

WhatWorksSC

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An expert series building on the findings of the largest ever study of public education in South Carolina

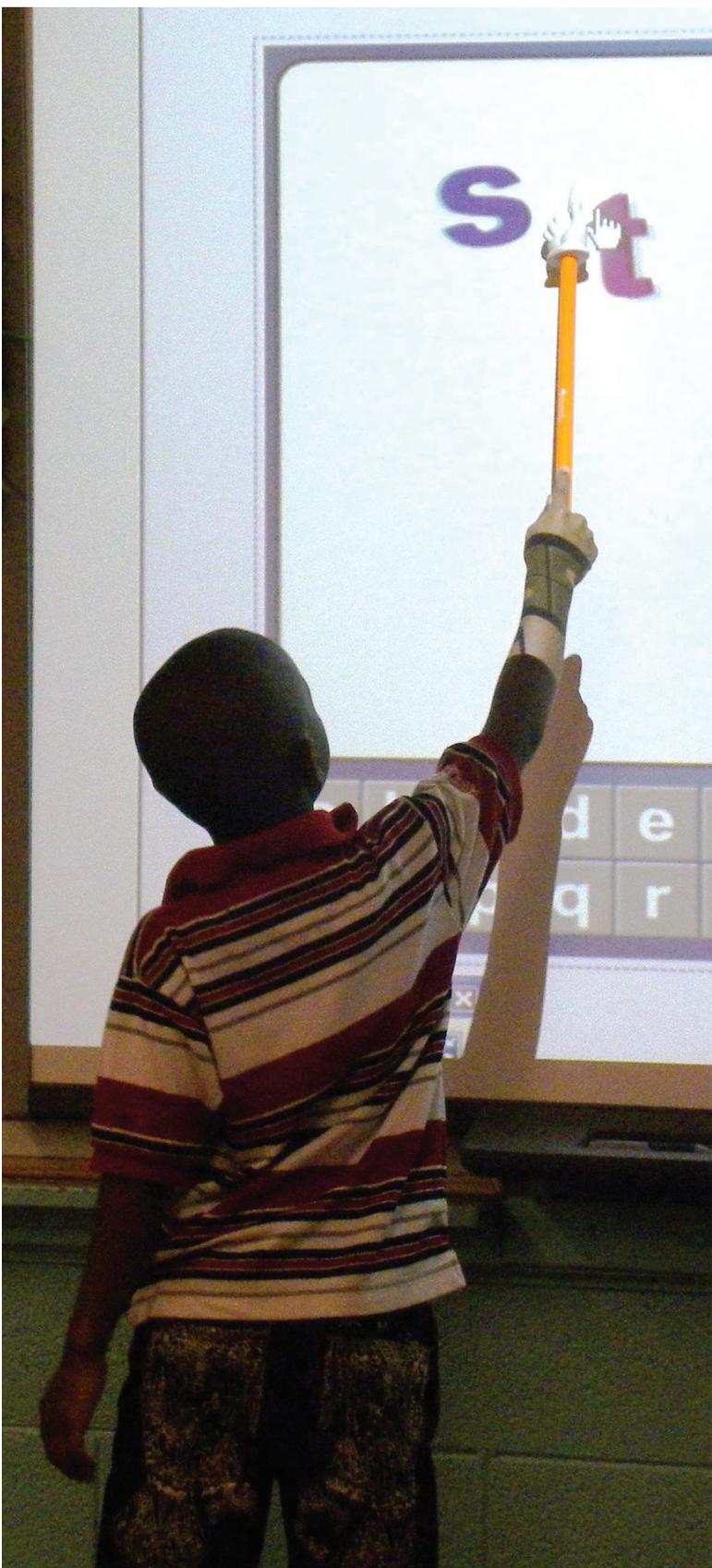
Transforming Schools into Community Learning Centers

Hundreds of thousands of South Carolina's students are struggling to meet ever-increasing education and job requirements. In order to help these young people catch up, keep up, and get ahead, communities need to work together to provide our students with the opportunities, encouragement, and support to succeed in school and get on a pathway to graduate from high school and be prepared for college or the workplace.

Research has proven multiple times that students need additional learning opportunities – after school, in the summer, and in the evenings. Students need extra help with their core school subjects and need many more opportunities to broaden and deepen other skills and competencies. In addition, many families need access to expanded learning opportunities and services right in their own neighborhoods, from adult education and literacy programs to parenting classes and health services.

This paper seeks to further explore the development of schools in South Carolina into community learning centers. In order to frame the issue, the results of the recent Riley Institute study on public education will first be discussed, a study that convincingly points to the development of schools as community learning centers as key to improving public education in South Carolina. Next, Dr. Paula Egelson, from the College of Charleston's Center for Partnerships to Improve Education, will further introduce the issue and provide insight into why stakeholders have overwhelmingly identified a focus on this issue as vital for the state. Following this, a sample of statewide initiatives will be highlighted, providing tangible examples of promising models already in place in South Carolina. Finally, Alex James of the South Carolina State Department of Education will evaluate how the state is doing as a whole and will analyze other national and international models that provide useful examples for South Carolina.

*Center for Education Policy and Leadership
Working at the Intersection of Research and Practice*





I. All Types of Stakeholders in South Carolina Support Transforming Schools into Community Learning Centers: The Riley Institute Study

How do we know that South Carolina's stakeholders believe that transforming public schools into community learning centers should be a priority? Results from a large-scale study conducted by the Riley Institute at Furman clearly show that various stakeholders from all over the state overwhelmingly support a focus on this issue.

Between May 2005 and November 2006, the Riley Institute project team spent more than 3,000 hours meeting with nearly 800 South Carolinians to gather their opinions on public education. The team met with businessmen and women, teachers of all levels, superintendents, parents, school board members, principals and students from every county and school district in the state - large and small, rural and urban, wealthy and poor.

Throughout the research, which was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, stakeholder groups across South Carolina voiced common support for transforming public schools into community learning centers. During the research, the following main ideas surrounding the development of schools as community learning centers emerged:

“Throughout the research, stakeholder groups across South Carolina voiced common support for transforming public schools into community learning centers.”

- Provide education for parents at local schools in the following ways: offer courses on early childhood best practices, literacy, and parenting; offer opportunities to get a GED or take courses after work hours, particularly for young parents who dropped out of high school and need financial aid to continue their education; offer classes on resume writing, financial management, career changes, and household issues; offer classes to teach parents how to help their children with homework; offer courses that parents can take with their children, such as financial planning, planning for college and work, health and nutrition, cooking, and technology and computer skills; provide courses on such issues as teen pregnancy and alcohol and drug abuse
- Offer assistance to students who are struggling, such as tutoring after school and during the summer; mentoring programs with local business or community leaders; academic counseling; and opportunities for students to use technology at the school to improve learning
- Provide to students a broader array of health services, including general health care and preventative services, counseling, nutrition, and overall wellness
- Offer activities and classes that benefit and bring together the whole community, such as free cultural events, voter registration drives, plays, and athletic events
- Open schools for longer and more flexible hours; have open house times so the community can take advantage of school facilities such as playgrounds, computer labs, and libraries
- Solicit the involvement of a greater and more diverse range of businesses and other groups to help mentor, tutor and assist families with wider social issues; businesses could conduct classes and seminars on banking, buying a home, and taxes
- Create a transportation network so the school is connected to all population groups in the community and, if possible, relocate or renovate schools in areas that are more central to the heart of a community rather than on the outskirts of town
- Evaluate the assets available in a community to bridge school-family gaps and connect the two; solicit business partnerships and financial aid to support needed programs; maximize the offerings and facilities of the school to make them beneficial to the entire community.



II. Why Focus on Community Learning Centers?

By Dr. Paula E. Egelson, College of Charleston

What is a Community Learning Center?

There is general agreement that a traditional school day and calendar don't provide enough time to meet the ongoing learning needs of all children (Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes & Malone, 2009). Over the past 35 years the creation of centers that serve K-12 students outside the school day and include academic, health, arts, and recreational opportunities has become increasingly popular across the country. Families are also encouraged to participate in center activities, and community partners support such programs. Because of a community learning center's flexibility, it is able to offer academic and cultural enrichment to children at times when school is not in session. This includes before and after school, weekends, holidays, and the summer. Funding for such centers usually originates from the U.S. Department of Education (21st Century Community Learning Centers grants), states, foundations, school districts, non-profits, and/or other local support.

There are several terms associated with out-of-school support for K-12 students that are both complementary and similar. They include **afterschool programs** which are structured activities during out-of-school time that coordinate with schools in providing supervised and safe learning opportunities for children (Malone, Weiss & Little, 2009). The term **expanded learning** denotes a school model that extends the school day and calendar and includes afterschool programs (Weiss, Little, Bouffard, Deschenes & Malone, 2009). **Community schools** are comprehensive schools that offer a variety of supports (health, academic, counseling) for children and families throughout the year (Malone, Weiss & Little, 2009). For the purposes of this paper the term **community learning center** will be used to denote academic, arts, health, and out-of-school programming for K-12 students that complements the school's educational program and includes community partners and opportunities for family involvement.

It is estimated that 6.5 million children and youth (kindergarten through 12th grade) participate in community learning center activities nationwide (Goss, Wimer & Little, 2008). Centers are most commonly found in high poverty and/or low performing schools or in nearby community centers. Frequently, community learning centers serve elementary school-age children, followed by middle school students and then high school students. Not surprisingly, there is more money available to fund elementary-age programs than middle and high school programs.

In community learning centers, safety, positive youth development, and academic enrichment and support are key concepts and are emphasized. Community-based agencies, recreation centers, faith-based organizations, Y's, libraries, and/or Boys and Girls Clubs often serve as center partners. Specifically, staff at such centers provide students with tutoring assistance in core academic areas and offer arts and technology programs, as well as recreational and health/wellness opportunities. The academic offerings complement the school's educational program. In addition, families often participate in educational, employment, health, and cultural arts offerings at the centers.

On average, community learning centers across the nation are open four or more days a week with 67 percent of centers open at least 11 hours per week. More than half the attendees qualify for free or reduced lunch and 17 percent have limited English proficiency. The average number of consistent attendees is 82 while the registered number of attendees per center is 148 (Afterschool Alliance, 2009).

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What are the Benefits of Community Learning Centers?

Many school-age children experience a cultural disconnect, a disengagement from family or the community, high poverty, too much unstructured time at home, undiagnosed health issues, frequent moves, unsafe learning environments, and too few educational resources. In South Carolina, almost 250,000 young people go home alone to no adult supervision after the school day ends. A community learning center represents one way to address these serious issues. Center staff members provide students with organized activities and a safe place to be outside of school hours and also support improved student learning in core academic areas. Students can also learn job skills, delve more deeply into subjects like hands-on science projects, be motivated to learn by being able to be more engaged in the arts or technology, develop relationships with supportive adults, and prepare themselves for the future by learning about workforce and college opportunities.

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The research on community learning centers focuses on several key areas. They include academics; social and emotional well being; crime, drug, and sex prevention; and health and wellness. Community learning centers make a positive difference in the lives of children based on over 10 years of solid research and evaluation studies. The following evaluation summaries provide specifics about outcomes related to community learning centers:

- Klein and Bolus (2002) found that elementary students from 19 schools in three states who participated in the *Foundations Inc.* extended-day program found highly statistically significant improvements in both reading and math scores.
- The national evaluation of the *21st Century Community Learning Center* program (US Department of Education, 2003) found in a random assignment elementary school study social studies grades were higher for participating students by a statistically significant margin. Middle school students participating in the program showed statistically significant improvement in school attendance compared to nonparticipants.
- Evaluations of Los Angeles’s Better Educated Students for Tomorrow (BEST), a comprehensive school-based after school program serving 19,000 students, showed that participation in the program improved school attendance, increased students aspirations for high school graduation and college attendance, and decreased the dropout rate (Huang, Coordt, La Torre, Leon, Miyoshi, Perez, et al., 2007).
- An evaluation of Louisiana’s *21st Century Community Learning Centers* (Jenner & Jenner, 2004) revealed academic gains related to levels of student participation. Participants with moderate attendance (60 days) demonstrated significantly more academic growth on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills compared to nonparticipants, while higher attending students (90 days) were likely to receive an even stronger impact score.
- The National Center on Time & Learning created and analyzed a national database of 300,000 students in 655 schools with extended time (increased instructional time for students outside of school). They released a report in 2009 stating that there was a moderate association between increased time and how well students did on state tests in English and mathematics in grades 6, 7, 8, and 10 (Farbman, 2009).
- The Harvard Family Research Program (2008) found that a decade of research and evaluation studies, as well as large-scale, rigorously conducted syntheses of many research and evaluation studies, confirms that children and youth who participate in after school programs can reap a host of positive academic, social, prevention, and health benefits: http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/file/OSTissuebrief10_summary.pdf



- The Study of Promising Afterschool Programs (2007) was produced by the University of California, Irvine; University of Wisconsin - Madison, and Policy Studies Associates, Inc., and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The study finds that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students: <http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/Promising%20Programs%20FINAL.pdf>

Factors associated with positive community learning program outcomes have included sustained student participation in programs, quality programming (appropriate supervision, well-trained staff, structured programming) and partnerships with the community (Goss, Wimer & Little, 2008). Despite the positive outcomes associated with community learning centers, while there is increased interest in expanding learning time and improving the connections among schools, families and the community, the majority of schools in America and in South Carolina do not reflect these needed changes yet.

Community Learning Centers in South Carolina

The high number of children living in poverty in South Carolina is a serious issue. In 2005-2006, 52 percent of South Carolina K-12 students were eligible for free and reduced lunch (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Correspondingly the number of South Carolinians who receive undergraduate degrees by age 25 is at a lower level than many other states. Eleven percent of African Americans in South Carolina receive degrees in comparison to top states' degree attainment of 33%; for whites it is 27% in South Carolina in contrast to 40% for the top states (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

Zelda Waymer, director of the South Carolina Afterschool Alliance, reports that there are approximately 1,013 afterschool programs in the state of South Carolina. Some are in schools and others are in community organizations. Such programs are not increasing steadily in the state, primarily due to the current economic downfall. Some of the afterschool programs serve only a small number of students and many do not offer a full range of learning opportunities for children and families. Some might be considered full community learning centers, but most are much narrower in focus and services. And the number of programs is decreasing because of a lack of resources. "No one entity monitors afterschool or community learning centers in South Carolina, so the quality of programs varies," says Waymer. She states that the greatest need associated with community learning programming is ensuring a high quality of services for students and informing the public about what the definition of quality is.

Waymer believes that in recent years there is increased interest and understanding of the need for community learning centers across the state but not the increase in funding or resources. She thinks South Carolina citizens and decision makers have become more educated about community learning centers and their benefits and flexible offerings. She notes that businesses view community learning centers as doorways for job training and teaching employability skills to young people. In some cases, judges in the state assign troubled youths to teen community learning centers instead of incarcerating them. With community learning centers there is the capacity to serve the whole family, from providing computer training and GED offerings to adults to offering opportunities to high school students to stay in school.

Waymer suggests that exemplary community learning programs in South Carolina have several things in common. They include effective professional development for staff, programs

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Michael Lisle, director of children and families for the Trident United Way of Charleston, remarks that there is a bright horizon ahead for community learning centers in South Carolina and a tremendous interest in them from community stakeholders. United Ways across the country strongly support community learning centers as an approach for improving learning outcomes for students and supporting their families.

It is critical to examine the success of community learning centers across the state. The South Carolina Extended Learning Time Final Study (2006) answered four primary questions connected to community learning centers in South Carolina related to implementation, cost effectiveness, and outcomes (Learning Points Associates & Berkeley Associates, 2006). The following results were based on 120 South Carolina community learning centers:

- Similar to national statistics, South Carolina community learning centers on average were open 10.6 hours a week.
- On average, 90 students were enrolled in a program, and 65 students on average attended on a regular basis.
- Sixty-five percent of programs in South Carolina required that students who enrolled be below average in grade-level proficiency standards or just barely meeting the standards. The remaining programs, 22%, allowed all students to enroll.
- A primary goal of 88% of these programs was increasing academic outcomes for struggling students.
- Offering math and reading instruction was the primary goal for 90% of the programs.
- Eight-eight percent of the programs had contact with parents about their child's progress in the program while community partners most frequently provided volunteers (28%) for the programs.
- The greatest challenges these programs faced was low attendance (19%) and the second was not enough staff (15%).
- Forty-two percent of program directors reported that that they had been very effective in providing a space for students to complete homework.
- Twenty-one percent revealed that they had been able to provide activities for students that are not offered during the school day.
- Eighteen percent said they were effective in enabling the lowest-performing students to achieve grade level proficiency (Learning Points Associates & Berkeley Associates, 2006).

Cases studies of five randomly selected South Carolina community learning center programs across the state showed that on a one-to-five scale, one as the lowest and five as the highest, all five programs scored four or higher on safe environment and supportive environment. Lower scores were reflected on staff-student interaction (sense of belonging, small group activities, mentoring) from 3.18 to 1.14, and student engagement (students setting goals and making plans) from 2.22 to 1.25 (Learning Points Associates & Berkeley Associates, 2006).

Urgency of Having Community Learning Centers in South Carolina

Zelma Waymer states that if there is a breakdown in the community, community learning centers can assist in putting pieces back together for children and their families. Michael Lisle believes that the community learning center's impact is tremendous in meeting the academic and nonacademic needs of children if planned and executed well. Terry Peterson, director of



the Afterschool Community Learning Network and a senior fellow for Partnerships and Policy at the College of Charleston, reflects that offerings like hands-on learning projects (e.g., in science), service learning opportunities, art, music and fitness classes, tutoring and mentoring can engage students in successful learning experiences and can be a part of the flexible scheduling of community learning centers. He also believes community learning centers positively address an opportunity gap for many families, and for older students, can give them the chance to take courses not available during the regular school day (e.g., for college credit) and recovery credit in courses they failed, and help them learn about pathways to careers and college. The most powerful community learning centers are built on strong school-community partnerships and often are staffed with energetic and well-prepared educators, youth development professionals and volunteers of all ages.

Given the large number of struggling students and high numbers of children and adults living in poverty in South Carolina, children unsupervised after school, unsatisfactory student achievement results, and high school dropout rate, many more community learning centers are urgently needed across the state. For every K-12 student in South Carolina to be successful in the future, continuous and expanded learning opportunities and partnerships are critically needed for them now.

To make this expansion a real possibility, core funding, new partnerships, and financial incentives for starting up and sustaining community learning centers are needed. The state of South Carolina, county and city governments, school districts, and community organizations should all contribute to the improvement and expansion of community learning centers, especially for the most struggling students and schools.

III. Initiatives in South Carolina: What Is South Carolina Doing to Address Transforming Schools into Community Learning Centers

From a growing number of studies from across America, there is evidence about program characteristics of effective community learning centers. These characteristics, among others, include: utilizing school facilities for multiple purposes to serve the community as a whole; serving students outside the traditional school day; integrating academic, health, arts, and recreational opportunities for students, parents, and community members; and offering academic and cultural enrichment to students at times when school is not in session.

Is South Carolina integrating these characteristics into its schools? To what extent are different manifestations of community learning centers appearing across the state? Initiatives highlighted below have been identified based on information gathered from meetings throughout the state with education leaders and groups; phone calls, electronic mail and other correspondence with a variety of education and community leaders throughout the state; and from a survey sent to superintendents, principals, and education leaders statewide.

A larger list of these initiatives can be found in the WhatWorksSC clearinghouse, which can be found on the Center for Education Policy and Leadership's web site: www.rileyinstitute.org

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Initiative #1:

CAMPUS HEALTH CENTER – FLORENCE COUNTY DISTRICT FIVE

Goal: By providing health and wellness care to students, teachers, and the public, the campus health center strives to improve the overall health of the community and ensure the children of Johnsonville are healthy and prepared to learn.

Short Summary: As Johnsonville is small and rural, many citizens need transportation to larger towns for medical attention, which in some cases leads to forgoing medical treatment. Gaye Douglas, the nurse practitioner who runs the facility, began caring for students in the high school gym because of this lack of access. Her additional work with patients in an ER in a neighboring town made her aware that many people utilized the ER for non-urgent needs, simply because they had no where else to go. The entire community was in need of the health care provided, but especially those who did not have existing health care benefits or who had not regularly seen a doctor. When Douglas began providing medical care for students in the high school gym, she formed a relationship with Florence County School District Five that made the development of the Campus Health Center possible. The relationship continues, through the referrals of students and teachers by the school nurses and through the IT personnel, facilities, and housekeeping support that the school district provides.

Demographics

- Target Settings: Community of Johnsonville, in Florence County
- Target Groups Served: The entire community but primarily those without existing health care benefits
- School/Districts Served: Florence County School District Five
- School-level focus: All

Research and Evaluation: As Douglas is able to treat more and more students, a goal is for more students to regularly see a doctor and to find a “medical home.” This scenario should reduce student absences, although Douglas says that this will be hard to measure. She has carried out a qualitative study, by asking teachers about their use of the facility. Based on their feedback, Douglas determined that the district saved on substitute pay at the rate of 30 half days in 4 months, which would indicate that the Campus Health Center is allowing more teachers to receive prompt medical treatment and miss fewer days.

Program Resources

- Annual Cost: \$250,000
- Funding Sources: Private grant fund – Duke Endowment
- Staffing Needs: Nurse Practitioner
- Infrastructure/Equipment Needs: General clinical supplies
- Partner Organizations: Duke Endowment, McLeod Regional Medical Center, Florence County School District Five

Contact Information: Gaye Douglas; 843-386-2609; gdouglas@flo5.k12.sc.us
<http://www.flo5.k12.sc.us/>



Initiative #2: INSIDE OUT CENTERS FOR LEARNING (IOCL)

Goal: IOCL serves as a model of integrated, cost-effective educational services that lead to higher student achievement; higher teacher quality, recruitment, and retention; and increased community/parental satisfaction.

Short Summary: The IOCL model seeks to transform schools into personalized learning and service centers. Students engage in education experiences tailored to their individual learning needs, while teachers work in teams to create innovative, standards-based, and individualized instruction. Learners experience team teaching, looping, community schooling, and extended learning time. Health services are provided on-site to children and their families. Two schools in South Carolina have adopted the IOCL model and are operating as pilot schools—Forts Pond Elementary School in Anderson and Nevitt Forest Community School in Lexington.

Demographics

- Target Settings: Schools that are unsatisfactory or below average (report card ratings)
- Target Groups Served: Both pilot schools have high percentages of students receiving free and reduced meals, single parent households, and parents working multiple jobs
- School/Districts Served: Forts Pond Elementary School, Lexington School District 1; Nevitt Forest Elementary School, Anderson School District 5
- School-level focus: Elementary

Research and Evaluation: A state-level advisory board will meet quarterly to provide a consistent platform for ongoing, systematic review and continuous improvement of the IOCL. Topics will include recruitment and retention results and plans, implementation status, school report card data, adequate yearly progress (AYP), working conditions and stakeholder perceptions about meeting the needs of the communities, business support growth, and overall satisfaction of community agencies. Based on the board's findings, changes will be made in the program's implementation to ensure that all of the program's objectives will be met.

Program Resources

- Annual Cost: Increases with each IOCL component added. The more costly components include the addition of whole child services, wellness facilities, extended hours, and an Instructional Guide and Life Coaches
- Funding Sources: At the school and district level, principals and district officials have committed to reallocating available resources from local, state, and federal funds to support the initiative. Some of these funds will include Title I allocations and funds provided through Title II, Part A of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. In addition, they received a grant of \$49,000 from KnowledgeWorks Foundation and a \$25,000 donation from Michelin, North America.
- Staffing Needs: Personnel will eventually be added for psychological and medical needs; life coaches and instructional guides; sharing of community experts/resources



- Infrastructure/Equipment Needs: Ideally, the infrastructure needs to be more in line with the “school of the future” architectural design (larger classrooms with flexible design and furniture), social spaces, smaller media center, medical facilities, and parent conferencing areas.
- Partner Organizations: Riley Institute, SCASA, CERRA, Future Minds

Contact Information: Dr. Joanne Avery, Co-Chair, SC National Commission for Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF); 864-646-8000; javery@anderson4.k12.sc.us

Initiative #3: SPARTANBURG HIGH SCHOOL SHARED FACILITIES PROJECT

Goal: To serve a higher percentage of the community by opening up school facilities for multiple uses, to utilize existing facilities, to make the best use of resources, and to give students a safe place during the summer and after school.

Short Summary: This project was the result of a partnership between the City of Spartanburg and Spartanburg County School District 7. While Spartanburg High School tried to figure out how to provide facilities for its various sports teams, three historic Duncan Park baseball fields lay in forgotten disrepair only a few thousand feet away. It was a “natural extension to talk about this partnership” said Superintendent Thomas White. District 7 is committed to offering a range of sports and extra-curricular activities to supplement its regular academic program. The district is aware that these activities keep the children engaged, active, and healthy, while keeping them from having to figure out on their own how to fill their idle time after school and during school breaks. The City of Spartanburg and the school district agreed to fill the needs of both entities.

Demographics:

- Target Settings: Lower socioeconomic areas surrounding the school
- Target Groups Served: All students and surrounding community members
- School/Districts Served: Spartanburg High School, Spartanburg School District 7
- School-level focus: High School

Research and Evaluation:

Not only did the agreement between the city and the school district give the ball fields a new purpose, it helped to breathe life back into that part of the community. The community is allowed to use the facilities when the school is not using them and the American Legion across the street also uses the ball field during the summer.

Results are difficult to measure, but the informal feedback has been positive thus far. A quote in the *Spartanburg Herald Journal* on May 28, 2008 by Spartanburg Post 28 athletic director Jesse Campbell says, “[i]t’s a thrill to be able to come in here and see people filing into this ballpark again with smiles on their faces.” Residents of and visitors to Duncan Park can see children and families at the fields several times a week. The district and the city continue to improve the facility. For example, sidewalks were being added at the front of the ballfields to help connect other trails and create a safer pedestrian environment.



Program Resources:

- Annual Cost: Initial investment of \$750,000. Ongoing maintenance provided by the City of Spartanburg
- Funding Sources: City Hospitality Tax Funds, Spartanburg School District 7 General Obligation Bonds, Community Fundraising
- Staffing Needs: Existing
- Partner Organizations: City of Spartanburg, American Legion Post 28

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IV. Community Schools: What Should South Carolina Do to Move Forward?

By Alex James, South Carolina State Department of Education

Are community learning centers a passing fad or an ill-chosen path? Or, on the other hand, are they one of the golden tickets of education, dramatically improving student outcomes and turning around our state's lowest achieving schools? When looking to successful national and international education models, community learning centers are often part of the equation. Many states, as well as countries, have been utilizing the community learning center concept for years. And, in many cases, convincing results have been found to show that the concept is working and producing results, although the degree to which data are collected to measure effectiveness varies.

National Models and Research

An excellent example of the community learning center concept is Harlem Children's Zone's Promise Academy in New York City. This school incorporates many community functions and has shown impressive results for its children and families. The school has within its doors the following: a family development program; a family support center; truancy prevention programs; "Baby College" and other early childhood services; fitness, health, and nutrition initiatives; an employment and technology center; and a college success office.

In terms of results garnered from the above model, according to Ronald Fryer, Harvard economist: "The most common education reform ideas - reducing class size, raising teacher pay, enrolling kids in Head Start - produce gains of about 0.1 or 0.2 or 0.3 standard deviations. If you study policy, these are the sorts of improvements you live with every day. Promise Academy produced gains of 1.3 and 1.4 deviations. That's off the charts. In math, Promise Academy eliminated the achievement gap between its black students and the city average for white students. Let me repeat that! It eliminated the black-white achievement gap. What Geoffrey Canada, Harlem Children Zone's founder and president, has done is the equivalent of curing cancer for these kids."

A promising movement also is found in Denver, Colorado. Denver's move towards community schools has been evolving for nearly 14 years. The initiative began when a local developer began to finance schools in his subdivision by charging fees on all homes sold within that entity.

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Since then, Denver has set a national precedent for community learning centers. It took five years for this approach to be accepted by that city's inhabitants, during which time the state largely focused on sharing research and findings related to the positive impact of community learning centers.

The result is that today, Denver citizens will not accept a school design model unless it is a community school model. When a school is planned in Denver, the citizens request that the community school concept be implemented and support its development: the political will has been set. The initiative has become so successful that in the last two years, the state of Colorado has established an office to assist with the community schools planning process for all new schools. A specific example is Green Valley Ranch in Denver. Located on a 42-acre site, the schools houses 750 K-8 students, has a 35,000 square foot community recreation center, a community amphitheater, and a 21 acre regional park. The school, recreational center, and amphitheater were completed in 14 months and saved taxpayers \$2.5 million.

International Models

Many other countries have been experimenting with community learning center models. Scotland has been utilizing the concept of community learning centers for nearly 15 years. The nation of Scotland is similar in size and population to South Carolina, but its poverty level is slightly less. Of particular note is that each council within Scotland has on staff a person in charge of incorporating both programs and facilities for the community into the schools. In all cases, the criteria are simple – combine those elements that improve both the community and the school. The Community School of Auchterarder, north of Edinburgh, is a rural example of community interaction in Scotland's schools. Archterarder is an infant through secondary school that houses a gym/health club for use by the community as well as the school.

St. Thomas of Aquinas High School in south central Edinburgh is another good example. It provides a building that has "civic presence" set within its historic urban context. In addition, the project incorporated a number of strategies to ensure the building will be a long-term asset, and one which will accommodate change. The design was influenced by office business parks and schools in the United States and elsewhere in Europe - all of which feature successful social spaces at the heart of the building.

The idea of community learning centers has spread to other countries as well. For example, at a recent conference for the Council of Educational Facilities Planners International, a presentation was made focusing on Japanese schools. This presentation highlighted the fact that a new emphasis in Japan is the 2005 adoption of the community school design process. Still in a fledgling stage, the developments in Japan will be interesting to watch.

Bringing the Model to South Carolina—A Plan of Action

If these nations and states are any indication, it appears that the concept of community learning centers is gaining national and international recognition and support. So the question then is not "Is it a passing fad?" The question then becomes: Although some momentum is taking place, why are we in South Carolina not doing more to implement this movement here in our home state? Perhaps the answer lies more with the needs of our times versus the ability of a society to change. Look at the decades that we have paid lip service to becoming more energy efficient. As we are experiencing the worst economic times of most of our population's lives here in the United States, what choice do we have other than to live more efficiently, whatever the resource?



Although South Carolina has been slower to embrace the concept than some other states, this is beginning to change. Recently, in its school reform efforts, South Carolina has begun to more fully embrace the community learning center model. The listing of promising initiatives found in the above section of this paper is an example of the ways in which South Carolina has begun to implement this model. Other events and partnerships have developed to further the use of this model statewide.

The 21st Century Educational Campus Symposium was convened in July 2009 to bring education experts from across the state and nation to envision the ideal educational campus for the 21st century. With this project, South Carolina was seeking to transform J.V. Martin Junior High School, the subject of much publicity in terms of its physical plant and representative of other schools along the I-95 corridor, into a model that can be replicated in high poverty, rural communities across South Carolina and the nation. The South Carolina Department of Education has created a project design team to consider the recommendations from the 21st Century Educational Campus Symposium in working with the Dillon community to design a new facility for J.V. Martin Junior High School. Several of the participants in the 21st Century Educational Campus Symposium are continuing their service, pro bono, as design team members. The project design team's directive is to complete planning for the school in preparation for ground-breaking by summer 2010.

In addition, in the fall of 2009, several organizations partnered to conduct a very successful school design summit in Greenville -- the SC Sustainable Schools and Communities Design Summit. This event was carried out by the SC Arts Foundation, the SC Arts Commission, the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) - SC, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) - SC, and the Riley Institute, and brought together experts and stakeholders in school design to begin discussions on how best to promote and create community school models in South Carolina. The initiative stemmed from the "Helping Johnny Walk to School" project of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and also addressed broader issues concerning building and renovation that support the concept of the school as an anchor of its community.

The summit's success led to the formation of the SC Coalition for Community Learning Centers, which promotes community-based schools in our state. The Coalition has begun to meet with the following objectives: the development of models for rural and urban districts for both new and existing schools; the provision of technical assistance to districts interested in developing community learning centers; and the provision of policy recommendations to promote the feasibility of community learning centers.

Potential for Community Schools in South Carolina

Given all of the activity at the national and state-level for community learning centers, where do we go now as a society in South Carolina as we address community schools? How do we get from here to the next level of schools operating in our communities? Numerous cases have been cited above on successful community schools in our culture, and we need to use these models as examples for our communities and help schools begin to open across our state.

Many of the nation's community schools have originated through diverse paths, so multiple models and opportunities exist. The question is how to bring about a more concerted approach to providing community schools throughout our educational system.

This author contends that though each community school is different, they all are derived from a similar process. This process involves multiple steps, including school readiness, an

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analysis of school/community needs, developing community/family business buy-in and support, and developing a funding stream. Communities and schools must come together to analyze whether or not a community school and its potential components fulfill a need that is beneficial to both the community and the school, without jeopardizing security within the school. The components needed within each community will be different and a needs assessment must be conducted. In addition, each component must fit within the culture and the political will of the community to be considered. If these conditions are met, then that component should be considered.

The question of how developing a school as a community learning center originates is perhaps an even more important question to ask. In order for the idea to become reality, it must have the backing of many factions. Consequently, someone (either an individual or an organization) must get the movement rolling. In South Carolina, the first objective is to assure a school district that implementing a community school will not be burdensome and overwhelming, and that the end justifies the means. South Carolina's districts are already overburdened with state and federal regulations and it should be clear going into this project that other partners will be utilized so as not to overburden the resources of the district.

Efforts are already being implemented to move the community learning center concept forward by the South Carolina Coalition for Community Learning Centers mentioned earlier. These efforts include discussions on creating a South Carolina specific resource guide for developing this type of school. In addition, school districts are being identified by the Coalition that are interested in developing and building models of community learning centers here within the state. Those models will serve as examples for other school districts to build on as they in turn build their own community learning centers in the future.

Below are some other suggestions for how we might move the community learning center concept forward in South Carolina

1. Establish an office either in the State Department of Education or the Department of Commerce (or any other appropriate department origin) to help facilitate community schools around the state. If this is not achievable, then we should house the movement within a non-profit such as the one in Colorado that works to bring various factions into the community school development.

2. Devise legislation that would provide incentives to districts and/or municipalities and counties that plan and start up community learning centers in schools.

3. Continue to identify and engage with other organizations (such as the South Carolina American Planners Association, the Mayors Association, the Municipal and County Associations, etc.) that can aid the furthering of this concept.

4. At the least, develop and build models that can be studied by other districts and community groups for them to improve on in turn as they program their own. This model building can be done by individual school districts or consortiums around the state, and with other local government or business groups.

5. Create a website that promotes the concept and list parties that are willing to participate. This website will provide a communication vehicle to other parties that would like to explore the idea.

We must keep to the quest of providing better education for all residents in South Carolina. Properly utilized, community learning centers will help us achieve that goal. As shown from the growing body of research on community learning centers, they have become a part of the greater sustainability community, community connectivity efforts, and even a part of the recent



stimulus package. With this proliferation of the concept/model, more and more schools have the opportunity to develop as community learning centers, and support is growing among local school boards, superintendents, business leaders, and the broader community. Thus, the time is ripe to further expand community learning centers in South Carolina in an effort to turn around our lowest-performing schools and provide additional learning opportunities for all students.

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"We must keep to the quest of providing better education for all citizens in South Carolina. Properly utilized, community learning centers will help us achieve that goal."



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Web site References

- AIA (American Institute of Architects) is promoting sustainable communities, and part of their definition of sustainability involves the incorporation of community schools. www.aia.org
- The latest LEED (Leadership through Energy and Environmental Design) 2009 standards, as many as five points (a minimum of 49 points will get a LEED certification) are rewarded for the community school design usage. This is under the category labeled as Community Connectivity. www.usgbc.org
- The US Department of Education is promoting community-oriented schools as part of their nationwide education improvement efforts, including Race to the Top, Title I School Improvement, and the reauthorization of ESEA www.edfacilities.org/rl/index.cfm see Preplanning
- The Council of Educational Facility Planners, International promotes the proliferation of community learning centers for improving education and communities. www.cefpi.org
- The **21st Century School Fund** was founded in 1994 on the premise that communities are responsible for creating healthy, safe, and educationally appropriate learning environments, and builds public will and capacity for educationally appropriate school facilities that meet community needs. www.21csf.org
- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides opportunities for developing community schools. <http://ed.sc.gov/ARRa>
- The Coalition for Community Schools provides a wealth of excellent information, research, and tools for developing schools as community learning centers. www.communityschools.org The Coalition is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education K-16, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government and philanthropy as well as national, state and local community school networks. The Coalition advocates for community schools as the vehicle for strengthening schools, families and communities so that together they can improve student learning.
- The following web site contains additional information about community learning center models found in Scotland: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/Buildings/CaseStudies>



- The Study of Promising Afterschool Programs (2007) was produced by the University of California, Irvine; University of Wisconsin - Madison, and Policy Studies Associates, Inc., and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The study finds that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits as well as reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students: <http://www.policystudies.com/studies/youth/Promising%20Programs%20FINAL.pdf>
- The Harvard Family Research Program (2008) found that a decade of research and evaluation studies, as well as large-scale, rigorously conducted syntheses of many research and evaluation studies, confirms that children and youth who participate in after school programs can reap a host of positive academic, social, prevention, and health benefits: http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/fckeditor/File/file/OSTissuebrief10_summary.pdf

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