



Raising Graduation and College Going Rates

COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL CASE STUDIES

Rita Axelroth

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About the Coalition for Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education K–16, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government, and philanthropy as well as national, state, and local community school networks. The Coalition advocates for community schools as a strategy to leverage local resources and programs, changing the look and feel of the traditional school structure to best meet the needs of children and families in the 21st century.

About the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)

NASSP is the preeminent organization of and national voice for middle level and high school principals, assistant principals, and aspiring school leaders from across the United States and more than 45 countries around the world. Its mission is to promote excellence in school leadership.



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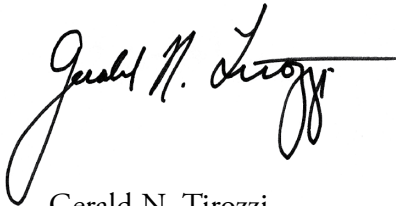
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PREFACE

A decade into the 21st Century, we see a growing interest among school leaders for a more holistic approach to education. Community schools are an alternative to an outdated public education system that disaggregates a challenging curriculum from the other important factors that influence student success. To raise academic achievement and reengage students so they stay in school, get good grades, and graduate prepared for post secondary education and a career with a future, we need more than what a 20th Century system has to offer.

Community schools as evidenced in this report implement many of the strategies aligned with *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*. These community schools get their strength from the local community as they create personalized environments, ensure a relevant and rigorous curriculum, and build sustainable partnerships that put a caring adult in a student's life before, during, and after school and during the summer.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Coalition for Community Schools are pleased to present a review of eight high schools that have embraced the community school approach and are showing results in student success that include reduction of dropout rates, increase in college acceptance, and more. These schools from around the nation in Bronx, NY; Chicago, IL; Cincinnati, OH; Indianapolis, IN; Philadelphia, PA; Portland, OR; and Tukwila, WA, have found a way to reconnect with youth, enriching their educational experiences through the partnerships that make up the community school strategy.



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Introduction

What is a Community School?

A community school is a place and a set of partnerships between the school and community resources. The community school strategy integrates academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and civic engagement to improve student learning and to develop stronger families and healthier communities.

Community schools are centers of the community—open to everyone—all day, every day, evenings, and weekends. Families, local government, higher education institutions, businesses, community-based organizations, and local citizens are all involved.

Key Features of Successful Community School High Schools

- ▶ Lead partner organization
- ▶ Community school coordinator
- ▶ Robust, reciprocal partnerships
- ▶ Focused leadership
- ▶ Critical programs and services
 - After-school, weekend, and summer programs
 - Academic support
 - Mentoring
 - College and career preparation
 - University partnerships
 - Culturally relevant programs
 - Parent engagement
 - Health services and education
 - Youth and community nutrition
- ▶ Shared results: graduating college-ready students

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Turning the Curve on High School Dropouts

The challenges facing our nation's youth are great. Dropout rates are unacceptably high and too few young people enter and succeed in postsecondary education and training. Too many children live in poverty, while the achievement gap for poor and minority students continues. Truancy, juvenile arrest, and juvenile victims of crime are on the rise.* These consequences have lifelong, damaging effects on youth.

This report tells the stories of eight community high schools across the country that are changing this picture. They are turning the curve on high school achievement and preparing students for success in college, careers, and life. Robust partnerships, focused leadership, and the provision of critical programs and services, as seen at these schools, are leading to positive changes in students' behavior, academic achievement, and preparation for post-secondary success. For example, since graduating its first class in 2006, Community Links High School has maintained a 99 percent graduation rate, with an 85 percent college-going rate. George Washington Community High School has raised its attendance from 88 percent to 96.2 percent in just two years, and 100 percent of the school's 2009 graduates were accepted to college. Cincinnati Public Schools, which made a commitment in 2002 to make every school a Community Learning Center, has seen its district-wide graduation rate improve from 51 percent to 82 percent over the last 6 years. These community schools are helping move our country towards the Obama Administration's goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by 2020.

The eight featured schools represent some of the poorest and most ethnically diverse schools in the country, many with a large number of English language learners. Across the schools, at least 60 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, while most of the schools have rates of 90 percent or more.

* Over 1.2 million American students drop out of high school each year. Half of these dropouts come from just 15 percent of high schools in our nation's high-poverty neighborhoods. Nearly a third of all public high school freshman—and closer to half of all African American, Hispanic, and Native American students—fail to graduate with their class. Forty to 60 percent of all students say they feel disconnected from school: unsupported, unsafe, academically unchallenged, and disengaged. Among children living in urban areas, 49 percent (9.7 million) live in low-income families. In the last three decades, U.S. racial and ethnic diversity has significantly increased. Over 20 percent of school-aged children in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home. Truancy, juvenile arrest for drug-related offenses, and juvenile victims of gunshot wounds run rampant in many of our nation's cities. Juvenile crimes peak between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. on school days. (Swanson 2004; Yazzie-Mintz 2006; Douglas-Hall and Chau, NCCP 2008; NCES 2007; US Dept. of Justice 1999).

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS

Yet, the young people at these sites have an advantage over many urban high school students. Their schools and communities have come together to offer safe, positive, and constructive environments before, during, and after school. Underpinning the success of these high schools are partnerships—school, community, non-profit, higher education, local government and business leaders—working together to provide much needed resources and opportunities for their young people. With high expectations for all students, these community schools are pulling together both financial and human resources to provide the support that students need to achieve.

Community schools serve as hubs whose partner agencies and organizations collaborate to address the specific needs and interests of its students, families, and other members of the community. At most community schools, a lead partner organization helps provide and coordinate the many programs and services at the school. These lead partners usually employ a full-time coordinator on site who serves as the “link” between the community school’s diverse constituencies. For example, at George Washington Community High School, lead partner Mary Rigg Neighborhood Center provides funding for a school/community director who works with more than 50 local organizations to ensure that student and community needs are met on site.

Strong partnerships are reciprocal: community school partners capitalize on each other’s resources, maintain constant communication, continually shape programs and services to address student and local needs, and share accountability for results. In most cases, a governing body made of students, parents, school staff, and partner representatives meet regularly to ensure that these requirements are met.

INTEGRATED PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

At community schools, real-world problem solving is incorporated into the core academic curriculum, engaging students through hands-on lessons and opportunities to contribute to their school and community. Academic opportunities continue into the after school hours, weekends, and summers, and community school coordinators work with teachers to link school day with out-of-school learning. Community adults and undergraduate volunteers often serve as tutors. Seven of the schools featured

have partnerships with local colleges or universities. Sayre High School represents the strongest higher education partnership, with more than 350 University of Pennsylvania students serving as tutors, mentors, classroom fellows, and program leaders at the school, as part of a university-assisted community schools approach.

Community schools encourage and support students in planning and preparing for post-secondary success. The high schools featured offer specialized college and career-related activities after school and/or during the school day. Some schools connect their students directly to college-level courses, such as Community Links High School’s *College Bridge* program, through which all students take classes for dual credit at nearby institutions. Other schools, such as Fannie Lou Hamer High School, focus on post-secondary preparation through a hands-on curriculum that promotes research, problem solving, and communication skills. Many of the sites have college advisors who provide individualized support to students and parents. Volunteers from the community come in to provide one-on-one mentoring relationships. For example, Oyler Community Learning Center has more than 350 mentors, from 65 different organizations, supporting its students on a weekly basis.

Many of these sites promote career exploration and job readiness through established internship programs for their students. At the Little Village Lawndale High School Campus, lead partner Enlace Chicago offers stipend based programs for nearly 100 students focusing on students’ individual career-based aspirations. Enlace has partnered with more than 16 local organizations to support high school interns.

To meet the needs of ethnically diverse student bodies, the schools partner with local organizations to provide culturally specific services. For example, at Parkrose High School, the Black Student Union and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (M.E.Ch.A) are two among many of the youth groups supported by city or statewide cultural programs. Community school staff are also engaging parents through culturally relevant programs so that they can be partners in their child(ren)’s education and better access resources for their families. At Foster High School, community liaisons work with community school staff to improve communication between parents and the school, particularly for Somali and Spanish speaking families.

When basic needs are met, students, principals, and teachers can focus on teaching and learning. Community schools collaborate with both public and private health care providers to offer health services, including free physicals, dental and vision screenings, and mental health support on site. Six high schools in this study have developed school-based health centers. Most offer programs aimed at improving student and community nutrition, such as the youth-led farmers' markets at both Sayre and Fannie Lou Hamer High Schools.

CROSS-BOUNDARY LEADERSHIP

School principals are integral to the success of community schools, and they work with lead partner organizations to leverage significant resources. The principals at the schools interviewed in this study understand that *schools can't do it alone* and reach out to local organizations, businesses, universities, and other key stakeholders, inviting them into the school to share their resources and expertise. A community school principal engages families, staff, partners and the community into the life of the school. As the community school site manager for Parkrose High stated, "Having our principal as a 100 percent supporter is the key reason for the success we've had."

At many sites—particularly Indianapolis, Portland, Chicago, and Tukwila—school superintendents have championed community school efforts, providing invaluable support as public advocates and district partners. During his time as the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan supported the development of 150 community schools throughout Chicago.

Local community members also provide critical leadership for community schools. At Oylar Community Learning Center, for example, local business and community leaders convinced the Board of Education that adding high school grades to create a pre-K–12 program was essential for the community to succeed. The leaders at these featured high schools understand that *strong schools require strong communities and strong communities require strong schools*.

BUILDING YOUR COMMUNITY SCHOOL

If you are interested in turning your high school into a community school, these tips will help you get started:

- ▶ Reach out to potential partners and explore how a community school partnership could be mutually beneficial.
- ▶ Capitalize on each partner's strengths and align them with the goals of the school and community.
- ▶ Focus on bringing in partners who can prepare your students for post-secondary success—individualized tutoring, mentoring, and job skills training are essential, and they require significant human resources.
- ▶ Keep communication open and strong, and be flexible when challenges arise.
- ▶ Open the doors of the school to the entire community, and reach out to parents so they can better support their child(ren)'s learning, while furthering their own education.
- ▶ Share responsibility with partners for your success *and* your challenges.
- ▶ Be patient—deep, systemic change takes time. But don't forget to celebrate the little accomplishments along the way. ❖

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Case Study 3

Oyler Community Learning Center Cincinnati, Ohio

Oyler Community Learning Center

Cincinnati, Ohio

Student Population: 870 (pre-K–12)

Demographics:

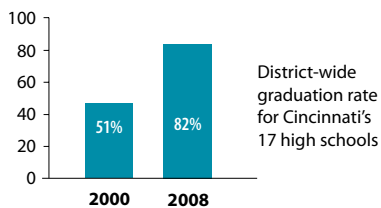
- ▶ 54% White
- ▶ 42% African-American
- ▶ 4% Multi-Racial
- ▶ 79% Free and Reduced Lunch

More than one quarter of the community surrounding Oyler is illiterate.

<http://oyler.cps-k12.org>

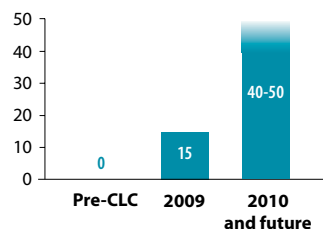
SELECTED RESULTS

Percent of Students Graduating



Note: In 2002, Cincinnati Public Schools made a commitment to make every school a Community Learning Center.

Annual Number of Oyler HS Graduates



BACKGROUND

The Appalachian community of Lower Price Hill lies in an industrial area along the Ohio River, where homes are interspersed with factories and environmental quality is very poor. The community's Oyler Elementary School was in danger of closing, due to decreasing enrollment and poor academic outcomes, but families refused to leave their homes. Through community engagement, Cincinnati Public Schools Consultant Darlene Kamine mobilized local residents to create a vision for a new school—a Community Learning Center. The effort was supported by a district-wide goal set in 2002 to make every Cincinnati school a Community Learning Center.

During their meetings on rebuilding the elementary school, community members insisted that a high school be built. For generations, nearly 85 percent of students would graduate from Oyler in the 8th grade and that was the end of their formal education. Today, Oyler leads a hugely successful effort to recover youth from the streets back into the classroom.



PROGRAMS AND SERVICES: Removing Barriers to Learning

When delivering *The State of Oyler Address* in 2007, Principal Craig Hockenberry stated: “The vision for our school took years of planning and partnerships. We had to tap into resources and experience beyond what we as educators are capable of coordinating.”

Oyler Community Learning Center is now co-located with a Boys & Girls Club and a school-based health center, in partnership with the City Health Department, providing much needed services to students from pre-kindergarten through the 12th grade. The Boys & Girls Club provides a full-time resource coordinator to manage and supervise the many partnerships and programs during and beyond the school day and year round.

The Boys & Girls Club and the Cincinnati Recreation Center operate after school and evening programs for students and adults. With help from additional partners, the Boys & Girls Club opened a Teen Center at Oyler, which is open from 2–7 p.m. and which offers academic tutoring, job training, and college resources as well as access to computers, video games, and a lounge and study area.

Students come to the “Kid’s Café” for free hot meals in the evening, provided by the Freestore Foodbank. Full health services, including dental care and vision screenings, are available to all students. Mental health is also provided, including a psychiatrist from Cincinnati Children’s Hospital who comes to the school every other week to work with children and families.

Principal Hockenberry has led a massive effort with his teaching staff to stay aligned with the district's strategic plan. In 2007, Oyler implemented Data Folders, which include current data on how students in every grade are doing on benchmark assessments. Teams and individual teachers routinely meet with students and their parents to talk about specific strengths and weaknesses. Teachers also use the data to help improve their own instructional programs.

PARTNERSHIPS: Focus on Mentoring and College Preparation

Through the school's HOSTS Program, more than 350 mentors, from 65 different organizations, provide individualized attention and support to Oyler students on a weekly basis. The Cincinnati Youth Collaborative (CYC), for example, matches volunteers with students in grades 3 through 12 for one-to-one mentoring and tutoring. Mentoring begins at a young age at Oyler: Adopt A Class Foundation, started by a local businessman whose company headquarters are around the corner from Oyler, connects dozens of area businesses to every pre-K–8th grade classroom for a full year of mentoring activities including a spring outing to the Adopter's business.

Individualized support from college advisors prepares Oyler students—and their parents—for post-secondary success. This includes a College Access Center and college campus tours for students beginning in the 7th grade.



Oyler also partners with Jobs for Cincinnati Graduates, a non-profit that helps develop the social and work skills required for success in school and career.

LEADERSHIP

When planning for this Community Learning Center, it was a grass roots political group—community members, the local community council, parents, local business and church leaders, members of Leadership Cincinnati, and the Urban Appalachian Council—who collected signatures from community youth and convinced the Board of Education to open a high school. These individuals continue to play a strong role in bringing resources to Oyler.

As the high school program was being developed at Oyler, Hockenberry began “re-capturing” students by offering an online program for young people that had either dropped out or needed some type of alternative schedule in order to graduate. Students were able to move at their own speed with the assistance of Oyler faculty and the safety net of support services provided by the school's co-located partners. The first online class had 14 graduates: eight went on to college, all with scholarships. In three years, Oyler has re-captured nearly 150 students.

“It's really a Cinderella story,” Kamine reflects. “But we could have never done it without the community driving it, fueled by their understanding of the inextricable link between the success of our schools and the success of our city. The repositioning of schools as the centers of community has resulted in the realignment of resources that allow for sustainable partnerships accountable to shared school-community outcomes. Students, teachers, families and communities are setting their own goals, selecting their own partners, and finding their own pathways to success. This has proven to be a much more genuine, embedded transformational approach than the traditional provision of services that are done to and for schools. Together we are leveling the playing field for our children and making graduation, college, and a career a real possibility.”

RESULTS

Since the full high school program started two years ago, Oyler has not had a single dropout. “This year we are expecting about 15 graduates and then, every year after that, we expect 40-50 students,” says Hockenberry. “This means that, by [2010], there will be more high school graduates in Lower Price Hill in one year than we think have ever graduated in almost 85 years.”

Many other success stories are happening across Cincinnati Public Schools. At the same time as the school district committed to making every school a Community Learning Center, they also engaged in a \$1 billion Facilities Master Plan. This confluence has provided the opportunity to rebuild every school through an extensive community engagement process, which is making a dramatic difference for Cincinnati's young people: from 2000 to 2008, the district's 17 high schools have seen their overall graduation rate improve from 51 percent to 82 percent. ❖