



Ready High Schools Project

Community Schools and Family Involvement

When community members caucused at DC VOICE's spring 2009 Town Hall to prioritize which education issues to work on in the future, community schools offer longer hours and multiple services as well as parent-community resource coordinators in schools topped the list, along with improved professional development for all education employees.

Actions taken since that May 2009 vote include the following: The 3 priority issues formed the basis for DC VOICE's "Campaign for Equity" during the summer and fall of 2009. Over 1300 pledge cards were filled out by citizens in all eight wards of the city, supporting the need for reform in these areas. Consequently, DC VOICE worked with members of the City Council on legislation to establish community schools in Washington, DC. The supporting legislation was introduced in April 2010, and was reintroduced in January 2011. We have continued to press for placing and fully supporting parent community resource coordinators in more schools and the school system has made some gains in this area.

To build on the data already gathered in past years, DC VOICE included questions on community and family issues in its Ready High Schools Project. Administrators at the 10 comprehensive high schools participated in confidential two-part interviews during the fall of 2010. The part on high school college and career readiness was released on February 23, 2011. This report presents the



"If our children aren't safe, they can't learn...if our children aren't fed, they can't learn...if our children can't see the blackboard, they can't learn," *U.S. Department of Education secretary Arne Duncan, at a forum on health sponsored by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation in 2010.*

"We need to work in the District of Columbia towards creating a support system for children and their families so that they are not isolated from community resources." *DC VOICE Town Hall Meeting Data Guide, February 2008*

findings on community schools and parent/community involvement.

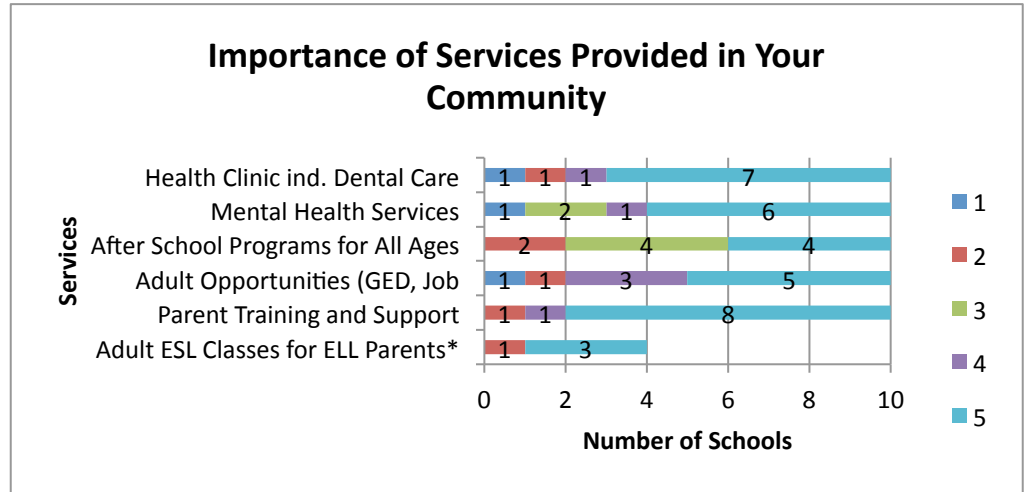
Community Schools

A community school is broadly defined as a public school that combines the best educational practices with an

extensive range of in-house health and social services to ensure that students are physically, emotionally and socially prepared to excel at learning. Schools and communities working together are a critical part of this vision.

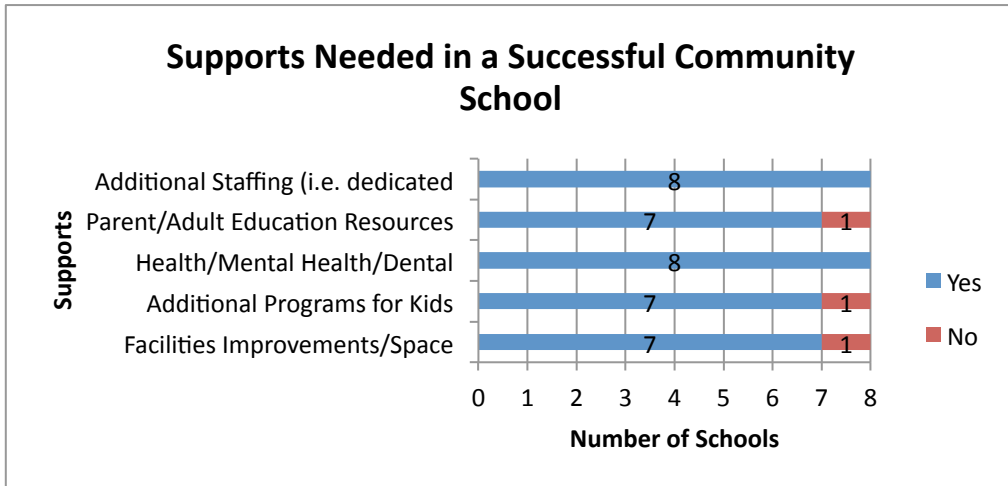
DC VOICE volunteers first asked the administrators to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning low need and 5 meaning high need, the importance of having support services in their own communities,

regardless of where they might be located. Parent training and support was the highest need expressed, followed by health and mental health services. In these two areas, several principals commented that if we had provided a



broader scale, they'd choose a 6 or even a 10; these needs are so important.

We asked the 10 school leaders specifically if, with sufficient resources, they would be interested in becoming a community school. Seven of the 10 said yes, but emphasized the importance of having the supports and resources needed to make these successful schools. Some of those who said they were not interested were schools in transition at the present time, or had specific



facilities and resource issues standing in the way. School leaders noted the need for additional staffing, particularly to have a dedicated coordinator of the community services. Some principals also noted that the supports needed might be

different in different communities, and that both the community and the school should be involved in defining those needs.

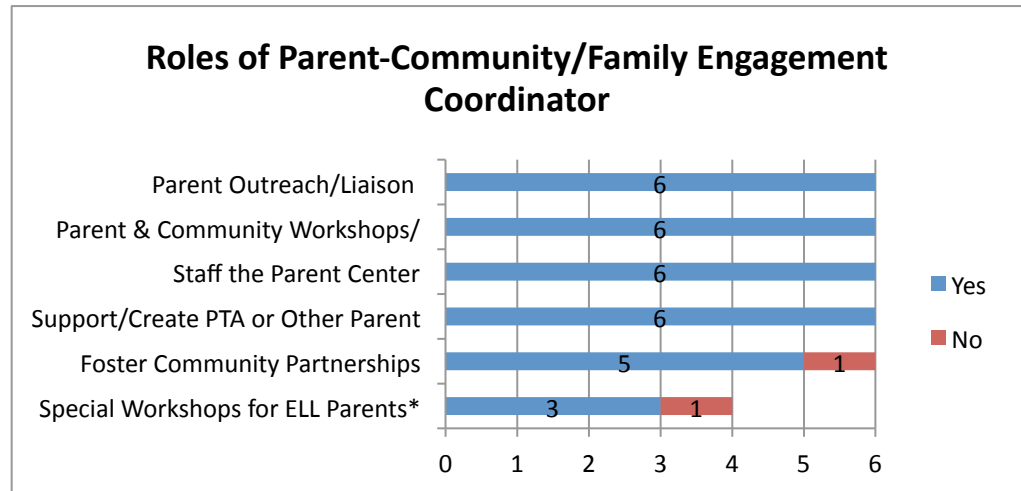
Administrators were also asked how they would rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how open and available their schools are for broad use by the community at the present time, with 1 meaning not very open, and 5 meaning very open. Responses ranged from 2 to 5, with an average of 3.8. For the most part, the comments showed an interest in having buildings open and available longer hours, but also noted present resource restraints in areas like maintenance and security.

Parent/Community Resource Coordinators and Family Involvement

Research on community schools is very clear on the need for a dedicated coordinator of the multiple services offered in a community school. While six of the 10 high schools said they presently have a parent/community resource/family engagement coordinator in place, it appeared that these persons are sometimes part-time or may have other duties as well. Present roles of these coordinators are presented in the graph below, and clearly, because of the present job description, focus mostly on family engagement. It is possible that with training, support and some shifting in

priorities that this coordinator position could fill the need for coordinating services in a community school.

We asked the school leaders this general question:



What 3 things would ensure families are involved in their children's education? The most often common responses were:

- 1) how parents themselves need a better quality of life, to be employed and have a decent way of earning a living, so that they are not working long hours and perhaps two jobs, and are beaten down by poverty and other issues;
- 2) the need for more parent education and information, including the school's need to hold parents accountable for the school attendance of their children. Some administrators would like to require a broad range of parent participation, from supporting their kids with being on time and having the school supplies they need to being more active in parent groups at the school;
- 3) the ways schools can employ an abundance of resources to encourage higher parent participation, by making home visits, making schools more family and people friendly, providing better food at school events, and putting in place structures that enable some parents to empower other parents to become more involved.

BASED ON THIS DATA WHAT CAN WE DO?

The need for a comprehensive approach to educational reform that includes attention to both the academic and social-emotional needs of our students drives DC VOICE's Ready Schools Projects. Do our students have what they need to succeed in school? Do they have what they need to prepare for college and their futures as productive citizens? Based on the data in this report, we cannot say "yes" but we are confident that this data and the accompanying town hall meeting discussions can provide a framework for radically changing this culture.

But working together we can make a difference. The newly introduced DC Council legislation on Community schools provides a specific opportunity. Please contact us 202-506-6367 or dcvoice@dcvoice.org to get involved!

* Questions asked at schools with a sizeable ELL population

For more information on community schools and family involvement:

- Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Center*, <http://datacenter.kidscount.org>
- Axelroth, Rita, *High Schools as Community Schools*, Coalition of Community Schools in partnership with National Association of Secondary Schools, www.communityschools.org, 2009
- Blank, Martin J, Ruben Jacobson, Atelia Melaville, Sarah S Pearson, *Financing Community Schools, Leveraging Resources to Support School Success*, Coalition for Community Schools, 2010.
- Coalition of Community Schools, *Community Schools racing to the Top of the Class*, 2009
- *Community Schools Incentive Initiative* legislation, a Bill in the council of the District of Columbia, available at: www.dccouncil.dc.gov.
- DC VOICE in partnership with the Coalition of Community Schools, *Working Together for Community Schools in the District of Columbia*, www.dcvoice.org, 2009
- Economic Policy Institute, *Statement: A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education*, www.boldapproach.org/statement.html, 2008
- Fine, Sarah, *Community Schools: Reform's Lesser-Known Frontier*, Education Week, www.edweek.org, February 1, 2010
- Henderson, Anne T., editor, *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/school Partnerships*, 2007
- Klein, Alyson, *Wide Range of supports, Services, and Enrichment Seen as Vital but Costly*, published as *Needs of 'Whole Child' May Factor in ESEA Renewal*, Education Week, April 28, 2010.

Special Thanks to our Partners

Capitol Hill Public Education Parent Group, Coalition for Community Schools, Columbia Heights Shaw Family Support Collaborative, Concerned Parents of Petworth, Crossing the Lines, DC PIRC, Empower DC, Georgia Avenue and Rock Creek East Family Support Collaborative, Higher Achievement, LAYC, MLOV, Roosevelt PTA, 21st Century School Fund, Teaching for Change, and YEA.

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