

**COMMUNITY EDUCATION PARTNERS
PROGRAM EVALUATION REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

PREPARED FOR:

**SCHOOL DISTRICT OF PHILADELPHIA
AND
PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

PREPARED BY:

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Introduction

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), the U.S. Department of Education's Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, conducted the evaluation of two Community Education Partners (CEP) programs in Philadelphia, those based at the Hunting Park and Allegheny facilities. The role of LSS was to provide an independent, objective, third-party evaluation of the CEP programs.

The evaluation addressed student outcomes such as attendance, grades, graduation rates, and measures of behavior for CEP students returning to a district school as well as for a comparison group of students. The evaluation also focused on program implementation, the ways in which the programs impacted the students, and the factors that were instrumental in program success.

Findings

The review of the literature suggested that some of the characteristics of a successful alternative school included productive learning environments that emphasize the academic mission of the school, consistently enforced discipline standards, positive relationships between staff and students, and an ethic of caring. Based on the data gathered from site observations, interviews, surveys, and focus groups, it seems clear that CEP school leadership conveys dedication, caring, passion, and commitment to the student body and that the daily "modus operandi" between staff and students stresses building and nurturing relationships of mutual trust.

This positive school climate may be the reason so many of these students and their parents would have preferred that they stay at CEP and subsequently graduate from CEP, or perhaps transition to a different school other than their original sending school. They feel that this would allow them a better chance to escape the environment that led them to CEP in the first place. Many students and parents appreciated the smaller class size and the more structured, disciplined approach at CEP, and would like to see some of the same mechanisms in place at the school where students are transitioned.

The data examined as part of this study indicate that while attending CEP, students attend school regularly, stay out of disciplinary trouble, and make, on average, impressive if not extraordinary gains in terms of all available measures of student achievement. The evidence clearly supports the contention that while at CEP, students are there, they are behaving, and they are learning. In conclusion, while at CEP, students are attaining the BE HERE, BEHAVE, and BE LEARNING goals of CEP.

The current follow-up on CEP students returning to district schools also found encouraging results with respect to student outcomes. These data indicate that, relative to the comparison group of students, the former CEP students tend to: (1) remain enrolled in district schools; (2) have higher graduation rates; (3) have higher grade promotion rates and lower retention rates; (4) attend schools more regularly; and (5) have fewer

disciplinary infractions. In conclusion, the findings indicate that CEP is making significant progress in attaining its ultimate goal of improving student retention rates in district schools.

Recommendations

There were suggestions for improvement that affect both CEP and the district. In general, it seems clear that some parents and students feel that the transition process is problematic upon return to the public schools. Participants in the evaluation noted that increased communication, cooperation, and collaboration between staff from CEP and the public schools might provide a more seamless delivery of services to the students served; more specifically, some suggestions included exit interviews from CEP, more timely receipt of transcripts and records at the receiving school, and trial adjustment periods for students at the receiving school. The implementation of ideas such as these would require appropriate training and resource allocation to enhance the transition process.

Finally, there are three broad suggestions or ideas for consideration that seemed to follow from the data gathered and analyzed for this report.

- The district should continue their contracts with CEP as the added cost seems well worth the benefits the students in their programs derived (the cost per CEP student is about \$11,350, or about \$2,000 more than the average per-pupil cost, with a substantial portion of the total amount reimbursed by the state). Based on the data analyzed in the study, CEP seems highly qualified to operate these types of alternative schools for the district and their management approach has been successful in meeting the needs of these students requiring greater support.
- Based on student and parent interview and focus group data, it may be that simply keeping the students at CEP until they graduate would be beneficial for some students.
- The evaluation findings also suggest that the adoption of some type of setting with smaller class sizes and perhaps smaller learning community program(s), focusing specifically on this group of at-risk students, would provide a more supportive environment when they transition back to the public schools and may be helpful to many of these students.