COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS: TOMORROW'S SCHOOLS, TODAY

Specifications

The Community Learning Centers specifications were developed by a New American Schools design team to accomplish top to bottom school reform. For further information, contact: Designs for Learning, 1000 Hamline Ave, St. Paul, MN 55104, phone 651-645-0200, www.designlearn.net.

Introduction

Community Learning Center sites call for systemic or comprehensive change, not a mere tuning-up of schools. Each Community Learning Center site must be a charter school or a school with decision authority in the areas of program, staffing and a sufficient budget to overcome institutional barriers to change.

1. Transformational outcomes determine learning experiences. Curriculum is based on achieving standards and outcomes through powerful real life and active learning experiences within and beyond the school walls. Learning experiences feature modern learning principles and are child-centered, life-centered and brain-based. Assessment is embedded into daily student work and evaluated through competency expectations and checked against community standards.

2. Each learner has a personal learning plan (PLP) for recording goals, experiences to reach goals and progress toward goals. Each learner has an advisor who meets periodically with the learner and the parent to review the PLP. Students are not only directly involved in the development of their learning plan, but also in decisions about the school program. Their ideas increase the pool of creative thinking for problem solving and their school service responsibilities lighten the work load for staff.

3. Teachers as "facilitators of learning" are provided support staff to increase productivity. Teachers agree to three fundamental roles: teaching, advising and participating in continuous improvement, both professional and school-wide. Staff development runs 20 to 30 days a year based on individual professional development plans. Staff accountability for results occurs through a performance-based compensation program and transfer or removal of ineffective members from the program. Support mechanisms that sustain change include staff appropriateness, staff stability, assurance of funding, site decision-making, feedback on progress for continuous improvement, and rewards and recognition.

4. Decision making is decentralized. Stakeholders make key decisions about program, staffing and budget. Professional educators make curriculum decisions and are accountable for student learning outcomes. Decisions are data based and checked against outcomes and results. Parents are actively involved through participating in their child's education conferences, sharing their skills and experiences, reinforcing learning at home and through involvement on decision making boards and committees.

5. Resources are reallocated or redeployed. For example, more is spent on instructional materials, instructional equipment, field trips and community based learning than in most schools. Large technology expenditures are capitalized over time. Budgets are lump-sum based and include all revenues students earn from all sources.

6. Maximum effective use of technology empowers learners and staff. All routinely use word processing, Email, spreadsheets, remote databases, desktop publishing, graphics, multimedia, and other programs.

7. Partnerships with other units of government, public and private agencies, early childhood programs and post-secondary education integrate use of community resources and reduce fragmented services and duplication.

8. Community Learning Centers as headquarters for learning for the community are open year round and extended hours. Richly stocked collections of learning materials are available on site or electronically for all ages. Adults are served through community education and other means. Parents and pre-school children will be served through early childhood and other family education programs.