates in a holistic manner and is active in many aspects of community life. For example, it coordinates recreational programs, provides meals to adults in need and offers job placement services. It also acts as a hub for the community in terms of activities, events, meetings and services.

(April Lewis, Community School Coordinator, Feb. 26, 2004)



### Theme 5: Community Partnerships

Questionnaire respondents reported that community partnerships range from informal arrangements around facility use or program delivery with one or more community organizations to formal joint use agreements with Health Authorities, Parks and Recreation Departments, etc.

Respondents felt that the benefits derived from community partnerships far outweighed the challenges involved in creating, maintaining and sustaining them. As for benefits, they include but are not limited to:

- increasing community access to and making more efficient use of community facilities;
- broadening one's client base;
- increasing program offerings;
- facilitating sharing of expertise and resources;
- facilitating joint programming and marketing opportunities;
- increasing community exposure and profile;
- improving efficiency (by reducing duplication of effort);
- building an integrated continuum of services;
- enhancing fundraising abilities.

Regarding effectiveness, 70.4% of respondents felt that their school is very effective or effective in facilitating community partnerships.

### Theme 6: Accountability

Most questionnaire respondents reported that they are accountable to their funders; however, it was noted that this accountability is typically limited to providing budget information related to funded programs. With regard to program evaluation, it was noted that this is usually limited to tracking the number of participants or volunteers involved in a program.

Respondents emphasized that greater emphasis is being placed on accountability, especially given limited dollars and concerns about government waste. As such, many felt that an annual report containing budget and program information will no longer be sufficient. Instead, it was felt that funders will increasingly be asking for tangible evidence as to program effectiveness and outcomes achieved. To this end, some participants suggested that evaluation tools needed to be developed and that training needed to be offered in the areas of program monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

*My vision is for community schools to become models of integrated service delivery and for them to be seen as a key component in building a more equitable and just society.*

*(Questionnaire Respondent)*

*Community schools address the root causes of social issues and often take a longer-term, more preventative approach. For example, a community school may not have a school meals program where low or no cost meals are served but it may have a community kitchen program where residents get together to cook low cost, nutritious meals and learn about budgeting and nutrition. The latter is intended to have benefits long past the duration of the program.*

*(Barb Peabody, ACEbc,  
July 9, 2004)*



#### Reference #3:

As part of a major review of community schools in the US, it was found that there are positive outcomes in the following four areas: learning and student achievement; family functioning and parental involvement; healthy youth development and social behaviour; and community life. Regarding the latter, it was found that the benefits extend beyond the school and into the community and include: higher rates of volunteerism, improved school readiness and increased utilization of school facilities.

*(Joy G. Dryfoos, Evaluation of Community Schools, Nov. 2000)*

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**To download a copy of the phase one report or to find out about opportunities to learn more about the BC Community School Research Project, please go to:**

**[www.acebc.org](http://www.acebc.org)**

**Profile #3:**

The Burnaby School District is a recognized leader in the area of community education. It currently operates seven designated community schools; each with its own full-time community school coordinator.

These schools act as a hub for a comprehensive, community-based system of education, health, recreation and social services provided to meet the needs of children, youth and families in Burnaby.

A key component of this model is its District Community School Advisory and Coordinating Committee, which serves as an advisory body to the Burnaby School District, the City of Burnaby and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Its primary purpose is to oversee planning, funding and operational matters.

(Elliot Grieve, Director of Instruction, Burnaby School District, 2004)

**Mission Statement for ACEbc:**

*ACEbc is dedicated to fostering and promoting all aspects of community education and community schools in British Columbia, through liaison, information dissemination and training programs. ACEbc has been active in BC since 1975 and is affiliated with other provincial, national, and international educational and community organizations. ACEbc is a non-profit organization with membership open to individuals, groups or organizations having an interest in community education.*