
4-2016

Recommendations and Resources for Evaluating Community School Programs

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Fairman, Janet C. Ph.D. and Johnson, Amy F. PhD, "Recommendations and Resources for Evaluating Community School Programs" (2016). *School Improvement*. 5.
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Recommendations and Resources for Evaluating Community School Programs



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April 2016

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Orono, Maine



Published by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Maine.

MEPRI was established to conduct studies on Maine education policy and the Maine public education system for the Maine Legislature.

Statements and opinions by the authors do not necessarily reflect a position or policy of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute, nor any of its members, and no official endorsement by them should be inferred.

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This study was funded by the Maine State Legislature, and the University of Maine System

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report was prepared for the Maine State Legislature as part of the work of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). The legislative charge called for development of guidelines and recommendations for evaluating community school programs, as part of a pilot project for funding three community schools in Maine. This effort addresses recommendations made by the Essential Programs and Services (EPS) Commission in its final report (Millett & Hubbell, 2015) and supports the initiative outlined in legislative bill LD 956 “*An Act to Create Community Schools*” (127th Maine State Legislature, LD 956), which ultimately was incorporated into the state budget (Maine Public Law 2015, Chapter 267).

The legislative definition of “community schools” is intentionally broad and anticipates the possibility that community schools might vary significantly in their locally-developed goals and intervention programs. The needs of students and their families may vary by community, as does the array of existing resources available in the surrounding area. This leads to a broad set of possible strategies that may imply different expected outcomes and evaluation processes.

The grant program requires pilot schools to meet certain application criteria. Applications require schools to submit an audit or needs assessment, a community resources assessment, an outline of plans and goals based on the needs assessment and developed in collaboration with community partners, and a budget. Schools that receive awards will be required to develop an evaluation plan and to submit program evaluation reports to the Maine Department of Education (MDOE). This report is intended to assist schools in developing an evaluation plan that is feasible, cost efficient, and useful for informing whether their programs are providing expected results.

Positive Impacts from Community Schools

The broad concept for community schools centers on the idea that factors beyond the school day impact what and how students learn, and that families, other community members, and experiences outside the school day are integral to youth development. In this view, supporting healthy development of youth must go beyond academics to include attention to social and emotional development, mental health, physical health, and enrichment experiences. In addition to a focus on youth, community schools also seek to support the health, education, and welfare of parents, families, and other adults in the community. This goal is based on the idea that children do better in school and develop in a more healthy way when their families do better and they live in a healthy, thriving community. The Coalition for Community Schools defines a community school as “both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources.” In this view, the school is a “hub” that “brings together many stakeholders to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families, and communities” (Coalition for Community Schools, 2009).

The Coalition for Community Schools has published highlights of evaluation findings from 20 different community school evaluation projects from across the U.S. (Coalition for Community Schools, 2003). Broadly, the evidence from these 20 evaluations supports the

conclusion that community schools have positive outcomes across multiple goal areas. The studies linked participation data with specific kinds of outcomes for students, their families, schools, and communities. Positive outcomes were realized for students, their families, schools, and communities. Student outcomes included improved math and reading achievement, improved attitudes about school, improved behavior and attendance, improved self-esteem and other outcomes.

A recent report on findings from community school programs across New York state (NYSAN, 2016) emerged from a workgroup of education leaders, program coordinators, and researchers that met over a period of 18 months to share findings. The report points to the importance of partnerships for sustaining programs, the challenges of finding partners in rural areas, the need to develop data sharing systems and policies between schools and their partners to allow for collection of data to evaluate programs, the importance of having a program director to coordinate partnerships, and the competitive nature of grant seeking that impacts program sustainability.

Many of the findings and recommendations align with those of two recent MEPRI reports: a review of the literature on extended learning programs (Biddle & Mette, 2016), and a study of extended learning programs in six community schools in Maine (Mette, Biddle, & Fairman, 2016). These reports supported the idea that partnerships are critical for community schools to mobilize the resources to support a broader range of educational and health goals for students and their families. Community partnerships in these settings provided significant resources to support after-school programs for youth including: funding, staff, staff development, materials, and activity leaders with unique kinds of expertise. Schools and school districts cannot do it alone.

Evaluation Process

The evaluation process for community schools will be similar to that of any program evaluation. The starting point is establishing the goals of the program and each component of the program, and identifying important questions that stakeholders will have about the outcomes of the program. Program evaluation includes the following steps:

Planning:

1. Gather information about the design of the program.
2. Identify both broad and specific evaluation questions.
3. Identify potential types of measures and sources of data to address questions.
4. Develop a plan for how and when data will be collected and by whom.

Implementation:

5. Collect and analyzing data.
6. Share evaluation findings with stakeholders.

Adjustment & Iterative Improvement:

7. Use evaluation findings to improve program design, implementation, and ultimately outcomes.
8. Continue the evaluation process and feedback cycle.

Designing a community school and developing an evaluation plan begin with a logic model, which provides an effective planning and communication tool that specifies program inputs, activities, intended short-term and medium-term outcomes, and longer-term impacts for various targeted groups. A guide to developing logic models is available online as part of a larger “toolkit” for designing, planning, and evaluating community schools, produced by the Coalition for Community Schools and Stanford University (2009). This is reproduced in Appendix A of this report. Another excellent resource for developing logic models was published by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004) and is also available online. The online resources also provide sample surveys for evaluating community school initiatives.

Maine schools applying for the pilot program funding to establish or expand community school programs will need to specify their goals and objectives, among the many potential areas allowed by the legislation. Each community school program and application will have a unique set of goals, objectives, and initiatives. The evaluation designs will also be customized to meet the needs of each program. Schools will need to collect different kinds of data for evaluation depending on the nature of their program. For example, schools planning initiatives to improve student mental, physical health and nutrition will collect different kinds of data than schools focusing on student behavior and academic improvement. To assess impact, schools will need to collect data that measures outcomes and allows for a comparison of outcomes prior to the initiative and after the initiative, or outcomes for students who participate or receive services compared to students who do not participate or receive services.

The schools that are targeted for support in the pilot program are those that are currently facing challenges in student success or community vitality. If under-resourced, the schools may also struggle with having adequate staff resources to collect and analyze data. The guidance provided emphasizes evaluation measures that are readily available or able to be implemented with minimal expertise. Measures that demand strict adherence to a standard process, such as observation protocols that require prior formal training, are not encouraged.

Introduction

This report was prepared for the Maine State Legislature as part of the work of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). The legislative charge called for development of guidelines and recommendations for evaluating community school programs, as part of a pilot project for funding three community schools in Maine. This effort addresses recommendations made by the fall 2014 Essential Programs and Services (EPS) Commission in its final report (Millett & Hubbell, 2015) and supports the initiative outlined in legislative bill LD 956 “*An Act to Create Community Schools*” (127th Maine State Legislature, LD 956), which ultimately was incorporated into the state budget (Public Law 2015, Chapter 267). The Maine Department of Education (MDOE) is currently accepting applications until June 9, 2016 for the pilot program. The guidance and resources outlined in this report will be made available to school districts in the state as they are developing their applications so that it may provide helpful information to support their efforts.

This report begins with a brief overview describing the community schools pilot program and school requirements. We then describe our investigation of community school programs and evaluation methods nationally, and provide guidance and caveats on developing community school evaluation plans and selecting data collection methods suited for different kinds of program goals and initiatives. We describe resources that are publicly available and which have been researched to support program evaluation. In the final sections of the report, we describe anticipated challenges for schools in meeting the requirement for program evaluation, and we offer broad recommendations for supporting program implementation and evaluation.

Description of the Pilot Program

The legislation authorizing the pilot program defines a “community school” as “. . . a public elementary or secondary school that:

- a) Participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships; and
- b) Provides access to services under paragraph A to students, families and the community, such as access during the school year to services before school hours, after school hours and during the weekend, as well as access to such services during the summer. (Maine PL 2015, Chapter 429)

This definition is intentionally broad and anticipates the possibility that community schools might vary significantly in their locally-developed goals and intervention programs that serve students and families in their communities. Further, schools may choose to implement different kinds of interventions and programs at different times and in different combinations, depending on the needs and resources available.

The pilot program requires schools that apply to meet certain criteria. The legislation specifies that priority in awarding projects will be given to school units with at least 40% or more students who are economically disadvantaged. The MDOE funding provides up to \$150,000 per year for five years to three community school pilots. Districts are not prohibited from having more than one school apply for funding. Schools must be designated by their district school boards as community schools, and both established and newly-designated schools may qualify. The application requires schools to submit an audit or needs assessment, a community resources assessment, an outline of plans and goals based on the needs assessment and developed in collaboration with community partners, and a budget. The application form is included as Appendix B. Awards may help to support the salary of a community school coordinator. Audits or needs assessments must include and address three areas:

- a) A community needs audit to identify academic, physical, social, emotional, health, mental health and civics needs of students and their families that may affect student learning and academic achievement;
- b) A community resource assessment of potential resources, services and opportunities available within or near the community that students, families and community members may access and integrate into the community school; and
- c) For an existing school that has been designated as a community school, an operations and instructional audit.

While the process for conducting audits is not specified in the legislation, schools might draw upon a variety of methods to collect information and data to assess community needs—those of students and their families. These methods might include but are not limited to: holding informational meetings or forums in the school and community, conducting smaller focus groups with stakeholder groups, conducting online and/ or paper surveys, holding meetings with community organizations and businesses who might be potential partners, and collecting documents to utilize existing data, staffing and budgetary information.

The results of these needs and resources assessments should inform the next steps in the proposal planning process when schools determine the types of activities they intend to implement if selected for grant funding. The legislation establishing the pilot community schools grant program specifies a number of different programs that may be supported with the supplemental funding. Schools are expected to provide a rationale in their grant applications to demonstrate how their proposed supports will develop or enhance community resources to address demonstrated needs and improve outcomes for students. Figure 1 details the complete list of possibilities, grouped into six categories: health, academic support, student and parent engagement, youth development, community engagement and community development, and other social supports. The alphabetic labels align with the original order and designation in legislation (PL 2015, Chapter 429).

Figure 1: Community School Program Possibilities

Health

- A. Primary medical or dental care;
- B. Nurse home visitation services;
- C. Mental health treatment and counseling services;
- D. Developmentally appropriate physical education activities;
- Q. Nutrition education;

Academic Support

- E. Academic enrichment activities;
- F. Specialized instructional support services;
- K. Early childhood education;
- S. Remedial education and enrichment activities, including expanded learning time;
- T. Summer or after-school enrichment and learning experiences;

Student & Parent Engagement

- G. Teacher home visits;
- H. Programs designed to improve student attendance at school, including programs that provide assistance to students who are truant or who have been suspended or expelled;
- L. Programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy;
- M. Parenting education activities;
- N. Parenting leadership development activities;
- O. Child care services;

Youth Development

- I. Mentoring and other youth development programs, including peer mentoring and conflict mediation;
- V. Juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs;

Community Engagement & Community Development

- J. Community service and service-learning opportunities;
- P. Youth and adult job training, internship opportunities and career counseling services;
- R. Adult education, including instruction in English as a second language;

Other Social Supports

- U. Legal services;
- W. Homelessness prevention services; or
- X. Any appropriate services and programs authorized by a community school that are consistent with the services and programs specified in paragraphs A to W.

The focus of this report is on program evaluation, and we discuss and describe broadly the process and methods for evaluating programs. Schools that receive a community school award will be required to develop a program evaluation plan and to submit evaluation reports annually to the Maine Department of Education (MDOE). Because each selected community school will have a unique set of goals and initiatives, each must develop an evaluation plan that is customized to their specific project. The Maine Education Policy Research Institute will consult with selected pilot projects and provide technical assistance; this report is intended to facilitate that process. Therefore, we offer some broad advice and resources for conducting program evaluation in general, as well as some specific guidance for collecting data to evaluate different kinds of program goals. These guidelines are described in later sections of the report, and some materials are also appended to the report or referenced in the bibliography.

Methodology

The authors used a variety of search terms to explore the research literature on community schools and evaluations of community schools. There is a limited but growing literature on the community school concept and reports of small studies of individual cases. Some reports were written by program developers or community school organizations, while others were authored by independent researchers. Most often, these reports focus on a specific goal and program component, such as: engaging families of color, reducing truancy, reducing out-of-home placements of youth, encouraging healthy lifestyles, and increasing youth voice. Other research papers look at the experiences of community schools more broadly and reflect on the development of community partnerships, role of universities as partners, and sustaining partnerships. Program evaluations are available from schools across the U.S., and provide data

on both academic and other kinds of outcomes for students, families, schools, and communities. We highlight selected reports of research and evaluation of community schools, as well as trustworthy resources for school districts designing community school evaluation plans, in the sections that follow.

Findings from Existing Reports

Community School Concept

The broad concept for community schools centers on the idea that factors beyond the school day impact what and how students learn, and that families, other community members, and experiences outside the school day are integral to youth development. In this view, supporting healthy development of youth must go beyond academics to include attention to social and emotional development, mental health, physical health, and enrichment experiences. Focusing on the needs of the whole child can improve the child's readiness to learn and achieve academically and to interact with others productively. The ultimate goal is a student that is ready to participate in continued education and/or is ready to participate in the workforce.

In addition to a focus on youth, community schools also seek to support the health, education, and welfare of parents, families, and other adults in the community. This goal is based on the idea that children do better in school and develop in a more healthy way when their families do better and they live in a healthy, thriving community. The Coalition for Community Schools defines a community school as "both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources." In this view, the school is a "hub" that "brings together many stakeholders to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families, and communities" (Coalition for Community Schools, 2009).

Partnerships are critical for community schools to mobilize the resources to support a broader range of educational and health goals for students and their families. Schools and school districts cannot do it alone. In a recent report of the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (Mette, Biddle, and Fairman, 2016), researchers investigated extended learning programs for students in six schools in diverse settings in Maine. All six settings would meet the legislative definition of community schools. This study found that community partnerships provided significant resources to support after-school programs for youth including: funding, staff, staff development, materials and activity leaders with unique kinds of expertise. However, the study also found that partnerships took time and effort to develop and sustain, and may demand more time than a single coordinator or part-time coordinator may be able to manage. Further, the authors concluded that rural or geographically isolated communities have fewer opportunities for partnerships than more urban regions.

Community schools provide various resources or inputs, which may be funded through grants, district funding, fundraising efforts, or external organizations and in-kind donations. The resources generally include: a community school coordinator, staff, staff training, funding, community partners, facilities or space, and broader support from the community (see Logic Model in Appendix A). Stakeholders collaborate to develop program goals, and design and deliver programs and activities, which take place both at the school and elsewhere in the community. Programs have both short-term and longer-term impacts for participants, whether they are youth, families, or other members of the community. A continuous cycle of program evaluation and feedback to improve program outcomes is needed to ensure that the community school achieves its intended goals.

Community School Evaluations

The Coalition for Community Schools has published highlights of evaluation findings from 20 different community school evaluation projects from across the U.S. (Coalition for Community Schools, 2003). These evaluations include national models of community schools (Children's Aid Society, School of the 21st century, Communities in Schools, and New York City Beacons), state-funded or statewide models in diverse states (California, Kentucky, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, and Texas), and school district or local initiatives. While many of the evaluations are for programs implemented in several schools located in urban settings, some evaluations focus on programs in rural settings. Broadly, the evidence from these 20 evaluations supports the conclusion that community schools have positive outcomes across multiple goal areas. The studies linked participation data with specific kinds of outcomes for students, their families, schools, and communities (Coalition for Community Schools, 2003). Positive **student** outcomes in the evaluated programs included improved performance on math and reading assessments for students who participated in after-school programs, improved reading performance for English Language Learners who participated in after-school programs, reduced gaps in achievement within the schools, improved positive attitudes about school, improved school attendance, reduced dropout rates, improved student behavior, and increased self-esteem and aspirations. **Families** showed increased engagement in students' learning, increased involvement in the school, improved communications with teachers, improved stability in families, improved nutrition and healthy eating habits, and parents' increased completion of a GED diploma. **Schools** experienced improved relationships with families, stronger community support, increased teacher satisfaction, and a more positive school environment. And finally,

Communities reported better use of school buildings, improved rapport between students and community members, and improved relationships between school and community organizations.

An evaluation of a local initiative across five community schools in Redwood City, California (Castrechini & London, 2012) serving a diverse student population, found that students' participation in after-school programs improved their motivation and self-esteem, which were in turn linked with improved academic performance. The authors note that less attention nationally has been focused on students' social and emotional development, despite the continued research findings that students' sense of connectedness and belonging in their school is an important factor influencing academic achievement. They also outline several implications for policy from their findings. One important implication is the need for school districts and their community partners to establish a way to share certain kinds of data to evaluate the impact of program initiatives. Infrastructure for data collection and management, staff capacity, and policies may need to be developed to allow for programs to make the linkages between program inputs and outcomes. Without strong evaluation design, community schools cannot convincingly communicate the value of their programs.

A recent report on findings from community school programs across New York state (NYSAN, 2016) emerged from a workgroup of education leaders, program coordinators, and researchers that met over a period of 18 months to share findings. Many of the findings and recommendations align with those of two recent MEPRI reports: a review of the literature on extended learning programs (Biddle & Mette, 2016), and the study of extended learning programs in six schools in Maine described above (Mette, Biddle, & Fairman, 2016). Findings that were consistent between the New York state report and the MEPRI reports include the following:

- community partnerships are important for leveraging resources to expand learning opportunities
- the quality of the program(s) and quality of the partnership(s) are crucial to generating positive outcomes
- a dedicated director is crucial for coordinating the partnerships and for the success of the program
- partnerships take time to develop
- the current funding for expanded learning opportunities is not adequate to meet the demand and need, and sustainability of programs is uncertain
- rural communities are more challenged due to fewer potential partners and difficulty staffing programs
- the competitive grant process creates barriers to sustainability

Additional findings from the New York state report:

- most community schools include after-school and expanded learning time (90% nationally, more than that in New York state)
- some expanded learning time programs have incorporated medical, dental, mental health, and social services, and adult education
- technical assistance may be needed to support programs and is not available to all programs
- there are barriers to sharing data between schools and community partners, which limits the ability to measure outcomes
- transportation for programs is a critical element and costs may be a barrier

Consistently across the literature there are themes related to inequities in local capacity or resources between urban and rural community school programs, the challenges and importance of community partnerships to support programs, the difficulty of sustaining adequate funding for programs once they're established, the challenge of meeting the demand or need in communities, and the need to address barriers that prevent schools and community partners from sharing data that is necessary for evaluating program effectiveness.

Designing Program Evaluations

Each program evaluation must be designed to fit the unique components and goals of a particular program, and to answer the questions that program funders, staff, and stakeholders have about the program's implementation and results. Formative evaluations are used during early to mid-implementation phases of a program and allow for evaluation findings to inform programmatic decisions that serve to improve implementation fidelity or efficacy and ultimately results. Summative evaluations are used toward the end of a funding cycle or in a later phase of program implementation, to assess the cumulative results of program activities.

Program evaluation requires developing an evaluation plan, based on a solid understanding of the program's design and goals, and what questions need to be answered. Evaluation follows a process, but must also adapt as needed to changes in the program implementation or new questions that are raised. We outline here the basic stages of program evaluation design:

Planning Phase:

1. ***Gathering information about the design of the program***—the components, activities, participants, goals and intended results. A logic model is valuable to inform this first step. Logic models are described in more detail in the next section.
2. ***Identifying both broad and specific evaluation questions*** in collaboration with stakeholders, which will drive the design of the evaluation.
3. ***Identifying potential types and sources of data*** to answer each evaluation question. Using the evaluation questions as a starting point, the methodology for collecting data to answer those questions is developed. For example, types of data might include: student participation records, student assessment results, student behavioral referral records, surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. Sources of data might include: program records or documents; school records; parents, students, staff or stakeholders.
4. ***Developing a plan for how and when data will be collected and by whom***. This is a detailed plan, typically using tables or charts, to specify the timeline for data collection activities. Time must also be allowed to develop data collection tools, such as survey instruments or interview questions.

Implementation Phase:

5. ***Collecting and analyzing data.*** Depending on the nature of the data, collection and analysis may take a few minutes or several weeks. This translates to staff time and funding. Some data may need to be re-organized or reconfigured before it is ready to analyze. Different types of expertise and software tools may be needed to analyze more complex data quantitative data (e.g., student assessment outcomes) or qualitative data (focus group or individual interview transcripts).
 6. ***Sharing evaluation findings with stakeholders.*** Evaluation findings are sometimes shared informally with program staff and coordinators, particularly during the early implementation phase. Results may also be shared in formal ways through reports or presentations geared toward community stakeholder groups, the general public, or research community.
1. Adjustment and Iterative Improvement:
7. ***Using evaluation findings to improve program design, implementation, and ultimately outcomes.*** The ideal use for evaluation is to allow for a feedback loop which informs program decisions, increases effectiveness of implementation, and strengthens positive program results. Making adjustments to the program may necessitate revising the evaluation plan or data collection methods as well.
 8. ***Continuing the evaluation process and feedback cycle.*** If programs continue indefinitely, the evaluation process would continue with the same feedback loop for continuous monitoring and improvement of the program. As programs mature, the nature of the evaluation may also shift. If programs will end, or a funding cycle will end, then a summative and comprehensive evaluation may be called for. In many cases, the potential for renewed funding and continued support of stakeholders will strongly depend on documented evidence of program results.

Logic Models

Logic models are a commonly used visual tool to conceptualize and describe interventions or programs. They also serve to guide program planning, implementation, and evaluation efforts in a more practical way. Further, logic models provide an effective way to communicate with different stakeholder groups about a program. Logic models describe a theory of action for how an intervention may logically influence outcomes and achieve a broader goal or intended impacts.

Most often, logic models are depicted as a visual figure or flow chart with boxes and arrows, listing specified *resources or inputs* (such as staffing, training, or materials supported by fiscal resources), that will support program activities which, in turn, lead to certain immediate *outputs* (such as participants completing a program), then short-term (1-3 years) and medium-term (4-6 years) *outcomes*, and finally *impacts* (longer-term outcomes, 7-10 years). Logic models can also include mediators, intervening factors, or contexts which may influence outcomes and impacts. Outcomes and impacts can also specify targets or benchmarks for improvement. For example, increasing the high school student graduation rate from 80% to 90% or reducing the high school drop-out rate by 50% might be stated as intended outcomes, while the goal of improved college and career readiness of youth might be a longer-term impact.

Many different images and examples of logic models can be readily viewed online. One excellent guide on developing logic models was published by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004) and is available online. Another guide that is part of a larger “toolkit” for designing, planning, and evaluating community schools, produced by the Coalition for Community Schools and Stanford University (2009), is also available online. Their sample logic model for community schools is reproduced in Appendix A of this report.

Resources to Support Program Evaluation

There are helpful published resources available online from national organizations that support the community schools model, most notably from the Coalition for Community Schools and the Children’s Aid Society. In addition, MEPRI researchers have prepared guidance targeted specifically at the rural Maine high-poverty schools that are anticipated to apply for the pilot grant funding. This may help schools that do not have advanced experience in program evaluation to narrow the list of possible evaluation measures to those that are likely to be readily

available and easy to implement in projects of this scale. These resources are described in the next section and summarized in Appendix C.

Published Resources

The Coalition for Community Schools is a national consortium of community schools that maintains a website and links to valuable tools and resources to assist communities and schools in developing and evaluating programs. The Coalition's evaluation toolkit (2009) is available online, and provides an excellent and easy to read overview of the evaluation process, and also provides specific tools and examples to illustrate each step of the process. The toolkit provides: a sample logic model for community schools, examples of indicators that relate to program goals or results, sample evaluation questions and data collection methods from actual community school studies, and guidance on the evaluation process and communicating evaluation results. The Coalition website provides sample survey instruments from evaluation studies referenced in their research report (2003). These surveys primarily consist of parent, student, and teacher surveys, but do not currently include surveys of community partners. A list of the 45 surveys with active links and references can be accessed online (http://www.communityschools.org/resources/data_collection_instrument_guide.aspx). The Coalition maintains a director of 5,000 national and international community schools. Information about studies or evaluations of community schools can also be found through the Coalition's website, their toolkit publication (2009), and their publication on evaluation findings (2003).

The Coalition's resources provide a helpful starting point for communities that are planning for a community school and evaluation of programs, and we highly recommend these resources. However, the Coalition's toolkit does not create evaluation designs for schools, but

rather provides some guidance and tools to support that effort. Schools will still need to develop their own evaluation plan, and one that meets their unique needs. The toolkit may not address all aspects of a community school program or goals.

One piece that we found missing in the Coalition's toolkit was guidance on broader data collection from community partners. Community organizations are important stakeholders and partners in designing and implementing activities as part of the community school. Conducting periodic interviews or surveys of these stakeholders would be an important part of an evaluation plan.

A second piece missing from the Coalition's toolkit is a broader set of program goals and indicators for community schools. The toolkit includes goals related to: pre-K school readiness, student attendance and engagement in school, students' sense of belonging at school, parent or family engagement with the school, student academic success, physical and mental health and safety of students, and community climate. However, schools and communities may wish to target other kinds of goals as well including, but not limited to: cultural enrichment experiences for students, service learning opportunities, parent education, job training, adult education, homelessness services, or legal services.

In 2013 the Children's Aid Society published another helpful report in collaboration with The Finance Project entitled "Measuring the Social Return on Investment in Community Schools: A Practical Guide." This report is particularly focused on helping schools to demonstrate the financial benefits of investing in the Community Schools model. It explains a process for calculating return on investment that is likely beyond the scope of analysis that is feasible or appropriate for this pilot grant project. However, the report (<http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/publications/measuring-social-return-investment->

community-schools-practical-guide) provides conceptual guidance for approaching program evaluation, and also includes clear and replicable examples of data checklists for various types of program interventions.

Specific indicators for these kinds of goals, along with appropriate data collection methods and instruments, need to be identified or developed by schools. The following section provides guidance on the types of measures schools may wish to include in their evaluation plan.

Identifying Evaluation Measures Aligned to Program Activities and Goals

As described in the prior section about the evaluation plan design process, schools must consider their goals and objectives when deciding what data to collect about their programs. Without relevant measures that are aligned to the program components, leadership will not be able to gauge whether their activities are having their intended effects. These measures typically include both short-term and long-term indicators of success. In addition, programs must collect data about how well their programs are implemented, and who participates. An exemplary program design that is poorly run or does not include the students who need it most will not reach its full potential. Thus, so-called “process” measures of program implementation are also critical for helping practitioners to interpret their results.

When taken as a whole, the number of possible data points to collect from students, staff, families, and community members can be daunting. It is thus necessary to prioritize data collection around measures that are readily obtainable, easy to administer, and provide actionable information. It is important that the data collection resources are proportional to the investment (approximately \$50,000 per pilot community school per year). As a rule of thumb, resources for program evaluation should not exceed 10% of the total project cost, or roughly \$5,000 per year (some years can budget more resources than others). The following table provides guidance on

some of the most commonly recommended data indicators in the community schools evaluation resources, along with comments on their appropriateness for Maine’s current pilot program. The first grouping of general measures are applicable to all types or proposed programs. The subsequent sections address possible measures *if* a school implements an activity or program intervention in one of these areas: health, academic support, student and parent engagement, youth development, community engagement and community development, and other social supports.

Table 1: Suggestions for Potential Evaluation Measures for Various Community School Programs and Activities

Potential Measure	Recommendation level	Comments on Usefulness and Feasibility
General Measures: Foundational for all types of programs or activities		
Program Participation	Necessary	Individual level attendance/participation data in programs and activities. Key data component of all evaluation models. Participants can be students, teachers, family members, community members depending on the program and goals. Core foundation data for tracking impacts (or explaining lack of impacts); if an intervention is effective, results should differ for participants and non-participants.
School attendance	Necessary	Individual student attendance data is useful for several purposes: identifying students in need of intervention (i.e. chronic absentees or tardiness), estimating the extent to which students are exposed to in-school interventions, and calculating changes in individual and overall school attendance over time.
Student achievement / individual assessments	Necessary	Student achievement data can serve as baseline information (individual level or overall school / group averages), and also a measure of program impact. The achievement measure should match the learning that is expected from the program activity (i.e. if the program is related to reading, the assessment data should be aligned to the specific reading skills addressed in the program). Grades and standardized test data are usually readily available to schools; if more targeted assessments are used, new assessment instruments and data collection mechanisms may be needed.
Program quality	Recommended	In addition to relevant student participation and assessment data, it is advisable to collect data to gauge whether programs are well-implemented. May include informal observations, surveys (of students, parents, and/or staff), interviews, or focus groups. Formal observations with a structured protocol (i.e. requiring a trained observer) are typically too resource-intensive for projects of this scale.

Health Intervention: Measures for medical, dental, mental health, fitness, nutrition programs		
Individual health data	Use with caution	In general, privacy restrictions (HIPAA laws) as well as responsible treatment of human subjects mean that collection of identifiable student health information is rarely justified. Schools may have ready access to some data such as immunizations, or vision and hearing tests administered by school staff, that can be summarized from existing administrative sources.
Anonymous health data	Use selectively	In rare cases, it may make sense to consider collection of pre- and post-data on student health outcomes to assess impacts of a specific intervention. Putting provisions in place to de-identify the data is preferable to obtaining identifiable data. However, this introduces a level of complexity in data handling and the need for parental permission that greatly increases cost and effort required, and may not be worthwhile.
Summary / average health data	Recommended	Typically a more efficient option that protects student privacy is to collect aggregate (summary) data from the relevant health program providers on a regular basis to track trends over time. This is most feasible for programs such as fitness, wellness, nutrition, or preventative care.
Academic Support: Measures for extended learning, tutoring, or enrichment programs		
Student perceptions	Recommended	Surveys to assess attitudes towards school, self-efficacy, college and career aspirations, etc. as relevant
Other student academic outcomes	Recommended	Graduation rates, dropout rates, college enrollment, college persistence. Appropriate for certain program interventions and for long-term outcomes.
Student and parent engagement activities measures		
Student perceptions	Recommended	Surveys to assess attitudes towards school, self-efficacy, college and career aspirations, etc. as relevant
Parent perceptions	Recommended	Surveys, interviews, or focus groups to assess parent engagement level and perceptions of program impacts. Self-reported data on parenting behaviors.
Youth development activities measures		
Student perceptions	Necessary	Surveys to assess attitudes towards school, self-efficacy, college and career aspirations, etc. as relevant
School climate	Recommended	Summary data on disciplinary actions (suspensions, expulsions, etc.), bullying incidents.
Community engagement & community development measures		
Community perceptions	Necessary	Surveys to assess perceptions of community partnerships, school quality, and general feedback.
Other measures		
Measures of community health	Dependent on programs	Long term outcomes: Employment rates, crime rates, incarceration rates, student mobility rates, poverty rates, summary health indicators, etc.

Common Evaluation Challenges and Possible Solutions

It is anticipated that some of the schools that may benefit most from pilot grant funding are small, rural, and under-resourced. These settings typically do not have extensive experience in conducting program evaluations and do not have many administrative staff members to contribute to data collection and analysis. With the needs of these schools in mind, we present here some expected challenges and strategies for overcoming them.

Challenge 1: Designing an evaluation plan. Schools that are selected for funding will need to develop an evaluation plan as one of their early requirements. This may be unfamiliar.

Moreover, schools that intend to use grant funds to hire a coordinator may not have that person in place at the outset of the project.

- The application form itself was designed to lay some groundwork, including identification of high and low-priority goals and inclusion of possible indicators of success in the community schools plan.
- This report, and particularly the resources in Appendix C, provide a starting point for approaching the evaluation plan development. The MEPRI researchers authoring this report are available for phone and email consultation to the selected schools.
- Selected schools may wish to collaborate when designing their plans, particularly if they have similar types of interventions. The grant coordinators at the selected schools are likely to be useful professional resources to each other.
- Make use of the public data available in the Maine Data Warehouse to compare basic data measures with peer districts on key indicators.

Challenge 2: Lack of internal staff expertise. Schools will be very familiar with some of their data (e.g. student assessments) but may need additional support for collecting or designing new types of measures.

- The most important strategy is to develop a plan that is feasible to implement (see above). The toolkit in Appendix C identifies existing survey instruments that can be used or slightly modified rather than building new items from scratch.
- Collaborating with other schools may also be an effective strategy for this challenge. If schools can choose similar measures, survey questions, and interview methods, they may pool their expertise and produce better results. They may also gain even more meaningful insights into their results with the ability to compare data across sites.

- It may be most efficient to hire an external evaluation consultant on a per-diem basis to help design surveys and develop interview question protocols, and possibly to conduct interviews. Consultants can also provide technical assistance to teach grant coordinators or other district staff about appropriate ways to analyze their data. This investment could have future benefits by building capacity within the district. Applicants that have known challenges with this expertise may wish to budget for some outside assistance.
- For data collection using interviews and focus groups, it is often preferable to have an outside person (i.e. not the grant coordinator) asking the questions in order to ensure honest feedback. Grant coordinators in the pilot schools may find it useful to swap schools to interview in order to avoid hiring an external person. Another option is to consult with nearby (non-pilot) districts to possibly identify individuals who may wish to trade in-kind interview services to gain insight into their own contexts.

Challenge 3: Resources to implement evaluation plan. Even the most efficient evaluation plan will require time and energy to carry out. Given the size of the grant fund and the need to maximize the resources used to improve services, these additional tips may help to streamline.

- One strategy for reducing the level of effort required to meet reporting requirements is to propose uneven reporting levels. Schools can focus their evaluation work on a limited number of program goals or components each year, with a more comprehensive report at selected appropriate points. Annual reports in lean years may cover just basic measures and programmatic updates. This strategy can target the energy spent on qualitative data collection (interviews and focus groups) in a different area each year. In this design, it is critical to stage some basic data collection each year to inform program feedback and improvements, but more in-depth evaluation questions can be timed in the year where they can best be answered.
- Barriers that are encountered along the way, such as policies that prevent data sharing with other schools or community partners, should be captured and described in annual reports. Selected schools may need to advocate for themselves as well as future community schools to effect any needed policy changes.

Conclusion

The impending funding of three pilot community schools presents an opportunity for the state to explore this model for enhancing student outcomes and community vitality. It is important to evaluate the impact of the changes in these settings in order to assess whether funding should be expanded. This report provides practical guidance to future community schools, and presents suggestions for engaging in program evaluations that are both useful and feasible to implement.

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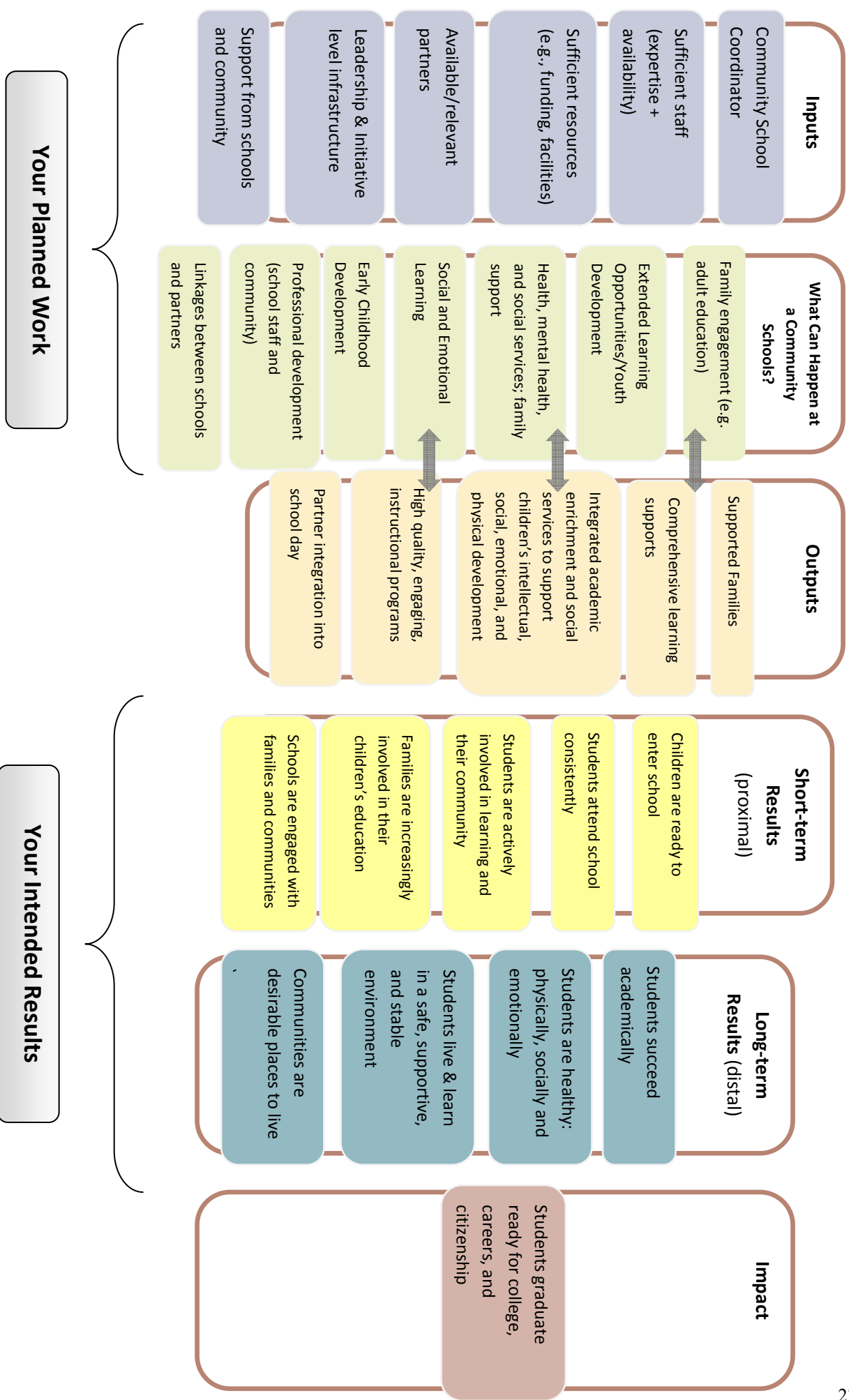
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Author Information

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Community Schools: A Results-Based Logic Model



STATE APPLICATION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PILOT

I. BACKGROUND

1. Basis

Maine Legislative Action of the First Regular Session of the 127th Legislature, in the Budget bill, Public Law 2015, Chapter 267.

2. Department parameters - Pilot project for community schools

The Department is authorized to designate 3 community schools established in accordance with 20-A MRSA Chapter 333 as part of a 5-year pilot project beginning in the 2016-2017 school year. In providing funds under this subsection, the Commissioner shall give priority to a qualified school administrative unit in which at least 40% of the students are economically disadvantaged students as determined pursuant to section 15675, subsection 2 and that has more economically disadvantaged students than other qualified school administrative units under this subsection.

The Commissioner shall provide state funding to the school administrative units in which the designated community schools are located and may employ a state community school coordinator to implement this pilot project. Annual state allocations for this pilot project may not exceed \$150,000. This section is repealed July 1, 2021.

II. DEFINITIONS

1. A “Community school” is a public elementary or secondary school that:

- A. Participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships; and
- B. Provides access to services under paragraph A to students, families and the community, such as access during the school year to services before school hours, after school hours and during the weekend, as well as access to such services during the summer.

2. A “Community partner” is a provider of one or more of the following services to students, families or community members:

- A. Primary medical or dental care;
- B. Nurse home visitation services;
- C. Mental health treatment and counseling services;
- D. Developmentally appropriate physical education activities;
- E. Academic enrichment activities;
- F. Specialized instructional support services;
- G. Teacher home visits;
- H. Programs designed to improve student attendance at school, including programs that provide assistance to students who are truant or who have been suspended or expelled;

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- I. Mentoring and other youth development programs, including peer mentoring and conflict mediation;
- J. Community service and service-learning opportunities;
- K. Early childhood education;
- L. Programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy;
- M. Parenting education activities;
- N. Parenting leadership development activities;
- O. Child care services;
- P. Youth and adult job training, internship opportunities and career counseling services;
- Q. Nutrition education;
- R. Adult education, including instruction in English as a second language;
- S. Remedial education and enrichment activities, including expanded learning time;
- T. Summer or after-school enrichment and learning experiences;
- U. Legal services;
- V. Juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs;
- W. Homelessness prevention services; or
- X. Any appropriate services and programs authorized by a community school that are consistent with the services and programs specified in items A to W.

III. REQUIREMENTS

1. Establishment of a community school

Beginning October 1, 2015, a school board may designate an existing school or establish a new school as a community school.

2. Community school plan goals

A community school shall collaborate with community partners to provide services to students, families and community members that promote student success while addressing the needs of the whole student. A school board may designate or establish a community school as long as the community school plan developed by the school board is consistent with the following goals:

- A. Improving student learning and development by providing support for students to enable them to graduate college-ready and career-ready;
- B. Improving the coordination and integration, accessibility and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for students attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools;
- C. Enabling educators and school personnel to complement and enrich efforts to improve academic achievement and other results related to student learning and development;
- D. Ensuring that children have the physical, social and emotional well-being to come to school ready to engage in the learning process every day;
- E. Promoting and enabling family and community engagement in the education of children;
- F. Enabling more efficient use of federal, state, local and private sector resources that serve children and families;

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- G. Facilitating the coordination and integration of programs and services operated by community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations and state, local and tribal governments;
- H. Engaging students as resources for their communities; and
- I. Engaging the business community and other community organizations as partners.

3. Audit

Following the designation or establishment of a community school, but prior to the opening of a community school, a school board shall conduct:

- A. A community needs audit to identify the academic, physical, social, emotional, health, mental health and civic needs of students and their families that may affect student learning and academic achievement;
- B. A community resource assessment of potential resources, services and opportunities available within or near the community that students, families and community members may access and integrate into the community school; and
- C. For an existing school that has been designated as a community school, an operations and instructional audit (Describe how you will integrate the community needs of students affecting learning and achievement and the services/resources that families can access within the facilities structure of your school).

4. Plan

A school board shall develop a community school plan for each school designated or established as a community school.

- A. When developing a community school plan for the establishment of a new community school, the school board shall use the results of the community resource assessment under subsection 3, paragraph B to address the specific needs identified in the community needs audit under subsection 3, paragraph A
- B. When developing a community school plan for the designation of an existing school as a community school, the school board shall use the results of the community resource assessment under subsection 3, paragraph B to address the specific needs identified in the community needs audit under subsection 3, paragraph A and the operations and instructional audit under subsection 3, paragraph C.
- C. A community school plan must coordinate, integrate and enhance services for students, families and community members at the community school to improve the academic achievement of students and increase family and community involvement in education.
- D. A community school plan must include cost estimates or an operational budget for the specified educational, developmental, family, health and other comprehensive services to be provided by the community school.
- E. When developing a community school plan for the establishment of a new community school, a school board shall designate a community school coordinator to manage the partnerships with community partners participating in the community school plan.

5. Evaluation

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Schools selected to receive funding as part of this pilot Community Schools project will be expected to develop an evaluation plan with assistance from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI). MEPRI will work with funding recipients to develop annual reporting measures that are aligned to the project goals, provide useful information about program outcomes, and are feasible to collect within available resources. Evaluation measures may include participation data, surveys of community engagement, data relevant to the expected program outcomes, or other relevant indicators. Annual reports will be required and continued funding will be subject to demonstration that the proposed activities are implemented as described.

APPLICATION for COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PILOT

School District Name:	
Superintendent Name:	
Tel:	E-mail:
Address:	
Participating School:	
Principal Name:	
Tel:	E-mail:
Address:	
Has this school been designated by the School Board as a Community School? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <i>(If yes, you will be asked to provide an operations and instructional audit if selected for funding.)</i>	
Has the included Community School Plan been approved by the School Board? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If no, when will the plan be considered for approval (Month and Year)?:	
Has a Community School Coordinator been designated by the School Board? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If no, when will a Coordinator be selected and approved (Month and Year)?:	

To the best of my knowledge all information provided in the enclosed proposal, both programmatic and financial, is complete and accurate at the time of submission.

Superintendent Signature	Date	Name (Typed)
School Board Chair Signature	Date	Name (Typed)

Appendix B

A. Community Partners

1. Which of these services you intend to provide at the community school(s) if selected for the pilot project? (Check all that apply)

- A. Primary medical or dental care;
- B. Nurse home visitation services;
- C. Mental health treatment and counseling services;
- D. Developmentally appropriate physical education activities;
- E. Academic enrichment activities;
- F. Specialized instructional support services;
- G. Teacher home visits;
- H. Programs designed to improve student attendance at school, including programs that provide assistance to students who are truant or who have been suspended or expelled;
- I. Mentoring and other youth development programs, including peer mentoring and conflict mediation;
- J. Community service and service-learning opportunities;
- K. Early childhood education;
- L. Programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy;
- M. Parenting education activities;
- N. Parenting leadership development activities;
- O. Child care services;
- P. Youth and adult job training, internship opportunities and career counseling services;
- Q. Nutrition education;
- R. Adult education, including instruction in English as a second language;
- S. Remedial education and enrichment activities, including expanded learning time;
- T. Summer or after-school enrichment and learning experiences;
- U. Legal services;
- V. Juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs;
- W. Homelessness prevention services; or
- X. Any appropriate services and programs authorized by a community school that are consistent with the services and programs specified in paragraphs A to W.
Please describe: _____

2. Please list the community partners that will collaborate with the community school to help provide students, families and community members with access to these services:

B. Community Needs Assessment

1. Which of these areas present challenges for students and families in your school community that you believe may negatively affect student learning and academic achievement? For each area identified as a challenge, provide your reason(s). Include supporting data where available.

- Academic needs

- Physical needs

- Social needs

- Emotional needs

- Health needs

- Mental health needs

- Civic needs

- Other _____

Appendix B

C. Project Goals

For each of the Community School goals listed in items A through I below, indicate how critical the goal is to your project by rating it with a 1 (primary or high priority goal), 2 (secondary or medium priority goal), or 3 (tertiary or low priority goal) in the space provided.

- A. _____ Improving student learning and development by providing support for students to enable them to graduate college-ready and career-ready;
- B. _____ Improving the coordination and integration, accessibility and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for students attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools;
- C. _____ Enabling educators and school personnel to complement and enrich efforts to improve academic achievement and other results related to student learning and development;
- D. _____ Ensuring that children have the physical, social and emotional well-being to come to school ready to engage in the learning process every day;
- E. _____ Promoting and enabling family and community engagement in the education of children;
- F. _____ Enabling more efficient use of federal, state, local and private sector resources that serve children and families;
- G. _____ Facilitating the coordination and integration of programs and services operated by community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations and state, local and tribal governments;
- H. _____ Engaging students as resources for their communities; and
- I. _____ Engaging the business community and other community organizations as partners.

D. Community School Plan

Attach a plan, not to exceed five single-spaced pages, that describes the Community School Plan and addresses each of the following questions.

1. What activities or resources will the school implement if selected as a pilot school?
2. How will selection as pilot a Community School facilitate coordination, integration and enhancement of the services listed in section A in the community school?
3. How does the plan address the community needs identified in section B?
4. How will the plan address goals A through I in section C?
5. How will the plan increase family and community involvement in education?
6. If the project is successful, what visible signs will be apparent to indicate progress toward meeting the goals?

E. Budget

Attach an operational budget or cost estimates for the specified educational, developmental, family, health and other comprehensive services to be provided by the community school using the funding requested from the pilot project. Maximum award amount: \$ 50,000 per year for up to five years (\$250,000 total).

Appendix C

Resources for Developing a Community School Evaluation Plan

Resource	Description & Link
Coalition for Community Schools Evaluation Toolkit	
http://www.communityschools.org/resources/community_schools_evaluation_toolkit.aspx	
Report	Starter guide (4 pages) http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Evaluation%20Toolkit%204%20Pager%20Final.pdf
Complete toolkit	http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Evaluation_Toolkit_March2010.pdf
Sample logic model	http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/RMLM.pdf
Sample surveys	Links to 45 surveys of students, parents, and teachers: http://www.communityschools.org/resources/data_collection_instrument_guide.aspx
Evaluation results report	Summary of multiple program evaluation findings http://www.communityschools.org/resources/coalition_resources.aspx
Children's Aid Society	
Reports	Measuring the Social Return on Investment in Community Schools: A Practical Guide http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/publications/measuring-social-return-investment-community-schools-practical-guide
	Building a Community School: A Complete Manual http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/publications/building-community-school-complete-manual
Maine Education Policy Research Institute	
Amy Johnson	amyj@maine.edu or (207) 228-8221
Janet Fairman	Janet.fairman@maine.edu or (207) 581-2475