

## HELP FOR THE JOURNEY

Community education has always been a journey, not a destination. As communities begin this journey, they should know that they are not traveling alone. Across the country, and in many parts of the world, there is a rising movement toward community education as a way of transforming schools and communities into places where all community residents can thrive and grow and reach their full potential.

A growing resource base is available to assist communities in this transformational process. Throughout the rest of this book are numerous examples of how communities have implemented various aspects of the Community Learning Center. In the Appendix, a list of resource agencies and organizations is provided to assist in building Community Learning Centers. People, working together, can make a difference in their communities. Together, they must begin the journey to create the kind of learning community we need to face the challenges of the new century.

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# COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

As I was developing the Community Learning Center concept, I was frequently asked why I did not use the term "school" or "community school." My answer is this: Our society has had such a long history with schools and schooling that it makes sense, if we are to create a major change in the institution of the school, to invent a new name, which communicates more clearly the kind of institution that would evolve from that change.

One difficulty that is encountered when comparing the Community Learning Center with the traditional school is that no two schools or communities are precisely alike, so there is no "typical" school. Even so, traditional schools have common characteristics. This chapter describes schools as we now know them in order to develop a context for the changes that are necessary to create Community Learning Centers.

### WHY DO WE NEED TO CHANGE?

In the Phi Delta Kappa (1994) videotape series *Reinventing Our Schools*, Phillip Schlechty, director of the Center for Lead-

ership in School Reform, said, "There is one group that believes that schools have somehow deteriorated and gotten worse than they used to be. Another group argues that schools are better at doing what they used to do but it doesn't want them to do those same things any more." Schlechty counts himself among the latter group, believing that schools are not doing too badly but that they need to redesign what they are doing and focus on change. Many prefer to think of schools as needing to be restructured, rather than reformed, because "reform" evokes images of the wayward, in need of redemption.

The public schools in this nation have well-served children and young people over the years, but they have also grown distant from the communities they serve. There are many reasons for this: growth in the size of individual school units; state and federal mandates; educators' mistrust of community members; community mistrust of educators; demographic shifts in the makeup of the family; and a focus on "schooling," rather than on education.

As Minzey and LeTarte (1994, p. xiii) put it, "There is still a need for a major change in education, not just in rearranging the current program but in restructuring the very nature of schools and actually redefining and altering the current paradigm we call public education." Public schools must connect with the communities they serve to take on the difficult job of providing opportunities for all children, youth, and adults to realize their full potential. Schools are now becoming aware that they can neither do the job alone nor continue to exist as islands apart from their communities.

More than half a century ago, William Carr (1942, p. 34) painted a striking picture of schools as islands in their communities:

Many schools are like little islands set apart from the mainland of life by a deep moat of convention and tradition. Across this moat there is a drawbridge which is lowered at certain periods during the day in order that the part-time inhabitants may cross over to the island in the morning and back to the mainland at night. Why do these young people go out to the island? They go there in order to learn

how to live on the mainland. When they reach the island, they are provided with a supply of excellent books that tell about life on the mainland. They read these books diligently, even memorizing parts of them. Then they take examinations on them.

Once in a while, as a special treat, the bus takes a few of the more fortunate or favored islanders on a hasty tour through the mainland itself. But this is very rare and is allowed to occur when the reading of the books about the mainland has been thoroughly completed.

After the last inhabitant has left in the early afternoon, the drawbridge is raised. Janitors clean up the island, and the lights go out....It never occurs to anyone on the mainland to go to the island after the usual daylight hours. The drawbridge stays up and the island is left empty and lifeless through all the late afternoon and evening hours, all the early morning hours, and all day on Saturday and Sunday.

Day after day, week after week, continues the strange procession of young people going out to the island to learn about life on the mainland.

Unfortunately, Carr could go into many of our communities today and find schools still operating in virtually the same way. This book seeks to provide a vision of schools as institutions that are no longer islands designed exclusively for children, but have become genuine learning centers for everyone in the community.

### THE VISION OF COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

About five years ago, I participated in a dialogue at the National Center for Community Education in Flint, Michigan. The purpose was to develop a vision of what the community school of the twenty-first century should look like. The group was composed of two dozen people from the community education movement in the United States and Can-

ada; universities, local school districts, and state departments of education were represented.

The vision developed by the group included many of the characteristics of the community schools that have been developed in North America over the last two or three decades. But few, if any, of the vision schools embodied the concept of community-centered learning taking place throughout the school.

The community school envisioned during the dialogue session has these features:

- ◆ It is open year-round, day and night.
- ◆ It serves all ages, often in intergenerational programs.
- ◆ Decision-making involves the community.
- ◆ The building has a multiuse design.
- ◆ The curriculum is community-based.
- ◆ The school serves as a community technology center.
- ◆ The school has partnerships in and with the community.
- ◆ Its system of governance is community designed.
- ◆ The community supports the school.
- ◆ Everyone is both teacher and learner.
- ◆ Risk-takers are willing to fail and try again.
- ◆ Mentors for students are recruited from the community.
- ◆ The level of parent and family involvement is high.

This vision of the community school of the twenty-first century has been my guide in developing the concept of the Community Learning Center—a concept that cuts across a wide range of issues in the design and operation of a school. The concept is not, of course, entirely new. Its historical roots can be found in the progressive education movement of John Dewey (1916) and the writings of Samuel Everett (1938) and

his colleagues in *The Community School*. In the 1930s, the Mott Foundation, in partnership with the Flint, Michigan, public schools, developed the prototype of the community school that exists today in communities across North America. A few years ago, the Bush administration established the New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) to support the development of “break the mold” schools that would lead the restructuring movement then underway. One of the nine original design teams proposed a Community Learning Center model (InfoMedia, 1994) that has many of the characteristics identified by the dialogue group that met at the National Community Education Center. All of these designs owe something to the concept of community schools developed in the United States in the early 1900s.

### COMPARING THE DIFFERENCES

In comparing the traditional school with the Community Learning Center, these dimensions will be used: time; space; relationship to other organizations and agencies; family/community involvement; instruction; use of technology; and sources of leadership. These dimensions provide the framework for contrasting the differences between schools as we know them and the Community Learning Centers proposed for the future.

#### TIME

<i>Traditional School</i>	<i>Community Learning Center</i>
5 days a week	7 days a week
6–8 hours a day	10–12 hours a day
180–200 days a year	300+ days a year
50-minute class periods	Extended blocks of time

The concept of year-round operation of the Community Learning Center is examined in Chapter 9. There are many compelling reasons for discontinuing the antiquated practice of closing schools during the summer months. The traditional September-to-June school calendar arose in an agricultural age, when youth labor was needed in the fields and barns of the family farm. Now, less than three percent of U.S.

families live on farms, and mechanization has decreased the need for youth manpower in most kinds of agriculture.

If General Motors were ordered to operate its plants less than 75 percent of the time, shutting down its operation every summer, the management would be quick to point out that they have an obligation to realize a return on the stockholders' investment in those plants; using them at less than their full capacity would diminish that return. Why, then, are we willing to close one of the largest public investments, the schools, for more than two months every summer? Should we not feel an obligation to the taxpayers who support our public schools and attempt to maximize the return on their investment?

I do not propose that we extend the school year by doing more of the same things we are currently doing, or that we adopt a rotating schedule that would simply use the buildings year round without increasing the amount of time each student spends in school. What I propose is that schools, operating year round, provide students with those activities and services they are unable to provide under the present abbreviated school calendar.

Community Learning Centers are open and available to the community seven days a week in the morning, afternoon, and evening. This seven-day operation recognizes that not all members of the community have the same schedules or the same religious observances. The goal is to operate at full capacity with programs and services designed to meet the broadly defined needs of the whole community.

## SPACE

<i>Traditional School</i>	<i>Community Learning Center</i>
Education takes place in the classroom.	Education takes place throughout the community.

The Community Learning Center redefines the space and location in which learning takes place and the resources that are brought into the teaching and learning process. Responsibility for education is accepted by both the community and the school. William A. Yeager (1939, pp. 3-4), an early critic of American education, wrote eloquently about what the nature

of that relationship should be: "Education conceived as a cooperative process entails responsibilities upon all of those concerned in the educational process. As the eye cannot get along without the hand, neither can the school get along without the home, nor the school or the home without the community."

This transformation of schools involves a recognition that authentic education may take place outside the four walls of the classroom, in such places in the community as zoos, museums, nursing homes, homeless shelters, hospitals, the mayor's office, and so forth.

## RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

<i>Traditional School</i>	<i>Community Learning Center</i>
Few connections with other community agencies and organizations.	Collaboration with other community agencies to provide services to families and children.

The Community Learning Center also serves as a focal point for the delivery of critical services to families and children. This does not mean that public schools should become providers of all these services, but rather that they provide a place in each community where community members can come for services delivered by appropriate community agencies and organizations.

"The physical, financial, and human resources of every community should be interconnected and used to their fullest if the diverse needs and interests of the community are to be met," Larry Decker and associates (1990, p. 11) write in *Community Education: Building Learning Communities*. Schools have to be thought of as part of a larger system in the community.

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

### *Traditional School*

Involvement limited to parent participation in such activities as open houses and parent conferences.

### *Community Learning Center*

A comprehensive process of family and community involvement in a wide range of programs and activities.

Probably no education issue has received more attention in recent years than parent, family, and community involvement. The term used is intentionally broad so as to include the breadth of stakeholders who are potentially affected by the outcome of public education efforts and who have the ability to influence the educational process itself.

Parents are beginning to be widely recognized as a child's first teachers. They are also being acknowledged as having the best knowledge of and insight into each individual child. Yet, many schools have failed to develop a comprehensive plan to involve families and parents, and most school budgets offer little evidence that significant resources are devoted to parent, family, and community involvement.

At the national level, the adoption of a strategic plan for the Department of Education initiative, the Family Involvement Partnership for Learning, brought together branches of the federal government and a variety of nongovernmental organizations and associations committed to improving the quality of education for all children. This new partnership signals the beginning of an era in which the family's role in the learning process is brought to the forefront of education reform. The goals adopted by the national partnership are listed in Chapter 4.

The positive impact of parent involvement has been well documented. The research of Epstein (1986, 1987, 1991, 1993), Davies (1988, 1991), and others, clearly show that student achievement improves when parents get involved in their children's education. It would seem natural for schools to concentrate on this proven approach to improving student learning. The reality is that, with a few notable exceptions, educators are talking a lot about parents but doing little to get

them involved. The Community Learning Center has a comprehensive and continuous program to engage parents, families, and the community in the teaching and learning process.

## INSTRUCTION

### *Traditional School*

One teacher lectures to a homogeneous group of students.

Emphasis is on paper-and-pencil, norm-referenced tests.

Instruction is limited to resources represented by the teacher and the textbooks.

Students focus on individual assignments.

### *Community Learning Center*

Teams of teachers work with groups of students of varying abilities.

Authentic assessment is used to test whether students can use their knowledge in real-world situations.

Instruction uses resources from the community.

Collaborative methods teach students how to work as members of a team.

John Goodlad (1984, p. 109) provides a depressing description of instruction in a traditional school:

Teachers talk at pupils; students work on written assignments or answer specific narrow questions; there is little feedback or guidance from the teacher; students work with textbooks and complete written homework assignments, and are judged by how well they perform on paper and pencil tests.

As we begin restructuring our work at the university where I teach (yes, higher education is addressing the process of change, too!), we are moving away from the traditional lecture, test, term paper format. Now, we often teach as members of a team, using collaborative methods and measuring student learning through authentic assessments designed to show how well the student can perform when faced with realistic situations from the world in which they live and work. We jokingly say we are moving from "the sage on the stage" to "the guide on the side." This approach to teaching and learning characterizes the new Community Learning Center.

The Community Learning Center supports the formation of teacher teams to work with students who, in most cases, are grouped heterogeneously. These teacher teams will facilitate student learning through teaching approaches that are based on collaborative or cooperative learning, using inquiry and problem-based approaches that will allow students to acquire knowledge and to apply what they learn.

Learning will be assessed by giving students opportunities to show how well they can perform tasks using what they have learned in the classroom. Resources from the community will be used to support classroom instruction. On many occasions, classes go into the community to take advantage of community resources that cannot be brought into the school.

### USE OF TECHNOLOGY

#### *Traditional School*

Instructional technology is centered in media centers and computer labs. Technology hardware is reserved for student use only, and only during the regular school day. A few specialists are trained to use instructional technology. There is little access to telecommunications resources such as the Internet. Except for videotapes, televised instruction is not part of the school's program.

#### *Community Learning Center*

Instructional technology is located throughout the school. Technology hardware is available for student, family, and community use. All teachers, staff, and students have the skills to make use of multimedia technology. Networks give all classrooms access to the Internet. Interactive two-way televised instruction is used to enrich curriculum offerings for all students and the community.

The use of technology provides a dramatic demarcation between the traditional school and the Community Learning Center. The key difference is access. The Community Learning Center makes all forms of instructional technology available to students, faculty, staff, and even to parents and com-

munity members. This takes detailed planning and a greater investment than communities have been willing to make in the past. Support from the community will be increased by demonstrating a commitment to making access to new technology a reality for everyone in the community.

In a recent graduate class for school leaders, the faculty teaching team had invited the superintendent of a nearby school district to talk about how technology was being used to improve instruction in his schools. The superintendent warned that schools need to be ready for students who will enter school already computer literate. He used the example of his own two-year-old who uses one of the two computers in their home to play simple educational games. What struck me as I listened to him was the gulf between his child and some other child a mile or two down the road in a low-income housing project, with no computer and few books or magazines suitable for children. I believe that we will soon face a serious gap between children who have access to technology at home and those who do not. Having a place in the community where children, parents, and families can regularly go to make use of technology will lessen the effect on learning of this gap in access. All we have to do is find ways to make use of equipment that is now locked up after the last school bus leaves the front drive of the school.

*(Text continues on next page.)*

## LEADERSHIP

### *Traditional School*

Decisions are made by central office staff or by principals. Principals are expected to be leaders of their schools and are held accountable for results. Parents and the community have no voice in developing plans for the school or in deciding how resources will be used.

### *Community Learning Center*

Decision making is a shared responsibility of principals, teachers, staff, parents, students, and members of the school community. Leadership is shared among all stakeholders in the school community, who are held jointly accountable for results. Parents and the community have multiple opportunities to be involved in developing an annual plan and deciding how resources are to be used.

A new form of leadership is taking shape in many schools. Individual schools and school districts may call it site-based management, school-based improvement, or shared decision-making. Whatever the label, this new form of leadership is grounded in the theory that those closest to the scene are best able to make wise decisions about what should go on there. According to Bullard and Taylor (1993, p. 57), the factory model of hierarchical management, authoritarian teaching, and standardized learning for all is being replaced by a decentralized, shared decision-making model of teaching for learning for all in order to meet the needs both of a new age and of a multitalented, complex student population. In schools, this means that most policy and budgetary decisions about how a school will operate should be made by the local community, not by a school board or the central administration of the district. This kind of local empowerment will not be achieved without pain. Each community will have special interest groups with their own agendas, which these groups will try to impose on the schools. Whether it is advo-

cacy for the arts or for school prayer, or opposition to sex education or to the inclusion of special education students in regular classrooms, conflict is inevitable. The Community Learning Center will have to work hard at providing opportunities for opposing views to be heard and at creating ways for developing a communitywide consensus on these and countless other issues.

Change in some school districts has been accompanied by a dramatic change in the roles of principals, teachers, parents, and community members. Cunningham and Gresso (1993, p. xi) describe the phenomenon this way: "The new paradigms of excellence recognize, develop, support, and encourage all individuals to use their knowledge, skills, and experiences to improve their organization." This means that opportunities to provide leadership must be available to people in all the stakeholder groups in the school community.

In Chapter 3, we take a closer look at the kinds of skills needed to ensure that shared decision-making works in the Community Learning Center, and at the changes in traditional roles that are required. A consequence of these changes is an evolving concept of shared ownership, in which people feel that they own not only the problems that exist in their schools, but also the processes that used to solve them. Succeeding chapters focus on important aspects of the Community Learning Center as a model for schools of the twenty-first century. While any one aspect could be implemented independently as a form of educational restructuring, readers are urged to look at the totality of what is presented, rather than the parts.

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## SHARING THE POWER

Seymour B. Sarason (1991, p. 83), writing in *The Predictable Failure of Education Reform*, highlights the frustration of being powerless:

When one has no stake in the way things are, when one's needs or opinions are provided no forum, when one sees oneself as the object of unilateral actions, it takes no particular wisdom to suggest that one would rather be elsewhere.

The design of the Community Learning Center focuses on changing this feeling to an empowerment that allows each participant a voice in how the Center operates.

If you were to visit a Community Learning Center in a community previously served by a conventional elementary or secondary school, the first thing you would probably notice is that the learners represent a wide range of ages. Linger a while and you would observe that students and teachers are working in teams. Perhaps you would also notice that the principal—someone we are used to thinking of as the person "in charge"—is functioning more as a facilitator than a boss, and that a team of stakeholders from the community served by the school are making the decisions that were formerly