

# **A Preliminary Evaluation of the Evans Community School and the Extant Literature on Community Schools**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this report is to provide a general overview of the literature on community schools, to present some initial suggestive empirical evidence regarding some aspects of the performance of the Evans Community School, established in 2010, and to offer professional impressions of the work of the Evans Community School gleaned from a day-long site visit that I conducted in December 2015.

The fact that there is no uniform definition of a community school has limited the degree to which there have been large-scale rigorous evaluations of the community school model. However, while most of the extant literature on community schools does not meet modern standards of research evidence, the existing case studies provide suggestive evidence that community schools have been successful in a variety of locations. The most scientifically sound quantitative studies of community school models (those pertaining to Communities in Schools programs) find that these programs boost academic achievement and reduce dropout risk. Other evaluations of component programs, such as school-based health centers and programs promoting positive youth development, also find improvements in academic outcomes as well as emotional and physical health. Therefore, while still limited, the extant literature affords a great deal of optimism regarding the likelihood that Evans Community School and similar community schools will be successful.

It is not possible to formally evaluate Evans Community School using state-of-the-art methods. However, a careful comparison of Evans High School academic outcomes before versus after the establishment of Evans Community School indicates that Evans High School has improved over time relative to the twelve most similar high schools in Florida. In 2012-13 Evans High School had experienced relative improvements in 9 of the 14 academic metrics included in Florida high school grades, as compared with pre-implementation levels, and in 2013-14 Evans High School had experienced relative improvements in 12 of the 14 academic metrics. The data do not currently exist to conduct similar analyses regarding social, emotional, and physical outcomes, but the extant literature provides reason to believe that these outcomes would have improved as well.

My professional judgment based on a day-long site visit conducted in December 2015 provides corroborating evidence regarding this likely success. I found the community school to be very impressive in its governance and management

structure, the commitment and collaboration of key institutional partners, its quest for continuous improvement, its range of programs aimed at promoting whole child development, its deployment of a range of high-quality programs and services, and its efforts at community and family engagement. While I have some concerns about the degree to which reduced school district support to Evans High School might reduce the community school's future efficacy and I have some worries about the potential for staff burnout, I believe that the community school program is replicable and I have a high degree of confidence that this same model will yield considerable successes elsewhere in Florida.

I also lay out some suggestions regarding more formal future evaluations that can be conducted were the state to invest in the reporting of more extensive data and following the rollout of more community schools in different parts of the state over the next several years. I recommend that the Legislature support the conduct of a formal evaluation in the medium-run time period, and support data collection and intermediate analyses to provide early indicators and facilitate continuous improvement in the near term.

# **A Preliminary Evaluation of the Evans Community School and the Extant Literature on Community Schools**

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## **Introduction**

In 2010, the University of Central Florida, Children's Home Society of Florida, and the Orange County Public Schools -- and subsequently the Central Florida Family Health Center -- joined to establish (at Evans High School) the first community school of its kind in Florida. The purpose of a community school is to integrate academic programs with a range of in-school services, supports, and opportunities aimed at promoting whole child development. Buoyed by the initial successes of the Evans Community School, the state of Florida is supporting the establishment of several new community schools.

The purpose of this report is to provide a general overview of the literature on community schools, to present some initial suggestive empirical evidence regarding some aspects of the performance of the Evans Community School, and to offer professional impressions of the work of the Evans Community School gleaned from a day-long site visit that I conducted in December 2015. In addition, this report lays out a framework for aspects of a more formal evaluation that could be conducted as more community schools are established in Florida, and I encourage the Legislature to fund data collection, a medium-run formal analysis that could be conducted in five years or so, and intermediate analyses to facilitate continuous improvement and point-in-time snapshots of progress.

## **Review of the extant literature on community schools**

The concept of community schools does not imply a specific program, but rather represents a broad "strategy".<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that every community school model is implemented differently, with a variety of management strategies, integrated services and program offerings. As a consequence, however, there have been little in the way of rigorous evaluation of the efficacy of community schools per se to date.

Most of the studies that have been conducted to date are of case studies of specific examples of the community school model. While these studies often show very promising suggestive evidence, and often offer rich description, they are limited because they do not offer evidence that is ideal by modern standards of evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Quinn, 2009, "Community Schools: A Strategy, Not a Program," National Education Association visiting scholars series, vol. 2.

Specifically, most cases only present pre-versus-post differences without any comparison conditions, and those that do tend to compare the community school(s) to all others in the district rather than a matched comparison. For instance, a study of community schools in the Redwood City, California school district documented the usage of programs and showed that participants' academic trajectories exceed those of nonparticipants, but did not account for differential selection into the programs or offer any comparisons to comparable students who were not offered these services.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a study of community schools in Philadelphia reported that students self-reported improvements in their confidence, attendance, and performance, a finding corroborated by increases in graduation rates and attendance rates, but again, there was no accounting for selection into programs or comparisons to other student populations.<sup>3</sup> Studies of Children's Aid Society community schools in New York City reported superior academic progress and improvements in mental and physical health and social and emotional development for participants relative to nonparticipants, and offered some comparisons to other New York City schools, but it remains difficult to know the degree to which these schools are close comparators, and the studies lacked pre-post comparisons for both groups.<sup>4</sup> Promisingly, though not definitive, the New York City results indicated that teachers, parents, and students at community schools rated school climate better than did those at similar nonparticipating schools, and student and teacher attendance was greater at community schools. A study of the Tulsa Area Community School Initiative indicated that community schools had better academic achievement and faculty trust, among other outcomes, than comparison schools, but again no counterfactual condition was considered.<sup>5</sup>

The most rigorous evaluations related to the community schools models to date pertain to the Communities in Schools models, which range from relatively light-touch community partnership models to models that also incorporate case management. A national evaluation of Communities in Schools compared treated schools to matched comparison schools before versus after implementation of the schoolwide community school treatment and found relative improvements in graduation rates and progress toward graduation (referred to as "promoting

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<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Castrechini and Rebecca London, 2012, "Positive Student Outcomes in Community Schools," Center for American Progress report.

<sup>3</sup> Ira Harkavy, Matthew Hartley, Rita Axelroth Hodges, and Joann Weeks, 2013, "The Promise of University-Assisted Community Schools to Transform American Schooling: A Report From the Field, 1985-2012," *Peabody Journal of Education* 88, pp.525-540.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Kira Krenichyn, Helene Clark, Nicole Schaefer-McDaniel, and Lymari Benitez, 2005, "21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers at Six New York City Middle Schools: Year One Findings," Children's Aid Society, as well as follow-up reports.

<sup>5</sup> Curt Adams, 2010, "The Community School Effect: Evidence from an Evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community School Initiative," University of Oklahoma working paper.

power”).<sup>6</sup> More recently, in 2012 Communities in Schools of Chicago brought aboard 20 new K-8 schools into its community partnership model out of 47 applicant schools deemed to be good candidates for participation. This random assignment permitted a “gold standard” evaluation of Chicago’s Communities in Schools partnership model. The study documented large and sustained improvements in reading and mathematics proficiency accruing to students attending treated schools, though no lasting effects on attendance rates.<sup>7</sup> Other Communities in Schools affiliates in Jacksonville, Austin, and Wichita carried out random assignment evaluations at the individual student level and found that students case-managed by Communities in Schools affiliates experienced substantial improvements in behavior and academic performance.<sup>8</sup>

Relatedly, there have also been a number of evaluations of the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) in New York City. For instance, health programs associated with HCZ provided children with access to health services that were otherwise lacking.<sup>9</sup> The high-quality charter schools associated with HCZ have also been shown to have substantial positive effects on academic achievement themselves<sup>10</sup> and others have suggested that the principal academic gains accruing to HCZ students come from the schools rather than the full set of services on offer<sup>11</sup>, but of course it is not clear the degree to which these schooling factors are complementary to the work of other social, emotional, and physical health services, so it is difficult to divine what exactly about HCZ is positive academic benefits to students.

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<sup>6</sup> ICF International, 2008, “Communities in Schools National Evaluation, Volume 1: School Level Report”, Communities in Schools.

<sup>7</sup> David Figlio, 2015, “Experimental Evidence of the Effects of the Communities In Schools of Chicago Partnership Program on Student Achievement”, Northwestern University working paper.

<sup>8</sup> ICF International, 2010, “Communities in Schools National Evaluation, Volume 4: Randomized Controlled Trial Study, Jacksonville, Florida”; ICF International, 2010, “Communities in Schools National Evaluation, Volume 5: Randomized Controlled Trial Study, Austin, Texas”; ICF International, 2010, “Communities in Schools National Evaluation, Volume 6: Randomized Controlled Trial Study, Wichita, Kansas”.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Stephen Nicholas et al., 2005, “Addressing the Childhood Asthma Crisis in Harlem: The Harlem Children’s Zone Asthma Initiative”, *American Journal of Public Health* 95(2): pp. 245-249.

<sup>10</sup> Will Dobbie and Roland Bryer, 2011, “Are High-Quality Schools Enough to Increase Achievement Among the Poor? Evidence from the Harlem Children’s Zone”, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 3(3): pp. 158-187.

<sup>11</sup> Grover Whitehurst and Michell Croft, 2010, “The Harlem Children’s Zone, Promise Neighborhoods, and the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education”, Brookings Institution report.

Moreover, there has been considerably more study of specific components of many community schools. For example, a number of recent studies using state-of-the-art empirical methods demonstrated positive effects of school-based health centers on student academic achievement and student health and reduced rates of teen pregnancy, depending on the study.<sup>12</sup> New field experiments have shown strong positive benefits of programs aimed at promoting positive youth development on reduced rates of criminal behavior and dropouts among adolescents,<sup>13</sup> to complement a considerable extant literature on the efficacy of after-school and curriculum-embedded programs.<sup>14</sup> Programs that promote student and family engagement have been shown to mitigate the risk of dropout.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, while evaluations of community school models employing state-of-the-art standards of evidence are still in shorter supply than would be desirable, the available empirical evidence regarding community schools and a number of component aspects (such as school-based health centers and programs aimed at promoting positive youth development and student and family engagement) is very favorable, and there is considerable reason for optimism.

### **Preparing for rigorous evaluation of community schools in Florida**

It is impossible to evaluate community schools in Florida at a rigorous level at present, because only one school (Evans Community School) is at a mature stage. In this report I present my professional impressions about how Evans Community School is currently operating as well as some aggregate data comparisons between Evans and a set of twelve statewide comparison schools.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Michael Lovenheim, Randall Reback, and Leigh Wedenoja, 2014, "How Does Access to Health Care Affect Teen Fertility and Dropout Rates?" Cornell University working paper; Jane Rochmes, "School-Based Health Services and Adolescents' Academic Performance: The Role of School Provision of Preventive and Physical Health Services in Educational Outcomes", Stanford University working paper; and Walker Swain, "School-Based Benefits of School-Based Health Services: Evidence from the Non-Urban Districts of Tennessee", Vanderbilt University working paper.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Sara Heller, Anuj Shah, Jonathan Guryan, Jens Ludwig, Sendhil Mullainathan, and Harold Pollack, 2015, "Thinking, Fast and Slow? Some Field Experiments to Reduce Crime and Dropout in Chicago", National Bureau of Economic Research working paper 21178.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Richard Catalano, M. Lisa Berglund, Jean Ryan, Heather Longczak, and J. David Hawkins, 2004, "Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 591 (1), pp. 98-124.

<sup>15</sup> Russell Rumberger, 2011, *Dropping Out: Why Students Quit School and What Can Be Done About It?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

I recommend that the state fund and begin preparing for a five-year evaluation of the rollout of the community school model as it is being implemented in Florida. The planned rollout of the community school model to a dozen schools will present an opportunity for a rigorous evaluation of the community school model in Florida. Specifically, because some community schools will come on line in different years than others will, it will be possible to compare outcomes of students before versus after the implementation of the community schools, taking advantage of the fact that different schools will be at different points in the implementation process at the same point in time.<sup>16</sup> This form of evaluation will allow for identifying the effects of community schools based on the timing of the implementation of the community school; a comparison of students at one school with a community school to another school that has a community school starting a couple of years later (to deal with the selection problem at the school level); and individual-level analyses that follow specific children over time before vs. after entry into the school (to deal with the selection problem at the individual level, to the extent possible).<sup>17</sup> By approximately 2021 there should be a sufficient number of community schools online in Florida to facilitate this formal model, which will be more compelling if the rollout of community schools across the state take place deliberately, such that new community schools are established at several different times, rather than all at once, or all at two points in time. Funding a thorough study, providing individual-level state-collected data, and rolling out community schools implementation in a manner that facilitates causal evaluation will maximize the likelihood that an evaluation conducted when a number of schools are mature will be very meaningful for future decision-making.

In order to maximize the efficacy of such an evaluation, it will be important for the state to collect and make available to designated researchers a wide array of data. In addition to data that will help to gauge whether students are succeeding academically (for instance, standardized test scores, graduation and dropout rates, and rates of college and career readiness), it will be very valuable to measure the degree to which students are actively engaged in their learning environments (for instance, by collecting attendance and truancy rates, as well as surveys of student connection) and whether students are physically and emotionally healthy (for instance, by collecting measures of well-being on a variety of health indices collective via health department records as well as, ideally, student surveys). It will also be desirable to gauge the degree to which community health is improving, as

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<sup>16</sup> A good model for the recommended type of empirical analysis is presented by C. Kirabo Jackson, 2010, "A Little Now for a Lot Later: A Look at a Texas Advanced Placement Incentive Program", *Journal of Human Resources* 45 (3): pp. 591-639. In this paper, Jackson evaluates the rollout of an incentive program for students to participate in advanced placement coursework that was implemented in different Texas schools at different points in time.

<sup>17</sup> This will, however, be made somewhat more difficult to the degree to which some community schools are at the elementary level while others are at the high school level.

well as the degree to which children are physically, emotionally, and academically ready to start school. While an evaluation based exclusively on the factors that go into school grades still has some benefit, it would miss many of the important points and possible effects of community schools, so I strongly encourage a more comprehensive evaluation than one based only on a narrow range of academic outcomes.

While a formal evaluation will not be possible for another five or six years, I encourage the state to begin the evaluation process as soon as possible. The state should begin the evaluation planning process as soon as possible both to ensure that data collection along a variety of lines is underway, as well as to provide intermediate feedback to the community schools so that they can engage in continuous improvement. Furthermore, even if not as rigorous as desirable, intermediate evaluations of data as community schools are rolling out that follow approaches such as the pre-post comparisons made in this report will provide early indications to the community schools, partner organizations, school districts, and the state about the degree to which the new community schools are succeeding and which dimensions should be investigated more closely. Collecting data along the way and carrying out purposeful and organized evaluation at intermediate states will make it more likely that community schools in Florida will be as successful as possible.

### **Preliminary comparisons of Evans High School to comparable Florida high schools before versus after the community school introduction**

While this should be considered purely descriptive evidence, and while it will be important to conduct a more formal study such as that described in the preceding section once a sufficient number of community schools in Florida have reached maturity, it is possible to obtain some preliminary evidence about how Evans High School students are faring along some dimensions relative to outcomes observed prior to the implementation of the Evans Community School. That said, it bears repeating that a single case study is extremely difficult to evaluate. For example, Evans High School is serving a dramatically different population than it did even one decade ago, with a population that is considerably needier today than in prior years. Nonetheless, the descriptive information provided in this section will be valuable in painting a general picture about some elements of success.

In this section, I follow publicly-reported academic outcomes of students at Evans High School in the years following the implementation of the Evans Community School up through the 2013-14 academic year, the most recent year of data available at the time of writing, as compared with the same outcomes in the 2008-09 and 2009-10 academic years, the years immediately before the introduction of the Evans Community School. To provide a counterfactual condition, I make this same pre-post comparison with the twelve most similar high schools to Evans High School, as measured along two dimensions -- the historical poverty status of the students enrolled at the high school in 2009-10 and 2010-11 and the eighth grade



FCAT scores of the students enrolled at the high school in 2009-10 and 2010-11. I used student-level microdata to identify these comparison schools, but publicly-reported data to conduct the analysis itself. I chose 2009-10 and 2010-11 as the years in question to match the schools because these are the last year prior to the implementation of the Evans community school and the first year of implementation.

As mentioned in the preceding section, there are many possible outcomes that would be desirable to evaluate. However, only a subset of these outcomes are publicly-reported and measured for both Evans High School and the twelve comparison schools in both the pre-implementation and post-implementation periods, so this preliminary evaluation must necessarily investigate only a portion of the possible ways in which Evans Community School might be influencing student and community outcomes. Specifically, the available indicators are all measures of academic outcomes, but not physical or emotional health measures or measures of engagement, say. It will be important for the state to collect and make available down the road a broader range of outcomes measures in order to paint a more complete picture of the effects of community schools in Florida. For the purposes of the present analysis, I compare the components of the state school grades for high schools – proficiency rates in reading, math, writing and science; gains in reading and math; gains for the bottom 25 percent of the school in reading and math; acceleration participation and performance; graduation rate and at-risk graduation rate; and postsecondary readiness rates in reading and math.

With the relevant provisos, the results are quite promising: As can be seen in Table 1 at the end of this report, out of 14 indicators, Evans High School has improved relative to the comparison schools along 12 dimensions in 2013-14 (all except for at-risk graduation rate and postsecondary math readiness), relative to the two years prior to the implementation.<sup>18</sup> In the preceding year (2012-13), Evans High School had improved along 9 dimensions. Note that sometimes results jump around considerably from year to year; this is the benefit of averaging over multiple comparison schools and multiple pre-implementation years, as well as showing the results in different years. With just one community school case I do not feel comfortable gauging whether these differences are statistically significant, nor do I feel comfortable ascribing causal interpretations to these differences, but they tend to be sizeable in magnitude, and the fact that they almost all move in the same positive direction despite the fact that Evans High School is serving a comparatively disadvantaged clientele nowadays relative to the comparison schools suggests that there have been considerable generalized improvements in the outcomes

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<sup>18</sup> One can read the first column in the table as representing the difference between 2013-14 and the average of the immediate two pre-implementation years for Evans High School, the second column as the same difference but for the average of the twelve comparison schools, and the third column as the difference in difference between Evans High School and the comparison schools, before versus after the implementation of the Evans Community School.

incorporated in the school grades. This descriptive evidence suggests that it is quite likely that the Evans Community School has been very successful to date, a result consistent with the extant literature regarding community schools, to the extent to which it exists. Given that school grades only pick up a portion of the outcomes about which we collectively care (for instance, individual and community health and sense of well-being are very important but not measured by school grades) it is reasonable to believe that the positive benefits may be stronger still, though this is necessarily speculative.

### **Professional impressions of Evans Community School efficacy based on site evaluation**

While the quantitative evidence is certainly supportive of the notion that Evans Community School has been successful in boosting academic outcomes of the students at Evans High School (subject to the provisos mentioned above), it is important to make a more thorough assessment of the community school than can be conducted with the limited available quantitative data. To this end, I conducted a full-day site visit to Evans High School on December 9, 2015. At this visit I met with school administration, members of the community school “cabinet”, all of the key individuals who implement and manage the community school, and a large number of staff members. My general conclusion is that the Evans Community School is very well-functioning, sustainable, and replicable. It is noteworthy that this is the same conclusion drawn by Janice Chu-Zhu, Senior Director of National Capacity Building at the New York City Children’s Aid Society, who performed a site visit in February 2015 to assess the work of the Evans Community School through a different lens.

The following briefly describes the evidence that I collected to come to this conclusion. I emphasized six specific and interrelated criteria in doing so:

(1) *A successful community school should take a whole child perspective.* Evans Community School is considering children’s academic, social, health, and developmental needs in a holistic and systematic manner. Wrap-around services are very well-integrated and coordinated with one another and a full and genuine sense of partnership across all actors is apparent. The geography of the school, where academic staff and community school staff tend to be in physically distinct buildings, causes a bit of separation between academic personnel and community school personnel that might limit collaboration between instructional staff and community school staff, and, indeed, much of my concerns about the degree to which the Evans Community School can continue to improve involves the limitations imposed by space at the school. Geographical issues are also apparent with regard to the (medical and dental) health partner, physically located quite some distance from the other activity of the school. My perception is that the health partner is not quite as integrated into the whole child approach as are the other key players in the community school, as they are serving in somewhat more of a vendor role.

(2) *A successful community school should be responsive to need.* Evans Community School deploys impressive efforts to meet children’s physical and mental health needs; address nutritional shortcomings; support families by connecting them with employment opportunities, housing assistance, social services, and adult education opportunities; stimulate educational advancement through curricular offerings, tutoring support, and extracurricular programs; and connect students with community-based assets to help to ensure success. My impression is that the community school works extremely hard to “go the extra mile”, including, for instance, building considerable capacity to serve the large and rapidly growing Haitian Creole population in the community. The strong set of partners is a clear asset of the community school. It is also clear that there exists a substantial amount of unmet need, including, for instance, in the mental health dimension. Part of this is due to financial constraints; as Evans High School has become more successful, Orange County Public Schools have considerably reduced support for the school, making it more difficult to facilitate integration between the various services offered by the community school and the high school writ large. Part of this is also due to space constraints, as there is physically not room to provide for additional services to be offered.

(3) *A successful community school deploys high-quality and integrated programs and services.* Evans Community School provides a substantial array of programs and services aimed at supporting the whole child and family. Particularly impressive among these services, in my opinion, are the mental health and counseling opportunities; the state-of-the-art health care facility (though, as mentioned above, the location proximate to the school provides substantial benefits but its physical distance from the activity of the school could be somewhat problematic); the freshman success program; the recruitment of University of Central Florida students to serve as mentors; the range of after-school programs available; and the parent resource center. I was also very impressed with the apparently seamless coordination between various dimensions of services, as well as the beginnings of working together with feeder schools to even more successfully prepare students for high school. It is clear that the community school leadership team has a strong game plan for making this happen, and they have accomplished quite a bit in the period of time thusfar.

(4) *A successful community school is heavily engaged with families and the community.* Evans Community School is clearly both serving the community as well as being served by the community. A number of community partners and volunteers support the school’s activities, and there are a variety of ways in which the school offers support to community members, both families of students as well as others in the community. Visiting the parent engagement center was a particular highlight for me, as the community school team are clearly aiming to serve parents where they are, with an emphasis on creating and nurturing relationships; while the community school staff recognizes that they have a long way to go in this challenging domain, I am quite sanguine about the prospects for success. Likewise, there exists a strong and vibrant community network, and there exist regular monthly meetings

involving key community stakeholders, including faith-based leaders, alumni, representatives from feeder patterns, public servants, and others in the Pine Hills community. I could not ascertain the degree to which family members offer additional programmatic elements, aside from volunteering opportunities.

(5) *A successful community school has a transparent governance structure with opportunities for continuous improvement and empowered leadership.* I was particularly impressed with the governance structure of Evans Community School and think of this as a model for expansion to other locations. The community school has developed a sensible and sustainable governance model with a cabinet comprised of high-ranking officials from all of the key partner organizations that meets every other month, together with teams representing each organization that meet regularly (weekly or biweekly) regarding operations, communications, and data. Regular monthly meetings involve key community stakeholders (including faith-based leaders, alumni, representatives from feeder patterns, public servants, and others in the Pine Hills community) and a student council meets biweekly. The core staff and leadership of the community school have a clear degree of cohesion and interact effectively with school administration and the leadership of the relevant key organizations.

The governance model adopted by the community school helps to facilitate thoughtful self-evaluation. The cabinet has established a data committee that meets regularly and they are currently developing assessment tools. It is evident that quantitative and qualitative information feeds back to promote improved decision-making and service delivery.

Furthermore, the management of the community school is clearly outstanding, with strong rapport with staff, community members, organizational leaders, and school leaders. The staffing of the community school was clearly chosen with care and great insight. In addition to the remarkable talents of the community school director, Jarvis Wheeler, another particular strength of Evans Community School is the presence of a district senior administrator who is deployed to serve as the liaison between regular school activities, community school activities, and the school district. This is a position that I believe helps to ensure the success of the community school, and pains should be taken to have a similar liaison position, staffed by a similarly-experienced professional, in other community school implementations in Florida.

One concern that I have is that the staff appear to be working extremely hard, and burnout and turnover are potential worries. The management of the community school is aware of this issue, and has been working with individual staff members to ensure that multiple staff members can support one another, thereby facilitating somewhat more flexible work hours. Cross-training of leadership helps to ensure continuity. Nonetheless, some additional staffing and space support would go a long way to helping the community school fully achieve its potential.

(6) *A successful community school is sustainable in the long term.* Evans Community School is bolstered by long-term commitments from all key organizational partners. I view this degree of commitment and sustained investment as important for trust-building. The school leadership and organizational partners are in the process of implementing institutional arrangements that will ensure continuity of collaboration and service delivery as organizational personnel change. Likewise, community school leadership is set up to develop future operational leaders. Space constraints hamper the community school's ability to fully serve students and their families; a repeated refrain from the community school side is that the principal limiting factor is space, even more than financial resources.

However, I am also concerned about the fact that, as Evans High School has sustained higher school grades than was experienced before the community school was established, Orange County Public Schools have significantly reduced the number of support staff positions the district is providing to the school. I worry that the reduced capacity of school personnel may impede the efficacy of the community school moving forward. One key lesson from this point is that I suspect that community schools are more likely to be successful to the degree to which the school district is fully committed to the prospect.

In summary, with the exception of my concerns about space, reduced school district funding to Evans High School, and potential for staff burnout, the Evans Community School is functioning at a very high and sustainable level that is consistent with the very positive, though only suggestive and not causal, quantitative evidence observed. All indications suggest that this model would be very successful if imported to other school settings in Florida so long as comparable degrees of school and organizational buy-in and long-term commitments are secured and sufficient funding is allocated such that a community school akin to that operating at Evans High School can be implemented.

## **Conclusion**

While we are still a number of years away from it being possible to evaluate the implementation of community schools in Florida in the rigorous manner that would be most desirable, there are many reasons to be optimistic about the prospects for other community schools in the state of Florida. A formal causal evaluation of Evans Community School's successes is impossible, but all of the suggestive signs point toward considerable success. The limited number of available quantitative indicators suggest that the community school is likely substantially boosting academic success of students drawn from a very needy population; these findings are consistent with the limited existing empirical literature on community school performance. These quantitative indicators are corroborated by my professional impressions drawn from an extensive day-long site visit to Evans Community School that allowed me to gauge firsthand the likelihood that academic successes are coupled with social, emotional, and physical health successes that are currently not

measurable in a comparative framework, at least not with accessible data to which I am aware.

The governance and staffing structures, as well as the deep degree of collaboration and commitment by the partner organizations and the intellectual and managerial leadership of the University of Central Florida team are surely extremely important elements of the success of the Evans Community School. Having conducted my site visit, met with key personnel from a variety of organizations, reviewed the relevant materials, and carried out my review of the available quantitative data, **my professional judgment is that the Evans Community School model is one that is likely to yield considerable successes in other locations in Florida.** I believe that a gradual rollout of additional community schools, under the guidance and certification of the University of Central Florida team and its partner organizations, and with mechanisms put in place for formal evaluation in the medium-run and data collection and less formal evaluation in the intermediate period, is **highly warranted given all available information.**

Table 1: Changes over time in Evans High School versus twelve comparison schools along dimensions used for Florida high school grading

Indicator	Differences between 2013-14 and the average of 2008-09 and 2009-10			Differences between 2012-13 and the average of 2008-09 and 2009-10		
	Evans HS	Comparison school average	Difference-in-difference	Evans HS	Comparison school average	Difference-in-difference
Reading proficiency rate	+8	+7.1	+0.9	+9	+9.2	-0.2
Math proficiency rate	+2	-7.6	+9.6	-12	-8.7	-3.3
Writing proficiency rate	-15	-29.9	+14.9	-22	-29.9	+7.9
Science proficiency rate	+35	+27.3	+7.7	+64	+29.4	+34.6
Reading gains percentage	+13.5	+11.1	+2.4	+21.5	+17.4	+4.1
Math gains percentage	-4.5	-10.1	+5.6	-6.5	-6	-0.5
Gains among bottom 25% of reading	+15.5	+8.9	+6.6	+30.5	+19.9	+10.6
Gains among bottom 25% of math	-1.5	-3.8	+2.3	+1.5	-0.6	+2.1
Acceleration participation rate	+41.5	+17.3	+24.2	+30.5	+14.8	+15.7
Acceleration performance rate	+47.5	+16.6	+30.9	+35.5	+18.6	+16.9
Graduation rate	+1.5	-0.4	+1.9	+0.5	-1.2	+1.7
At-risk graduation rate	-8.5	-5.9	-2.6	-5.5	-4.4	-1.1
College reading readiness rate	+10.5	+6.3	+4.2	+16.3	-3.9	+20.4
College math readiness rate	-5.5	-1.4	-4.1	-4.5	-6.1	+1.6