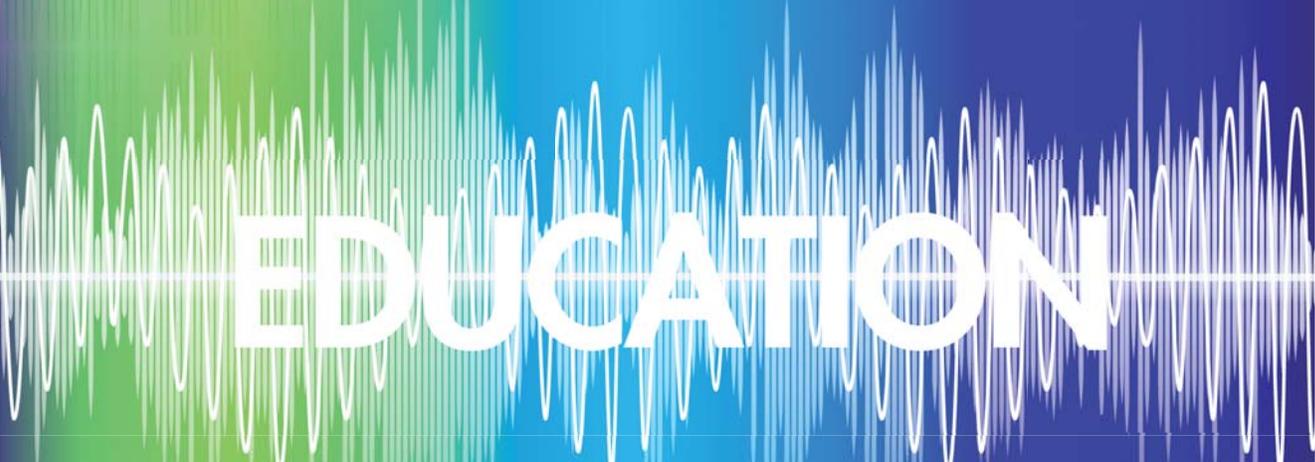# Community Schools:
The Great Equalizer?

"Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery."

— Horace Mann

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Preface

Community schools address not only the academic needs of students, but also their social, emotional and health needs, as well as the needs of their families. They are, in effect, multi-tiered support systems embedded in a school. The primary goal of community schools is to give students and families access to support systems that they might not otherwise have, in order to help all students pursue their educational goals and dreams. Support systems vary, but often include services like dental care, physical and mental health care, parental support programs and youth academic enrichment initiatives.

While community schools can provide a safe haven for all students, this is especially true for needy students and families. Community schools "bridge the tensions between poverty and academics" notes an April 2016 *Huffington Post* article. These schools provide extra academic, emotional, health-related or workforce development support to enable disadvantaged students and families to be on par with their peers. Through the community schools model, the obstacles that breed inequity in education such as "hunger, homelessness, health issues, a parent in jail – are addressed by professionals offering specialized community-based

services," states a 2014 commentary by *EdSource*, a California-based education think tank.

A lot of the success of community schools resides in the delicate interplay between schools and community partners. There needs to be what is called a "goodness of fit" between them. P.S. 15 Roberto Clemente, one of the community schools addressed in this report, highlights this type of successful synergistic relationship between school and community-based partner.

The report also addresses funding for community schools and the type of leadership the model warrants.

Finally, given the broad scope of community schools and the student needs they address, it takes at least five years to fully effect change in a school, according to research. Focusing on student performance too early in the reform process can impede efforts to improve the school. [1]

Community schools have the potential to be a great equalizer, especially for children in poverty. But, just like any reform, they have to be developed and implemented with great foresight and care.
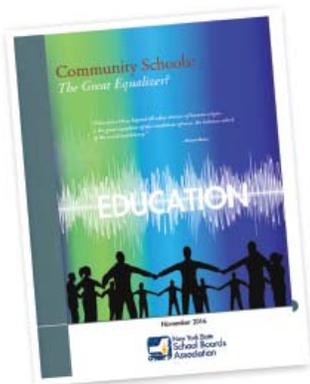
This NYSSBA research report was researched and written by **Gayle Simidian**, research analyst. It was edited by **David Albert**, director of communications, marketing, and research.

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[1] University of Colorado Boulder. National Education Policy Center. Time for Improvement: Research-Based Expectations for Implementation of the Community Schools Initiative in New York City. June 2016.

Introduction

School 2, a pre-kindergarten through grade 5 community school in the Troy City School District, serves a diverse student population of 334 students. About two-thirds of students are eligible for free and reduced price lunch in the district,[2] which far exceeds the statewide average of 53 percent.[3]

Yet despite this poverty, the school maintains a climate of high expectations for students, shared responsibility and leadership, and participates in partnerships that cater to the needs of both students and parents.

School 2's students are reaching higher proficiency levels on state exams. For example, while only 11 percent of School 2's students achieved proficiency levels of 3 and 4 on grade 3-8 ELA exams in 2013 and 2014, 17 percent of them achieved these levels in 2015 and 2016. Similarly, only 10 percent of students achieved proficiency levels of 3 and 4 in math in 2013 and 2014, while 16 percent of them achieved these levels in 2015 and 2016.[4]

This report provides school board members with an understanding of the history of community schools, the research basis for them, their core components and their impact on students. The report includes an in-depth look at two community schools, School 2 in the Troy City School District and P.S. 15 Roberto Clemente in New York City, and provides insight into the day-to-day workings of these types of schools.

"It takes a village to raise a child" is a popular saying that relates well to this multi-faceted approach to fostering positive youth development.

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[2] Horn, Brittany. Troy's School 2 Works to Build Community Beyond Campus. Times Union. May 9, 2015. http://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Troy-School-2-unveils-new-playground-6253166.php.

[3] New York State Education Department. New York State School Report Card Data 2014-15. https://data.nysed.gov/reportcard.php?instid=800000081568&year=2015&createreport=1&freelunch=1.

[4] New York State Education Department. New York State School Report Card Data. PS2 at a Glance. https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?instid=800000039473.

A "Whole-Child" Approach

On a warm and sunny summer morning, Analusette Shaelo-Johnson, community school facilitator at Troy's School 2, escorted the author through the school's main entrance. Once inside the building, we were joined by five other administrators closely involved with the development of the community school.[5] We met in a room aptly called the "Community Room."

Project-based learning at School 2.

School 2 is in its second year of superintendent receivership, and its second year of operating as a community school. Receivership requires the governance of schools deemed persistently struggling or struggling to be turned over to the superintendent for a set period of time. If the school does not make sufficient improvement during that time, governance of the school is handed to an independent receiver.[6]

In 2013-14, the Troy City School District applied for a Community Schools Initiative grant (a funding stream established in the 2013-14 state budget) and received $500,000 over three years. According to Julianna Currey, the district's director of grants and funded programs, "The ultimate goal of the grant is that this would become a one-stop shop for their [students and families'] needs."

In a community school, success is often measured by how well families can learn to meet their own needs, such as obtaining employment, according to staff at School 2. When asked what families need when they drop by the community room, Principal Assistant Lakime Meadows answered, "I need a job. I need help." Meadows said there are a host of other needs as well, such as housing and transportation. The community school, according to the school administrators, "gives them a leg up."

To support the goal of helping families, School 2 works with a number of community partners, but most closely with the Commission on Economic Opportunity (CEO), a non-profit that supports families via programs such as health services and career development. CEO provides the school with a staff person (Candace Dobbs-Miller, School 2's community schools service coordinator). The non-profit is also involved with evaluation of the project in conjunction with a professor at the State University of New York at Albany. Moreover, School 2 benefits from CEO's food pantry, so needy students and families do not go hungry. Additional services such as on-site mental health services are provided by Rensselaer County.

In addition to the school's work with CEO, School 2 also collaborates with a number of community organizations, including Capital Roots, which provides information about nutrition to School 2's students. The school partners with Girls, Inc., which offers self-esteem-building programs for the district's female students in third grade through high school.

Besides meeting more immediate needs such as health and nutrition services, School 2 addresses the social and emotional learning needs of students. Morning breakfast clubs are scheduled times each morning where students can get help with their uniforms, receive snacks, review their upcoming day and participate in activities such as yoga or fitness. Students also receive help in structuring their day. Moreover, through wellness programming, students learn how to manage their emotions, which is one of the hallmarks of social and emotional learning. For these vulnerable kids, it helps them, "get ready for the day," according to Principal Natélegé Turner-Hassell.

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[5] Stephanie Stinney, School 2's parent engagement and family advocate; Candace Dobbs-Miller, School 2's community schools service coordinator; School 2 Principal Natélegé Turner-Hassell, Principal Assistant Mr. Lakime Meadows and the district's Director of Grants and Funded Programs, Julianna Currey.

[6] New York State School Boards Association. State Takeover of Public Schools: Lessons from the School of Hard Knocks. June 2016. http://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_pdf/research-report-state-takeover-public-schools-06012016.pdf.

As previously stated, community schools take a "whole-child" approach to positive youth development that addresses multiple aspects of a child's well-being – physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and relational. Evidence-based community school approaches that foster productive learning environments for students and engage both students and families include:

- rigorous curricula that incorporate topics germane to students' cultures such as ethnic studies;

- a commitment to sound teaching practice, including teachers' input in professional development;

- support services such as health care;

- school disciplinary practices that attend to the importance of relationships like social and emotional learning (SEL) and strategies such as restorative justice;

- parent and community involvement; and

- school leadership dedicated to the community school model.

When these approaches work in tandem, outcomes can include "increasing school attendance, decreasing suspensions and expulsions, creating healthy and safe communities, and improving academic outcomes." [7]

These six approaches are very similar to decades-old findings from a study by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research on how to improve schools. The study found that effective schools result when there are high levels of parent and community support and engagement, high-quality teaching, well-designed and maintained facilities and a curriculum that includes issues relevant to the student population of the school. These school characteristics are known collectively as social capital, and are most common in wealthier communities, according to the study, which also states that "if conditions of social capital were created in communities of poverty, measures of academic success, school climate, and community cohesion all shifted dramatically." [8]

Like snowflakes, no two community schools are alike. Since schools are part and parcel of their local community, they have specific needs that are unique to their school community. As a result, it's important that a community school's programs and services respond to school-specific needs. To fill these needs, effective community school models warrant a needs assessment that includes input from school and community stakeholders, a strategic vision to achieve desired outcomes, community partners to help implement programs and services, and a point person or coordinator to direct these efforts. [9]

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[7] The Popular Center for Democracy, The Coalition for Community Schools, and Southern Education Foundation. Community Schools: Transforming Struggling Schools into Thriving Schools. February 2016. p.3.
https://populardemocracy.org/news/publications/community-schools-transforming-struggling-schools-thriving-schools.

[8] Ibid: 12

[9] Ibid.

Report Card on Community Schools

Student learning is hindered by many things, including health ailments, poverty, chaotic family lives and trauma. This is where the community schools model steps in. By providing students and families accessible and personalized services (targeted to the local school community's needs), community schools can overcome many obstacles to student learning.

Community schools in Cincinnati, Hartford and Portland, among other cities, illustrate that this approach positively impacts students' academic achievement. For example, in Cincinnati, students who received community school services such as tutoring or mentoring during 2009-10 and 2010-11 had higher reading and math scores than their non-community school peers. In addition, third-year community school students in afterschool programs in Hartford had higher 2009-2011 proficiency levels compared to their peers. Students in Portland, who attended a community school for at least one month met or exceeded state reading and math benchmarks.[10]

Research shows that wraparound services, which do not traditionally offer the level of academic enrichment that community schools do, have varied results, but are most effective at improving student attendance and grades.[12] Community schools tend to offer more comprehensive services than traditional wraparound models and usually benefit those that are served. But, what do those benefits look like?

A comprehensive 2000 analysis of 49 reviews of community schools showed that 94 percent had positive results. Seventy-three percent of them made academic strides, most noticeably in reading and math assessment performance. Thirty-eight percent of these schools showed better student attendance and 22 percent had fewer school suspensions.[13]

More recent research demonstrates that students in community schools in Chicago and New York City made progress on standardized math and reading tests, as well as leadership and conflict resolution skills. In New York City, students who attended afterschool programs over

WRAPAROUND SERVICES

The community school model is like an umbrella which consists of many types of programs and services aimed at supporting many different aspects of development for both children and families. Wraparound services, often referred to interchangeably as community schools, tend to focus less on academics than traditional community schools and more on the health and wellness of students and their families, although they often offer adult education classes for parents.

Wraparound services gained momentum over 30 years ago by organizations such as New York City's Children's Aid Society and, most recently, became popularized via the Harlem Children's Zone, which incorporates such services in its educational model. Based on the success of the Harlem Children's Zone, there is a push to replicate such models through efforts on the federal level like Promise Neighborhood Grants, which aim to promote educational success through community-based services and supports.[11]

[10] Coalition for Community Schools. Community School Results.
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Community%20School%20Results%202013.pdf.

[11] Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. Uplifting the Whole Child: Using Wraparound Services to Overcome Social Barriers to Learning. August 2014.
http://www.massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=Uplifting_the_Whole_Child.html.

[12] Ibid.

[13] National Center for Community Schools. Community Schools: Frequently Asked Questions.
http://www.p12.nysed.gov/accountability/de/documents/CommunitySchools-FAQs.pdf.

a three-year period (2004-2007) in Children's Aid Society community schools had higher math scores than peers in non-community schools. In addition, school attendance increased for students who attended afterschool programming at these schools for at least three years compared to their peers with little or no involvement in the programming. Students at other New York City community schools called Beacon schools benefited from learning leadership and conflict resolution skills. [14]

Research has also shown that the benefits don't apply to just students but parents and the greater community as well. For example, parents of students who attend the San Mateo County Community School in California and take advantage of community school services show greater involvement in their children's education. And, communities, in general, benefited by developing greater community bonds, alternative ways to occupy buildings, higher levels of security and neighborhood pride. [15]

Are community schools worth the investment? Existing research suggests they are. For example, a 2013 report found that every dollar put into a New York City community school yields "between $10.30 and $14.80 in return on investment." This value reflects the ability of community schools' networked partnerships to generate sustainable funding streams. [16]

Any return on investment may be mitigated by ineffective school leadership. Community schools require leadership to be shared. This collaborative style of leadership is linked to better academic, socio-emotional, and civic skill sets for students. This type of leadership is essential for leading a community school. Some of these leadership skills include effective listening, cultural competency, emotional intelligence, empathy, the capacity to co-own decisions and engage in sensitive discussions. [17]

[14] Coalition for Community Schools. Community Schools Research Brief 09. 2009. http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CCS%20Research%20Report2009.pdf.

[15] Ibid.

[16] New York City Offices of the Mayor, Education, Youth and Community Development, Health and Mental Hygiene and Children's Cabinet. New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan. http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/communityschools/downloads/pdf/community-schools-strategic-plan.pdf.

[17] Children's Aid Society. Leading Community Schools Requires Complex Skills. November 2015. http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/community-schools/partnership-press/november-2015/leading-community-schools-requires-complex-skills.
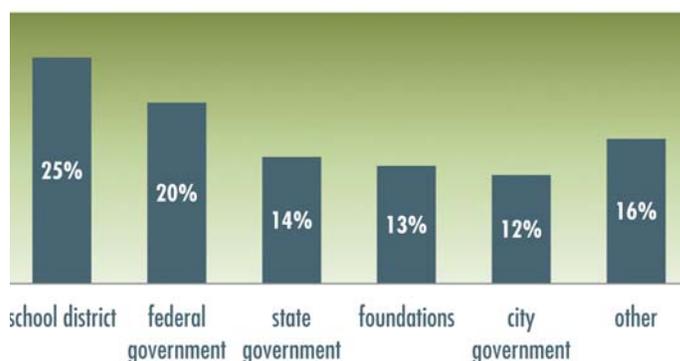
Community School Funding Sources

The federal "Every Student Succeeds Act" promotes the community schools model. [18] On the state level, the importance of community schools is highlighted in the 2016-17 New York State budget, in which certain districts are required to dedicate $100 million of their Foundation Aid to community schools, with an additional $75 million earmarked for schools deemed "struggling" [19] or "persistently struggling." These allocations are relevant because under the state's new receivership law, a superintendent receiver *can* transform a persistently struggling or struggling school into a community school, while an independent receiver *must* transform one into a community school. [20] As of the publication date of this report, no schools have independent receivers.

Diversification is important when it comes to financing community schools. Community school funding comes from many different sources. In a study of about 49 community schools across the country, the Coalition for Community Schools, an alliance of national, state and local k-12 stakeholders, found that about 25 percent of funding comes from local school districts, while 75 percent of funding comes from external organizations. Federal monies account for approximately 20 percent of the funding, while state contributions make up about 14 percent of the total. Other fiscal contributors include foundations, (13 percent), and cities (12 percent) (see Fig. 1). The remainder comes from contributors such as local businesses, community-based organizations (CBOs), in-kind assistance and individual contributions. [21]

FIG 1: **Community School Funding by Source**

Source: Coalition for Community Schools. Financing Community Schools: Resources to Support Student Success

Medicaid can offset health-care expenses for poor families via reimbursement to community school healthcare clinics. [22]

Each community school varies according to its partnerships and needs, however. For example, during 2008-09, P.S. 50, a K-8 community school in East Harlem, focused on health services to combat a growing number of asthma and obesity cases. Medicaid covers these services. Other sources include private donations. It cost a total of $1,183,000 to run the community school that year and health-related expenses comprised 27 percent of the cost of the full service model. The full distribution of funding resources for P.S. 50 that program year came from the following: local district funds (4 percent), city (36 percent), state (33 percent), federal (6 percent), CBOs (14 percent) and private foundation (7 percent). [23]

The types of services and programs provided to students and families by community schools are also diverse. The Coalition for Community Schools study found that most of the funding for community schools went toward academic enrichment (57 percent), such as afterschool programming, service opportunities and general skills training. The second most costly service, which accounted for 19 percent of a community schools' expenses, was mental health and general health services, according to the study. Twelve percent of the funding went to both family engagement and support services and community school personnel. [24]

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[18] Coalition for Community Schools. Community Schools Prominent in Every Student Succeeds Act. December 10, 2015. http://www.communityschools.org/new_federal_education_law_boosts_community_schools/.

[19] New York State School Boards Association. NYSSBA 2016 Budget Analysis. April 2016. http://www.nyssba.org/clientuploads/nyssba_pdf/gr/state-budget-analysis-04052016.pdf

[20] New York State Education Department. Moving Forward with Receivership in New York State. October 14, 2015. http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/receivership-testimony.pdf.

[21] Coalition for Community Schools. Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success. November 2010. http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

New York City: Investing in Community Schools

New York City is one of the pioneers of community schools, as many community schools there have been around for several decades. But a strategic plan for supporting and sustaining them didn't solidify [25] until 2014 under Mayor Bill de Blasio. [26]

Mayor de Blasio put forth a strategic vision for community schools in New York City that strives to achieve equity in education. He, along with other community school advocates, believe that "…students who are hungry, who can't see the blackboard due to poor vision, who are missing school regularly due to health or housing challenges, or who are stressed because of difficult family situations, will face critical challenges in the classroom." [27] His plan is guided, in part, by an examination of more than 20 studies by the New York City Department of Education that show the effectiveness of community schools in improving academic performance, school attendance, school engagement and high school graduation rates. Research also points to more parental engagement in community schools. Teachers in community schools also had greater job satisfaction. [28]

The mayor exceeded his first-term goal of creating 100 community schools. One of his charges is to standardize core components of community schools. He also acknowledged that there are many established community schools in the city that can serve as models for his new initiative

and reap benefits from the initiative such as funding or networking with service providers to ensure that each community school over time provides similar offerings for children and families. [29]

Standard core community school components include: expanded learning time; early childhood programming (specifically, universal pre-K, if feasible); general health and mental health offerings; and parent, family and community partnerships. All of these services are offered within a school context that is focused on three things: a rigorous curriculum, lots of engagement (by the whole school community), and constant improvement. [30]

[25] The New York City Community Schools Coalition. Strengthening Schools, Strengthening Communities: The Promise of Community Schools. May 2013. http://www.uft.org/files/strengthening-schools-strengthing-communities-the-promise-of-community-schools.pdf.

[26] New York City Offices of the Mayor, Education, Youth and Community Development, Health and Mental Hygiene and Children's Cabinet. New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan. http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/communityschools/downloads/pdf/community-schools-strategic-plan.pdf.

[27] Ibid: p.7.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

A SEAMLESS PARTNERSHIP: P.S. 15 ROBERTO CLEMENTE

School personnel at P.S. 15 Roberto Clemente, a PK-5 community school located in the Lower East Side of New York City, focus on providing students with stable relationships and social services. [31] That's because about 40 percent of the student population lives in temporary housing. The community school started two years ago with city funds from an Attendance Improvement and Drop-Out Prevention (AIDP) grant [32] (roughly $350,000) and $25,000 from the city for mental health services. [33]

The school partners with Pathways 2 Leadership (P2L), an organization that works with schools through curriculum and afterschool programming to foster resiliency and social and emotional competencies. [34] The brainchild of this collaboration is P.S. 15 Principal Irene Sanchez, who chose P2L for its social work background to combat the high level of poverty and transiency at the school. The two entities work together as one, according to Sanchez. [35] In addition, New York University provides dental services to P.S. 15 students.

Kathleen Shamwell from P2L is the director of the community school. She works with a social worker, program manager/grant manager, twelve part-time afterschool programming staff and three social work interns to provide a range of services to students and families. [36] For example, P2L staff conduct school-based intervention via play therapy with students to help them develop smart goals, work on their interests and their self-identity. P2L also leads a five- to six-week summer camp for about 30 students consisting of academics, enrichment, arts, music and field trips. [37] During a recent school day, the students practiced for the camp's finale for parents by belting out pop singer Adele's runaway hit, "Hello," with an enthusiasm that rang out in the hallways.

In addition, P2L runs afterschool programming for P.S. 15 during the school year from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Shamwell says that parents appreciate this programming, since it provides academic enrichment to students and accommodates parents' schedules. [38]

Moreover, having so much time together helps build relationships with staff as well as with the students. [39]

The two-year partnership seems to be yielding positive results. When Sanchez checked 2014, 2015 and 2016 state ELA and math scores, cheers rang out in the office because student proficiency rates rose considerably (see Fig. 2).

FIG 2: **ELA and Math Proficiency by Year at P.S. 15 Roberto Clemente**

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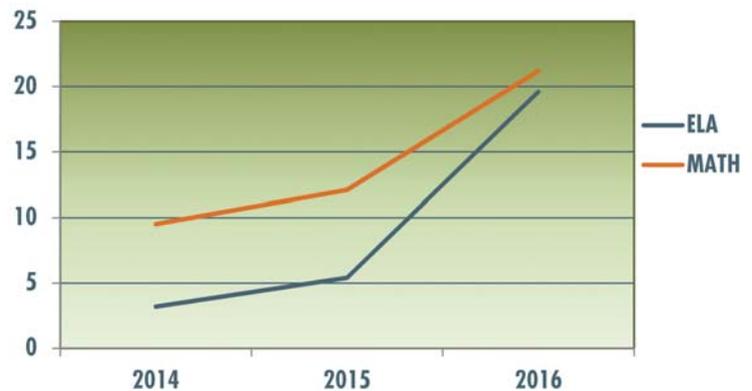
[31] Sanchez, I. Communication with G. Simidian. August 2016.

[32] The New York City Department of Education's AIDP funding for schools is used to increase attendance rates. New York City Offices of the Mayor, Education, Youth and Community Development, Health and Mental Hygiene and Children's Cabinet. New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan. http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/communityschools/downloads/pdf/community-schools-strategic-plan.pdf.

[33] Sanchez, I. and Shamwell, K. Communication with G. Simidian. August 2016.

[34] Pathways 2 Leadership. http://www.pathways2leadership.org/what-we-do/. Retrieved August 2016.

[35] Sanchez, I. Communication with G. Simidian. August 2016.

[36] Sanchez, I. and Shamwell, K. Communication with G. Simidian. August 2016.

[37] Shamwell, K. Communication with G. Simidian. August 2016.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Sanchez, I. and Shamwell, K. Communication with G. Simidian. August 2016.

Conclusion

In many ways, establishing community schools seems like a no-brainer – better grades, more parent and student engagement, and healthier student development. But research highlights some nuances to consider about best practices regarding community schools. They are as follows:

- *Leadership needs to be shared.*
  As shown by Sanchez and Shamwell's seamless partnership at P.S. 15 and the collaborative approach taken by Troy's School 2 leadership team, effective community schools have many leaders.

- *Funding needs to come from several sources.*
  Sustainability of funds is driven, in part, by the very partnerships formed by the community school.

- *Seek "Goodness of Fit" when looking for partner organizations.*
  Goodness of fit, a term rooted in child development, can aptly describe the effectiveness of appropriate school/community partner organization teams. For example, Irene Sanchez purposely chose PL2 as a primary partner organization to address poverty and transiency at P.S. 15.

- *Change doesn't happen overnight.*
  Research shows that five years is about the earliest to expect fundamental change to occur in school reform, [40] which includes community schools.

Irene Sanchez (at left), principal of P.S. 15 Roberto Clemente, and Kathleen Shamwell (at right), director of the P.S. 15 community school, posing in front of students' Andy Warhol-inspired Pop Art.

[40] University of Colorado Boulder. National Education Policy Center. Time for Improvement: Research-Based Expectations for Implementation of the Community Schools Initiative in New York City. June 2016. http://nepc.colorado.edu/files/publications/PM%20Daniel%20Community%20Schools_0.pdf.