

Wraparound Social and Community Services Programs

SNAPSHOT

Initiative:

Community-School Programs

District:

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation

Location:

Evansville, Ind.

Grades: PreK-12**Enrollment:** 23,000**Free/reduced-price lunch:** 56%

Enticing the community to share responsibility

Community-School Programs

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation

Evansville, Indiana

Evansville's wraparound services programs are driven by the concept that if schools are to succeed in closing achievement gaps, they must become full-service community centers for students, parents, and other family members. In the words of Vince Bertram, the school district's superintendent from 2007 to June 2011, "The schools cannot succeed alone...when you look at the factors that affect achievement. The way I believe we improve our schools is getting to the individual students, addressing needs in an individual way." A majority of the students at Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; 74 percent are white, 22 percent are African American or multiracial, and the rest are Hispanic or Asian.

Cathlin Gray, EVSC associate superintendent for family-school-community partnerships, started Evansville's initial wraparound services program in the 1990s at Cedar Hall Elementary School (now Cedar Hall Community School) with a grant from the Indianapolis-based Lilly Endowment to the United Way of Southwestern Indiana. She was a teacher at the time, but in 1994, she became principal of the school. In 2000, a U.S. Department of Education grant allowed the services to expand to five schools. Today, the entire district participates, and the offerings include early childhood learning centers, afterschool and summer programs, a college-access network, health and dental care, social and emotional support, alternatives to suspension/expulsion, and more.



How the initiative works

The School-Community Council, headed by Gray, administers EVSC's community-school programs. The Council, also known as the Big Table, has members representing more than 70 local nonprofit, business, social service, education, and faith-based organizations that provide services.

The Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships houses multiple wraparound services furnished by local organizations, which augment the ongoing work of teachers,

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nurses, counselors, and other school staff. The services include everything from free wellness, medical, and dental care to preschool, afterschool, and summer programs.

Private donations provide only a small portion of the financing. Since 2000, the district has secured \$30 million in federal grants, mainly from 14 programs funded through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which are administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED).

In 2010, ED's Full-Service Community Schools Program awarded EVSC a \$2.5 million grant to create five full-fledged community schools similar to the well-known Harlem Children's Zone. Evansville sites include McGary Middle School, part of NEA's Priority Schools Campaign, and Cedar Hall Community School. At Cedar Hall, which served as the original model, the current focus is on physical and mental health, recreation, and educational and vocational studies, under a "circle of caring" theme.

Evidence of effectiveness

The district achieved Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for the first time in 2010. Furthermore, a 2010 study by Diehl Evaluation and Consulting Services, Inc., found the following:

- ▶ Parents, teachers, and the students themselves reported that behavioral concerns had declined and adjustment had improved among students receiving school social work services.
- ▶ The focus on early childhood development, through community partnerships, has contributed to an increase in the percentage of students entering kindergarten who meet the district's early literacy benchmarks. More than 50 percent met the benchmarks in 2010, compared to 39 percent in 2006.

- ▶ Students who participated in afterschool and summer programs for 30 or more days had better attendance records than those who did not. Those who participated for 60 or more days had higher overall grade-point averages, based on an analysis of 1,500 students.

Exemplary practices

Agreeing on core values: The school district and its partners all agree that home, school, and the community are jointly responsible for students' well-being. They also agree that to close academic achievement gaps, they must meet the needs of the whole child.

Building community support and buy-in: The school system has spent more than a decade fostering relationships with the local organizations that provide services and support. Since 2009, a local bank, Old National Bank, has been leasing its large building at 123 Main Street to the district and its community partners for \$1 per year. The building serves as the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships, a one-stop source of services and support. It is also the headquarters of the School-Community Council.

Engaging parents and families in learning: The Center offers parent education, family, and financial literacy programs; provides access to computers; and helps low-income families enroll in Hoosier Healthwise, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, food stamps, and other government assistance programs.

Using targeted outreach: For at-risk students from low-income families, the Center offers mentoring, counseling, and connections to agencies that work with school staff to address attendance, behavior, and other problems. St. Mary's Children's Services provides free dental care, physical examinations, and immunizations for uninsured, school-age children.

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Setting high expectations for students and families:

The district's Expectations for Excellence, adopted in 2010, is a pledge for the district to "deliver rigorous and relevant learning experiences" and also a pledge for students to "come to school daily, on time, and ready to engage in meaningful learning."

Outlook

Community commitment is especially strong in Evansville, as evidenced by the more than 70 community partners and use of the building donated by a local bank. Since the initiative has required less private funding than community-school models elsewhere, it may offer a feasible model for many other communities with relatively little access to private funding.

Association perspective

Evansville Teachers Association President Keith Gambill sums up his perspective: "Our community had high hopes for its children, but if we were honest, some kids were being left behind. So, educators had to find a different, more comprehensive way of working with parents and our community. And it has paid off in terms of relationships with families and improved outcomes for our students."

Local contact

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Related information

Report card: www.doe.in.gov/data/

Education Week: "School's a Community Effort in Indiana District," April 19, 2011, <http://bit.ly/hWE56k> (\$2.95; free for EdWeek subscribers)

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