



Coalition for Community Schools

Because Every Child Deserves Every Chance

News Article

Community Schools Facilitate Strong Leadership, Better Conditions for Teachers

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The simultaneous release of two reports on school-community partnerships by the Center for American Progress (CAP) is a good indication that the community schools strategy continues to move to the forefront of education reform.

Achieving Results through Community School Partnerships, authored by Atelia Melaville and the Coalition's Martin Blank and Reuben Jacobson, highlights successful strategies for building partnerships championed by school district and community leaders in community school initiatives. The other report, *Lightening the Load*, written by CAP's Theodora Chang and Calyssa Lawyer, delves into four ways community schools make teaching more effective.

A near-capacity audience gathered for a roundtable **panel event** in conjunction with the release of the reports at CAP's headquarters in downtown Washington, D.C. Wednesday (Jan. 18) morning for a deeper discussion on the reports. The panel included Blank, Oakland Unified School District Superintendent Tony Smith, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Assistant Superintendent Tony Majors, and Cincinnati Federation of Teachers President Julie Sellers.

"When adults are not in good relationships, it's the kids who suffer," said Oakland (CA) Unified School District Superintendent Tony Smith during the panel discussion.

Smith has garnered a lot of attention from local and national press for his ambitious plan to convert the embattled Oakland public school system into a full-service community school district.

"We are all in this together as a city and a community. We need to link all our resources together around our children," Smith said.

Oakland is not the only major school district revamping their school through a community school strategy by forging groundbreaking partnerships with organizations that have historically been out of sync .

Nashville and Springfield, Missouri are among a handful of districts that are finalizing partnerships with local organizations to bring into their schools.

"Once (partners) are involved, they do take (the outcomes of students) personal." They do care about their outcomes," said Tony Majors, assistant superintendent of student services of Metro Nashville Public Schools.

Dozens of Nashville organizations have long worked independently in area schools to bring needed resources to improve students, communities, and education without much coordination. Thanks to Nashville's ongoing community schools movement, those resources are being aligned in a much more coordinated fashion

tailored to individual school and community needs.

Glencliff High School in Nashville, in which Majors is the former principal, is a good example of how those partnerships helped the school make tremendous gains. What started as a search to find resources to stem the tide of teen pregnancies, eventually led to partnerships with the local YMCA, Ford Motor Fund, and several local health agencies. As a result, Glencliff was able to increase its graduation rate by nearly 15 percent, increase its enrollment in Honors and AP courses by nearly 13 percent, and increase the number of students who scored proficient or higher on state writing assessments by over 35 percent over a 4 year period.

The entire district is now on course to incorporate the same community school model used at Glencliff.

Eventually, building these partnerships not only benefits students and their communities, but teachers and school staff as well.

"We can't blame kids for coming to school hungry. We have to create better conditions for learning," Smith said.

That's why so many teacher union organizations have gotten involved in community school initiatives as well.

Teacher unions in Evansville, Ind., Syracuse, N.Y., and Cincinnati have bought-in to the community schools concept because they are convinced that the services and enrichment activities found in community school support teachers inside the classroom by optimizing conditions for teaching, make curriculum more relevant and engaging, and create conditions for learning that enable children to succeed.

"I don't think we could give up the resource we have now (with community schools)," Sellers said.

You can find the reports and the event video here:

<http://www.americanprogress.org/events/2012/01/partnerships.html>

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