

Building Healthy, Self-Reliant Communities Using the Community School Model

A Working Document

September 28, 2001

PRESENTED BY



THE ASSOCIATION FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN BC

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Since 1975, the Association for Community Education in BC (ACEbc) has fostered and promoted Community Education and Community Schools in British Columbia. ACEbc is a non-profit organization with national and international affiliations and a membership open to individuals, groups and organizations having an interest in Community Education.

Introduction

At the turn of the millennium our communities are feeling the impact of a host of changes. The knowledge explosion and changes in information technology have affected how we work, how we learn and how we communicate. Globalization is having impacts on social cultural, environmental and economic systems. Our communities are made up of increasingly diverse populations and we have experienced major changes in family structure and work patterns.

In such a world of change, it is more important than ever that we facilitate the development of strong, inclusive, prosperous communities that are responsive and sustainable and that promote an active citizenry. This requires a comprehensive, integrated, community-based life-long learning approach that draws on the leadership potential of all citizens.

In Burnaby, B.C., on May 23-26, 2001, ACEbc co-hosted a World Conference on Community Education: *Active Citizens/Strong Communities*. This highly successful conference attracted over 400 participants, including international delegations from seven countries in Europe, Asia and Africa; representatives from fourteen states in the U.S.A.; and delegates from nine of Canada's provinces and territories.

Part One: Invitation

The Association for Community Education in BC (ACEbc) through its “Community and Government Relations Committee”, provide this working document for discussion to consider how schools can be more effectively utilized beyond the traditional program for development and delivery of integrated services and programs for communities. Currently many Community Schools function this way, using a life-long learning model, making full use of a public facility to provide comprehensive, community-determined and directed programs and services. We invite you to work with us to further develop the rich potential of the Community School concept. This cost effective, efficient and accountable approach to the development of communities results in healthy, resilient, resourceful neighbourhoods.

Today we have an opportunity to meaningfully engage and more fully utilize the greatest BC resource of all – the social and intellectual capital of the citizens of this Province. We have an opportunity to meet the challenges of sharing the responsibility for maximizing individual and collective community assets in ways that we firmly believe create, based on the experiences of the Province’s Community Schools, the best working solutions to complex, urgent problems at economic, social and environmental levels.

The integrated service approach we wish to discuss is consistent with recommendations from major government reports and initiatives that were designed to increase our understanding of how to most effectively deliver programs, service and life-long learning.

Part Two: Significant Reports, Initiatives and Recommendations

Six major reports and initiatives that support the Community School concept include: The Sullivan Report (1988), the Gove Inquiry into Child Protection (1995), The Ministry of Education Memorandum on Community Schools (1995), Healthy Communities (1986), Population Health (1997), and Learning Communities (2000). Common themes emerged that point to a number of key characteristics essential to an effective human services model: comprehensive, multidisciplinary, coordinated, integrated and community-based. All of the reports speak to the importance of building local capacity as an essential ingredient for the development of responsive, caring communities. When local capacity is developed and utilized, communities become empowered to act in their own best interests using the best of emergent thinking to guide them in their practices. Community Schools provide support systems, programs and services that facilitate the building of local capacity in ways that embody the key characteristics.

Part Three: The Concept of Community Schools

“Community School” is a concept which advocates a process for empowering citizens in a community to address local needs. Its underlying values and principles are guided by practices such as: utilization of community resources for curriculum enhancement, life-long learning, shared resources, integrated services, leadership development, responsiveness, neighbourhood-based action, self-determination and self-help, inclusiveness, sustainability, and accountability.

Community Schools offer an opportunity for local citizens, businesses, agencies and institutions, to become active partners to enhance the educational, social, economic, cultural and environmental conditions of their community. In a Community School, processes are in place that develop and support programs, services, events and opportunities that empower the neighbourhood to address community needs and provide developmental opportunities for everyone.

Part Four: The Components of Community Education

ACEbc recently conducted a survey of over one hundred officially designated Community Schools in urban, rural and remote communities throughout British Columbia. This survey revealed a comprehensive range of programs and services developed in response to locally identified needs and aspirations. Each Community School reflects the uniqueness of its own community using both formal and informal resources.

Key components include the following:

- Enrichment of K-12-College-University curriculums, e.g. *Peer Mentors, Service Learning projects, multi-generational initiatives, work experience opportunities, classroom support for special projects.*
- Family Literacy, e.g. *HIPPY, Mother Goose, Reading Rascals.*
- Early Intervention from Pre-Natal through Pre-School e.g. *Parenting courses and support groups, infant to toddler daycare and pre-school programs.*
- Hidden Children (school drop-outs and alienated youth) e.g. *High School upgrading initiatives, leadership development programs, mentoring.*
- Community Economic Development Partnerships, e.g. *Community Futures Corporation, Human Resources Development Canada,*

Chamber of Commerce, Forest Renewal BC, Industry Canada, working together to promote opportunities for viable work for people.

- *Jobs/Skills Development and Adult Educational Upgrading, e.g. Adult Learning Centres, Job Clubs*
- *Safer Communities Initiatives, e.g. Anti-bullying, harm reduction programs (needle exchanges, counseling services, food programs), Anti-vandalism programs, Youth Promotion Projects, Restorative Justice.*
- *Community Schools Councils, Role: Define local needs and resources, identify and nurture individual and collective assets.*
- *A stronger 'sense of community' through increased dialogue and communication within and between sectors of the neighbourhood generating inclusion and cohesion, e.g. First Nations, ESL, cultural groups, business, Labour, Seniors, agencies, police, etc.*
- *Programs for all ages and walks of life, e.g. Adult Education Classes, Multi-cultural activities, recreation, fine arts, and many special events.*
- *Efficient Utilization of Human and Financial Resources, e.g. Enhanced use of schools and other public facilities that extend hours of public access to include after school, evening, weekend and holiday use.*
- *Integrated Human Services Development, e.g. Inter-Agency Teams, Integrated Case Management Structures, Wrap-around Service Delivery for Children, Youth and their Families.*
- *Technology Initiatives, e.g. CAP, VOLnet*
- *Environmental Initiatives, e.g. Community Gardens, Stream Enhancement and Education, School and Community Greening Projects.*

Part Five: Next Steps

ACEbc proposes the formation of a Roundtable with representatives from Provincial Ministries and Federal Departments to examine inter-ministerial sponsorship and funding for the measured growth of Community Schools. Community Schools, often with a variety of partners, are presently providing a process for programs and services that cross many government ministry mandates including the following:

Provincial Ministries

- ▷ Advanced Education
- ▷ Attorney General and Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations
- ▷ Children and Family Development
- ▷ Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services
- ▷ Education
- ▷ Forests
- ▷ Health Services
- ▷ Human Resources
- ▷ Public Safety and Solicitor General
- ▷ Responsible for Youth
- ▷ Skills Development and Labour
- ▷ Minister of State for Women's Equality
- ▷ Minister of State for Early Childhood Development

Federal Departments

- ▷ Industry Canada
- ▷ Health Canada
- ▷ HRDC/OLT
- ▷ Indian Affairs & Northern Development
- ▷ Solicitor General
- ▷ Rural Partnership Program

Part Six: Together We Can

ACEbc recognizes that Community Schools represent a natural, logical and cost-effective solution for empowering communities to address the multiple, complex and urgent problems facing British Columbians. British Columbia is in a position to further build and sustain healthy communities. We invite you to meet with us in the spirit of collaboration to explore how the Community School model works, why it is effective and how it can be utilized to more fully develop the potential of British Columbia communities.

*Revisions:
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