Community Schools: Stages of Development

Over 15 years of practice, both managing and training in the development of Community Schools, the National Center has promoted the use of "Stages of Development" to help practitioners and policy-makers understand where they are on the continuum of Community Schools and what they need to do to move forward. We believe that each initiative and each site must develop a set of four Capacities:

- **Comprehensiveness**
- **Collaboration**
- **Coherence**
- **Commitment**

This document summarizes the features of Community Schools at four Stages:

- **Exploring**
- **Emerging**
- **Maturing**
- **Excelling**

There is a considerable amount of information contained in these four charts. For most effective use, focus either on one set of Practices across all four Stages OR focus on one stage of development and examine the Practices listed, Note throughout that a site or an initiative can easily be at one Stage in one Practice and in quite a different Stage for another, indicating areas of focus for your work.

Capacity: Comprehensiveness

Principles and Practices	Stage 1: Exploring	Stage 2: Emerging	Stage 3: Maturing	Stage 4: Excelling
Community Schools build their vision from a comprehensive understanding of the developmental needs of children and youth, and seek to address the major developmental domains (cognitive, social, emotional, physical, moral) in ways that promote student success.	*Characterized by recognition that children and families have multiple needs that impact school climate and inhibit learning, and that schools cannot address them alone. Focus on how to get services and programs for children and families, both non-academic and academic enrichment.*	*Characterized by initial steps towards building relationship with a Lead Partner and other willing providers. School open extended hours for partners to provide services, as well as inviting programming and support services during the school day.*	*Characterized by opening school to multiple partner services and programs that respond to identified needs of students, school, families and community and that improve the overall conditions for learning.*	*Characterized by a shift in role of schools as hubs of opportunity and civic engagement for students, families and neighborhoods residents. System in place for on-going comprehensiveness in response to need and demand.*
Whole Child Perspective Underlying approach recognizes that school success results from positive development in all the major domains, not just cognitive. Social-emotional learning understood to contribute to and support academic achievement. CS approach recognizes the importance of the family, school and community as context for student development.	Focus on shared learning of high-quality principles and approaches: • academic enhancement • child and youth development • parent involvement and family strengthening • community development	Complementary programs target identified needs: • initial programs/services may be added by opportunity • program resource development prioritized by need • referrals to programs identified by need • family and community need considered	Major areas of developmental concern are being addressed by programming and/or linkages: • academic support and enhancement • cultural enrichment/skill development • physical and mental health • family social services, adult education • early childhood • community safety and development	Academic, social, health and developmental needs are systematically being addressed: • Opportunities to progress along continuum of programming • Developmental opportunities fuel academic success • Developmental opportunities fuel improved related outcomes

Responsiveness to Need Systematic assessment of needs –of each target population, school climate and community context—grounds decisions about resource allocation and partnership recruitment. Existing resources are well understood and evaluated for alignment with results framework of the community school.	Initial needs assessment and mapping of existing resources in school and in community:
	• leadership "brainstorming"
	• discussions with stakeholder groups
	• study of existing community and school data
		In-depth, on-going needs assessment and resource mapping:
		• Surveys/focus groups with all stakeholder groups:
		   ▪ Parents
		   ▪ school staff
		   ▪ students
		   ▪ community residents
		   ▪ partners
		• Systems put in place to monitor school and community data
			Program utilization is linked to need and monitored for outcomes:
			• needs assessment is institutionalized as on-going process; regular channels exist for input and feedback
			• appropriate students/families linked to needed services and programs by site coordinator and school staff
			• enrichment activities complement school-day program
			• school facilities offers numerous opportunities in out-of-school time
				Partner-provided and school-provided programs jointly meet district and community goals:
				• needs assessment addresses individual need, population needs, and community needs
				• assets/resources of community are fully integrated to target challenges
				• new challenges regularly brought to CS for coordinated responses

High-Quality Programs and Services The array of activities and services offered is designed to augment, enrich and increase the capacity of each target group. Scarce resources are directed at identified needs and targeted to appropriate populations in order to achieve agreed priority results.	Some partner programs and services may already exist in school. Partners and school begin to explore how to improve:
	• access to services
	• coordination
	• integration
	• targeting to identified needs and results
	• quality assurance
		Developmentally appropriate programs added as resourced:
		• resource development for needed programs and services
		• attention paid to quality programming:
		   - youth development
		   - family strengthening
		   - community empowerment
		• use needs data and best practices
			Principles of youth development, family strengthening and community development underpin program content:
			• core competencies of partner agencies are fully utilized
			• school and partner programs use common philosophical approaches
			• programs and services are perceived as desirable, fun, responsive by students, families and neighbors
				School is seen as a vibrant, busy center for activities desired by its community, as well as locus of effective service delivery and active civic engagement in education:
				• schools are partners of choice for new programs and opportunities
				• community has confidence in school as access point for responsiveness
				• school seen as purveyor of excitement, opportunity, and hope

Capacity: Collaboration

Principles and Practices	Stage 1: Exploring	Stage 2: Emerging	Stage 3: Maturing	Stage 4: Excelling
In Community Schools, multiple partners develop the trusting relationships and the capacity to work smoothly together with authentically shared leadership and mutual accountability for shared results.	*Characterized by interest in CS strategy as way to engage others in removing barriers and improving conditions for learning. Open to sharing leadership. Interested in increasing parental and community engagement.*	*Characterized by increased efforts to engage parents and community in planning, implementation and oversight of academic and non-academic programs. Beginning to involve partners and parents in decision-making.*	*Characterized by the regular involvement and leadership of wide range of stakeholders. Transparent agreements and mutual accountability underpin the ongoing development of partnerships.*	*Characterized by permanent engagement across community, collaborative mode of community and program development, and policy-making.*
Community Engagement Civic engagement in schools will increase their success. Community acts as advocate, supporter, partner, service user and guardian that holds schools accountable for student success.	Recognition of the connection between success of school and thriving community: • engagement of community leadership in efforts to improve conditions for students • interest in school as center of community • importance of community conditions recognized, e.g. safety, environment, housing • public interest in increasing civic engagement in education	Clear communication and engagement of community in planning and implementation: • public education about CS strategy • may establish agreements with community residents, businesses, organizations to provide services to students and families • community representation on all governing and coordinating bodies	CS is responsive to needs of the community and generates regular community events and programs: • increased visibility, public celebrations • services directed at community needs, accessible in school/non-school hours • community represented in leadership • community-based learning opportunities • parents and youth encouraged to become community leaders	Community regularly utilizes schools as venues for problem-solving, cultural celebration, development, engagement: • "swinging door" access for community members and organizations as providers of and participants in school-based opportunities • joint planning and accountability with community • community members rally as advocates for CS strategy
Partnerships Schools and one or more organizations with a shared vision and resources come together to serve students, their families and the community. Agreements are structured to ensure clarity of roles and shared accountability.	Openness to agencies and organizations with services and programs essential to student success: • study of models of partnership • willingness to share leadership, accountability	Formal agreement with Lead Partner shifts some responsibilities to partner staff:. • principal begins sharing management of building, activities, and scheduling • joint decision-making in agreed areas of work	Lead Partners serve as lead point-of-contact for all school partnerships: • agreements in place for all providers • monitoring and accountability • shared responsibility of partners and school staff for success of students • shared philosophies of youth development & family strengthening	Seamless coordination among permanent and mobile partners: • Systems allow for occasional and long-term partnerships to evolve, with monitoring and accountability assured
Governance Structures and processes are created through which shared leadership is institutionalized and decisions are made for CS. A coordinating body and leadership team at the school level must bring all partners into regular and active communication, giving voice to all perspectives. At the initiative level, a resource coordination/policy development body is important. Mid-level management collaboration may also require institutionalization.	Interest in sharing leadership and responsibility for success of students: • principal and district leaders retain sole responsibility for school facilities and programs • existing school leadership teams and structures are in place • informal networks may also be at work to support school and students	Formal governance structures, agreements built around shared vision and objectives: • selection of lead partner and agreement on roles • decision-making and communication processes developed among school, lead partner and providers • development of coordinating body with representative stakeholders • memoranda of understanding (MOU) or letters of agreement (LOA) concluded District and municipal policy leadership develop governance structures as well.	Governance bodies effectively institutionalized within schools: • leadership committees include needed representation of relevant stakeholder groups • mission and strategies integrated with school improvement plan • CS coordinating bodies enhance existing school committees Vertical communication among levels of governance (school site, district, regional, etc.) is responsive, transparent and effective.	School-site and community-wide governance in place and functioning as part of public and private networks: • management issues efficiently responded to • flow of ideas and concerns is smooth, up and down the governance chain • linkages to political systems ensure effectiveness and relevance

Capacity: Coherence

Principles and Practices	Stage 1: Exploring	Stage 2: Emerging	Stage 3: Maturing	Stage 4: Excelling
In Community Schools, a shared vision drives the alignment of community resources toward student success. Effective management structures, communications and logistics are institutionalized in support of the whole child, family and community.	*Characterized by recognition that effective management of needed programs and services exceeds capacity of existing staffing and structures. Recognized need for program integration. Planning process engages all stakeholders.*	*Characterized by efforts to develop effective coordination and system of monitoring and accountability for programs and services. Development of new resources for staffing, communication patterns, management.*	*Characterized by the integration of CS structure/processes/programs into "normal" operations of schools. Site coordinator role is clearly understood and leadership is reliably shared. Effective, consistent management is a hallmark of this stage.*	*Characterized by policy shifts that make CS a permanent approach to school reform, service delivery, community-based education, and civic engagement.*
Integration The process of aligning diverse and separate programs and activities into a coherent, congruent whole around an agreed set of results. Participation of CS leadership in school's regular teams and regular communication between partners and educators are key features of well-integrated initiatives.	Interest in moving toward more comprehensive, integrated system: • programs and services are not integrated with the school's academic program • programs and services not highly integrated with one another • limited integration may exist through district-mandated structures	Extended-day programming complements content of school-day curriculum: • initial efforts to align enrichment program with state and district standards • initial efforts to open communication between staff of school and program partners • develop coordinating body for regular communication among various providers	Extended-day programming developed in concert with school staff and addresses school learning priorities, as well as school climate:. • program referrals from established Pupil (Student) Support Teams • content developed in collaboration with school staff	Joint development of academic and extended-day programs, with curriculum enhancement provided by partners and teachers together:. • partners' cost-sharing contributes to optimal programming • shared delivery of content • connection to community-based learning • shared responsibility for success
Management and Staffing Paid and volunteer personnel are used to accomplish the tasks and activities of the CS. Key staff positions include Community School Director/Site Coordinator; and Parent Coordinator/Liaison. Regular consultation between leadership and key school administrators is critical. Smooth logistical and communication strategies in place.	Desire for principal's primary role to be instructional leader: • Principal remains sole manager of all activities in building. • No formal budget exists for program and coordination staffing. • Volunteers may play roles in management but with little coordination or planning.	Site Coordinator (title varies) assuming responsibility for agreed set of responsibilities: • budget established for coordination functions • additional roles may be played by staff or volunteers (parent coordinator, etc.) • program staff provided per grant sources	Well-trained program staff, coordinated by CS Director, supported by school and community volunteers, provide high-quality, well-utilized programming:. • consistent practices across providers • enrollment, disciplinary and termination policies aligned • leadership opportunities for program graduates, parents • new staff acculturated to collaboration	Programs become part of enhancement of employment, volunteerism, and leadership development for community:. • staff promoted to become leaders in new CS sites, coach new staff • CS programs enhance and improve quality of academic instruction • Common standards of quality enhance wide range of school- and community-based programs
Family Engagement The underlying philosophy and daily practice reflecting the belief that parents/caregivers are key to student success, and must be included in school life at all levels.	Awareness of impact of parental involvement on academic success:. • PTA/PTO, existing school policies, or no functioning formal structures; some natural leadership • study of successful family engagement strategies • informal parent groupings around natural commonalities	Energized focus on family engagement as advocates, volunteers, partners in education:. • parents involved in all levels of planning, needs/assets assessment, governance bodies • scheduled parent activities • active parent leadership bodies • reliable communication between CS and parents • parent space being developed in school	Parents present in wide range of supportive roles for entire community school: • effective as decision-makers in governance structures of school • utilizing dedicated parent space with access to information, technology, etc. • leadership development and opportunities for parents, including as volunteers and staff • connected at home to learning process	Parents both take advantage of and generate/provide elements of programming and are fully empowered as leaders: • provide leadership development for other parents • trusted partners for school and provider organizations, as well as at levels of governance • serve as advocates and spokespeople for CS in policy-making arenas

Capacity: Commitment

Principles and Practices	Stage 1: Exploring	Stage 2: Emerging	Stage 3: Maturing	Stage 4: Excelling
Actions and communications reflect intention to remain partners for the long-term, independent of any particular grants or initial funding stream or political scenario.	*Characterized by an interest in building the CS for the long term, with policy changes, systems, resources and engagement geared towards permanency.*	*Characterized by systematic, multi-year efforts to collect data, build focus on results, seek resources and build support.*	*Characterized by growing realization that CS can provide coordination and targeting for numerous child/family/community goals. Policy and funding decisions begin to reflect site successes.*	*Characterized by permanent political commitment, designated funding, private and community support, alignment of related initiatives, using CS as coordinating strategy.*
Sustainability Planning Key partners act in such a way as to sustain the initiative through time and across changing political realities. Includes: - shared vision - broad support of community/leaders - agreed set of results - strategic financing: public/private funds	Conversations begin with wide range of stakeholders: - results framework developed in collaborative process - policy leaders involved in planning, collaborative structures - financing options are investigated, including grants, public funds, in-kind	Sustainability activities are regular work of staff and governance bodies: - resource development is multi-year - policy changes to align existing public funding - integrate with broader public goals - networking within initiatives at perhaps systemic level - garner commitments from policy-makers	Results in CS sites are connected with broader goals and agendas, providing rationale for increased support:. - key policy-makers taking ownership, backed by community demand - collaborative, strategic proposal-writing - advocacy for alignment of existing funds - connections to related initiatives - CS strategy enters political discourse	CS strategy seen as integral to regional service delivery and to the new definitions of "school" and "community": - schools seen as locus of family strengthening, access to resources - schools seen as centers of community development - Public and private funding aligned
Evaluation Assessment of the process & impact of programs & partnership on the target population. Includes the systematic collection, analysis and use of data in programs.	Understanding of need to document positive impact of CS activities: informal observations some may have concern for costs of evaluation identification of program objectives resource development for formal evaluation	Systematic collection of relevant data tied to results: closely analyze process data (utilization, satisfaction, etc.) for use in quality improvement using preliminary data, demonstrate correlation between need and utilization generate baselines for outcome research	Comprehensive evaluation underway and beginning to show outputs, outcomes: meaningful data demonstrate improvements in key indicators (e.g. attendance, safety) commitment to full funding for multi-year evaluation Early results broadly communicated to generate future commitments	Ongoing evaluation demonstrates effectiveness and areas for improvement: continuous looping of information informs policy-making and capacity-building planning informed by past successes and shortcomings commitment to evaluation sustained
Marketing and Communications A developed capacity to communicate the impact and the value of the community school on academic achievement, child and youth development, family and community well-being; and to convey confidence in the management systems that undergird these efforts.	Plan development is shared with stakeholders: - can experience concern over new approach and/or cynicism about past efforts - ways in which different stakeholders can participate and benefit are communicated - leaders strive for maximum transparency	Regular communication vehicles selected and implemented: - newsletters, websites, blogs, chat rooms, hotlines, calendars, etc. enable free flow of communication among multiple stakeholders - regular reporting from leadership/governance bodies to all stakeholders of policy development	Communication practices effectively link all stakeholders and engage them in planning, implementation and utilization: - keep pace with times - utilize appropriate technologies, maintaining sensitivity to various communication pathways of stakeholders - media utilized to publicize CS activities	Information flows in multiple directions through multiple pathways: - partners integrate CS into internal and external communications - public media regularly transmit information about CS - successes are regularly publicized communications and media mobilize public will to sustain CS

Capacity-building Creating infrastructure to build capacity of all stakeholders and among sites within initiative.	Begin to understand that there is a body of knowledge from both research and practice that can guide CS implementation: • leadership development • understanding Four Capacities, associated Practices and Activities • developing skills at all levels	Establish training and networking opportunities at all levels: • develop intermediary with capacity-building skills • consistent message about centrality of capacity-building in CS systems • create developmental ethic at all levels	Ongoing training/networking at all levels of initiative: program, site coordination, management and governance: • training and coaching functions are budgeted and regularly scheduled • accountable for skill/knowledge dev't. • connection to national movement	Initiative perpetuates excellence as it grows, provides opportunities for leaders to train and coach others: • develops own procedures and best practices as teaching tools • serves as regional site for expanded learning