



Beyond The Bell | Making The Home-School Connection

## Cincinnati tests limits of community involvement

By [Erin Richards](#) of the Journal Sentinel

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Individual schools around the country have adopted a "full-service," or "community school" model, but are there enough community resources to pair with schools in an entire district?

Cincinnati, which is turning more than 50 of its buildings into school-community centers, is finding that out.

The district is in year seven of a 10-year, more than \$1 billion project aimed at improving student achievement and district enrollment by outfitting each school with resources to improve the health, safety and stability of school families and residents of the surrounding neighborhoods.

A major consultant on the project has been Darlene Kamine, a former juvenile court attorney who left the city's Children's Defense Fund in 2001 to work on the overhaul.

"We planned and held real community meetings," said Kamine. "We took people by bus to school board meetings. Neighborhood by neighborhood, people felt involved in a way they never have before."

So while environmentally focused residents in one area designed and built a "green" Montessori school, humanities-focused residents in another built a school with an arts center in an empty, adjoining historic building.

Cincinnati Public Schools has 58 schools that serve about 34,000 students, less than half the size of Milwaukee Public Schools, which has almost 200 schools and serves about 82,000 students.

The district is relying on the state for a large portion of the rebuilding costs.

The state involvement was set in motion in 1996, when a federal study named Ohio's schools among the most dilapidated in the country, and the Ohio Supreme Court responded by ordering more state funding for schools.

The state is expected to fund about \$230 million of the little more than \$1 billion price tag. In 2003, voters approved a \$480 million school construction bond issue. The remaining money, roughly another \$480 million, is from other state and local sources.

Many of the rebuilt or renovated schools in Cincinnati have full-time resource coordinators who help build the partnerships to match the needs of students.

For example, a coordinator may work with a local health system to bring full-time nurses and mental health staff into the schools. The specialists get a free place to practice in exchange for treating patients eligible for Medicaid. Less intense partnerships include asking businesses to adopt a class.

The United Way of Greater Cincinnati and other foundations and agencies paid for the resource coordinators in nine schools. The district has since paid for others.

Early data from the nine pilot sites found higher levels of parent satisfaction, and eight of the schools increased daily student attendance to 93% or more between 2006 and 2008.

The sites also showed an average graduation rate increase from 59% in 2002 to 89% in 2008. On state achievement tests, they saw a 45% increase in students scoring proficient or advanced in math and reading.

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