



Introduction to the Peabody Journal of Education

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What good is learning about algebra when you're hungry? What good is learning about history if you don't know where your next meal is coming from? Those things [sic] are important to survival, whereas education, at that point [of being hungry], is just a luxury. —Marklyn Joachim, community school student

Though marketed as a new idea, community schools have a long history dating back to the 19th century settlement houses of Britain. They also exist worldwide. With strong development in Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America, definitions of community schools vary widely from country to country, but core to each definition is the harnessing of local resources to address the needs of students. According to Children's Aid Society (2011), community schools share a common mission “to change the role of education in the lives of students, families, and communities, so that underserved youth may be empowered to overcome obstacles and become happy, healthy and productive adults” (p. 6).

Motivations behind establishing community schools also vary from country to country; some countries focus on democratization and community service, while others strictly target the improvement of academic achievement. In countries where females are not guaranteed schooling, community schools are instituted to ensure educational opportunities for girls. In some African countries, providing any sort of education means the need to establish a community school; parents and community members not only build the schoolhouses but also teach the children.

Positive outcomes in community schools are expected based upon variations of a similar underlying logic: If schools provide services addressing barriers faced by students and families in low-resourced communities, the potential for teaching and learning will be more fully realized, students will be provided the tools and opportunities to succeed, and society will comprise adults who meet life situations with resilience. Contrasts in practice and motivation make evaluation of community schools as a strategy complex, however. Though literature is limited, and gaps exist from region to region, research involving community schools has grown over the past several years, with evaluations focusing on specific community-school models showing evidence of improvement trends. Our intent for this collaborative work is to add to the limited literature on community schools, providing global perspectives on motivation, approach, lessons, and impact.

An African proverb says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If want to go far, go together.” Whether referred to as “extended schools,” “community-focused schools,” or “core offer schools,” the epicenter of community school activity is working together in partnership. Partnership between schools and communities brings together individuals who share a vision and purpose. By collectively responding to the unique needs of students and families, barriers to student success are addressed, and *surviving circumstances* transform into *thriving opportunities*.

Much can be learned by understanding commonalities between community-school strategies and identifying best practice trends. Though variance across countries, cultures, and political contexts makes global community-school-learning exchange challenging, broadening perspectives is critical to the advancement of our work. Where knowledge silos create limits in scope and practice, knowledge expansion produces gains in innovation and an elevation of the entire field of education.

I want to thank the authors of these articles for their valuable contributions, commitment, and leadership. Forming international collaborations to share perspectives and best practices has become

increasingly vital as we fuel innovative strategies advancing education and community-school development. Adding to this literature promises a deeper understanding of perspectives, global trends, and initiatives as we build partnerships to help students and communities realize their full potential.

Author bio

Dr. Amy Ellis is director of the Center for Community Schools at the University of Central Florida's College of Community Innovation and Education. The Center for Community Schools serves as a comprehensive resource for technical assistance, university-assisted partnership, training, and assessment and evaluation in the development of high-quality community schools. Ellis has more than 25 years of experience in intervention and prevention programs and services for disadvantaged children. She specializes in the development of partnerships that integrate these programs and services into K–12 schools and the scale up of initiatives that improve student outcomes. In 2015, Ellis came to University of Central Florida (UCF) to help implement the Community Partnership Schools model developed at Evans High School in Orlando at other schools across Florida. She went on to develop Community Partnership Schools standards for the schools to follow and a Community Partnership Schools certification process. Ellis has presented widely on community schools, including presentations on the impact of Community Partnership Schools to the Florida legislature, which has funded the initiative since 2014. Ellis earned her doctorate in educational leadership at UCF and holds a master's degree in education from Florida State University.

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Reference

Children's Aid Society. (2011). *Building community schools: A guide for action*. New York, NY: Author.