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

## **Investing in Community Schools — An Economic Perspective**

By Don Reimer,  
for ACEbc—The Association for Community Education in BC  
April 17, 2007

*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.*

Community Schools – A Handbook of Best Practices, ACEbc, Revised 2007

Community school programs have direct benefits for those served, but they also benefit the general public and governments because of reduced expenditures over the long term. This paper draws on research in economics, early childhood development and other sources to set out some reasons why public funding of community schools is a good investment.

Currently, most community schools in BC receive their core funding from the Ministry of Education through CommunityLINK, which is intended to support vulnerable students. However, an analysis of the wide range of programs offered by community schools shows that funding should come from several government ministries, not just the Ministry of Education.

Four key reasons are cited for investing in community schools in British Columbia:

1. Community schools implement prevention strategies at the local community level.
2. Community schools leverage core funding by creating partnerships to multiply limited resources.
3. Community schools coordinate and integrate services from government ministries, non-profit organizations and community based organizations.
4. Community schools provide programs and services year round to the entire community, maximizing the investment in public facilities.

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### **Why invest in community schools?**

#### **1. Community schools implement prevention strategies at the local community level.**

Prevention strategies are universally regarded as more cost effective than subsequent intervention. Prevention is a core value of community schools, implemented through programs, services, community capacity building and various other actions.

##### **Early Childhood Development**

The most compelling economic arguments in support of prevention are from research on early childhood development, which has resulted in a global proliferation of preschool programs in recent years. Early childhood development programs are already prominent in most community schools, which is now more significant because the BC government recently expanded the mandate of the public school system to include preschool programs.

In developmental terms, the first few years are critical for brain development – which is mostly over or waning by the age of six. Brain development depends on positive early childhood experiences in stimulating and nurturing environments, which will determine factors such as language skills and emotional control. Positive preschool experiences will directly affect a child’s academic progress in school, as well as affecting health, employment, social – or antisocial - behaviour, and many other circumstances all through life. [Early Years Study, McCain & Mustard, 1999].

In their follow up study released in March, 2007, the authors state:

We now understand how early child and brain development sets trajectories in the health, learning and behaviour for life. How we apply this knowledge in our various societies will determine whether we will be successful in the 21st century. To establish stable, prosperous, equitable societies, we have to make equality of opportunity for all young children a key policy of our societies.

[Early Years Study 2, McCain, Mustard and Shanker, 2007, p. 11].

British Columbia economist Mike Stolte links the demographics of our aging population to the necessity of investing in young children. He points out that behavioural problems can be identified at an early age and that programs to support young children will have major economic returns to society in future. For example, regarding the early identification of social behaviour:

- 28 percent of boys with anti-social behaviour entering kindergarten were delinquent by age 13.
- 6 percent of all children born in any year account for 50-70 percent of all crime committed by that year’s group in later life. Of these children most can be identified by age 3.
- Mental health problems of children are often not diagnosed until they go to school. 71 percent of seriously aggressive 6-year-olds grow up to be seriously aggressive adults.

Stolte also points out that:

- The average current government investment in children age 0 - 6 is \$2,500/yr.
- The average current government investment in children aged 6 -12 is \$7,500/yr.
- The cost to keep a person in prison for one year in Canada is \$51,000.

[The Looming Seniors’ Crunch – the Case for Early Childhood Funding, Mike Stolte, 2006].

For many years, researchers have noted the direct economic returns to society of investing in children. In the United States, one of the most significant studies is the Perry Project, which showed up to a 17:1 economic payback for poor, at-risk children over forty years: In the Perry Project, children were provided quality childcare and parents had home visits from ages 3 until school entrance. Savings came from factors such as reduced welfare expenditures, benefits in productivity, higher wages (therefore higher taxes paid), fewer arrests, and higher likelihood of home ownership. [The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40, Schweinhart, 2005].

In 2003, the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis stated:

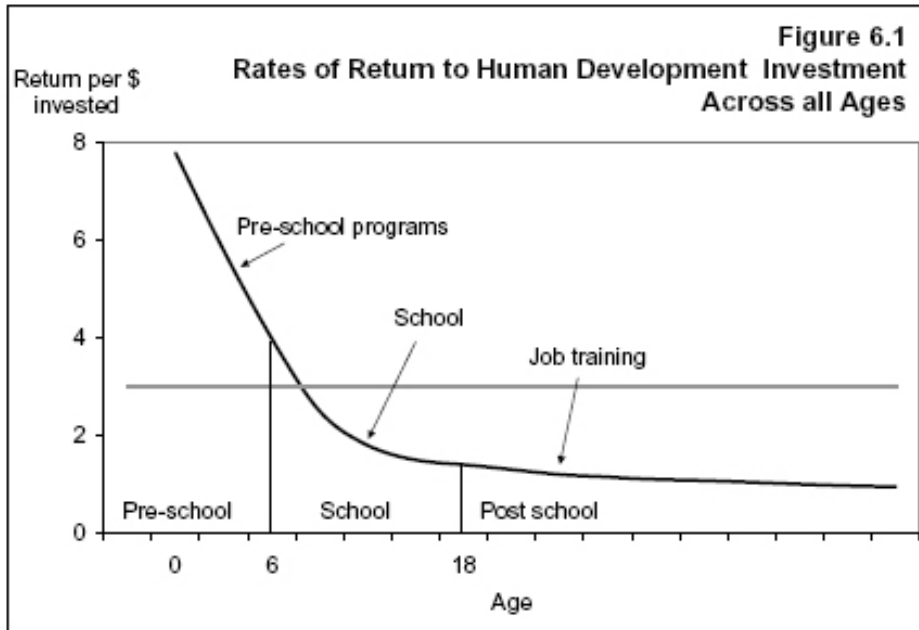
The conventional view of economic development typically includes company headquarters, office towers, entertainment centers, and professional sports stadiums and arenas. In this paper, we have argued that in the future any proposed economic development list should have early childhood development at the top.

Knowing that we need a highly educated workforce, however, does not tell us where to invest limited public resources. Policymakers must identify the educational investments that yield the highest public returns. Here the literature is clear: Dollars invested in early childhood development yield extraordinary public returns. [Economic Development with a High Public Return, Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003, p. 16].

The Early Years Study 2 makes several specific references to return on investment:

The view that investments in early childhood programs are justified by the returns provided to society as a whole is supported by the research of James Heckman, a Nobel prize-winner in

economics. His work with Flavio Cunha demonstrates that early childhood provides an unequalled period for the development of human capital.



[Cunha et al., 2005]

A dollar invested in early childhood yields three times as much as for school aged children and eight times as much for adult education.

**Figure 6.1** shows how investment in the foundation stage of early childhood is therefore of major importance. They calculate that the return on investments in primary and secondary education is about 3:1 in contrast to at least 8:1 for early child development programs. [Early Years Study 2, McCain, Mustard and Shanker, 2007, p. 136-7].

**Lifetime Costs to Government**

The federal government of Canada has reported on the lost government revenues and increased government expenditures resulting from the lack of school readiness. The benefits to government of high educational attainment are very significant, as shown in the Table 1.

**Table 1** Estimates of individual lifetime tax and premium contributions made between the ages of 25 and 65 years of age, 1990 dollars.

| Taxes and Premiums           | 0 - 8 years Education | 12 years Education | Degree             |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Federal Income Tax           | \$159,000             | \$292,000          | \$642,000          |
| Federal Consumption Taxes    | 76,000                | 94,000             | 141,000            |
| Provincial Income Tax        | 110,000               | 179,000            | 415,000            |
| Provincial Consumption Taxes | 75,000                | 92,000             | 139,000            |
| E.I. Contributions           | 18,000                | 29,000             | 39,000             |
| <b>TOTALS</b>                | <b>\$438,000</b>      | <b>\$686,000</b>   | <b>\$1,376,000</b> |

[Zero to Six: The Basis for School Readiness – May 1997, Human Resources Development Canada].

**Youth Programs and After School Programs**

Economically sound prevention programs are not limited to the support of early childhood development. Research has shown that unsupervised time after school is associated with involvement in violence, substance abuse, and other risk taking behaviours. Also, most crimes occur during the

after school hours, late afternoon and early evening. [America's After-School Choice: The Prime Time for Juvenile Crime. Or Youth Enrichment and Achievement. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2005].

Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, a UBC Professor, has also done extensive research on children and adolescents. She states: "Prevention programs that work use a framework that involves families, peers, schools, and communities as partners to target multiple outcomes." She goes on to quote Joy Dryfoos, a widely published U.S. researcher and writer who notes "What is needed is a set of coordinated, collaborative strategies and programs in each community." [Promoting Positive Development in School-Aged Children: Strategies for Successful Prevention, Schonert-Reichl, 2004].

Another British Columbia study by Schonert-Reichl on middle childhood (ages 6-12) released in March, 2007, includes findings on the importance of community connections and effective after school programs for children:

Children reported consistently higher levels of well-being, against every measure, the greater the number of adults they can identify in their community as knowing or caring about them.

Connectedness to schools provides children with a strong foundation: we know that the more adults in school children can look to for help, the higher their level of well-being. Community connections ground children and give a sense of belonging that can help to counteract challenges in their lives. It is possible to create neighbourhoods and communities where children are valued, where their voices are heard and where they feel safe. [Research Highlights, p. 8].

This study also asked parents about barriers to the involvement of their child in activities during out-of-school hours. The most significant barriers to children's involvement from a parental perspective were transportation, time availability and cost.

Parents were asked about program availability. Fully 20% of parents indicated that programs or services for their children during the out of school hours are not available in their community. Twenty one per cent indicated that there was a lack of information about the services offered for children in their community. [Research Highlights, p. 16].

[Middle Childhood Inside and Out, Schonert-Reichl, 2007].

Community schools are particularly relevant to these findings for several reasons:

- They offer a wide range of programs for middle years children after school, evenings and weekends year round in the local schools, strongly connecting children to their school and community.
- "Teen Nights" and other youth programs can be found as a component of virtually every community school in BC.
- Accessibility is generally not a concern. There are few, if any, barriers to these programs because of low or no costs to participants and the location is usually close to home.

To summarize, child and youth prevention programs have been highlighted by economists and child development researchers as valuable long term public investments. Community schools in BC typically focus on these programs, and therefore make a strong economic contribution to the province. This factor is not well understood, and along with the three following reasons indicates that long term, sustained core funding from government is a worthwhile investment.

## **2. Community schools leverage core funding by creating partnerships to multiply limited resources.**

Prior to 2003, annual core funding of \$75,000 had been targeted directly to community schools. For the past few years BC school districts have received from the Ministry of Education a package of funding known as CommunityLINK to support vulnerable and at risk children. Districts then have discretion to allocate these funds for several types of programs, including the option to provide core

funding for community schools. The Ministry's level of CommunityLINK funding has been constant since 2004 for most districts, although inflation and growing needs have put increasing pressure on these funds.

Only a very few districts have maintained core funding to community schools at the former 10-year level of \$75,000. In most cases it has dropped to between \$40-50,000. A few have been reduced to between \$25-30,000, some districts have discontinued funding to community schools over the past 4 years, and some districts such as Vancouver and Surrey have created new models of community schools.

Core funding provides essential infrastructure, including the community school coordinator, who is able to develop partnerships, apply for grants, and attract large numbers of volunteers. In this context, the core money can be justified as an investment with high returns, unlike typical allocations of government funds.

### **Leveraging of Public Investments**

In an ACEbc survey of BC community school coordinators in February 2007, three key questions were relevant to this paper:

- What funding do you receive from CommunityLINK allocations?
- What is your total budget for 2006-7, including the CommunityLINK funding?
- What other major partners assist with your funding?

From the 11 survey replies that accurately fit this question, the leveraging of core funds averaged 2.8 times the core funding. A few community school coordinators have a rule of thumb that they can generate three dollars for every core dollar from the district. Some coordinators have averaged 4 times their core allocation, and one coordinator in a small rural community school with a focus on community development and life long learning in 2004 through 2006 leveraged almost 9 times her core funding, generating \$813,000 from core funding of \$92,000. [[Questionnaire to Coordinators](#), Reimer, ACEbc, Feb., 2007].

These estimates of leveraged funds do not include volunteerism, which is an additional major factor in multiplying funding. Volunteer input often exceeds the core funding received, based on the Canada Revenue Agency's valuing of volunteer time at \$10 per hour.

### **Partnerships**

Community schools create partnerships with government agencies, non-profit organizations and community based organizations. The partners identified in the Feb. 2007 ACEbc survey included local municipal governments, parks and recreation departments, Literacy BC, United Way, local businesses, credit unions, trust companies, foundations, regional health authorities, local health associations, fire fighters, Industry Canada, Parent Advisory Councils, First Nations organizations, Legacy 2010 and many others.

The Surrey School District, largest in BC, in partnership with the City of Surrey is embarking on a major expansion of the community school concept through a new "Community-Schools Partnership Initiative." They are creating a number of "hubs" that comprise several schools as neighbourhood focal points. A new staff team of Community-Schools Partnership Coordinators are implementing the plan, guided by a broadly representative committee of school district, city, non-profit agency and other members. This partnership initiative seeks to:

- weave together an array of local services and resources for children, youth and families;
  - provide connections to the broader network of city-wide services;
  - build a sense of neighbourhood identity;
  - promote lifelong learning and overall community liveability.
- [[Community-Schools Partnership Initiative](#), Surrey School District, Revised March 2007 – Version 4].

Through many types of partnerships, as well as direct grants for specific programs, community schools are able to multiply their limited core funding. Most community schools that have operated for several years are associated with non-profit societies, which enables them to apply for grants and receive funding not available to non-community schools. However, a sound infrastructure must be in place (staffing, office facilities, etc.) to qualify for many grants, which makes the core funding essential.

### 3. Community schools coordinate and integrate services from government ministries, non-profit organizations and community based organizations.

In addition to providing regular educational programs for its enrolled students, a community school accepts responsibility to provide programs and services to meet needs of all members of the community. The Community School Coordinator is the key player in linking the various agencies, services and organizations to maximize their effectiveness in meeting community needs, particularly for vulnerable children, youth and families. Government agencies and non-profit organizations often work in “silos” whereas the community school coordinates and integrates services, resulting in more effective and efficient service.

#### ACEbc’s Inter-Ministry Framework

The programs and services of community schools typically reflect the mandates of many provincial government ministries. At the ACEbc Coordinators’ Retreat of October 2006, an Inter-Ministry Framework was developed to show the connections between programs and ministry mandates. The Framework is organized under the BC government’s Five Great Goals and the New Relationship with First Nations. [BC Government Budget 2006, Strategic Plan 2006-9]. The Framework was developed by about 20 coordinators who are providing these programs in schools across the province.

An examination of Table 2 shows examples of community school programs matched against various government ministries. An in-depth study is needed to quantify the cost savings of coordinating these services, but coordinated, collaborative strategies are consistent with research findings mentioned previously. Also, it is intuitively clear that children, youth, families and communities – and one could argue, taxpayers – are well served by the integrated approach of community schools.

**Table 2. Inter-Ministry Framework** [ACEbc, 2007]. This Framework demonstrates that many of the programs and services currently provided by community schools can justifiably be funded by several government ministries, not just by the Ministry of Education’s CommunityLINK funding.

[Key to abbreviations: **Min Ed**: Ministry of Education; **MCFD**: Ministry of Children and Family Development; **Min AG**: Ministry of Attorney General (and Minister Responsible for Multiculturalism); **MCS**: Ministry of Community Services (and Minister Responsible for Seniors’ and Women’s Issues); **MARR**: Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation. Note that in June 2006, the former MCAWS (Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women’s Services) was changed to the Ministry of Community Services and some of its former responsibilities were shifted to Min AG, MARR and other ministries].

| Community Schools and British Columbia’s Great Goals |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| BC Goal 1: Education and Literacy                    |                                       |
| Sample of Community School Programs and Services     | Ministry(s) Mandate                   |
| After School Homework Help                           | Min Ed                                |
| Parent and Tot Literacy                              | Min Ed                                |
| Parent Education and Support Program                 | Min Ed, MCFD                          |
| Pre Teen Youth at Risk Program                       | MCFD, Min Health                      |
| Roots of Empathy Program                             | Min Ed, MCFD, MCS, Min AG, Min Health |
| Summer Camp and Recreation                           | MCFD, MCS, Min Ed                     |
| Adult ESL  | Min Ed                                |

| <b>BC Goal 2: Healthy Living and Physical Fitness</b>  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Sample of Community School Programs and Services</b>  | <b>Ministry(s) Mandate</b>            |
| Community Kitchens   | Min Ed, Min Health, Min AG, MCFD      |
| Breakfast Programs   | “ “ “ “                               |
| Food Bank and Christmas Hampers  | “ “ “ “                               |
| Nutritious Lunch Workshop for Parents  | “ “ “ “                               |
| After School Activity Clubs  | “ “ “ “                               |
| Friday night Gym Nights  | “ “ “ “                               |
| <b>BC Goal 3: Systems of Support</b>   |                                       |
| <b>Sample of Community School Programs and Services</b>  | <b>Ministry(s) Mandate</b>            |
| Clothing Exchange  | Min AG, MCFD, Min Health, Min Ed, MCS |
| Before and After School Child Care   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Prenatal Education and support   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Family Place   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Emergency Social Services  | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Surplus Food Distributed to Families in Need   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Saturday Recreation Activities   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Home Alone Program   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| <b>BC Goal 4: Sustainable Environmental Management</b>   |                                       |
| <b>Sample of Community School Programs and Services</b>  | <b>Ministry(s) Mandate</b>            |
| School Ground Greening   | Min Ed, Min Environment               |
| School Gardens   | “ “                                   |
| Walk to School Programs  | “ “                                   |
| Community Cleanup  | “ “                                   |
| Outdoor Education Programs   | “ “                                   |
| Partnership with Corporations  | “ “                                   |
| <b>BC Goal 5. Jobs and the Economy</b>   |                                       |
| <b>Sample of Community School Programs and Services</b>  | <b>Ministry(s) Mandate</b>            |
| Resume Writing   | Min Ed                                |
| Computer Programs for Job Search   | “                                     |
| Life Skills and Leadership Programs  | Min AG                                |
| Financial Literacy Program   | MCFD                                  |
| Stay in School Program   | Min AG                                |
| <b>BC Goal: New Relationship with First Nations</b>  |                                       |
| <b>Sample of Community School Programs and Services</b>  | <b>Ministry(s) Mandate</b>            |
| Aboriginal Kids Club   | MCS, Min Ed, MCFD, Min AG, MARR       |
| Aboriginal Art and Story Telling Programs with First Nations Role Models   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Youth Drop-ins   | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Aboriginal Family Support and Service Workers  | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| All Elementary Students Learn about First Nations  | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Aboriginal Head Start  | “ “ “ “ “                             |
| Adult Education (Adult Peoples returning to school after trauma of residential schools) – child minding provided | “ “ “ “ “                             |

#### 4. Community schools provide programs and services year round to the entire community, maximizing investment in public facilities.

##### Life Long Learning

Early childhood development and adult literacy are often discussed as separate topics: yet the interrelatedness of these concepts is of utmost importance. Recent international evidence exposes two disturbing findings. One: nearly nine million adult Canadians lack the literacy skills necessary to cope with everyday life.\* Two: among developed countries, Canada comes dead last in spending on early childhood programs.

High literacy skills can equip a population to compete for quality jobs, to earn more, be healthier, build safer communities and take an active part in civic life. Evidence also shows that the benefits of literacy are intergenerational. A child's best start is closely linked to the literacy levels of his parents.

"Thinking" governments advance a life-long approach to learning understanding that success in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education, as well as in the workplace — gets a good start or not, depending on early experiences. [Early Years Study 2, 2007, p. 11].

*\* On a 5-level scale, 42% of adult Canadians and 23% of Swedes were at low skill levels 1 & 2. At the advanced skill levels 4 & 5, there were 23% of the Canadians and 34% of Swedes. For comparison, 18% of U.S. adults and 3% of Chileans were at levels 4 and 5. [Early Years Study 2, p. 43].*

The Brookings Institution has noted that a more highly educated nation leads to economic growth, and that education for all age groups is more important than ever as we "transition to a post-industrial, knowledge-based economy." [The Effects of Investing in Early Education on Economic Growth, April 2006].

Community schools offer life long learning opportunities to all members of the community and as the demographic shift in Canada gains momentum, immigration will rise, requiring more adult programs in future. Community schools – open year round – are well-positioned to help meet this need.

##### Maximizing use of Public Facilities

Public schools are usually among the most valuable public assets in communities, especially in smaller towns and rural areas. Community schools can provide access to highly desirable facilities, especially gymnasiums. Promoting health and recreation programs is increasingly recognized as a key part of reducing the escalating health care costs of an aging population.

Education levels are also closely related to health:

The obvious economic explanations – education is related to income or occupational choice – explain only a part of the education effect. We suggest that increasing levels of education lead to different thinking and decision-making patterns. The monetary value of the return to education in terms of health is perhaps half of the return to education on earnings, so policies that impact educational attainment could have a large effect on population health. [Education and Health: Evaluating Theories and Evidence, Cutler & Lleras-Muney. Working Paper No. 12352, National Bureau of Economic Research, July 2006].

In 2004, the BC provincial government took a step to better utilize school facilities through the School-Community Connections Program (SCCP):

We need to make better use of our school spaces so they benefit B.C. communities. The School Community Connections program will help school boards and local governments revitalize schools as centres for community learning and activity. [Campbell, G. Premier of BC, SCCP web site].

Although there are some definite success stories reported by the government, after three years the overall impact of SCCP so far seems to be limited. However, the program does recognize the potential economic, learning and health benefits to communities of increasing the shared use of public school facilities.

There are other signals that the provincial government recognizes the benefits of wider use of school facilities. Education Minister Shirley Bond describes the “helpful advice” from Dr. Charles Jago, former president of the University of Northern BC, including his recommendation to:

Empower and assist districts to enhance community literacy by embracing everything from preschool-age programs on, by making schools multi-purpose facilities, and by developing a culture of literacy. [Education Report No. 19, BC Ministry of Education, Jan 2007].

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In recent years, the government of BC has begun funding a number of new literacy, early childhood, healthy schools, and other programs. One of the weaknesses of the wide range of new programs available to schools may be the lack of infrastructure and time for implementation. For example, legislating the expansion of the mandate of the school system to include preschool does not ensure that the programs will be effectively implemented. In this writer's discussions with educators, the implementation of preschool programs such as “Ready, Set, Learn” has been much easier in community schools than in regular elementary schools, because structures, skills, staffing and responsibilities for meeting the needs of preschool children have already been in place.

In conclusion, there are clear economic reasons to support prevention programs, to build partnerships, to integrate services, to support life long learning, and to maximize the use of public buildings. The coordinators, volunteer boards and councils that operate community schools have years of experience in these areas. Governments have often regarded community schools as an extra expense, whereas it seems clear that adequate levels of sustained core government funding, shared between several ministries, would be a sound investment for British Columbia, with high returns to society.

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*Education doesn't begin at kindergarten and end at Grade 12. It doesn't take place only in a classroom or a school. It doesn't start at 9 and finish at 3. Education involves the community: students, teachers, support staff, parents, businesses, grandparents, employees and trustees...in fact everyone. Now is the time for all of B.C.'s education partners to consider new and innovative strategies that will help students in B.C. reach even higher levels of achievement.*

Education Report No. 19, BC Ministry of Education, Jan 2007

*A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. In these schools, an integrated focus on academics and family support, health and social services, and youth and community development leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools are open to everyone—all day, including evenings and weekends. Community-based organizations or public institutions often work as lead agencies in community schools, helping to mobilize community assets and support student success. [p. v, Executive Summary]*

Growing Community Schools: the Role of Cross-Boundary Leadership

Martin J. Blank, Amy C. Berg, Atelia Melaville,  
Coalition for Community Schools April, 2006

*Transforming existing programs—child care, family support programs, early intervention, family health programs, and Kindergarten—into community-based hubs is time-consuming. It requires change in staff roles and may require new skills. Time to develop relationships and protocols is essential. Funding support for transforming how programs are structured helps to build sustainability. Existing mandates and government funding streams are typically not suited to innovation, but community leaders are. By starting small, this kind of leadership can demonstrate a new vision for governments. [p. 133].*

Early Years Study 2 Putting Science Into Action

The Honorable Margaret Norrie McCain, J. Fraser Mustard and Dr. Stuart Shanker,  
Council for Early Child Development, 2007

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Any errors are the responsibility of the author.