

**Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers:
A Community's Project Evaluated After Two Years**

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The **FitzCenter**
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Educating leaders who build communities



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What Our Community Set Out To Do

Our shared community vision is *New public schools are the centers of their Dayton neighborhoods, serving as healthy places of learning for children and families.*

Our Neighborhood School Centers (NSC) mission is *Committed to children and families, we work with many partners to develop inventive, enduring relationships to create environments where students will excel and neighborhoods will flourish with schools as their centers.*

Our stated objectives for the three-year pilot were:

1. Secure start-up funding.
2. Achieve strong involvement.
3. Identify and remove policy barriers.
4. Identify and leverage neighborhood assets.
5. Plan and open new schools.
6. Align with academic outcomes.

Over the next five years, our objectives are:

1. Improve quality of life in the neighborhoods.
2. Attract families with school-aged children.
3. Improve student performance.
4. Realign community resources to support youth achievement.
5. Sustain leadership and support for Neighborhood School Centers.
6. Serve as replicable national model.

In order to establish some intermediate measures of success, the Neighborhood School Centers focused on three outcomes: young people succeeding, neighborhood schools as first choice of residents, and neighborhood schools as centers of community involvement.

Indicators of Success

It is premature to declare Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers either successful or failing. Because of the importance given to sustainable relationships, it will take five to ten years to draw a definitive conclusion. However, there are already some indicators that look more like success than not.

1. Multiple programs have been started at each site. They indicate the breadth of school and neighborhood interests that have already been addressed and the variety of partners that have been attracted:

- Kiser Robotics Program with UD School of Engineering
- *Panther Pride* Newspaper Club
- Aullwood (Outdoor) Adventures School
- Nature Immersion Program with UD
- Salvation Army Summer Day Camps, Family Game Nights, and After-School Program
- Camp Swoneky
- Lunch with the Principal
- Camera Crew and PhotoBook
- Christmas at Kiser with UD
- Cincinnati Zoo Field Trip
- Ballroom Dance Lessons
- Trunk-or-Treat
- Grow with Your Parents Day
- Community Picnic
- World Explorers

- Kohl's and Children's Medical Center Bike Helmet Giveaway
- UD Math Pen Pals
- Cleveland Parents' Night Out
- Neighborhood Chili Cook-Off
- Arts and Crafts
- Zumba
- YMCA Youth Sports After School
- Healthy Lifestyles
- BATU Mentors
- Fairview Spanish Club
- Adventure Central After School at Fairview
- Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools Program
- Edison Annual Gender Retreats
- Home Connection
- UD Tutors and Service Learners
- Edison Eagles High Flyers Community Service Club
- Edison *Quarterly*
- *Fall into Reading* and *Spring into Math* Family Nights
- International Walk to School Day
- Girls Club
- Dads' Nights
- Miracle Makers
- Martial Arts

2. As hoped, the Neighborhood School Centers project has captured the imagination of community leaders, city planners, and local foundations. The Centers are attracting resources that are focused specifically on the Neighborhood School Centers and the surrounding neighborhoods. Grants are being written for external support that use the Centers as the proposed means of concentrating effort to demonstrate potential of new ideas. This leveraging of resources is one of the benefits of community schools.

Here are a few examples of grants written to include NSC sites:

- Ohio Department of Transportation *Safe Routes to School* Project (\$600,000)
- Dayton Foundation Arts Program (\$20,000)
- Iddings Foundation *Positive Behavior Support* Initiative (\$900,000)
- Cityfolk's *Culture Builds Community* Project (\$45,000)

Additionally, the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council recently voted to have its Safe and Supportive Neighborhoods team develop a comprehensive neighborhood initiative to be piloted in two of the Neighborhood School Centers neighborhoods. This initiative opens the possibility of focused support for work in these neighborhoods from Montgomery County's human services. The University of Dayton (UD) Fitz Center for Leadership in Community is involved in this planning.

Based on human testimony, the NSC project is a wonderful story. A multitude of anecdotes and stories of successes and good things that have happened can be told. These paint a wonderful picture of the creative opportunity that happens when good people unite for a common purpose around children, opportunity, sharing resources and building community. However, these same good stories come from many new projects with a challenging mission, strong supporters, and a compelling vision and goals. Similar stories arose from the Annie E. Casey Foundation New Futures Initiative, the creation of DECA, Project Well Being, the Parkside Early Intervention Program of the Montgomery County Early Intervention Consortium, and other similar projects in the community. The question becomes, why do some good projects end and others continue? Are there other factors beyond demonstrating outcomes that contribute to continued funding or inclusion as a line item in the budget of a non-profit partner? Who is advocating for the NSC project and for how long?

3. The Neighborhood School Centers are also attracting or supporting community investments in new housing. At the future site of the Fairview Neighborhood School Center, a major neighborhood redevelopment project is under way with the school as its

centerpiece. The Phoenix Project and key partners Good Samaritan Hospital, City of Dayton, Dayton Public Schools, and Citywide Development Corporation have pulled together to create the Fairview Commons. The Commons will include the school, park, playfields, walking paths, and a pool and splash park. Thirty new homes are being built in the Fairview neighborhood that will be rented with the option to purchase. Neighborhood safety has already improved through the use of neighborhood policing.

At the Edison site, Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (ISUS) has already completed 33 new homes for purchase and is continuing to build and sell homes. In Twin Towers, East End Community Services has developed a housing plan to support the comprehensive neighborhood development in the neighborhood of the Ruskin Neighborhood School Center.

4. Sustainable relationships characterize the Neighborhood School Centers programs and partnerships. The relationships are based on mutual self interest and, as such, are more likely to sustain than one-way service relationships. Why else would partner organizations bring their own limited resources to schools that are Neighborhood School Centers? The project must continue to recruit new partners to each site, but the potential of focusing an agency's efforts at a single school as part of that agency's core service mission has been demonstrated.

The key partnership at each site is between a lead nonprofit and the elementary school. This partnership provides for the selection, employment, supervision, and evaluation of the site coordinator. Each agency partner leads only one Neighborhood School Center initiative. By selecting an agency trusted and valued in each specific neighborhood and school, the NSC project was able to establish itself within the neighborhoods and schools within the first year. While the partners bring to their sites considerable and diverse programming, it is made clear by the leadership team that each is to serve as a broker for other community partners and avoid trying to provide everything for the neighborhood and the school itself.

Here are the school/agency partners:

- Fairview – Unified Health Solutions
- Edison – Dayton Urban League
- Kiser – The Salvation Army of Greater Dayton
- Cleveland – YMCA of Dayton
- Ruskin – East End Community Services

Because of the diversity of the partners, the neighborhoods, and the school communities, no two Dayton Neighborhood School Centers are alike. While this is difficult to manage, it is consistent with developing the schools as vital centers of their diverse neighborhoods.

5. One successful charter school, East End Community School, has been folded back into a Dayton Public School (Ruskin). As a school with site-based management, this Neighborhood School Center is set to demonstrate the full potential of the community school model. Neighborhood leaders and a strong non-profit partner are more directly involved in the leadership of the school, including selection of the principal. This model, if successful, could lead to similar experimentation at the other Neighborhood School Centers.

6. Parent choice of neighborhood schools over other options is slowly increasing. At the new Ruskin School, more than one third of the students are walking to school in the Fall 2008. This is the hoped for direction for all of the Neighborhood School Centers. No one in Dayton is required to go to a certain school, so neighborhood schools must become schools of neighborhood choice. The Fitz Center and DPS are tracking each of the Neighborhood School Centers to monitor enrollment from within 1.5 miles and 2.0 miles of the school. Although many of these students are bused, DPS is not mandated by the State to do so for students within 1.5 miles of the school. The 1.5 mile radius serves as an indicator of “potential” walkers.

Here is the actual enrollment breakdown for Fall 2008 as of September 24, 2008.

NSC Site	Total Enrollment	Within 1.5 mi.	Within 2.0 mi.
Cleveland	484	335	360
		69%	74%
Edison *	411	151	227
		37%	55%
Fairview	363	170	240
		47%	66%
Kiser	512	210	270
		41%	53%
Ruskin	398	312	349
		78%	86%

*Edison's permanent location is in the Wolf Creek neighborhood. The school is temporarily located in the Fairview neighborhood during construction of the new building and campus. The reported numbers are for the Wolf Creek site.

The NSC model has created more opportunities than existed previously in the school for families to be involved in low or no cost activities with their students in the school. As a result, there does seem to be a more favorable impression of the school by some parents which has lead to some parents requesting enrollment in the NSC. At this time, the Dayton Public Schools policy for enrollment does not guarantee priority to neighborhood families in the NSCs. The lack of such a policy has created a problem in that some families have been unable to register in their neighborhood school due to waiting lists and high demand. This has been identified as an issue in the Kiser and Cleveland NSC neighborhoods.

7. The NSC project has successfully brokered additional resources for the school community and students. Having a person with the designated role of brokering relationships between the school and the community (especially the UD community) has garnered a large array of volunteer hours, in-kind donations, monetary donations, and

grants that have supplemented and supported new and creative opportunities for academic support, learning and self discovery for the students in the school.

Future funding for years four and five tentatively has been secured sufficient to sustain current levels of activity at five Neighborhood School Centers. The baseline annual budget of Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers is \$400,000, not including significant in-kind commitments of time and professional expertise. Future funding sources are Dayton Public Schools, Montgomery County, United Way of the Greater Dayton Area, and the University of Dayton. Dayton Public Schools will pay half of the total cost. Additional private and public partners and funding sources are needed for the project to realize its full potential, to add programs, and to expand to other neighborhood schools.

The NSC project has many hidden supports from the partner non-profit agencies and the University of Dayton, making it difficult to calculate the actual total investment in the project. In some cases, the partner agency contribution has been sizeable and significant, providing needed resources to the students and families of the school and neighborhood. The sharing of opportunity appears to come about naturally because there is a "conduit" of the NSC project as a whole to promote this sharing of resources. In addition, the model has a great deal of "behind the scenes" support and involvement from many parts of the University of Dayton, especially the Fitz Center and the School of Education and Allied Professions. UD's Urban Teacher Academy assigns first and second-year teacher education students to the Neighborhood School Centers for field experience. The goal is to retain UD graduates in Dayton Public Schools at all grade levels.

While the Neighborhood School Centers project provides excellent opportunities for the University of Dayton as a whole to further its mission through development and sharing of creative curriculum ideas, service learning opportunities, and sharing resources needed at the sites, estimating the costs of this sharing is an important aspect of understanding the model. The University of Dayton's commitment has been crucial to the development, on-going implementation, and future planning of this project. The role of UD is a definite element of success in developing the model and its implementation.

An estimate of the real cost of the NSC project is not possible without a calculation of the contribution of UD and the other agencies. Costs associated with this type of sharing are very hard to calculate at this time, but these are real and would need to be understood both for sustainability of the current project and replication of the model in another setting. UD's involvement has made the project visible, brought to bear a great deal of social capital from the important sponsors and leaders in the community, and leveraged many of the structures that make the project successful. The role of UD is a definite element of success in the model and the implementation.

8. The site coordinator is the key role and most important investment. The NSC project has resulted in the successful creation of a model that has been implemented in four and now five schools for over two years. The project model of a site coordinator with a foot in the neighborhood community and a foot in the school, with the goal of bringing the best resources to bear on the children and the school for the promotion of student academic success, creating a neighborhood hub of activities, and creating such an inviting school that parents choose this model for their children has proven a useful model that contributes to school and neighborhood and is viewed as a welcome addition and desirable by those schools not in the NSC project. The site coordinator's personal attributes and skills contribute significantly to the success of the model and can be measured to the extent that the NSC principal needs and relies on the site coordinator and that a non-NSC principal "wants one."

The NSC project has contributed toward developing an understanding of the activities and role of a site coordinator in a community school. The evaluation process of the NSC by the Fitz Center has produced a body of data that help describe the type of activities and time spent in implementing the model. We have learned the following.

- Through this process, we can identify that to date most of the activity of the site coordinator takes place inside the school and involves supporting student enrichment and empowerment, such as social skills, supporting student

aspirations and helping students gain the ability to function at their personal best. Site coordinator activity has been developing programming and activities to support student learning and personal development.

- The data show that most of the energy of the project supports students from a strengths based (or assets based) perspective, involving direct contact with students, parents, teachers, families and groups.
- The data show that the site coordinators have not been pulled significantly for use in issues of discipline or attendance/truancy enforcement. However, direct contacts have included involvement in being present for bus duty, lunch duty, office coverage, and in meeting requests of the principals for specific tasks. The tenor of these activities (such as punitive/disciplinary, educational, student/family support oriented) seems to depend on the principal and site coordinator.
- The data also seem to indicate that the site coordinators are poised to respond to the demands and needs of the school setting more than the demands of the neighborhood community. The structure of the project contributes to this, as the site coordinator is in the unique position of being employed by the non-profit agency but stationed in the school. At this point, the agencies and the principals hold expectations of the site coordinator which are not clearly defined in all schools. The site coordinator is often in the challenging position of trying to accommodate two sets of expectations. The goal is to continue to clarify and define the structure of the project as it relates to the expectations and responsibilities of the site coordinator role in the NSC project. The data being gathered in Year Three are designed to understand and define movement toward common goals and understandings.

By understanding the activities, the role of the site coordinator can be evaluated and adjusted to focus on project goals with intention versus “being busy.” In addition, understanding the activities and defining the role of the site coordinator in the model allows for the model to be replicated and to determine what avenues of preparation contribute to success in implementing the role of site coordinator.

9. Outcome data and longitudinal evaluation would be useful to determine how this model in the five schools compares to other Dayton schools without a Neighborhood School Center. Comparing perceptions of safety, opportunity, attachment to school, and university involvement would be useful information for longitudinal comparison and measuring the value of the NSC model to the actual consumers – the kids, families, and neighborhoods of Dayton. We don't have much of this type of data currently. These indicators could be tracked in the future, but this will require an investment in survey research support.

10. While Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers probably are not a replicable national model, they are of interest to a national audience of communities attempting to create community schools. Fitz Center team members, site coordinators, and one principal have all presented at national conferences about the Dayton project. Ira Harkavy of the University of Pennsylvania, the national president of the Coalition for Community Schools, recently commissioned the Fitz Center executive director to write a chapter on Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers for a forthcoming book entitled *Comprehensive University/Community Partnerships for Youth Development and Civic Renewal*. The structure of our community's effort and the role of the University of Dayton are of particular interest to other communities that have struggled to get organized and to involve university partners.

Conclusion

There are many unanswered and possibly unanswerable questions about Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers. Can we help improve student academic performance? (Most schools are in Academic Emergency status.) Can we take the Neighborhood School Centers to scale? (Dayton has 22 public elementary schools.) How will a larger project be administered and by whom? (The guiding principles of the Neighborhood School Centers could be emphasized in various ways, depending on the administrative structure.) Will Dayton parents choose to have their children walk to a neighborhood school after a generation of busing them to the school of their choice? (In all but one of

the Dayton neighborhoods served by the Neighborhood School Centers, few children currently walk to elementary school.)

Acknowledging these challenging questions, no one has walked away from a leadership role on this project. The sponsors and partners remain believers. The University of Dayton remains committed to a leadership role. And the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community continues to believe that Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers are the best demonstration of the power of community building in urban Dayton. Patient persistence may be the most important leadership trait needed to realize a hopeful future for youngest citizens.

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