

In Depth: Lincoln, Nebraska Community Learning Center Initiative July 15, 2004 Vol. III, No. 12

Editor's Note

This is the second in the Coalition's series of in-depth newsletters on local community school initiatives. We are pleased to profile the work of our friends in Lincoln, Nebraska. Doing so gives us the opportunity to thank Phil Schoo, retired superintendent in Lincoln, who is a strong champion of the community schools vision. We know he will be sharing that vision with others as he helps educators across the country. Thanks too to Cathie Petsch and Lea Ann Johnson, Co-Coordiators of the Lincoln Initiative for their help in writing this newsletter. Lincoln also is the community with the most community schools that have completed the community schools survey. Please complete the survey and encourage others to do the same. Click [HERE](#) for the survey

I. LINCOLN, NEBRASKA FINDS A SOLUTION

In 1999, the notion of "community learning centers" (CLC) synonymous with community schools, peaked the interest of the Foundation for the Lincoln Public Schools (FLPS), a local education fund affiliated with the Public Education Network (PEN). This interest grew with a visit that key Lincoln stakeholders took to the Local Investment Commission in Kansas City to look at their Caring Communities work, another model of community schooling. The Lincoln Community Foundation put up money to test the fit of CLCs for the Lincoln community. When they received positive feedback, the Nebraska Investment Financial Authority (a state housing group interested in reducing mobility) joined in, giving an additional \$250,000 for the CLC endeavor. The combination of these dollars and the support of community partners gave the FLPS enough funding to establish four pilot elementary school-level Community Learning Centers. These centers were designed to engage community based organizations as partners in their development. The original partners of these schools included Family Service, Cedars Youth Services, YMCA and Northeast Family Center. In 2001, after a three year struggle for federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers funds the Lincoln Public School District received \$2.3 million for three years - enough for nine more schools. The decision was made to interweave the CLC pilot schools funding under the 21st Century grant, boosting the total number of CLCs to 13. In 2003, a state-level 21st Century grant allowed for the addition of two more elementary-level CLCs, bringing the total number of CLCs in the Initiative to 15. Starting in April of 2004, the original, soon-to-expire, federal 21st Century dollars were augmented with state-level 21st Century funding, to be used over five years. Additional dollars from local funders such as the J.C. Seacrest Trust, Woods Charitable Fund, Nebraska Investment Finance Authority (NIFA), as well as national groups like the Public Education Network (PEN) among others, help keep the blended CLC funding stream strong. PEN believes that school based CLCs are an appropriate mechanism to address the growing health and social service needs of children and youth, to close the achievement gap between minority and non-minority students and to foster community involvement in school improvement efforts. These activities are part of PEN's Schools and Community Initiative funded by the Annenberg Foundation. In addition to supporting site supervisors and their interns, PEN dollars are helping to implement a major communication and media campaign to build common understanding of the concept of community learning centers as more than just after-school programs. All 15 CLC sites receive funding from a pool of resources. Keeping the dollars blended help strengthen the Initiative, reducing barriers and limitations on how certain monies can and cannot be spent. The initiative has no legal status whatsoever; instead Lincoln Public Schools and FLPS act as its fiscal agents. Forward-thinking organizers did not want to create a 'whole new animal' in Lincoln because they wanted the initiative to be long term and sustainable. For more information about Lincoln, Nebraska's demographics please click [HERE](#).

II. LEADERSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

A. Community Leadership Council

Many of the key leaders who initially visited Kansas City have remained committed to this work and are now members of the Lincoln CLC Leadership Council. Consisting of 35 members, the Council is a diverse group of community stakeholders whose primary role and responsibility is guiding the development and long term financing of the Initiative. Their goals are to develop Lincoln's capacity to implement shared partnerships and to mobilize resources to ensure Community Learning Centers are a fundamental part of the community fabric. Bill Johnston, chair of the CLC Leadership Council, and publisher of the Lincoln Journal Star, states " My passion for CLCs comes from the belief that too many children in the United

States come to school not prepared to learn. Some do not have enough sleep, adequate food or appropriate clothing. We cannot expect our education professionals to teach and deal with all the social issues. They need help. CLCs provide that help by putting more community resources in to schools. It is a concept that makes good sense."Leadership Council member Lori McClurg, director of State of Nebraska Administrative Services said, "I am so impressed with what the CLCs have accomplished. The results are very impressive. The leadership has done a great job of giving this focus and making great strides."Kathy Danek, vice president of the Lincoln Board of Education says, "The challenge to close the achievement gap has been at the forefront of many initiatives in the Lincoln Public Schools. Community Learning Centers in Lincoln help empower parents, faculty and neighborhoods to combine forces to help all children succeed in school. I like community learning centers because they are tailored to each individual neighborhood, in doing this we bring parents into the schools - acquaint them with the curriculum, empower them to be a partner in their children's education, and help them establish a strong community for their children to grow and succeed".

B. Management Team

The Lincoln CLC Initiative is staffed by co-coordinators (Cathie Petsch and Lea Ann Johnson) and one administrative assistant. As Barb Bartle, FLPS executive director, puts it: "It is critical for the superintendent to feel confident and be able to trust the CLC administrative staff. When Cathie and Lea Ann were hired that was key to the success of the work in Lincoln. Lea Ann has huge credibility in the human service world, and Cathie is very well connected with the superintendent, school board and community."The CLC management team is comprised of partners from the Lincoln Public Schools, the City of Lincoln, and the University of Nebraska. Through shared leadership this team models and is committed to strong connections between schools and community, collaborative partnerships, respect for diversity and neighborhood strengths, results, and long-term sustainability. The Initiative-level staff does the financial and relationship building work, which includes leadership development, evaluation, sustainability, and development of core operating principles. "The relationships that develop in this process are essential to achieving positive results," notes Co-coordinator Lea Ann Johnson. "No one system can be perceived as bigger or better. But rather we have to honor the contributions that each partner brings. These contributions can't always be measured in dollars. The ability to create mission alignment and shared goals among partners is a huge contribution that must not be underestimated." "Some days I feel like I work for the world, says Cathie Petsch, co-coordinator of the Initiative. "Lots of times we become the go-to people when folks don't know where else to take something interesting. The loops we get involved in really show that our presence is a valuable one. We become a conduit for a lot of different things that maybe wouldn't happen if we didn't exist."

C. School Neighborhood Advisory Committees

Each CLC site or pair of sites has an operating School Neighborhood Advisory Committee (SNAC). SNACs are the cornerstone of Community Learning Center (CLC) governance, and are made up of parents, youth, educators and other school personnel, neighborhood residents, concerned citizens, community-based organizations and service providers. Their primary function is to assist with planning, communication, and oversight of the neighborhood CLC. SNACs are maintained as open groups with no rigid ratios, appointment processes, or membership limits. The membership is inclusive and fluid to allow for adaptation, changing and evolving as interest grows, relationships develop, and outcomes change. Each SNAC is expected to reflect the uniqueness of its school and neighborhood community, building on or coordinating with existing planning structures. For this reason, the committees may look different across sites; however, they all operate under a common set of principles.

In Lincoln's experience the key to organizing site teams is to focus on and evaluate the following operating principles:

Collaboration: The SNAC has a process for identifying and selecting partners to deliver program services.

Integration: Service activities tie into the three CLC goals and the CLC Annual Plan.

Lifelong Learning Culture:

The CLC has a range of program opportunities available for children and youth, adults and families.

Outcome focused: The annual plan is developed based on the needs of neighborhood children, adults and families utilizing various sources of information, and its activities are based on site goals and outcomes.

Community Leadership: Membership of the SNAC has both parent and neighborhood resident representation and develops the annual plan.

Neighborhood Based: Community/neighborhood service is part of the regular program activity, and the neighborhood association and the CLC work together to support the neighborhood.