

Healthy Bodies, Minds, and Buildings

The Mind-Body-Building Equation

Joy Dryfoos

Through partnerships with community organizations, full-service schools address the mental and physical needs of students and the community.

School buildings, which contain valuable resources, such as libraries, computer labs, gymnasiums, and swimming pools, typically sit empty for many hours a day, during the school year and during the summer. Extended-service schools bring these facilities to life by providing an array of positive activities and opportunities for young people and their families during the hours school is not in session. Their aim is to transform public schools into full-service youth and community centers that stay open year round.

—Laura Pires-Hester, DeWitt Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund

The interrelationship between strong minds and healthy bodies was established long ago. The public school's first role was to train little minds; gradually, schools became attentive to students' bodies as well, establishing physical education courses, cafeterias, offices for school health nurses and counselors, along with a plethora of categorical topics aimed at sex, violence, and drug prevention. But only recently has *building* been added to this equation. The environmental movement has raised our consciousness about the importance of toxic-free schoolhouses. In addition, the threat of violence has led to the call for schools that are safe havens.

In wealthy suburbs, mind, body, and building come together quite well on new school campuses where carefully constructed educational programs are integrated with comprehensive school health. Some schools have everything—star teachers, computer labs, trained counselors, exercise equipment, swimming pools—and that comprehensiveness shows up in high test scores and college admissions.

In communities without such a tax base, in inner cities and rural areas, the picture is very different. School systems cannot afford to raise teachers' salaries, and they struggle to reduce class sizes. To bring together the three

parts of the equation—mind, body, and building—they need outside help. These schools must rely on public and nonprofit agencies in the community to supplement staff materials and even space.

Full-Service Community Schools

Full-service community schools bring together all three concepts—mind, body, and building—into an integrated approach that places quality education and comprehensive support services at one site. These schools focus on the well-being of the child and the family—from early in the morning to late at night. The school building serves as a neighborhood hub, an institution that is safe, attentive, and comfortable.

Across the United States, educators are trying many different approaches to full-service community schools. A recent study identified 20 school-community initiatives as "intentional efforts to create and sustain relationships among a K–12 school or school district and a variety of both formal and informal organizations and institutions in the community" (Melaville & Blank, 1998). With support from the DeWitt Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund, schools and community agencies are replicating four of these programs at 60 sites in 20 U.S. cities. Many states, such as Kentucky, Missouri, and Iowa, have developed networks of community schools, as have many localities, such as St. Paul, Minnesota, and Portland, Oregon. Individual schools in which the principal single-handedly creates partnerships that open the school doors to the community have also surfaced (for a description of one such school, see Maguire, p. 18).

Vision of a Full-Service Community School

How do community schools address the mind, the body, and the building? No two community schools are alike. As the recently formed Coalition for Community Schools (1999) emphasizes, there are no "cookie cutters"; each community school must define its needs, identify its assets, and create its own solutions. But on the basis of what I have seen throughout the United States, I have my own vision of what a fully realized, full-service community school might look like (Dryfoos, 1998).

A school is paired with a lead community agency (a Boys and Girls Club, for instance). The principal and a full-time community school coordinator share the responsibility for operating the school. Education funds support classroom learning, with other resources for health, social, youth, and family services. The school doors are open from early morning to late evening, all year long.

The *mind* is addressed through carefully planned educational enhancement. The school is divided into houses, built around such academic subjects as science, music and art, business, and community service. The students divide into small groups and stay with the same teachers for several years. The community serves as a laboratory for educational pursuits, and students compile a community history, study community planning, and work with health care research and environmental surveys.

The *body* is addressed through on-site primary health services, including immunizations and dentistry. Counselors are assigned to specific houses to work closely with students, families, and school staff. Every student has access to an adult advocate—if not the parent, then another adult. Health education is built into the community school in many different ways. Teachers incorporate health information into the science curriculum. Trained health educators or youth workers from the community agency teach social and behavioral skills.

The *building* is designed to capture the spirit of a community school. It has ample room for a family resource center; preschool, before-, and after-school child care; a primary health care suite; and space for special projects, such as school stores, gardens, and science experiments. The community can use the auditorium for events, and the cafeteria is constantly available—from breakfast through after-school snacks and even for family dinners. When space is a problem, schools can use mobile units for resource centers and clinics.

These components are carefully woven together to produce an integrated program. The teachers and the staff of the partner community organization work in teams to create opportunities after school to continue the work that goes on during regular school hours. Families serve as school volunteers, aides, students in community education courses, and outreach workers. The community "owns" the school.

In addition, high value is placed on accountability. Each child is assessed upon entry to identify and meet his or her educational and support needs. A management information system documents staff time as well as student and family participation rates. This picture of an ideal community school puts all the pieces together to create a one-stop neighborhood hub.

Specific Models

The following descriptions highlight four model programs that the DeWitt Wallace–Reader's Digest Extended-Services Schools Initiative selected as exemplary.

Children's Aid Society Community Schools

Started in 1986 by the Children's Aid Society, this model partners a community agency with a school system to open the school for a wide range of services—a "settlement house in a school." Principals, assistant principals, and teachers work with agency staff to create continuity in the academic program through an extended day. The middle schools are organized into academies: community service; math, science, and technology; business studies; and communication (Moses & Coltoff, 1999).

Each community school has a built-in primary health center, typically staffed by a health agency, such as the Visiting Nurses. The middle schools offer health education through weekly sessions on a wide range of adolescent development issues. Both school and social agency counselors are available to deal with personal problems, school behaviors, and mental health.

The building is an essential part of this model. At two sites, new buildings were designed to be community schools. These schools have large spaces for family resource centers and after-school activities. The playground space is well lit so that the neighborhood can use it in the evening. At all the sites, the building is open all the time and is easily accessible to parents, children, and neighbors.

University-Assisted Community Schools

Many universities are involved in school programs, largely through teacher training, curriculum development, and evaluation. The University of Pennsylvania, in alliance with the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), went a step further by forming the Center for Community Partnerships. This agency is dedicated to "directing faculty research and student coursework toward solving pressing social problems in the university's backyard" (Sommerfield, 1996). In 1985, WEPIC began an after-school neighborhood clean-up effort in one school; now it develops community school programs at 13 sites within the university area.

The university addresses the mind through 50 community service courses. University faculty members develop the curriculum in conjunction with the public school teachers, and university students help teach courses in the schools and work with students as mentors and tutors. For example, in Anthropology 210: Biomedical Science and Human Adaptability, Penn students teach middle school students to conduct demographic and family health surveys and to evaluate anthropometric data, such as body mass and fat ratios. Another course, Urban Environment: West Philadelphia, focuses on environmental issues, such as lead toxicity, to improve the environment around the schools.

In some schools, health is the organizing theme of the learning unit. The curriculum is built around health issues, and the students work in local health agencies. After-school offerings include such courses as health awareness, landscaping and beautification, and health careers, with a homework center, a peer mediation program, and a computer center. Evening programs and a Saturday community school provide students and their families with free educational, recreational, and cultural events. Some schools have a social work office and medical and dental screening.

University faculty and students work with principals and teachers to transform the school buildings into community centers. Student art projects become attractive murals that decorate hallways. Students and staff perform theatrical events that trace local history for the whole community. They also dig up concrete playgrounds and replace them with gardens, which produce vegetables that they sell in the school store.

Beacons

Community schools foster the mind-body-building connection through diverse avenues. The Beacons model, pioneered in New York City through the Department of Youth and Community Development, picks up where the school system leaves off. Community-based agencies receive grants to go into school buildings and open them to the neighborhood from early morning until late evening, every day throughout the year.

Each of the 76 sites in New York, with 15 replications throughout the country, is different, depending on what the school needs most. Many focus on after-school youth-development activities and family and cultural events. Some bring in health centers, drug prevention programs, entrepreneurial programs, and community enterprises. Others feature tutoring, literacy, and parent education.

Bridges to Success

The United Way became interested in full-service community schools following the innovative work of the Indianapolis chapter (United Way, 1999). This effort, Bridges to Success, created a partnership with 10 major public and nonprofit agencies to integrate education with human and community-service delivery systems and to establish schools as lifelong learning centers and community hubs. The Adaptation Project puts the United Way in a partnership with the Institute for Educational Leadership to instruct local United Way agencies to extend services into schools.

Each site has a council—made up of the principal and school staff, service providers, parents, and community people—that plans and brokers services. The outside agencies may provide health care, dental care, case management, recreational and cultural after-school activities, mental

health services, community-service learning, tutoring, and job-readiness training. Each site puts particular emphasis on youth development and employment programs.

Looking into the Future

These examples all rely on partnerships between schools and community agencies. Increasingly, schools in all corners of the United States report formal and informal relationships with outside agencies. A process pioneered by Communities-in-Schools, for example, involves the business community to act as brokers for bringing community services into thousands of school buildings. Hundreds of primary health care clinics are moving into school buildings under the auspices of public and nonprofit community health agencies.

Across the country, school buildings are remaining open longer for many reasons: to provide a safe haven for children of working families; to help students raise test scores; to provide child care for welfare-reform programs; and to enhance youth-development experiences. The U.S. Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs offers grants to thousands of schools to remain open for more hours, primarily for tutoring and mentoring. Major foundation initiatives, notably the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation and the Open Society (George Soros), are supporting both schools and community agencies to get involved. My prediction is that in the future, all schools will be open for extended hours. The need for child care is great among families across all socioeconomic levels.

However, opening the schoolhouse to the community is only a first step toward realizing the promise of full-service community schools and fully implementing the mind-body-building equation. What goes on in that building to combine quality education, support services, parent involvement, and community development requires more than merely extending the hours or adding on services. The next step is to encourage educational leaders to invite community agencies to become partners in operating these new, complex institutions. Many models now exist, with the technical assistance and resources available. We can see the emergence of creative ideas and partnerships, and in the future we can expect many more new versions—and visions—of community schools.

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Author's note: The Coalition for Community Schools shares information and develops resources. More than 100 national educational and youth organizations have signed on as supporters. For more information, contact the Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Ste. 310, Washington, DC 20036 (e-mail: ccs@iel.org; Web site: www.communityschools.org).

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