

## **School Community Center, A Friendly School For All In Albania**

***PhDCandidate Nereida Balla***

Head Master of “Jusuf Puka” basic school, Durrës, Albania

---

### **Abstract**

To improve the quality of work and life in the country's schools, Ministry of Education and Sports has taken the initiative "Schools as Community Centre - A friendly school for all". Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs. Lindita Nikolla, presented this initiative and development incentives, aimed at turning the school into space where it will build a new partnership teacher-family-community. Our legislation on education, the law on university education in the Republic of Albania, the Implementing Provisions of this law, the draft of undergraduate education strategy 2013-2020, and other documents supporting the functioning of a school open to joint decision with family and the community. The concept of community school center, is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and presents a comprehensive approach that links all aspects of education reform in the child's placement in the center of attention in all activities organized and implemented at school. The school as community center, a friendly school for all is an approach (a promotional and developmental movement) to turn the school into the place where the partnership school-family-community is built and where it is cooperated to develop the full potential of each student. For more than two decades, Albania developed a number of initiatives which have prepared the society towards the creation of a culture, philosophy, practice and policy in support of child-friendly school which is inclusive and open to the community. It provides the opportunity for the evaluation of school performance regarding the cooperation school-family-community and on this basis, strategies to support the establishment of a community school model through cooperation with all stakeholders.

---

**Keywords:** Community school center, partnership teacher-family-community, a friendly school, parents collaborate

### **What is the school as a community center?**

School community center is a joint initiative that distinguishes the totality of relationships that link the school, family and community. It differs

in its focus on the academic development of children and youth, civic engagement and contribution, family support, social services with focus on safety and health and community services.

School community center aims at developing school quality and training of children and young people as citizens willing and able to contribute to their communities.

Schools as community centers is a collaboration between stakeholders in the community, parents and the school, focusing on:

- supporting the development of children and youth,
- improve their achievements,
- supporting families and,
- community development.

Albanian education system needs community schools, because being based on observations and experience it has been shown that children and young people need more opportunities and support to succeed in their studies and activities inside and outside school hours. School as community center is based on the motto of working together for a common goal.

### **Characteristics of school as a community center**

- Schools as community center are considered those educational institutions, which serve not only the school community (students and teachers) but are open and in the service of all members of the community.
- Schools as community center are institutions that establish and develop their work based on the needs of students, families and the community;
- Schools as community center offer a range of services, after school hours for students, families and the community;
- Schools as community center accept together educators and parents as they engage in shared decision-making;
- Schools as community center ensure social cohesion;
- Schools as community center are built on community strengths.

### **Why it is aimed to establish schools as community centers?**

School seems to have been transformed into a closed institution and focused only on one function, that of teaching and learning. Today many people see it as the isolated island in the community. The transformation of schools into community centers make them work and be perceived as the institution where the community can interact, collaborate and create.

Schools, families and communities today face a common challenge: quality education for children and young people and an opportunity to respond to their needs beyond academic preparation. Children and young people need to know and take a stand on social issues and community concerns. Partnership with other stakeholders creates the possibility of

establishing and implementing joint projects with themes enabling them to find ways to resolve them and enabling students to contribute to their communities.

***Schools, families and communities working together:***

- to build lasting strategies for children, youth and families
- to enrich and encourage through formal and informal activities
- to provide an environment that provides and integrates services for the school, family and community.

1.3.1 *Activities for the academic development of students* - school as a community center offers programs and services that provide support and academic development for children and young people, filling the curriculum. School builds academic courses (such as science courses, supplementary courses for students with difficulties, etc.), which do not overlap programs and experiences of students in the class.

1.3.2 *Activities on artistic, cultural and sports development* - School as a community center provides programs and services that it offers to address the needs of the physical, mental, emotional and social development of students. Students find at school the information and tools to meet these needs.

- sports activities such as volleyball, basketball, soccer, aerobics, etc.
- cultural activities such as theater, music, dance, drama, recitation, styling, painting, etc.

1.3.3 *Activities for the commitment and support of family* - school as a community center consider parents as partners and important source. It creates a positive climate, a welcome and cooperation and also builds programs on parent's involvement.

*These are activities that:*

- help parents follow the child's progress as for example through information sheets for parents, student diary, periodic meetings with teachers, etc.
- help parents support their children and the school as an institution, in order to increase the quality of service in school, participation in programs for student learning or adult (computer courses, programs helping simple professional skills, programs that parents can give to students facing difficulties, etc.).

**The process of transforming schools into community centers**

- The process of converting the school into a community center is a developer. Actors that cooperate together gradually reveal the available options and increase the benefits for students, families and community.
- In the school as a community center is available a continuous and permanent involvement of stakeholders. Promoting continuous reflections

from them will help to increase and improve student achievement and school.

- Two schools as community centers may not be identical. Each school creates its profile based on the needs identified and resources available in the school or community.

### **Standards of the school as a community center**

AREA: Enabling a quality education for every student

School, family and community collaborate together to support, enrich and promote learning for children and youth, through formal and informal activities, inside and outside the school. School integrates the programs and services that support academic development of students that meet their needs and interests.

### **Indicators**

- School encourages student participation and action on issues related to their success in school and beyond.
- Students and parents participate in the planning process and development of the curriculum in school.
- Parents collaborate with school staff to recognize the learning styles of students.
- The school, in cooperation with parents identify key indicators that measure the progress of students.
- The school engages teachers, parents and community partners to develop programs that support and enrich the academic and non-academic development of students.
- The school ensures the development of channels of communication parents-teachers to meet the academic and individual needs of the students.
- The school cooperates with parents to ensure that all students have equal access on reinforcement programs, counseling, and other types of support to improve their learning.
- School develops activities with students, parents and community partners on issues such as individualized curriculum, school-based curriculum, career planning, etc.
- Teachers collaborate with leaders, parents, and other community members to create an open environment of teaching.
- Teachers use interactive methodologies student centered that encourage curiosity and students` interests.
- Teachers encourage students` inner motivation, that he/she can take responsibility for his/her learning.
- School administrators engage parents and other community partners to plan activities that meet the needs and students` interests.

- School staff attends training and programs that enable their professional development, in order to improve students` achievement.

**AREA: Enabling a social, emotional and physical students` health well being.**

School cooperating with parents and other community partners to identify, address and meet the physical, emotional and social students and ensure their healthy development. They, together, provide programs (which include physical activities, sports, programs for healthy nutrition, cultural activities etc.,) that contribute in the improvement of students` achievements and provide a positive climate at school.

**Indicators**

- All school partners collaborate to develop experiences that help children and young people in developing the concept for themselves, build personal and interpersonal relations.
- All school partners collaborate to develop experiences that help children and young people in developing healthy lifestyles.
- Schools in collaboration with students, parents and other community members, ensures the development of artistic activities, cultural and sports to meet the needs and interests of students within and outside the learning process.
- The school plans a range of services that address prevention, intervention and treatment needs, based on focus groups.
- The school engages teachers, parents and community partners for meetings, consultations and discussions about health issues.
- All partners at school try to make children and young people to respect their rights and addressing cases of violation or rape them.
- The school cooperates with parents and other partners to design and implement policies that support positive school discipline.
- The school conducts training with various groups of interest (teachers, parents, students, etc.) for strategies and interventions to prevent and treat cases of violence, conflict, harassment and abuse.
- It cooperates with the Child Protection Units and organizations working in this direction for addressing and treating different cases.
- School psychologist offers counseling for children, parents and other community members to cases of concern to different problems of school life and outside it.
- The school offers spaces which enable the development of sportive, cultural and artistic activities.

### **Area: cooperation with the community**

The school offers services that are used for community development, and the community is an integral part of the activities organized by the school. In this way, it benefits not only the community from the school and also the school that cooperates with the community to increase and improve outcomes for students. The presence of parents in school and getting to know the needs of students means less stress for families and higher scores for students.

### **Indicators**

- All Parents are part of the development of students` life in school.
- They participate through volunteer work at school, or in special cases provide funds for the development of the school.
- Parents provide services in areas that they know or work, medicine, sports, arts, etc ,.
- Parents are willing to help in case of problems and specific difficulties to each student.
- Parents cooperate with the school to develop a formal program for volunteering.
- The school offers courses that help the community to be strong and develop continuously.
- The school prepares the community for intervention strategies in case of natural emergencies.
- School community awareness of the importance of respecting diversity.
- The school organizes activities aimed at strengthening community, students and teachers relationships.
- Schools in cooperation with public health sectors provide family counseling courses.
- The school takes measures to separate the tasks for managing the activities that take place in the school as a community center.
- The school takes steps to assess and monitor the situation constantly to see the operation, results and impact of the activities.
- Activities designed based on measurable objectives and feasible by the school and the community team.
- The school offers continuing professional development for its staff.
- The school offers a number of activities that respond to the overall needs of the students and the community.
- The school library is open to the community, and provides literature in his service.
- Non-profit organizations and associations help to create suitable conditions for the turning the school as a community center.

- The school organizes setting an office for psychological and social counseling in school.
- The school gives parents the information in their own language, and each parent feels freely speak his language.
- The school cooperates with parents to find ways of funding for extra-curricular courses.
- The school cooperates with parents to provide extra-curricular courses at no cost.
- The school collaborates with agencies / organizations / businesses to enable participants to community and student needs.

### **Area: inclusion and respect for diversity**

School provides all children the fundamental right to education and equal opportunities regardless of origin, cultural identity, language skills, or economic circumstances, respect the values of society, coexistence in society, as well as being an active citizen in the interdependent world.

*Standard 1: Respect for the rights of children*

### **Indicators**

- School has informational material on children's rights.
- Children's rights are taught at every level of education.
- There are clubs where the extracurricular school activities which have the opportunity to include all children.
- The views of children are heard and taken into account.
- The school creates a positive climate for conflict resolution.
- The school creates and improves mechanisms to ensure that all children are treated fairly, equally, with dignity and respect.
- The school has rules of behavior in school, which does not discriminate against children and do not allow discrimination against them.
- Educational staff (director, teacher, psychologist, and sociologist) at school are trained to respect the differences of any nature and to respond to any discrimination of students and school personnel and thereby contribute to creating the right perception of students.
- The school cooperates with the civil registration office and health center and takes them a list of all school-age children in the area (according to the instructions / Normative Provisions effect of 4-ministerial agreement).
- The school has formed a committee at the school for evaluation and registration of children, provides evaluation and registration forms for children in school and adhere it.
- The school has prepared a database with records of enrolled students and other information for students and the school.

- The school has an agreement of cooperation and collaborates with organizations and institutions that help ensure the inclusion in school.
- The school takes steps to train staff about the problem of inclusion and respect for diversity.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

1- Schools and teachers need the help of parents. They want one time, interest, and contribution. All for a common goal: to prepare children for life. Therefore working together, schools will optimize the bulk of problems.

2- Today the development of the individual is affected by the complexity of the premises where it operates in everyday life. It is confirmed that as greater is the involvement of parents in education, the child is more advanced in every aspect. This involvement, in the broad sense of the word, includes parenting.

3- This can not be denied education schools, which gives students equal educational opportunities and creates a stable value system.

4- Parents have the duty to commit themselves as a partner to the school education of their children.

### **References:**

Communities in Schools: <http://www.cisnet.org>

Community school transformation: A guide for schools, districts, parents and community members.

National Framework for before and after school activities in basic education 2011: Finnish Board of education.

National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools:<http://www.sedl.org/connections>

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE):

Notre vision de l'école communautaire: Cadre de référence, Commission scolaire de Montréal, 2007

Parental involvement in school life: recommendations for a successful partnership school-family-community: Open Society Foundation for Albania, 2011.

PTA National standards for family-school partnerships: an implementation guide, 2009, USA.

Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids

Standards of child-friendly school in Bangladesh: UNICEF, 2011 Coalition for Community Schools: <http://www.communityschools.org>