

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS?

Over the last decade many communities are re-inventing schools which embody the spirit of school-community collaboration. Nationally, there is a big debate about what these schools should be called. Most experts agree they have yet to hit upon the *right* name. For instance, the term “community school” in some states is also synonymous to “charter school” ... and in others it denotes juvenile detention centers.

The following are definitions for the most frequently used terms:

Community Schools

A community school is both a set of partnerships and a place where services, supports and opportunities lead to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Using public schools as a hub, inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, community volunteers, business, health and social service agencies, youth development organizations, and others committed to children are changing the educational landscape. These schools are based on the democratic ideal of respect for each individual person and his or her right to participate in the affairs of the community. Such a program is characterized by change in response to changing needs, continuous experimentation to seek out satisfactory ways of achieving common goals, and careful evaluation of the results of its activities. A community school, operating in a public school building, is open to students, families and the community before, during, and after school, seven days a week, all year long. It is operated jointly through a partnership between the school system and one or more community agencies. Families, youth, principals, teachers and neighborhood residents help design and implement activities that promote high educational achievement and use the community as a resource for learning.

From the Coalition For Community Schools
www.communityschools.org

School of the 21st Century (also called Family Resource Center School)

The School of the 21st Century (21C) is a model developed by Yale University for school-based preschool, after-school care, and family support services designed to promote the optimal growth and development of children beginning at birth. 21C, also known as Family Resource Centers (FRC) in some communities, transforms the traditional school into a year-round, multi-service center providing high-quality, accessible services from early morning to early evening. The flexibility of the 21C model enables individual schools to tailor it to match their own needs and resources. In many communities, 21C serves as an umbrella for an expanded array of family support services including adult education, youth development and social services. The School of the 21st Century is firmly grounded in the belief that all families in need of support and quality childcare should be able to obtain these services. To achieve this, 21C/FRC sites uphold these principles: strong parental support and involvement; universal access to programs through sliding scale fees; programming focus on the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of children; quality programming; professional training and advancement opportunities for childcare providers; and non-compulsory programming utilized at the discretion of the family. Key components include: guidance and support for new parents; preschool programs; before-school, after-school and vacation programs for school-age children; health education and services; networking and training for childcare providers; and information and referral services.

School of the 21st Century, Yale University
www.yale.edu/21C

Family-Supportive School

Family-supportive schools are about embracing diversity, welcoming multiple perspectives, addressing overlapping goals, and meeting the inter-related challenges of education, family development, social stability, and economic viability. Certain characteristics define family-supportive schools: the staff works together with children and families in relationships based on equality and respect; the staff enhances the families' capacity to support the learning, growth, and development of all family members; families are resources to their own members, other families, schools, programs, and communities; the schools affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities; they contribute to the community-building process; they advocate with families for schools, services, and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served; they are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family, community and education issues. These schools also: create an atmosphere of warmth and welcome that is communicated to parents, students and members of the community; have policies that promote outreach to parents, as well as parent leadership in the schools; emphasize goals for academic achievement; apply a strengths-based orientation to work with students, families and community; are culturally competent and inclusive; and coordinate and integrate a wide range of supports and opportunities.

Family Support America (formerly Family Resource Coalition of America)
www.familysupportamerica.org

Full-Service School

According to Joy Dryfoos, the ideal full-service community school brings together the three concepts of 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. The mind is addressed through carefully planned educational enhancement. The body is addressed through on-site primary health services. The building is designed to capture the spirit of a community school, with ample room for a family resource center, preschool program, before- and after-school child care and space that can be utilized by the community and families. The ideal full-service school: is linked with a lead community agency; coordinates activities very closely with the community agency to provide a broad array of youth and family services; is open from early morning until late evening year-round and would accommodate a number of different community activities and events; links what students study to the community and provides an advocate for each student. In summary, according to Jane Quinn, a full-service community school is an educational institution that combines the best educational practices of a quality school with a wide range of vital, in-house health and social services to ensure that children are physically, emotionally and socially prepared to learn. These schools have a common vision shared by everyone from community members, to staff and parents.

Joy Dryfoos
Independent Researcher, supported by the Carnegie Corporation

Jane Quinn, Children's Aid Society
www.childrensaidsociety.org