

# Manitoba Community Schools New Models for Community Economic Development

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## Introduction

Educators are facing major challenges as they work to meet the learning needs of an increasing number of at-risk students in their schools (Israel et al., 1993). Growing rates of family hardship, increased family and community instability, and changing family arrangements are having a significant impact on the needs of students and other school staff (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). Schools are being asked to carry increased responsibility and play out multiple roles in the lives of children that were previously accounted for by the family or the community (Blank et al., 2003). To give students the best educational experience possible, schools have changed the ways in which they use their time, money and space.

This research project is about a new model for schools and their role in fostering community economic development (CED). Community schools have the potential to drive CED through a comprehensive range of supports and approaches aimed to meet the diverse learning needs of children, families, and community members. Based on evidence that suggests there are more at-risk students in today's society than ever before, addressing these needs is important. CED principles and community school mandates share a common interest as they aim to improve social and economic conditions by enhancing student, family, and community opportunities.

## Community Schools and Community Economic Development (CED)

Unlike conventional public schools, community schools connect school and community resources as a fundamental part of their design and operation (Dumas, 2005). This means that although most regular public schools interact with their respective communities on some level, community schools connect with the communities in which they are situated on a greater level (Figure 1). Using schools as a hub, community schools bring together organizations to offer a range of services, supports, and opportunities that strengthen and support schools, communities, families, and students – before, during, and after school (Blank et al., 2003) (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 1: This entrance sign is an example of how WCS is striving to make students, parents, and community members feel appreciated and valued.



CED is a comprehensive, multi-purpose strategy aimed to revitalize and renew the local community (Bessant, 2005). It is a community based and community directed process that is directed towards fostering the social, economic, ecological and cultural well-being of communities and regions (Chaland and Downing, 2003). CED is the action of local people to create opportunities, particularly for those who are most disadvantaged (CED Across Canada, 2004).

Community schools represent one aspect of the broad CED movement because the emphasis is on direct initiative of goals by local people for local people (Rothman and Zald, 2001). Table 1 outlines seven basic points of comparison between general CED principles and the community schools model.

Comparative Element*	CED Principles and Practices	Community School Mandates and Characteristics
<b>1. Community Building</b>	Builds a sense of community by fostering relationships of acceptance, understanding, and mutual respect.	Fosters a sense of community in the school neighbourhood by serving as a hub of community activity and development.
<b>2. Community Capacity Building</b>	Builds on local strengths to address community needs.	Defines common problems and needs, and develops community-based solutions.
<b>3. Community Participation</b>	Involves inclusive participation, grass-roots, 'bottom-up' approach.	Engages community members and organizations to participate actively. Strives for greater involvement of First Nations' peoples.
<b>4. Holistic Approach to Development</b>	Recognizes healthy development of communities requires a holistic approach that addresses social, economic, cultural, and ecological dimensions of community well-being.	Serves as centres for a range of social, cultural, health, counseling, justice, personal support, economic, environment, and recreation services.
<b>5. Leadership Development</b>	Provides opportunity for building skills (human capital), connecting individuals to new information and resources, and helping people create new relationships (social capital).	Encourages participation and develops leadership capabilities of children and adults, especially those who traditionally have not played an active role.
<b>6. Partnerships, Collaboration, and Networks</b>	Recognizes the importance of partnering with groups, associations, and organizations to strategize, fund, and accomplish goals.	Builds networks with parents, community members, organizations, and human service agencies to address issues, share resources, and accomplish goals.
<b>7. Program Planning, Implementation, and Review</b>	Strategizes by using planning models, that is, visioning, assessing situation, setting goals, and devising, implementing and evaluating plans.	Includes a dynamic and inclusive process for visioning, assessing needs, setting goals, and devising, implementing, and evaluating the community school plan.

\*Comparative elements adapted from Bessant (2005)

Table 1: A comparison of core CED principles and community school characteristics.



Figure 2: This "Seven Teachings" poster is an example of how WCS is trying to promote healthy and active citizenship among students, parents, school staff, and the community at large.



Figure 3: The "Boys and Girls Club" in Thompson is one of WCS's partners.

## Methods

To determine how Manitoba's community schools are reflecting CED, a qualitative research approach was taken and two case studies were conducted. The sites chosen to investigate were Wapanohk Community School (WCS), in Thompson, Manitoba and Oak Lake Community School (OLCS), in Oak Lake, Manitoba (Figure 4). These sites allowed for an interesting rural/urban, north/south comparison. By conducting interviews and focus groups with 83 school and community personnel including: Manitoba's Education Minister, Superintendents, Principals, Community School Coordinators, Teachers, Support Staff, Parent Councils, City/Town Councils, and other key informants, it became clear how WCS and OLCS are generating CED. The basic needs, priorities, and goals of each community were established and how WCS and OLCS are using community strengths to address local needs became evident.

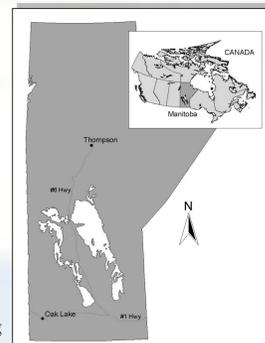


Figure 4: Map of sites chosen to investigate.



Figure 5: WCS's sign, written in English and Cree.



Figure 8: OLCS, Oak Lake, MB.

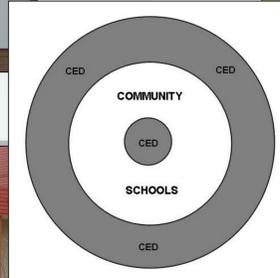


Figure 7: A visual representation of community schools and CED.



Figure 6: Welcoming sign, OLCS.



Figure 9: Pow Wow Club, WCS.

## Results and Discussion

After interviewing respondents from WCS and OLCS, it became clear that community schools are representing CED because they work with community members to improve social and economic conditions (Figure 7). The seven tenets of CED: Community Building, Community Capacity Building, Community Participation, Holistic Approach to Development, Leadership Development, Partnerships, Collaboration, and Networks, and Program Planning, Implementation and Review are mirrored by WCS and OLCS. The following discussion explores the core aspects of CED which are reflected in the goals and achievements of Manitoba community schools (Figure 8).

### Community Building

Both WCS and OLCS are trying to establish a sense of community where all residents within the community feel as though they belong and are included by developing meaningful relationships with people and creating welcoming school atmospheres (Figure 6). The two community schools investigated recognize the need to provide a variety of socializing activities involving families to create a feeling of connectedness among community and school personnel (Chaskin et al., 2001). They are working to strengthen the sense of community felt among residents by offering recreational and cultural programs that reflect the interests of the community (Figure 9).

### Community Capacity Building

WCS and OLCS are acting as CED organizations by using the strengths of their communities to meet the respective needs of their neighbourhoods (Chaland and Downing, 2003). For example, in OLCS, after-school programs and noon hour activities help in terms of eliminating time children spend at home alone due to both parents being employed, and working in Virden and/or Brandon. WCS embodies CED by meeting some needs of community residents through programs such as "Families in the Kitchen" and "FAST (Families and Schools Together)." WCS saw the need to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into course curriculum and so became a Cree bilingual school (Figure 5).

### Community Participation

Through staff meetings, Leadership Team meetings, Working Thursdays, Parent Council meetings, Junior Chief in Council meetings, Student Council meetings, and Integrated Service meetings, WCS and OLCS encourage community participation by allowing students, staff, families, and community members to learn how to work together to provide solutions to some of society's problems (Perry, 2001).



Figure 10: Oakwood Place, a seniors' home in Oak Lake, is a partner of OLCS.

## Leadership Development

Programs and activities offered through WCS and OLCS contribute to the development of human and social capital, both of which are essential ingredients to the leadership development of school and community personnel (Eberts and Scott, 2005). For example, adults develop leadership skills and human capital by helping enhance curriculum content and instructional practice by working, giving presentations, and talking with students in WCS and OLCS. Many of the programs and after-school activities that are run out of WCS and OLCS are taught by parents, community members, interagency staff, and teachers. School and community personnel also actively participate in school programs (Figure 11).



Figure 11: WCS's "Community Room," a place where many programs are run.



Figure 12: Aboriginal art designed by students and a local artist decorates the walls of WCS.

## Holistic Approach to Development

OLCS and to a greater extent WCS are unique in the roles they play in their communities by acting as service centres for families. These service centres allow community residents to access an array of counseling, health, justice, personal support, recreation, and social services either associated with or available right within the walls of the school (Government of Saskatchewan, 2002). For example, nutrition education, personal counseling, cultural activities, sports, and parenting education are available at WCS and OLCS.

## Partnerships, Collaboration, and Networks

Like CED, Manitoba community schools recognize the importance of building partnerships in order to accomplish goals (Bessant, 2005) (Figure 12). Many problems cannot be addressed in isolation and community schools, therefore, must network, partner, and collaborate (Figure 10). WCS and OLCS organize and encourage active engagement of students, school personnel, community residents and agencies to enhance the quality of life in the community. One of the ways in which WCS and OLCS do this is by connecting with community organizations to help students and families in meaningful ways (Figure 13).

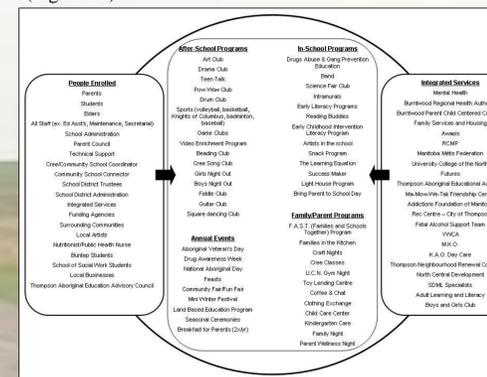


Figure 13: WCS: Partners and Outcomes.

## Conclusion

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) suggest schools that find ways to engage parents and others in CED through capacity building do better than schools that do not engage community members in helping students learn. Convincing evidence states that community schools are the most important drivers to ensure student success (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). The findings of this thesis parallel Sergiovanni (1994) and Blank et al. (2003)'s research, community schools can affect educational outcomes while they also affect better family functioning and parent involvement, access to support programs and services, improved social behaviour and healthy youth development, enhanced school environment, family and community life.

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