

## Expert commends Knox system on community schools plan

By Lydia X. McCoy

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Knoxville could be a national model for how it is implementing its community school concept, according to a national expert.

"If Knoxville is doing this in a strong way, it helps moves this forward for the rest of the country," said Darlene Kamine, executive director of the Community Learning Center Institute in Cincinnati.

Kamine spoke to city and county official and community leaders on Monday at the Knoxville Chamber.

She was invited by the Great Schools Partnership, which has partnered with Knox County Schools to manage and oversee the system's community schools concept.

Kamine answered questions from the group and commended them on the plan to implement the community schools concept in Knoxville.

"(Knoxville) really is the strongest start that I've ever seen," she said. "This is a process that got everyone talking and listening and learning. This wasn't done in some little room somewhere. This is exactly what you want."

Last year, 20 Knox County leaders traveled for a day trip to Cincinnati to see its model of community schools.

Under the concept, buildings are used for more than just teaching students. With the help of community partners, schools become a hub — staying open in the evenings, on weekends and during the summer for everything from health clinics to sites for yoga classes.

The Cincinnati public school system — which has gone from being in an academic emergency to being the highest-performing urban school district in the state of Ohio for the last two years — has become a national model for the concept.

Knox County piloted a community school at Pond Gap Elementary and expanded the concept into three additional schools — Lonsdale, Norwood and Green elementaries — this year.

Buzz Thomas, president of the Great Schools Partnership, said Kamine has been a big help.

"I thought the best person in America to come look over our plans ... was Judge Darlene Kamine," he said. "It's one thing for me to say to our board and our task force, the national guru in Cincinnati says this, this and this. I wanted them to see Darlene; talk to Darlene ... and let her help them wrestle with it."

Thomas said the next steps are to implement the three newest locations successfully and secure financial commitments.

"People are going to be more inclined to support it if we do a good job with these three," he said. "We're going to get this done."

Kamine said Knox County's success will hinge on community involvement and grass roots leadership.

"I'm excited about the quality and the vision and the commitment and the innovation that I see here in Knoxville," she said.

"I know that Knoxville is going to be the most successful community school initiative that we've seen. You're the new kid on the block and everybody is learning."



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