

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
A HANDBOOK OF “BEST PRACTICES”



*Building partnerships to strengthen children, youth, families
and communities throughout British Columbia*

DOCUMENT IN PROGRESS

*An evolving document reflecting
change and growth in the field.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Is a concept that advocates a process for empowering citizens in a community to address local needs. The underlying values and principles are guided by practices such as:

- Inclusiveness
- Self-determination & self-help
- Shared resources
- Leadership development
- Lifelong learning
- Integrated services
- Responsiveness
- Neighbourhood-based action
- Sustainability

1.2 A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Is a model that subscribes to the values and principles of Community Education. In a Community School, processes are in place that develop and maintain programs, services, events and opportunities to empower the neighbourhood to satisfy community needs and provide lifelong learning opportunities for people of all ages.

1.3 COMPONENTS PRACTICED IN A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

- Regular School Program
- Ministry of Education CommunityLINK Programs in support of vulnerable children
- Community Involvement
- Community Development
- Community Use of Facilities
- Interagency Coordination
- Extended Programs, Services and Activities
- Support of Lifelong Learning
- Development of Partnerships

1.4 WHY HAVE A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

A Community School takes one of the largest and most underutilized public facilities, the public school, and increases the investment by keeping it open during evenings, weekends and during the summer for community activities. The Community School provides a vehicle for the participation of community residents, with or without children in the school system in the activities and efforts of the neighbourhood school.

1.5 ADVANTAGES OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

- Increases the use of local public school facilities
- Integrates and coordinates existing public services
- Maximizes communication between school and community
- Enriches and enhances learning through formal and informal activities
- Develops the neighbourhood schools as the centre of community activities
- Improves communication between school and community by providing opportunities for local residents to participate in community activities.
- Contributes to local employment and community economic development
- More than triples the investment by leveraging funds from other sources

2. GETTING STARTED

To develop a new Community School the following activities are recommended:

2.1 GENERATING SUPPORT

Gather informal support and generate interest by using a variety of strategies to share the Community Education concept and Community School model with a wide variety of community audiences including:

- Board of School Trustees
- School staff and administration
- Students
- Parent Advisory Council
- Local government
- Local agencies and organizations
- Residents reflecting the diversity of the local community
- Local businesses and
- Other identified stakeholders.

2.2 FORMING A STEERING COMMITTEE

The composition of the steering committee should be broad-based and be reflective of the community that is served. Members should include representatives from the school administration, school staff, students, the Parent Advisory Council, local agencies and organizations, neighbourhood residents and the local business community to:

- Assess need and commitment,
- Promote the benefits of a Community School, and
- Investigate and recommend an appropriate governing structure.

2.3 DEVELOPING A PROPOSAL

Develop a proposal for presentation to the local School Board for "official designation" as a Community School. The proposal is to include:

- A statement of need,
- Evidence of community support and commitment,
- An outline of goals for the first year's operation,
- A description of the Community School structure, and
- A financial plan.

2.4 ESTABLISHING A LEGAL STRUCTURE

Develop a draft constitution and a set of by-laws. The by-laws of the governing body should define the following:

- Membership which reflects broad-based community representation
- Voting criteria
- Executive roles and responsibilities
- Meeting guidelines and decision making processes
- Financial guidelines
- Election process
- Amending process
- Dissolution clause and
- Personnel and hiring practices.

2.5 PRESENTATION TO LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

As an organized structure, the body presents a formal proposal to the local school board for official designation as a Community School.

At the discretion of the Board of School Trustees, funding may be provided from general operating funds or from CommunityLINK funds if the community school meets the Ministry of Education criteria of providing evidence-based programs that support vulnerable students to improve their educational performance, including academic achievement and social functioning.

3. MAINTAINING SUPPORT

Since communities change, developing and sustaining an understanding of the Community Education concept and the Community School model is an ongoing process. Using a variety of strategies the concept of Community Education and the model of the Community School is shared regularly with key stakeholders including:

- School Trustees
- School District Administration
- School administration
- All school staff
- Resident's associations
- Local agencies/organizations
- Community School volunteers
- Parents and students and families
- Neighbourhood residents
- Catchment area schools
- Funding Partners

4. GOVERNANCE

4.1 LOCAL GOVERNING BODY

The management of the additional programs and services offered by a Community School is the responsibility of a duly elected body representative of the local school/s and its/their community. This body may be referred to as a community council, community association, community board, or community services committee for example.

This governing body should be a non-profit society or affiliated with a non-profit society registered with the B.C. Registrar of Companies. The composition of this body should be broad-based and reflective of the diverse makeup of the community inclusive of residents, school students, school staff, local agencies/organizations, the business community, etc.

This body is elected annually at an Annual General Meeting. It should work in collaboration with the "Parent Advisory Committee" and where appropriate, have the Parent Advisory Committee as one of its committees.

4.2 MANDATE

The mandate of this governing body includes:

- promoting the Community Education concept in the community
- developing a long-range plan to ensure stability and growth of the Community School
- setting annual goals based on community needs, including an evaluation process
- implementing a variety of communication strategies among and with key stakeholders
- conducting a periodic community needs assessment
- managing the operation of the Community School Program
- managing the finances of the Community School Program, including the setting and administration of an annual budget
- facilitating the development of a wide variety of programs, services and opportunities for all ages in collaboration with other community services and
- maintaining accurate records of its operations, agendas, minutes, correspondence and financial records.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL COORDINATOR

A Community School Coordinator will be employed by the local governing body or other authority such as the School Board, regional district or the municipal parks and recreation department, or a combination of the above. This person will be accountable to the local governing body.

The role of the Community School Coordinator includes:

1. Acting on behalf of the local governing body in managing all organizational matters.
2. Supporting the local governing body in promoting the Community Education concept and Community School model among school administration and staff, neighbourhood residents, community agencies/organizations, the business community and local politicians.
3. Liaising between the various governmental bodies and providing leadership of the Community School operations in areas such as:
 - coordinating the integration of community resources and services
 - developing partnerships with community organizations and businesses
 - facilitating fundraising and grants submissions
 - supporting staff and volunteer involvement
 - developing programs and services to meet local needs and
 - coordinating community use of the school facilities.
4. Providing documentation for program evaluation required by the Ministry of Education CommunityLINK program and other partners.

5.2 SCHOOL PERSONNEL

The Community School Program is an integral part of the mandated Kindergarten - Grade 12 school program. The school staff- principal, teachers and support staff - all have roles to play to fulfill the goals of the Community School.

THE PRINCIPAL OR ADMINISTRATOR

The role of the school principal is:

- To establish a positive working relationship with the Community School Coordinator and the Community School Council for the operation of the Community School Program.
- To be a member of the Community Council.
- To become knowledgeable of the Community Education concept and the Community School model.
- To support and promote the Community School Program and the Community Council among teachers, parents, students and the community.
- To interpret School Board policy as it relates to Community Council programs, services and opportunities.
- To facilitate discussions where the community is receiving information or providing feedback or advice regarding the operation of the "regular day school program"
- To encourage teaching staff to use community resources in their lesson planning, to provide students with opportunities to be involved in classroom, school and community decision making.

TEACHERS

The role of the teachers is:

- To support the Community School Program.
- To become knowledgeable of the Community Education concept and the Community School model.
- To promote the Community School Program and Community Council projects, programs, services and opportunities among students and parents.
- To integrate the community's resources into their curriculum. The resources may include volunteers, speakers, attractions, events and physical locations.
- To have representation on the Community School Council.

SUPPORT STAFF

The role of the support staff is:

- To support the Community School Program.
- To become knowledgeable of the Community Education concept and the qualities of Community School model i.e., extended hours, community use of the building, shared facility use.

6. VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT

Volunteers are the backbone of the Community School Program. They need to be recognized, valued and nurtured. Volunteers provide leadership for the Community School Program, share their skills and interests with others and assist with projects, programs and services. The involvement of volunteers is guided by the principles of leadership development, lifelong learning, self-determination and self-help.

The Community School will have a volunteer development program which includes all the facets of voluntarism: coordination, recruitment, orientation, training, evaluation and recognition.

Volunteers should expect the following:

- an overview of the philosophy of Community Education and the Community School Program
- orientation to the school, its people, programs and policies
- appropriate training for the position or role assigned
- formal and informal leadership training opportunities
- opportunities to practice new skills
- ongoing support
- opportunities to provide feedback
- recognition for their contribution

The Community School Program would expect the following from its volunteers:

- respect for others
- a willingness to learn and to take required training if necessary
- enthusiasm and commitment to their program
- act as ambassadors of the Community School Program

7. PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The philosophy of Community Education strives to address the needs of the community and the student members through the development of relevant and appropriate projects, programs and services. This process of development provides an opportunity for lifelong learning and leadership through the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities and services.

The philosophy of Community Education encourages integration of projects, programs and services with other agencies/organizations in the community.

7.1 THE CONTINUUM OF INTEGRATION

All parties are involved in the needs assessment, planning and implementation of comprehensive programs and support services for community residents. Cooperation, coordination and integration represent a continuum in how the parties may work together. Integrated projects, programs or services should have funding and support from more than one source to engender the commitment to collaboration. Joint planning among workers from the school, agencies, and organizations takes place with active participation from the community.

Collectively, they work together to identify needs, resources, strategies and appropriate decision making mechanisms to ensure the optimum integration of ideas, resources and effort.

7.2 A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

Community School Programs develop integrated projects, programs and services. Projects, programs and services will be broadly based to meet the education, recreational, emotional, social and cultural needs to residents of all ages: pre-schoolers, children, youth, adults and seniors.

The program planning process includes:

- the development of goals and objectives
- the development of a budget
- the design of program content and format
- the recruitment of human resources required
- an implementation plan
- an evaluation plan

The planning process should provide an opportunity for community involvement and the development of leadership capacity.

8. COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In keeping with the concept of Community Education the involvement of the student body, the school staff, the parent/Community Council in the curriculum presentation is essential.

The delivery methods of curriculum and their choices are based on the needs and interests of the students. Practical relevance to neighbourhood issues and concerns enhances the learning process.

8.1 USE OF RESOURCES

The concept of Community Education advocates the use of community resources in the classroom, during school events and in projects. Community resources might include:

- Human resources -- classroom volunteers, community residents with skills and knowledge to share.
- Physical resources -- places, facilities and equipment, organizations, clubs and institutions.
- Financial resources -- supporting the cost of the program or event.

8.2 PROGRAMS AND EQUIPMENT

- The development of extracurricular activities which enhance the learning in the classroom is encouraged.
- Incorporating other school-based programs, such as lunch and meal programs, child care, clothing exchanges, homework clubs, and other activities which support students' learning.
- Students should be provided with an opportunity to learn leadership skills and be involved in decision making in the school. This could take the form of a students' council, a leadership group, or student representation on the Community Council.
- Opportunities for group problem solving and decision making should be a part of the classroom and school structure. A priority should be made for providing training and professional development for teachers and school staff in learning about and implementing of the principles of Community Education.

9. USING THE SCHOOL BUILDING

The Community School Program and its affiliated projects, programs and services use the school facility as a base of operations.

9.1 POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Policy should be developed jointly by the local community governing body and school staff in:

- Areas of the building and equipment available for community use
- A system of priorities for use of the building, particularly the gymnasium.
- A clear set of standards for use of the building and its equipment and an outline of actions which will be taken if standards are not met.

9.2 GUIDELINES

Community organizations will have year-round access to the school building, school grounds and its equipment.

Every effort should be made to facilitate access to the school facilities for extended hours to reflect community needs with particular attention to creating a welcoming environment--knowledgeable and friendly staff, appropriate signage, etc.

Since space in the school building may not be available or suitable for community projects, programs and services, an inventory of other community spaces should be maintained.

10. INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION AND COOPERATION

One of the goals of the Community School Program is to support and promote cooperation and coordination among agencies and organizations which provide programs and services in the community.

As the intersection between education and social service professionals the Community School is in a unique position to view the needs of the community in a holistic and encompassing way. It can serve as an objective point of reference and an effective forum for a multi-disciplinary approach in addressing local priorities.

10.1 ROLE IN MEETINGS

The Community School should take a leadership role in facilitating regular meetings of personnel from community agencies and organizations to pursue common interests. This can be accomplished through the basic practices of community development.

The goals of these meetings could include:

- To provide an opportunity for networking
- To provide an opportunity to promote projects, programs and services
- To provide joint professional development
- To identify community issues and needs
- To create an environment for the development of partnerships to solve community problems and meet community needs.

The Community School Coordinator may assume this leadership role and the Community School Program should support and promote networking, cooperation, coordination, collaboration and integration among community agencies and organizations in all facets of its work.

11. THE ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA - ACEbc

ACEbc is dedicated to fostering and promoting all aspects of community education and community schools in British Columbia through liaison, information sharing, research and training. ACEbc has been active in British Columbia since 1975 as a non-profit organization with membership open to individuals, groups or organizations having an interest in community education.

Membership in the organization enables members to:

- Meet with others active in community education and become partners in a provincial wide network.
- Participate in information sharing, conferences and other training opportunities.
- Provide support and leadership to others in the field and practice of community education
- Join the ACEbc Listserv for peer to peer communication and support
- Contribute to and receive newsletters and other publications, manuals and handbooks relevant to community education
- Apply for Directors and Officers liability insurance coverage for organizations
- Support the work of promoting and furthering community education and community schools in British Columbia.

Membership applications and access to research and other reports produced by ACEbc are available at the website: www.acebc.org