
NEWS

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Community Schools Show Promise As School Improvement Strategy

Community Schools Strategy Can Be an Important Part of Systemic School Reform Under the Every Student Succeeds Act

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WASHINGTON, D.C.—Community schools can be a successful strategy for improving schools under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), according to a policy brief released today by the National Education Policy Center and the Learning Policy Institute. The brief, *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement*, finds that community schools, an increasingly popular school improvement strategy, are strongly supported by research evidence, as required by ESSA. The brief is being released at an event organized by the Coalition for Community Schools.

Community schools are schools that partner with community agencies and local government to provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, and youth and community development. They provide expanded learning time and opportunities, engage families actively, and foster collaborative practices.

“Although the approach is appropriate for students of all backgrounds, many community schools serve neighborhoods where poverty and racism erect barriers to learning, and where families have few resources to supplement what typical schools provide,” said Jeannie Oakes, who is an LPI scholar in residence and Presidential Professor Emeritus in Educational Equity at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Oakes and co-authors, Anna Maier, LPI Research and Policy Associate; and Julia Daniel, a doctoral candidate at the University of Colorado Boulder, examined 125 peer-reviewed studies, program evaluations, and published research reviews on the impact of community schools or their component parts on a range of outcomes. The authors evaluated the studies against the

criteria set forth in ESSA for determining which interventions may be considered “evidence-based” and found that there is sufficient evidence to support the broad use of community schools as an “evidence-based” reform strategy. The brief stresses that community schools can be a particularly important strategy for transforming high-poverty schools.

Community Schools details how implementing a community schools strategy affects multiple domains—achievement, attendance, behavior, adult and peer relationships, and attitudes—but cautions that those effects will likely take time to be fully realized. Accordingly, the brief provides lessons that describe the research-based characteristics of well-implemented, successful programs.

These lessons stress the importance of:

- taking a comprehensive approach;
- adapting the strategy to local contexts;
- providing sufficient planning time to build trusting relationships between the school and partners;
- involving young people, parents, and community members in needs assessment, design, planning, and implementation;
- using evaluation strategies that provide useful information about implementation and exposure to services, as well as progress toward hoped-for outcomes; and
- using data for continuous program refinement, while allowing sufficient time for the strategy to fully mature.

The brief also recommends support for further rigorous studies of community schools in order to develop a better understanding of the conditions under which the various elements of the community schools strategy are most effective.

Jeannie Oakes summed up the brief’s significance: “The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), requires that federally funded interventions be ‘evidence-based.’ Our review makes clear that policymakers, educators, and communities can make community schools part of their evidence-based ESSA state plans.”

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About the Learning Policy Institute

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and

federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.

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