

Community Schools Program

Jurisdiction: Saskatchewan

Contact: Ted Amendt

Level: Early Childhood, K – 12

Theme: Government or board policies

Description of Practice:

Some of the difficulties children experience in school are often the result of circumstances that originate from outside influences. Schools need to help students achieve learning success through a collaborative effort. School, home, and community are joint partners, all playing a critical role in a child's education. Community education philosophy and approaches promote the school building strong relationships with community and families. School programs take into account the cultural and socioeconomic life experiences of the students and provide a wide range of supports needed for children to learn.

Saskatchewan has responded to these challenges by creating Community Schools and by having Community Education as the foundational philosophy for all schools in the province. Saskatchewan has become a leader in Community Education in Canada because of its well-developed programs, policies and networks

Background:

The Community Schools Program began in 1980 to address problems associated with urban Aboriginal poverty. Since 1996 there have been incremental funding increases to the Community Schools Program resulting in increased Community School designations and additional supports and benefits to children and families. There are now 98 designated Community Schools in elementary, secondary and K-12 schools situated in rural, urban, and northern areas of the province.

In their 2001 final report, the Task Force on the Role of the School recommended that all schools adopt Community School philosophy. The underlying philosophy of Community Schools is community education. School^{PLUS}, the government's response to the Task Force's report, includes community education as a key element. Saskatchewan Learning is collaborating with its partners to provide information and supports to assist school divisions and their communities to understand and adopt community education practices to improve educational and life outcomes for children, youth and their families.

Development:

Community Schools came onto the scene in Saskatchewan in 1980 as a result of the Community School Program Discussion Paper. In 1996, the policy framework

Building Communities of Hope: Best Practices for Meeting the Learning Needs of At-Risk and Indian and Métis Students was released. This policy provided direction in four areas: The Learning Program, Parent and Community Involvement, Integrated Services, and Community Development.

In November 2004, the revised policy framework *Building Communities of Hope: Effective Practices for Meeting the Diverse Learning Needs of Children and Youth* was released. This document helps to provide the linkages between Community Schools and School^{PLUS}. It outlines the vision and provides direction for the successful implementation of the Community Schools framework.

The government response to the Role of the School Task Force, *Securing Saskatchewan's Future: Ensuring the Wellbeing and Educational Success of Saskatchewan's Children and Youth: Provincial Response (2002)*, supports and recommends that community education approaches be adopted by all Saskatchewan schools. School^{PLUS} builds on the successes of Community Schools by recognizing that all students do better when schools and communities work closely together for the benefit of children, youth and their families.

Evidence:

Outcomes data and case studies consistently demonstrate that Community Schools do work. Saskatchewan students have benefited as a result of implementing Community Schools and Saskatchewan Community Schools have received national recognition for their outcomes. Saskatchewan Learning has commissioned the Community Schools Data Collection Project to measure the success of schools in adopting community education principles. In addition, Saskatchewan Learning has initiated an indicators project to measure the success of schools in implementing School^{PLUS}.

Adaptability:

Models of Community Schools do exist nationally and internationally. Community Schools and community education practices are adaptable in a variety of settings and create the conditions for authentic youth, family, and community engagement in education. Engaging youth, family, and community in school planning, decision-making, and evaluation is clearly outlined in provincial education policy and structures are in place (School Community Councils/Community Schools) to facilitate this level of engagement.

Further Information:

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