

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, 1021 Bandana Blvd., St. Paul, MN 55108, phone 612-645-0200, david@designlearn.net

1. Community Learning Center sites call for systemic or comprehensive change, not a mere tuning-up of schools.
2. Each Community Learning Center site must be a charter school or contract with the district for decision authority in the areas of program, staffing and budget to overcome institutional barriers to change.
3. Community Learning Centers have well articulated mission and beliefs to guide their development.
4. Transformational outcomes determine learning experiences. Assessment is embedded into daily student work and evaluated through competency expectations and checked against normed tests and community established standards.
5. Curriculum is based on achieving standards and outcomes through powerful learning experiences. The school acts as the broker in arranging learning experiences within and beyond its walls for real world application. Curriculum is defined as all the experiences of the learner irrespective of place, time or person.
6. Learning experiences feature modern learning principles and are child-centered, life-centered and brain-based, that is, compatible with the power of the brain to assimilate and organize learning.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. Teachers as "facilitators of learning" are provided support staff to increase productivity. Staff are compensated on the basis of responsibility, skill, productivity and other factors. Teachers agree to three fundamental roles: teaching, advising and participating in continuous improvement, both professional and school-wide.
10. Staff development runs 20 to 30 days a year based on individual professional development plans. Ultimate staff accountability for results occurs through transfer or removal of ineffective members from the program.
11. 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.
12. Students are viewed as powerful resources. Their active participation in decisions about the school program contributes to their development and connection. Their ideas increase the pool of creative thinking for problem solving and their school service responsibilities lighten the work load for staff.
13. 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.

14. The program vigorously involves parents through participating in their child's education conferences, sharing their skills and experiences, reinforcing learning at home and in governance. The program assists parents with the development of family learning plans.
15. 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.
16. Program choice to students, parents and staff means no one is required to attend or work at a Community Learning Center, thereby avoiding trying to please everyone. The student body represents the pool of applicants and reflects the student racial, socio-economic and academic makeup of the community.
17. 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.
18. Community Learning Centers emphasize active learning environments such as media centers, production studios, discovery centers, theaters of learning, labs, community based learning and work stations for various computer applications. The environment is inviting and convivial.
19. Support mechanisms sustain change. These include staff appropriateness, staff stability, assurance of funding, site decision making, and feedback on progress for continuous improvement, and rewards and recognition.