IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORHOODS IN CHICAGO AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: A MODEL FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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Abstract
    Schools can become the focus of community connected to daily lives and experiences. They can also address the academic and social context of education with strategic partnerships. Educational experiences are affected by school and non-school factors; therefore, schools need to expand their boundaries to other areas which affect learning. The greatest influence on students is the family and the greatest influence on families is the community so schools need to seek the integration of school, family and community to deliver a quality educational program for all students. Supporting and challenging students entail supporting and strengthening families. There is interdependence among schools, families and communities in order to exert a positive influence on academic outcomes. This paper examines the characteristics of effective community schools in a study of one particular school in an immigrant neighborhood in Chicago.

Keywords: Immigrant neighborhoods, community schools, partnerships

Introduction
    Many schools that advance student achievement continuously have a mission with a purpose. They also nurture relationships in order to challenge all participants to be the best they can be. These schools also demonstrate a shared belief in collective endeavors. According to Donaldson (2006), these characteristics constitute the three stream model- relational, purposive and action in common. Community schools foster mutual trust and openness so people can influence one another. They also connect individuals with organizational purposes and demonstrate a shared belief that goals can be accomplished. In many diverse school settings, economic, cultural and linguistic stereotypes influence expectations. Such expectations impact the performance of students – if they are allowed to occur. However, stereotype dangers are situational, therefore, educational environments can be created in which all students can excel academically, socially and emotionally and can

empower them to be successful and to have an unlimited positive attitude and perception of their own potential. Low-income communities, immigrant families, English language learners, undocumented students, special education programs, high number of dropouts, etc. – constitute myriad of reasons for some individuals who anticipate that these stereotypes have an unalterable impact in pursuing rigorous academic standards and excellent outcomes. This story with evidence-based strategies proves otherwise. It validates the transformative power that school communities can create to combat all of the above self-fulfilling prophecies which magnify stereotypes.

I.
Immigrants and Community Schools
Community schools and immigration represent the core values of democracy in America. The United States was founded based on the principles of freedom, economic and educational opportunities. All immigrant groups have contributed to these ideals. Yet, history repeats itself as new immigrants arrive and face their uphill battles in fulfilling the American dream. The draconian measures advanced in Arizona and other legislative initiatives in other states represent the antithesis of what this country is all about.

Due to economic pressures, immigration remains in the public eye. Dominant populations have always demonstrated a high level of anxiety while immigrants are arriving; yet everyone recognized their important contributions to America. Immigrant bashing continues to prevail nowadays regardless of the myriad contributions of documented and undocumented residents to the system of free enterprise. In the past, immigrant groups from Europe, Ireland and the Mediterranean were suspect on issues of public safety, religious and economic grounds.

However, as immigrant groups acculturated to the American way of life, the pessimism subsided until new issues emerge and immigrants become scapegoats among a variety of social and economic ills which become recycled in history. Latino, Asian, European and Caribbean immigration in its great majority is grounded on the value of hard work, family and faith commitments and the adaptation to America by learning English and most of all paying taxes.

The story of a community school exemplifies the attributes of all immigrant groups who aspire to the American dream in search of educational and economic opportunities.

It is estimated that immigrant origin youth will make up a third of young Americans in 2040. We need to focus on their educational and economic success for the well-being of this country. Therefore, the Dream Act as it has been proposed in Congress, unsuccessfully in the past, needs to

be addressed. It will provide equitable educational opportunities for successful students who have served their country well. One such approach is the concept of a comprehensive community school from preschool through high school. The driving force is a simple premise: Education does not occur in isolation from the rest of a student's life. Many factors – instructional quality, family, community, universities, non-profit organizations, government agencies, businesses – play an extremely important role in students' successful education. A continuous cycle of improvement is based on constant reflection of the following educational practices.

Relationships, Collaboration and Accountability

The interaction of all members of the school community, students, teachers and parents are critical aspects of school quality. Motivation and attitude toward the role of the school sets the tone for everyday accomplishments. This cannot occur without the development of social and emotional skills where conflicts are addressed and positive relationships are the norm. Empathy serves to engage people in treating one another with sensitivity and a willingness to support everyone. Self-awareness and your own assessment in how we react to others bring trustworthiness (Goleman 2006). According to Bryk and Schneider (2002), respect, competence, personal regard and integrity form the foundation for developing trust in schools leading to improved student outcomes. Even though academic cohesiveness is necessary, we must also foster teacher creativity by providing the necessary resources and flexibility to do innovative work. Collaboration by grade levels and academic houses leads to better planning and reviewing student work. It also leads to developing a student – centered approach where progress is monitored and resources are provided to meet student needs. Teacher autonomy also combats monotony and boredom.

Curriculum

A connected curriculum allows teachers to work with increased clarity and students to work with increased focus and responsibility. Teachers integrate reading and writing across the curriculum by using core frameworks for organizing instructional focus. Teachers organize activities in which students work independently or with a learning partner or team to "get it, get it clear, think it through, and get it across" (Radner 2006). Students use a variety of activities to learn by illustrating why they read and using graphic organizers to organize and communicate knowledge. Students explain what they learn – and how it relates to what they knew. They also communicate what is important using a variety of formats. Throughout this connected curriculum approach, the teacher makes learning clear and also guides activity. Students think thoroughly by connecting vocabulary and

making sense of writing. Staff development sessions focus on the implementation of the connected curriculum. All teachers receive curriculum maps to guide standards-based instruction. These tools provide a coherent program of instruction emphasizing standards in content areas and instructional activities to integrate them.

Youth Leadership Development
Students need to be encouraged with issues they regard as vital concerns and involved in planning what they will be doing. Whenever they are involved with applying ideals such as fairness, equity and justice to their world, their engagement is more powerful. Therefore, service learning opportunities enrich the curriculum and provide leadership development in order to address community needs. High school students serve as tutors in the primary grades on a daily basis. They participate in workshops to enhance their skills as reading buddies and increase their knowledge in the teaching of reading. This experience also conveys the message that they are role models in their own community. Internships in agencies surrounding the school expand their experiences to serve other members of the community. Students also participate in democratic life by researching and advocating legislative issues that affect their community by communicating with elected officials. Some examples include the advancement of fair immigration laws and gun control legislation. Other community organizing activities have included advocacy for a neighborhood public library, a play-lot for pre-school children and peace marches in the community. Students commit to meaningful school experiences when there is significance in what they learn and it reflects their world. They soon realize that their engagement makes a difference and they are connected to others through mutual work on common goals.

Parent, Community Engagement and Extended Learning Opportunities
Schools cannot escape interdependence with outside factors that influence whether students learn. Schools must seize opportunities to connect students and families to resources and support, rather than lament the prevalence of outside negative influences. By expanding boundaries, schools will become stronger and will engage parents and the community. Schools have the power to become the focus of the community, connected to daily lives and experiences and thus can share the educational responsibilities with other responsible partners. This process develops relational accountability where we become interdependent and co-determinants of student success. The meaningful extension of the school day is about providing the students with what they need to succeed, to beat the odds and capitalize on their strengths so they can grow up to be competent,

caring and responsible. Extended learning opportunities must provide a variety of academic, social and recreational activities, to accommodate different learning needs and styles. Family and community engagement can be fostered through high school equivalency classes, English as a Second Language, and literacy classes that reflect the needs of the community. A partnership with a health agency allows the school to offer health fairs, conferences and services to families. This collaboration culminated with the opening of a school-based clinic. Parents working as literacy leaders can teach other parents and community residents. Home gatherings can emphasize financial education, neighborhood improvement, immigration rights and community safety.

Assessment and Alignment

Student assessment occurs on a regular basis to determine progress in learning required content. Curriculum content is always aligned with instruction. Data on student assessment is used on a regular basis to make decisions regarding resource allocation, student needs, and the effectiveness of the instructional program. Data-informed instruction is integrated with the vision of the school and further developed with professional development. Common interim assessments are administered with defined standards aligned to state assessments and college readiness. Even though imposed accountability standards are used to assess compliance and progress, relational accountability permeates school culture where elements of quality reach beyond state tests and NCLB standards. This mission drives student success not only on mandated tests and assessments but on attendance, motivation, discipline, parent engagement, quality of student work and leadership. Evidence of student progress on required tests substantiate the following gains. Patterns of growth validate the effectiveness of the community school model in a Pre-K through High School setting.

Illinois Standards Achievement Test
Performance Profile for Spry Elementary School
Percent Meeting and Exceeding Standards
Composite Scores

Year 1	31.01%
Year 2	46.20%
Year 3	53.70%
Year 4	67.70%
Year 5	70.60%
Year 6	72.70%
Year 7	75.60%

High School ACT Scores

> Year 1   3.6% scored above 20
> Year 2 10.3% scored above 20
> Year 3 12.5% scored above 20
> Year 4   26%   scored above 20

Conclusion

These turn-around efforts contradict many of the stereotype dangers that abound in many school communities. Signs of success are evident such as high student attendance (98%), minimal discipline disruptions, no dropouts and the pursuit of post-secondary goals (95%). Parent engagement in school activities is very high.   All students and families make a commitment to complete elementary and high school successfully and enroll in post-secondary education. Capacity building is embedded in the culture of the school by engaging members of the learning community in planning and decision- making. Everyone shares a results orientation belief so progress can be sustained. A Pre-k through High School community school is a way of thinking, acting and working together to educate students and strengthen families and communities. All members of the school community interact everyday on the following basis. "WHAT LIES BEHIND US AND WHAT LIES BEFORE US ARE TINY MATTERS COMPARED TO WHAT LIES WITHIN US"
Ralph Waldo Emerson

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