

Transformational Community Schools

1 A transformational community school provides both a place and a set of transformative partnerships between the school and other resources from the larger community.

An integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement to foster community self-reliance and self-determination, lead to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier sustainable communities.

Transformative community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving for community change. Many public schools in urban areas, simply by location, experience the every-day effects of poverty and other social toxins. This position also provides an opportunity to understand and eradicate these toxins through a transformative curriculum and critical pedagogy.

Schools now become centers of community change, open to everyone to work for personal and community self-empowerment--all day, every day, evenings, and weekends as the community works its way to meet its own needs itself through self-reliance and collective self-determination.

2 Most people think of schools today as serving a single purpose: a binary, analog-system of delivery --teachers teach and students learn. Transformational community schools appear more akin to young democracies. Each day they work toward personal and community empowerment through self-rule.

Schools and communities connect and collaborate, and with the help of the array of supports and wrap-around services, create a place where what these supports and services provide no longer arrives into the community, but now grows out of the community's self-sustainability and cultural empowerment. Over time, realizing and manifesting its own self-sufficiency and self-determination, the community "raises" its own dentists and dental assistants, mental health specialists, social services and family experts, teachers and principals, youth workers, doctors and nurses, employment and training services, police, job opportunities, intra-community transportation services, businesses and corporations, nutritionists, lawyers, early childhood specialists and centers, community organizers, suppliers, city-county councillors, etc.

The initial supports, wrap-around service provider entities, and agencies needed to sustain the community slowly "withdraw" and enable the school-community-families-citizens to control their own destiny/ies. Children and families then have an array of supports from *within* the community which they have helped "grow" and establish directly at their school. For example, a doctor or nurse working in the school-based clinic would also mentor students or community members to come into the medical profession. The doctor/nurse and the school-community would encourage these persons to return to the community to live and practice.

Due to the community's ethos of self-empowerment, their community schools contain a host of opportunities and supports built-in that give students and parents all the tools they need to learn and grow.

Now, communities and schools leverage their self-empowerment and self-sufficiency to enable the community's physical and human assets to help children succeed.

As a consequence of a transformational community school and over time, the changed community will have eliminated the need of many services by eradicating the very social toxins which required them. This describes the American dream in action: grassroots democratic self-government.

Using public schools as hubs, transformational community schools bring together many partners. The initial goals of these "hubs" offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families

and communities. The longer-term goal of the partners/providers serves to “work themselves out of a job.” Here “success” becomes the self-determination of the community with the creation of its own resources with its own people.

Partners work with the community’s efforts regarding self-reliance and self-determination in order to achieve these results:

- children ready to enter school and schools ready for children’s entry;
- students attend school consistently and receive viable learning alternatives if they choose otherwise;
- students actively engaged in learning, school-related decision-making, and community change;
- families become increasingly a part of their child’s/ children’s education which progresses over time from involvement to engagement, and finally empowerment;
- schools engaged with empowering family and community self-sufficiency and self-determination;
- students succeed academically prepared for life-long learning and citizenship;
- healthy students--physically, socially, emotionally, and politically;
- students live and learn in a safe, supportive, and stable environment; and,
- communities become resilient, sustainable, and desirable places to live.

3 Transformative Community Schools must have a “Strategic Alignment.” Just like smart phones, community schools have an infra-structure or operating system that makes all the “apps” work in a synchronized manner not only to fulfill school-community needs and challenges, but working daily to enable the same community’s eventual self-determination and cultural empowerment. Of course, data on academic and non-academic factors drive the work for a transformative community school.

A school-site leadership team, comprised of a) educators, b) elected parents, community members, and students, and c) community partners and others, take responsibility for hiring/firing the school principal, creating a shared vision for the school, identifying desired results and helping align and integrate the work of partners with the school to ensure the eventual self-determination of community.

Three community-school transformative coordinators (one drawn from the school leadership team and each well-trained current residents from the community) work hand-in-hand with the principal. The transformational coordinators take responsibility for the delivery of supports by partners to students both inside and outside of the classroom all day, every day. Yet, they also take responsibility for building relationships with school staff and community partners/service providers, and engaging the families and community residents in transformational actions needed for the school’s and community’s eventual self-reliance and self-determination—a healthy sense of independence for sustainability.

By building relationships with providers from outside the community, who have a professional goal to enable the creation and use of similar provided services but from within the community, the coordinators eventually fosters the creation of “community-grown” entities and persons who will provide the same services.

A major purpose of a community school becomes acting as transformative agent for all concerned—clarifying for students, teachers and school staff, providers and partners, individual community members and the community itself, and our city of Indianapolis the purpose of American democracy.

This document is a transformed version of quotes and ideas from “What is a Community School?” See www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx

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