

COMMUNITY SCHOOL RESEARCH PROJECT: PHASE ONE REPORT

Prepared for:
The Association for Community Education
in British Columbia

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Introduction:

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 and Associates Inc. to conduct a research project involving 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 of the research project involved:

- compiling baseline information about the designated community schools in British Columbia;
- identifying the key elements of successful community schools;
- identifying the major opportunities for and challenges facing community schools;
- describing strategies which have been developed to address the identified challenges;
- describing some of the best practices in the areas of community development and partnerships.

The second phase aims to achieve the following objectives:

- raising awareness about community schools and their benefits. The target audience will comprise ministry officials, school trustees, senior administrators, school principals and parent advisory councils.
- developing a competency framework for community school principals, coordinators and teachers in support of their professional development and their community capacity building work.
- 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 their capabilities and to identify areas for improvement.

Plans are for the second phase to begin in the fall of 2004 and to conclude in the first half of 2005.

The three main reasons for researching community schools at this time are:

- There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that community schools do make a difference – e.g., in improving learning outcomes for students; in promoting parent and community involvement within the school; in increasing the community's utilization of school facilities and resources; and in improving the quality of life for community residents.
- Evidence also suggests that community schools offer an excellent vehicle to pursue larger governmental social agendas, including but not limited to: enhancing learning outcomes, especially for at-risk and marginalized children and youth; facilitating community development; improving the utilization of scarce resources by way of community partnerships; and increasing coordination and integration of services for children, youth and families.

- Despite the above evidence, community schools appear to be at a crossroads in their evolution. As such, this research project will identify some of the key opportunities for and challenges which will need to be addressed if the community school movement is to expand and thrive in British Columbia.

Methodology:

The methodology for the first phase consisted of the following four main components:

- An inventory of all community schools in British Columbia and an extensive survey of these schools, covering such aspects as organizational models, programs and services offered, partnership arrangements, sources of funding, accountability frameworks, etc. This information was used to provide a baseline of information from which to conduct long-term research.
- Site visits to community schools and a combination of both personal and telephone interviews. In total, nine site visits were conducted and eleven schools were examined in detail (see appendix 1). These schools represented a broad range of different models, settings and sizes and they were widely considered to be leaders in their field. They were also at different stages of their development, with some being relatively new, while others were established in the 1970s.
- A review of relevant documents provided by ACEbc, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Education, as well as a review of the community school literature in Canada, the United States and elsewhere. This information was used to augment the learnings from the questionnaire and the site visits.
- Interviews with key informants, including School Trustees, government officials, researchers and other influential practitioners. These interviews were used to discuss and refine the proposed directions.

Definitions Pertaining to Community Schools:

Based on the literature review, there are many definitions pertaining to community schools, two of which are included below:

The community school is a public school with a special emphasis upon the belief held by staff and residents in the value of community involvement.

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 or find support. The school strives to involve local residents in a variety of ways.

The community school places special emphasis on the following objectives:

- *utilizing the total resources of the community to enhance the development of learning skills;*
- *encouraging community participation and involvement;*
- *utilizing the school as a resource for the whole neighbourhood;*
- *utilizing school facilities for people of all ages;*
- *developing working relationships with both public and private agencies.*

The underlying values and principles of a community school are guided by practices such as:

- *community responsiveness;*
- *inclusiveness;*
- *integrated services;*
- *leadership development;*
- *lifelong learning;*
- *neighbourhood involvement and action;*
- *self-determination and self-help;*
- *shared resources.¹*

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 centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends.

Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers and community partners. 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. 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 neighborhoods. In an increasingly complex and demanding educational climate, schools are not left to work alone.

Students engage in learning and service activities at a community school and have access to an array of personal and social supports. Community schools promote youth development activities and community-based learning and offer preventive health and social services before, during and after school.

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 are all part of the community school vision.

¹ The Association for Community Education in British Columbia.

Families, youth and residents join with educators and community partners to articulate the community's goals for its students, and to help design, implement and evaluate activities. Participation of these stakeholders as decision-makers helps ensure that community schools meet local needs and show measurable progress.²

Background and History:

Community schools are not a new concept. They have been around for over half a century in the United States and have existed for over 30 years in British Columbia.

Fostered by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and its work in Flint, Michigan, a movement to promote community education gained national visibility in the 1930s. Its goal was to make schools the social, educational and recreational anchors of their communities and to involve youth and adults in lifelong learning. In the 1970s, the US Congress provided important seed money for the movement with the passage of the Community Schools Act, which signaled important federal support for community schools.

As for British Columbia, in the early-1970s, there was a growing movement for communities wanting to have more input into and control over programs and services. Governments were also interested in decentralizing services and promoting community development concepts. As such, community schools were initially developed in 1971, with the establishment of Queen Mary Community School in North Vancouver. Several School Districts (Burnaby, Surrey, Vancouver and Victoria) developed community schools in the 1970s. As originally envisioned, the schools were centrally located within the community; offered a safe and welcoming environment; and provided shared space.

These very early community schools were funded largely through monies provided by the local School District, supplemented by funding from available government programs (e.g., daycare funding) and revenue from program fees. No specific government funding was available in any organized way. During the restraint period of the 1980s, many community schools were closed. The first closures occurred in Surrey and then in North Vancouver. Burnaby, Vancouver and Victoria and a few other School Districts continued but there was only minimal expansion.

In the early-1990s, it became very apparent that community schools could not continue to be sustained without some type of stable funding source, as evidenced by the fact that several community schools were being threatened with possible closure. In 1994, the Ministry of Education initiated community schools grant funding, which allocated \$75,000 per year to each provincially designated community school. It also introduced an application process and by October 1996, there were a total of 71 provincially designated community schools. During this period, a number of other programs were also initiated, including the School Meals Program (1991/92), the Inner City School Program (1994) and the Kids-at-Risk Initiative (1994/95). In 1996/97, the social equity envelope (which combined the Community School, School Meals and Inner City School Programs) was put in place. This envelope also extended use to early academic intervention.

² US Coalition of Community Schools.

In 1997, a decision was made to transfer the social equity envelope to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, along with the staff resources to support it. The major reason for this transfer was the belief that these programs were a good means of supporting at-risk and marginalized children and youth, often living in poverty. The funding for this program had been maintained at around \$43 million but then in 2003, it was reduced to \$35 million. In May 2004, this funding, now called CommunityLINK, was increased to \$45 million. It was also transferred to the Ministry of Education.

An analysis of this background and history illustrates the changes in funding and mandate which can occur depending on where the program is located in government. It also illustrates that as programs move from one part of government to another, a different set of expectations and accountabilities often results.

For example, the Ministry of Children and Family Development saw this program largely as supporting the needs of at-risk and marginalized children and youth, as well as improving related support structures. It is now likely that Ministry of Education will focus on improving the learning outcomes for students in community schools, perhaps with a focus on improving the learning outcomes for at-risk and marginalized students. The future focus of community schools is still under discussion.

In addition, changes in funding and mandate have created an uncertain environment. As such, community schools have been reluctant to engage in long-term planning. Even now, with more money announced for CommunityLINK, there is no assurance that the additional money will flow to community schools, either existing or new. Community schools, as a result of the envelope approach to funding, must now compete with other areas such as counselling and school meal programs. The latter programs often have a higher recognition factor in the community and, on the surface, appear to be more concrete in directly delivering a tangible service to children and youth.

Of note, community schools aim to 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 program is intended to have benefits long past the duration of the program.

In summary, this historical perspective serves to highlight the fact that the concept of community schools has not been well understood. There have been few real champions of community schools among senior decision-makers in government. Given that community school funding has shifted from one ministry to another and from direct funding to School District funding and given cuts to budgets and then the reinstatement of funding, budget adequacy and stability continue to be issues for community schools. On a positive note, there appears to be a real interest in improving the understanding about and support for community schools.

Evaluative Literature on the Effectiveness of Community Schools:

There is an extensive literature regarding community schools, especially in the United States. While much of this literature is descriptive in nature; some of it is evaluative.

The evaluative literature has traditionally focused on learning and student achievement. Learning and student achievement outcomes include but are not limited to: test scores, attendance, expulsion and graduation rates. Given that community schools have a far broader mandate, some researchers have recently started to investigate other related outcomes such as ability to leverage additional funding; access to community and support services; family functioning and parental involvement; healthy youth development and social behaviour; perceptions about school and community safety; willingness to partner; etc.

As part of a major review of community schools conducted in the United States,³ it was found that there were 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 but are not limited to: greater involvement in life long learning, higher rates of volunteerism, improved school readiness, improved utilization of school facilities, increased willingness to partner, etc.

In Canada, Rianne Mahon and Caroline Beauvais reviewed public policies for school-aged children⁴ and found that some provinces have made real efforts to make the school the centre for the delivery of a broad range of services for children and their families. Louise Hanvey, in her review of early childhood education initiatives,⁵ reaffirmed the above finding and cited Saskatchewan's School Plus Program, whereby schools have two primary functions: educating children and youth and supporting service delivery. Regarding this Province, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education is currently conducting a ten-year longitudinal study of community schools and this research is yielding encouraging results, both with regard to student achievement and to broader community and social outcomes.

In British Columbia, David Hay completed 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.⁶ As part of his 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."⁷

³ Dryfoos, Joy G. Evaluation of Community Schools: Findings to Date. Hastings-on-Hudson, New York: Coalition of Community Schools, November 2000.

⁴ Mahon, Rianne and Caroline Beauvais. School-Aged Children Across Canada: A Patchwork of Public Policies. Ottawa: Canadian Policy Research Network, January 2001.

⁵ Hanvey, Louise. Middle Children: Building on the Early Years – A Discussion Paper. Ottawa: National Children's Alliance, June 2002.

⁶ Hay, David I. A Literature Review of the Effectiveness of School-Based Services. Victoria: Management Services Division, BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, September 26, 2002.

⁷ As part of this literature review, the following school-based services were investigated: community school programs, early intervention programs, healthy schools, inner city school programs, school-based support services and school meal programs.

Dr. Clyde Hertzman, who is currently mapping early child development in British Columbia, recently spoke on the effectiveness of school-based programs at a symposium⁸ in Vancouver. 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. Additionally, he reported that in high schools, drop-out rates are lower in community than in non-community schools (and that this difference increases as one moves down the socio-economic spectrum).

Of a more specific nature, Kimberly Schonert-Reichl and Denise Buote studied the effectiveness of school-based programs offered at Hastings Community School in Vancouver.⁹ As part of their study, they reported that "there exists an inextricable link between students' social-emotional adjustment and their academic achievement." More specifically, they reported that school-based programs targeting the former have a positive effect on the latter. As evidence, they cited research linking involvement in school-based programs with positive school adjustment, higher academic achievement, improved mental health, lower delinquency and lower rates of drop-out. Additionally, they cited research specific to Hastings Community School which revealed that student involvement in school-based programs resulted in higher levels of general and school self-concept, pro-social behaviours, school belonging and teacher-rated social competence.

Profile of Community Schools in British Columbia:

1. General Characteristics:

As described in the methodology, an inventory of community schools was prepared and a questionnaire was conducted. Of the 80 community schools who received the questionnaire throughout British Columbia; 64 or 80% completed and returned the questionnaire.

Of the 64 responses, 55 or 85.9% of respondents reported that their school is currently an officially designated community school. With regard to the date of designation, of those respondents who specified a date, 70.4% reported that their school was officially designated between 1994 and 1999. As for the remainder, 22.2% reported that their school was officially designated prior to 1994 and 7.4% reported that their school was officially designated after 1999.

The vast majority (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. For those coordinators who are responsible for more than one school, the range was from two to six schools. Regarding classification for the community school coordinator, most were classified as exempt (25.0%), contract (20.3%), union (12.5%) or teacher (10.9%).

⁸ There's More To School Than Schooling Symposium. March 5, 2004.

⁹ Schonert-Reichl and Denise Buote. "School Activity Participation and Children's Social and School Adjustment: The Hastings Community School Study." There's More To Schooling Than Schooling Symposium. March 5, 2004.

The vast majority (94.8%) of respondents reported that their school has a community school advisory council or similar type of body. Regarding this body, membership ranged from 6 to 30 members, with the average being 11. Membership varied by community school; however, it typically included the principal, the coordinator, a teacher, several parents and one or more (non-parent) community residents. Other potential members included but were not limited to: a business representative, the Aboriginal Education Worker, the Community Support or Youth Worker, a Parks and Recreation representative, and a School Board appointee.

Most respondents reported that their community school component was fully or partially funded by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, under its CommunityLINK Program. A number of respondents also reported that they received funding from their Municipality and/or their School District. Of significance, about half of community schools leveraged or raised additional funding through such means as donations, fundraising, gaming, grants, in-kind contributions, program fees and rentals. Of the 29 respondents who reported a dollar amount, most raised between \$10,000 and \$70,000, with a few schools raising in excess of \$100,000.

2. Organizational Models:

There are a number of different organizational models in operation within British Columbia, with some community schools using a combination of models. These models include but may not be limited to:

- **Non-Profit Association or Society:**

This model is the most common. Typically, a society, with its own bylaws, budget and Board of Directors, operates the community school component. In most cases, it has a broad mandate with regard to community development.

Advantages:

- It is an effective way to create a separate identity for the community school component.
- It can supplement its budget through fundraising, grants, etc.
- It is independent and can shape its own mandate.
- It offers a clear mechanism to obtain input by community residents and organizations.
- It can create its own credibility and profile within the community.

Disadvantages:

- It needs to meet the administrative and accountability requirements of a formal society.
- It may operate too independently from the school.

- **Community School Council:**

This model is also very common. Typically, it functions in conjunction with another society. It is usually advisory in nature and provides a good mechanism to obtain input by community residents and organizations.

Advantages:

- It is a flexible and simple way to obtain input by community residents and organizations, with some councils having more than 20 members.
- It allows a forum for key community interests to dialogue with each other.
- It assists in community development.

Disadvantage:

- It may be advisory only with no real decision-making authority.

- **Partnership Agreement:**

Many School Districts and community schools have arrangements whereby a Municipality or a Parks and Recreation Department enter into a partnership agreement with them. Both parties contribute money to the partnership; agree on common and mutually beneficial goals; and have a clear understanding as to each other's roles and responsibilities.

Advantages:

- It brings more money and resources to the community school.
- It brings more expertise and specialized knowledge to the arrangement.
- It can be a very efficient way to deliver programs, as many aspects are cost shared.
- It facilitates valuable partnerships.

Disadvantages:

- It requires time and energy to nurture and sustain the partnership arrangements.
- It can be administratively complex and cumbersome.
- It may lead to disagreements – e.g., different visions as to the future.

- **Multiple School Arrangement:**

In a few cases, a cluster of schools operate as a combined unit; sometimes with a single coordinator. This occurs when resources are limited and when there are common or shared goals among the participating schools.

Advantages:

- It may allow a small school to operate as a community school, even without the resources to pay for a full-time coordinator.
- It facilitates information sharing and learning.
- It still allows for the individual school to have its own unique ways of responding to the needs within its own geographic area.

Disadvantage:

- It can result in resources being spread too thinly, making it difficult to facilitate community development.

- **Steering Committee:**

This model often exists to coordinate children and youth services at the community level and to assist in allocating money to the various programs under CommunityLINK.

Advantages:

- It allows for decision-makers to have a forum to discuss common issues.
- It allows a mechanism for cross-ministry coordination.

Disadvantages:

- It can only recommend and has no decision-making authority.
- It can become another layer of bureaucracy and may slow decision-making.

- **Contracted Agency:**

One School District has selected an existing non-profit agency to manage or support the community schools within its jurisdiction.

Advantages:

- It can avoid labor relations issues.
- It can be more flexible – i.e., if more support is needed, it can be purchased without having to hire full-time, permanent staff.

Disadvantages:

- It may result in limited commitment to and ownership of the community school agenda.
- It may result in a separation of agency and school, as the agency may not be on-site.
- It may result in limited support, especially where an agency is supporting several community schools.

Findings and Analysis:

This section provides an overview of the findings from the key informant interviews, the questionnaire responses and the site visits, as well as the literature review.

Based on the questionnaire responses and the site visits, it became clear that there are wide disparities between School Districts and between community schools themselves with regard to the level of community education, community development and community partnerships.

Some School Districts, especially those with a long history of community schools, are very supportive of the model and have moved far beyond community use of facilities and program delivery to curriculum enrichment, community development and integrated service delivery.

While the following six theme areas identify common strengths and weaknesses based primarily on the questionnaire responses, they do not profile leaders in the field (i.e., both School Districts and individual community schools). As such, there is a need to recognize and profile such leaders as part of phase two; learn from their successes; and possibly recruit them as mentors or teachers.

Theme #1: Leadership

Introduction:

Leadership and vision, at all levels of the educational system, are crucial to the success of community schools in British Columbia. Based on the questionnaire, only 26.6% of respondents stated that their community school has a long-term plan. By contrast, 65.6% stated that their community school did not have a long-term plan and 7.8% did not respond to the question. While most community schools do not have a long-term plan; most respondents emphasized the need for the Province to develop a long-term vision for community schools, along with goals and strategies to achieve that vision.

Site visits and interviews with community school representatives confirmed that there are many committed, hardworking principals, coordinators, teachers and community members, including parents. However, in many cases, these people felt that they did not have the resources, support and training to provide the necessary leadership. At the Provincial and School District levels, interviewees and questionnaire respondents felt that while there are some champions of community schools, there is no consistent, strong leadership at either level.

Based on the consultation, three vital ingredients emerged with regard to leadership. First, there needs to be a clear, well-articulated mandate and vision for community schools, both in the short and long-term. There also needs to be a full understanding of and commitment to this mandate and vision. Second, there needs to be adequate, stable and sustainable funding to implement this mandate and vision. Third, there needs to be an ongoing commitment to review and monitor effectiveness. To this end, assessable benchmarks need to be established and appropriate information needs to be collected. This feedback will provide for continuous improvement and an ability to adapt to an ever changing environment.

Provincial Government:

Leadership at the Provincial government level is vital to the future functioning of community schools. Interviewees and questionnaire respondents felt that leadership needs to come from the most senior levels of government and needs to be expanded beyond the Ministry of Education. They also felt that community schools help serve the mandate of several ministries and that there needs to be cross-ministry understanding of and support for community schools. In Saskatchewan, the literature review found that community schools are increasing in number and becoming more effective in addressing community needs because of Provincial government support and the involvement of no fewer than six ministries, including the Attorney General, Culture and Recreation, Education, Health, Post Secondary and Skills, and Social Services.

The Provincial government controls the overall amount of funding available to School Districts and, therefore, it plays a critical role in the future of community schools. With regard to the current funding model, there is no assurance that money flowing to School Districts will be directed to community schools, since it is all part of the CommunityLINK envelope and left to each School District's discretion.

Interviewees and questionnaire respondents felt that the Provincial government needs to monitor the allocation of CommunityLINK funding to ensure that a reasonable share of money and resources is allocated to community schools. If this is not the case, it was felt that the Provincial government needs to allocate a specific community school funding envelope, if its goal is to support and enhance the community school movement within British Columbia.

School Districts:

Leadership at the School District level is exercised when there is an understanding of and commitment to community schools and when there is a designated champion advocating on behalf of them. Interviewees and questionnaire respondents felt that School District officials need to have a more complete understanding of and appreciation for the role and benefits of community schools. They also felt that there needs to be an acceptance that community education and community development are legitimate parts of both School District and school mandates.

Interviewees and questionnaire respondents felt that School Districts need to ensure that adequate resources are available to community schools. They also felt that School Boards need to work with the Province to ensure that adequate resources are available in this area. To this end, they emphasized that the total pool of Provincial dollars available for CommunityLINK needs to be adequate and that there needs to be a mechanism to ensure that a reasonable share of this funding flows to community schools.

Schools:

The four key groups at the school level who play a critical role in providing leadership are the principal, the coordinator, teachers and community members, including parents. The abilities, knowledge and skills required of these people need to be clearly articulated; and, then, the necessary supports and training need to be in place to improve their leadership capacities. There are many capable and talented people currently working in the community school system; however, interviewees and questionnaire respondents felt that their leadership abilities are often inconsistent. They also felt that competencies for effective leadership need to be established and supportive programs developed to ensure successful implementation.

Theme #2: Student, Parental and Community Involvement

Introduction:

Community schools try to involve students, parents and the community in the delivery of their programs. These groups may be involved in the design and development of programs, as well as in efforts to fund them.

Students:

Just under half (46.9%) of community school respondents reported that students are playing a very effective or an effective role in the delivery of programs. By contrast, 21.9% of respondents reported that they are playing an ineffective or very ineffective role. Additionally, about a third (31.2%) reported that they are unsure as to their community school's effectiveness in this area or did not respond to the question. Regarding the latter, several respondents who work in elementary schools stated that involving students in program delivery is more difficult than in secondary schools; given their age, interest level and maturity.

With regard to examples of student involvement, they include but are not limited to:

- establishing a student council to provide advice as to new programs and to assist in their delivery;
- establishing student planning committees around new program areas;
- hiring a community support worker to involve students in program delivery;
- holding a student retreat to identify equipment and program needs.

Respondents also made a number of suggestions to actively involve students. These suggestions include but are not limited to:

- designating an individual to coordinate student involvement;
- enlisting teachers, parents and community residents to provide guidance and support;
- establishing an inclusive student leadership development program;
- identifying involvement opportunities which are consistent with the abilities and skills of both elementary and secondary school students.

Parents:

Just over half (51.5%) of community school respondents reported that parents are playing a very effective or an effective role in the delivery of programs. By contrast, only 11.0% of respondents reported that they are playing an ineffective or very ineffective role. Additionally, 37.5% reported that they are unsure as to their community school's effectiveness in this area or did not respond to the question. Regarding the latter, no explanation is readily evident for this high percentage. In probing the responses, respondents who work in secondary schools are more likely to report lower levels of parental involvement. As such, this may suggest that as students age, parents may be less inclined to take an active role in their child's school.

With regard to examples of parental involvement, they include but are not limited to:

- ensuring parental representation on community school advisory councils or similar type bodies;
- establishing parent planning committees around new program areas;
- having parents act as advocates and fundraisers for their community school;
- involving parents in lunch hour and after-school activities;
- partnering with parent advisory councils;
- using parents as instructors and program leaders.

In reviewing the membership of community school advisory councils and similar type bodies, most include parental representation. These bodies are often involved in program design, development and delivery.

Respondents also made a number of suggestions to actively involve parents. These suggestions include but are not limited to:

- addressing economic and personal issues that may limit parental involvement – e.g., child care barriers, etc.;
- informing parents about available opportunities for involvement;
- recruiting parents as volunteers;
- scheduling programs to facilitate parental involvement – i.e., evenings, weekends, etc.

Community:

A majority (56.3%) of community school respondents reported that business people and community residents¹⁰ are playing a very effective or an effective role in the delivery of programs. Of interest, this is the highest percentage among the three groups and these people do not have a personal or self-interest with regard to involvement. By contrast, only 15.0% of respondents reported that they are playing an ineffective or very ineffective role. Additionally, 29.7% reported that they are unsure as to their community school's effectiveness in this area or did not respond to the question. Again, respondents who work in secondary schools are more likely to report lower levels of involvement.

With regard to examples of community involvement, they include but are not limited to:

- conducting a needs assessment survey to facilitate community input;
- ensuring community representation on community school advisory councils and similar type bodies;
- holding community meetings;
- requesting donations from business people and community residents;
- using business people and community residents as instructors and program leaders.

¹⁰ Community members refer to individuals who do not have school age children.

Respondents also made a number of suggestions to actively involve business people and community residents. These suggestions include but are not limited to:

- informing business people and community residents about available opportunities for involvement;
- raising awareness about community school programs and their benefits;
- recognizing the contributions of business people and community residents;
- working with volunteer agencies to increase the number of community volunteers.

Learnings / Future Directions:

Respondents felt that student, parental and community involvement is important in the delivery of their community school programs. It was noted that such involvement enables more programs to be offered; potentially reduces their cost (by using volunteers); and increases their chances for sustainability (by raising awareness, funds and participation).

With regard to facilitating involvement, it became clear that those community schools which are successful are characterized by the following attributes:

- 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

Introduction:

Most community schools are actively involved in facilitating community education and learning. Many, through their community development work and partnerships, also 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 curriculum, which contributes to academic success.

Community Education and Learning:

While respondents emphasized the importance of community education and learning; they noted that there are many barriers and challenges to improving educational and learning outcomes both in the school and in the community. These barriers and challenges include but are not limited to:

- high rates of poverty and unemployment;
- high rates of transience;
- inadequate or poor public transportation;

- inadequate or uncertain funding for community school programs;
- inadequate school readiness;
- increasing social isolation;
- ineffective or poor parenting;
- lack of accessible and affordable childcare;
- large English-as-a-Second Language population;
- large number of single parents.

To address the above barriers and challenges, plus many others, respondents made reference to over 75 strategies, including:

- creating a safe and welcoming school environment;
- developing goals related to social responsibility;
- establishing literacy and numeracy programs;
- establishing parent and tot programs;
- establishing parenting classes and parent support groups;
- offering homework clubs;
- offering pre-school programs;
- providing before and after school programs;
- providing food support programs;
- providing subsidies to facilitate access to community school programs.

Respondents recognized the fact that no one program will address all the needs within a school or community, but in combination and with the support of others, these programs can make a difference with regard to educational and learning outcomes.

Curriculum Enrichment:

Respondents identified a number of ways in which their school's curriculum had been enriched by operating from a community school model or perspective. Of note, most identified ways related to adjuncts with regard to programming and not changes to the core curriculum. Some of the identified ways include:

- enhancing art, drama and music programs and resources;
- establishing a safe and welcoming environment;
- establishing school clubs;
- improving school utilization;
- increasing parental and community involvement;
- increasing school readiness with regard to the pre-school population;
- introducing before and after-school programming;
- introducing guest speakers;
- offering early and family literacy programs;
- offering free community school programs;
- providing daily school breakfasts for all students;
- using volunteer mentors and tutors.

One respondent commented that due to Ministry of Education mandated examinations, it is far more difficult to influence a secondary school curriculum than it is to influence an elementary or a middle school curriculum.

Effectiveness:

About three-fifths (57.9%) of respondents felt that their school's community education component is very effective or effective in improving educational and learning outcomes. By contrast, only 3.2% of respondents felt that their community education component is ineffective or very ineffective. The remaining 39.0% of respondents were unsure as to their community school's effectiveness or did not respond to the question. Regarding the latter, this high percentage may be attributed to the fact that many community schools do not evaluate or have difficulty evaluating effectiveness, given the many variables involved.

Of those respondents who stated that they do evaluate effectiveness, most relied on FSA results or tracked variables such as program participation, school attendance and student awards. Several respondents stated that they relied on qualitative information such as observations and testimonials. Of significance, a number of respondents supported developing common evaluation tools which will yield consistent, objective and reliable results, especially given that funders are placing greater emphasis on accountability. Several other respondents emphasized the need to balance both quantitative and qualitative information collection.

Lessons Learned / Future Directions:

Most respondents felt that their school's community education component had positively impacted education and learning outcomes both in their school and in their community. Most respondents also reported that they had no way of empirically making a case for their assertion. As such, there was support for developing common evaluation tools which will yield consistent, objective and reliable results. It was noted that these tools needed to yield comparable information, both between different jurisdictions and over time in order to ascertain trends.

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

Introduction:

Based on the research, a continuum ranging from facility use, to program delivery to community development emerged. While most community schools encourage facility use and are involved in program delivery; far fewer are active in the area of community development.

Of note, community education is generally achieved in two stages. The first stage is often highly program-oriented and comes about as a result of meeting immediate needs as perceived by the community. Those responsible for community education will initially facilitate access to school facilities and resources and encourage community involvement in programs. As part of the second stage, those responsible for community education will often develop processes by which the community can learn to work together to identify problems and to seek solutions to these problems.

Given that this transformational process takes time and requires skilled staff and adequate resources, more schools will be involved in facility use and program delivery than in community development. As such, one of the challenges will be to ensure that community schools are able to make this shift.

This sub-section will address the above three roles played by community schools. It will also take a more in-depth look at community development, defining it, highlighting examples of it and addressing such aspects as the benefits of and challenges associated with it.

Facility Use:

All community school respondents stated that their school accommodates or encourages community use of its facilities and spaces outside of regular school hours. With regard to this use, the most popular facilities or spaces are gymnasiums, classrooms, libraries, multipurpose rooms and playing fields.

As for challenges encountered in making these facilities and spaces available for community use, they include but are not limited to: increased custodial duties and field maintenance; dealing with scheduling issues related to high demand facilities such as gymnasiums; ensuring building security; and informing the community of available opportunities. Other challenges include cost to participate in programs or to use facilities; cuts in community school funding; lack of administrative or clerical support; and reluctance by some staff to volunteer their time to supervise programs.

In response to above challenges and others, respondents identified a number of strategies, including:

- changing the work schedule of the community school coordinator – i.e., start and end later;
- designating a person to be responsible for facility use – e.g., activity coordinator;
- developing guidelines for community use;
- encouraging teachers to volunteer their time after regular school hours;
- ensuring effective communication with all user groups;
- hiring extra custodial assistance for special events;
- making better use of volunteers;
- posting room maps to enable rooms to be returned to their original configuration;
- requesting that user groups donate money toward equipment replacement;
- subsidizing some programs to facilitate greater access.

With regard to effectiveness, most respondents (64.1%) felt that their school is very effective or effective in accommodating or encouraging community use of facilities. By contrast, only 14.0% of respondents felt that their community school is ineffective or very ineffective. The remaining 21.9% of respondents were unsure as to their school's effectiveness or did not respond to the question.

Program Delivery:

Most community school respondents stated 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. For example, identified programs range from story time for toddlers to nights alive (for youth) to English-as-a-Second Language training for adults to a meal program targeting isolated seniors. As such, the combination of these programs facilitates intergenerational linkages and social interaction.

With regard to the most popular programs, they are: adult and continuing education; art, dance and music lessons; before and after school activities; computer access and courses; literacy and numeracy assistance; pre-school; recreational activities and classes; summer day camps; and youth initiatives. For a complete listing of programs, refer to appendix 2.

Community Development:

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

Definitions:

When asked to define community development, there were as many definitions as there were respondents who answered the question. Despite the many definitions, 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 also made frequent references as to end products or the reasons for doing community development. These references include but are not limited to the following:

- creating a better overall quality of life;
- creating a more livable community;
- creating a more equal and just society;
- creating a vibrant learning community;
- facilitating a feeling of belonging;
- facilitating lifelong learning;
- facilitating positive social change;
- providing at-risk and marginalized people with a voice.

Examples:

Respondents cited numerous examples of community development work. These examples include: developing a childcare facility; establishing a food support program; hiring a neighbourhood outreach worker; hosting a multicultural dinner; offering a youth program; partnering on a pathway and playground project; providing computers to needy families; and supporting an art gallery for local artists. Several respondents felt that it is not the end product itself but the process by which it is achieved that is at the heart of community development.

Two-fifths (40.7%) of respondents felt that their community school is very effective or effective in facilitating community development work. By contrast, 21.9% of respondents felt that their community school is ineffective or very ineffective. The remaining 37.5% of respondents were unsure as to their community school's effectiveness or did not respond to the question. Regarding the latter, this high percentage may be attributed to the fact that a number of community schools are not mandated to facilitate community development; while others are not doing much work in this area.

Challenges:

Respondents identified a number of challenges related to doing community development work. These challenges include but are not limited to:

- difficulty in maintaining partnership arrangements;
- lack of experience on behalf of the community school coordinator;
- lack of money and resources;
- lack of staff buy-in;
- limited parental and community involvement;
- limited support by the business community and social service agencies;
- limited time on behalf of the community school coordinator.

Regarding the second challenge, when asked, most (62.5%) community school coordinators who responded to the questionnaire stated that they had not received training in the area of community development. Of those who did say that they had received training, in most cases, this training was limited to attending a conference or workshop.

Remote / Rural Communities:

Several respondents referred to the significant role that community schools play in remote and rural communities. It was noted that these schools often act as a service hub not only for the immediate community but for the surrounding area and that they provide a forum or vehicle for addressing economic and social issues. It was also noted that these schools face special challenges, including serving an often isolated, sparsely populated area where transportation issues, particularly in winter, are paramount.

School and School District Support:

Under half (46.9%) of respondents reported that there was broad acceptance of and support for community development within their school. Another 6.3% reported that there was some acceptance of and support for community development in their school. By contrast, only 31.3% of respondents reported that there was broad acceptance of and support for community development within their School District. Another 3.1% reported that there was some acceptance of and support for community development within their School District.

With regard to schools, positive examples of acceptance and support include but are not limited to: very supportive principal and staff; active board and supportive parent advisory council; high rates of parental and community involvement; large number of volunteers; and willingness to work together. As for challenges, these include but are not limited to: inability by some teachers to see how community development relates to them and their classroom work; lack of training in community development; limited number of administrators and teachers who reside in the community; and reluctance by some teachers to share their classroom space.

As for School Districts, positive examples of acceptance and support include but are not limited to: continued funding; designated staff to assist in community development work; establishment of a Community Education Services Division; implementation of a policy whereby the community school can retain 75% of rental fees; and public recognition of the valuable work of community schools. As for challenges, these include but are not limited to: lack of adequate, long term and sustainable funding; lack of understanding of the benefits of community development work; and too much emphasis on the bottom-line.

Strategies to Overcome Challenges:

At the school level, respondents suggested the following strategies to overcome the above challenges:

- educating teachers, parents and others as to the benefits of community development;
- hiring teachers who have a community development background;
- improving staff training in the area of community development;
- informing teachers that helping students requires helping families.

At the School District level, respondents suggested the following strategies to overcome the above challenges:

- documenting and linking community development work with improved academic outcomes;
- educating School Trustees as to the benefits of community development;
- ensuring designated, long-term and sustainable funding for community schools;
- gaining support from senior School District officials – i.e., need for a champion;
- having School District personnel attend community school advisory council meetings;
- making delegations at School Board meetings.

Learnings / Future Directions:

Most respondents felt that they were doing an effective job in the areas of encouraging facility use and program delivery; however, this was not the case with regard to facilitating community development. For many respondents, they felt that they needed additional training in the area of community development and that they needed support for their work, both within their school and within the School District.

With regard to future directions, consideration should be given to targeted training in the area of community development for administrators, community school coordinators and teachers. Additionally, consideration should be given to informing School Trustees and School District personnel of the benefits of community development, especially the positive linkages to academic outcomes.

Theme #5: Community Partnerships

Introduction:

Most community schools make use of partnerships to better serve their communities in terms of program design, development and delivery. They also make use of partnerships to facilitate community development.

Types:

Partnerships range from informal arrangements around facility use or program development with one or more community organizations to formal joint use agreements with Health Authorities, Parks and Recreation Departments, etc. Regarding the former, examples include after school activities involving Boys and Girls Clubs, drop-in sports involving Neighbourhood Houses, etc. As for the latter, joint use agreements include written provisions covering such areas as equipment usage, maintenance provisions, staffing requirements, dispute mechanisms, etc. While almost all community schools have entered into informal arrangements around facility use or program development; far fewer (56.3%) have entered into formal joint use agreements.

Many community schools (42.2%) have also entered into partnerships with First Nations. These partnerships, as above, range from informal arrangements around facility use or program development to sharing agreements. Some examples of partnership initiatives include an Aboriginal Awareness Day, an Aboriginal Parent Club, a Learning About First Nations Program and an on-site Aboriginal Youth Worker, as well as a variety of literacy and youth employment programs.

Benefits and Challenges:

Most respondents felt that the benefits derived from 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 the 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 a continuum of services and contributing to one-stop service delivery;
- enhancing fundraising abilities – i.e., funders want to see that partnerships are in place.

As for challenges, they include but are not limited to:

- achieving a common vision;
- ensuring effective coordination of programs and services;
- facilitating effective and ongoing communication;
- establishing trust;
- reconciling different organizational goals, philosophies and values;
- dealing with different procedures, standards and systems;
- maintaining organizational independence.

Effectiveness:

Most respondents (70.4%) felt that their community school is very effective or effective in facilitating community partnerships. By contrast, only 6.3% of respondents felt that their community school is ineffective or very ineffective. The remaining 23.3% of respondents were unsure as to their community school's effectiveness or did not respond to the question.

As for advice with regard to creating, maintaining and sustaining effective partnerships, respondents had the following suggestions:

- be clear as to expectations upfront;
- develop common goals or values (and consider entering into an agreement or contract);
- agree on a clear dispute or problem-solving mechanism;
- build momentum – i.e., ensure some small successes at the beginning;
- create “win-win” situations;
- ensure mutual respect, support and trust;
- practice frequent, honest and open communication;
- provide regular feedback;

- recognize partners and jointly celebrate successes;
- monitor and regularly report on effectiveness.

Learnings / Future Directions:

Most respondents felt that partnerships were beneficial to furthering the mandate of their community school. They also felt that they were generally doing an effective job in facilitating them.

Theme #6: Accountability

Introduction:

While most community schools are accountable to their funders; this accountability is usually limited to detailed budget information related to funded programs. With regard to program effectiveness, this is usually limited to tracking the number of participants or volunteers involved in a program.

Information for Funders:

Most community schools prepare an annual report to both the Ministry of Children and Family Development and their local School District. This report usually details budget information related to funded programs. In some cases, it may also include benchmarks or targets to evaluate progress.

In addition to an annual report, other forms of accountability include but are not limited to:

- assessing community needs to ensure that programs are current and relevant;
- assisting funders to collect their own evidence with regard to evaluating the effectiveness of programs;
- conducting an internal financial review;
- engaging School District personnel in both the planning and evaluation of programs;
- evaluating programs at an annual society meeting and inviting all funders to attend;
- forwarding program evaluation information to all funders;
- highlighting successes;
- inviting funders to jointly review how their funding is being used;
- inviting funders to visit programs in which they have provided support;
- inviting School District personnel to participate in or observe community school programs;
- making delegations or presentations at School Board meetings;
- preparing an annual business plan;
- preparing formal written reports as requested;
- publishing budget information in the community school newsletter;
- sitting on the Boards of all major funders and having them sit on your Board;
- undergoing an internal audit.

Challenges:

With regard to challenges in being accountable to funders, these include: lack of time on behalf of the community school coordinator; limited experience and knowledge in the area of program evaluation; specific evaluation criteria as specified by certain funders; and staff turnover within the Ministry of Children and Family Development and the School Districts. Regarding the third challenge, it was noted that one funder requires that the community school document attitudinal changes in children after five months in a program. As for the fourth challenge, it was noted that new staff may mean new accountability procedures and standards. It was also noted that staff turnover may mean having to again make the case for renewed funding.

Recognition:

As part of the discussion on accountability, respondents emphasized the importance of recognizing funders. With regard to cited strategies, these include but are not limited to:

- acknowledging funders in promotional materials and on websites;
- forwarding student thank-you cards to funders;
- inviting funders to a volunteer tea;
- listing funders on a Tree of Thanks;
- recognizing funders at public and special events.

Program Effectiveness:

As part of being accountable to their funders, some community schools evaluate their programs as to their effectiveness. In most cases, this evaluation is limited to tracking the number of participants in a program or the number of volunteers or volunteer hours involved in its delivery. While these statistics provide information as to the level of interest in a program, they do not provide information as to a program's effectiveness.

A few community schools do conduct an annual evaluation of their programs; implement participant satisfaction surveys at the completion of each program; and/or seek feedback from instructors and volunteers. For these community schools, they are able to provide tangible evidence to funders as to program effectiveness; while being able to adjust programs in response to identified concerns and offer new programs in response to identified needs.

Several respondents emphasized the need to develop practical and universal evaluation tools to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. Other respondents emphasized the need for training in the areas of program monitoring and evaluation, including developing benchmarks. It was noted that many funders are requiring greater accountability and that program monitoring and evaluation is becoming increasingly important.

Lessons Learned / Future Directions:

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

Appendix 1: Community School Interviews and Visits

In total, nine site visits were conducted and eleven schools and school groupings were examined in detail. These eleven schools and school groupings are:

- Bamfield Community School
- Bankhead Bridges Community Elementary School, Kelowna
- Britannia Community School, Vancouver
- Campbell River School District
- Denman Island Community School
- Harewood Family of Community Schools, Nanaimo
- Hornby Island Community School
- James Bay Community School, Victoria
- John Maclure Community School, Abbotsford
- Maywood Community School, Burnaby
- Roosevelt Park Community Elementary School, Prince Rupert

Appendix 2: Community School Programs

Based on the questionnaires responses and the site visits, the following community school programs were cited:

- Addiction services.
- Adult and Continuing Education.
- Adult English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) training.
- Art, dance and music lessons.
- Baby Time.
- Babysitting courses.
- Before and after school activities and programs.
- Breakfast programs.
- Clothing exchanges.
- Community or Internet Cafés.
- Community kitchens and food preparation courses.
- Computer courses.
- Counselling and support programs.
- Craft fairs.
- Early Learning Canada Program.
- Early Reading Intervention Summer Program.
- Employment services.
- Environmental Program.
- Family Drop-In.
- First Aid courses.
- Games clubs.
- Gardening for Growth Program.
- Grandfriends' Program.
- Healthy Beginnings Program.
- Homework Club.
- Income tax assistance.
- Kidsafe Projects.
- Literacy and numeracy programs.
- Multicultural Dinners.
- Mural Project.
- Newcomers' Club.
- Nights Alive (Youth Crime Prevention Recreation Programs).
- Parent and Tot Programs.
- Parent Drop-In Programs.
- Photography courses.
- Pre-school programs.
- Public safety courses.
- Quilters groups.
- Recreational activities and classes.

- Seniors Meal Programs.
- Sports Nights.
- Story Time or Tales for Toddlers.
- Storybook Theatre Program.
- Summer Day Camp.
- Toastmasters.
- Volunteer opportunities and training.
- Weight Loss Group.
- Women's Groups.
- Women's Wellness Programs.
- Youth programs.