



Successful Schools—Successful Communities

**A process for enhancing the quality of life
in 21st century communities**

Ohio State University Extension, Community Development

Successful Schools – Successful Communities

A Community Action Process

Where will the highly educated and skilled workforce we need for the new knowledge based economy come from? How do we create active and engaged citizens who will build communities with a high quality of life? How will our children and grandchildren fair in the fast changing future? These are difficult questions with no easy answers.

But the people of Ohio have never been afraid to face a challenge and now the future of our state rests squarely on our ability to respond creatively to these questions. We can all see the decline of low skilled assembly line jobs in our state and nation. To be successful in the workplace you need a quality high school education and more.

Like our workplaces our communities face unprecedented change. Many communities, both rural and urban, face challenges to their quality of life and economic development efforts. Many school districts likewise struggle to meet their educational goals. To be a successful community you need active engaged citizens who are educated and understand the issues. How will we fill the pressing need for a highly educated workforce and active engaged citizens?

“Educating the whole child requires the whole community. This means bringing the community into the school and having the school see the community as a resource. ... While approaches that offer pieces of community engagement can be helpful, too often they lack a cohesive strategy that focuses the activities of school and community partners on results for students, families, and communities.”

**All Together Now: Sharing
Responsibility for the
Whole Child**

By Martin Blank
and Amy Berg

The good news is that it can be done. Research has shown that schools and communities who increase their level of engagement mutually benefit. Engagement increases the number of citizens who have an understanding of the challenges and needs of schools. Engagement also increases the number of citizens who are both prepared for the workplace as well as active engagement in the community. Simply said, deep engagement helps communities create successful schools and schools create successful communities.

Through the Successful Schools – Successful Communities process we help local communities reach deeper levels of engagement with their schools. Our central focus is facilitating positive change by identifying what is working in the school – community system. Using the successful experiences as a springboard helps to generate deeper and more sustainable positive improvement. The central task for each community is to identify where the school – community relationship is supporting quality education and “how” it is being accomplished. That “locally created solution” becomes the starting point for additional community-school collaborations.

Successful Schools – Successful Communities is built on the current body of positive organizational change research. By combining the latest change processes with other planning techniques we can assist communities as they create an effective collaborative relationship with their schools.

Key to the success of the process will be the true engagement of citizens and community leaders from both the educational community and the wider civic and business community. It would be short sighted to undertake a Successful Schools – Successful Communities effort in a community without the involvement of key school leaders (Super-intendent, principal, teacher representatives, etc.) or without the backing and participation of key leaders from business, political, faith-based, and other important community institutions.

Steps in the SS-SC Process

"At its best, community engagement in school improvement efforts seeks to bring all segments of the community – including school personnel, parents, students, senior citizens, elected officials, community residents, and representatives from local businesses, faith-based organizations, and social service organizations – to the table to discuss issues that are important to a community's quality of life. Community engagement encourages widespread participation in local decision-making, leading to better decisions that benefit more people." ... Effective community engagement, however, is not just about "process" – it also yields meaningful outcomes."

**Community
Engagement Guide,**
2005, Knowledge
Works Foundation

Step I: Preparing

- **Identification of a Steering Group:** Once a community decides to embark on the SC-SS process, the first step is gathering a representative steering committee to shepherd the community through the process.
- **Becoming Familiar with the Process:** The first task of the steering committee is to review the process outlined in this document and to come to a general agreement about their goal and the process they will lead.
- **Inviting School and Community Participation:** As the SS-SC process continues, the steering committee will take the initiative to encourage widespread participation among school and wider community groups.

Step II: Appreciating

- **Developing the Questions:** The change process starts with the preparation of questions for community interviews. For the SS – SC process the focus of the questions is school-community collaboration. For example: "Think about a time you have experienced, either as a community member or a school employee, a positive connection with a school or the community. Describe that experience. Who was involved? What happened? What made it a positive experience?"
- **Paired Interviews:** After the questions have been written and assembled into an interview guide an interviewing strategy is developed. Paired interviews can take place in a great variety of settings within the community. The goal is to give every person in the community an opportunity to both be interviewed and to do an interview.
- **Small Group Conversations to Identify Common Elements and Provocative Propositions:** Once all the interviews have been completed, one or more community conversations are used to draw the most important meanings from the interviews. The goals of the meetings are to:
 - ◇ identify successful locally created organizing principles
 - ◇ use the historically successful ways of organizing to construct new, even more desirable, organizing principles
 - ◇ use the new organizing principles and the logic model to create pilot projects that will simultaneously build on the best of what is and the community's highest hopes and dreams for the future.

Step III: Planning and Implementing Positive Change

Once the community has selected general goals for local community-school engagement they select target activities. Project teams are then formed for the various pilot projects identified. These teams will use logic model planning to develop projects and implement them.

Step IV: Evaluation

The evaluation of the SS – SC process is both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative evaluation includes the measurement of volunteer hours, pilot project completions, school graduation and post secondary education rates for the schools and employment and economic self sufficiency rates for the community. The qualitative component includes a community wide evaluation designed to give the community voice in identifying the best parts of the project.

The *Successful Schools – Successful Communities* process is part of the Knowledge Economy Initiative of Ohio State University Extension. For more information or to get assistance in implementing this process in your community, contact:



Joseph H. Konen, konen.2@osu.edu OR Chester J. Bowling, bowling.43@osu.edu

OSU Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all educational programs conducted by Ohio State University Extension are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, age, gender identity or expression, disability, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, or veteran status. Keith L. Smith, Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, OSU Extension TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868
