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Community Schools: Effectiveness of Addressing Barriers to
Education in Suburban Communities

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Departmental Honors Thesis
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Community Schools: Effectiveness of Addressing Barriers to

Education in Suburban Communities

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Abstract

Over the years, the once thought of as stable suburban community has seen a significant increase in poverty and homelessness which has impacted students in similar ways as it has students in urban area schools and has resulted in the implementation of community school programs. According to Pew Research Center in 2020, there were 37.2 million people living in poverty, 16.2 million live in the suburbs, 15.1 million reside in urban communities – and collectively 11.6 million are minors. Community school programs have grown in popularity as an intervention in urban communities to address challenges that students have encountered which create barriers to education. Commonly identified barriers are the lack of affordable housing, transportation, behavior and mental health conditions, sense of belonging, academic enhancements, along with bullying and living in unsafe neighborhoods. These programs seek to address those barriers by promoting equity within the school through the creation of an inclusive environment – a community, which ensures that students, families, and school staff have access to resources necessary to overcome barriers and develop a healthy norm in and out of the classroom. There is limited research regarding the student outcomes of community schools in suburban communities. This qualitative study helps fill the gap by examining a suburban area community school program to identify its effectiveness in addressing student outcomes by interviewing ten program constituents. The study resulted three themes: educational resources, access to resources, and social emotional learning skills.

Keywords: community schools, suburban, urban, rural, student outcomes, SEL

Community Schools: Effectiveness of Addressing Barriers to
Education in Suburban Communities

Introduction

The community school movement was sparked by the pragmatic philosopher John Dewey in the early twentieth century as he believed that schools should not just be a place where students gather to learn grammar, mathematics, and history, but that schools should teach children how to thrive in their social environment using what is learned in the classroom (Green & Gooden, 2014). In 1896, the educational theorist Dewey developed a Laboratory School at the University of Chicago in which he, “sought out such cooperative relations in deliberately created communities dedicated to change, experimentation, and social reform,” (Durst, A., 2010). The work of Dewey laid the foundation of logical solutions to not only in, but out-of-school factors that made it difficult for children to focus on learning activities at school.

Since the Progressive Era, the importance of community schools slowly spread, eventually leading to the 1990’s collaboration between the Children’s Aid Society and New York City Public Schools, which incorporated community resources into the school; this framework became a model of effective community school programming and exhibited the importance of implementation in urban communities (Green & Gooden, 2014). Effective community school programs are also associated with an inviting school environment, vision driven administration, inclusion, mutually beneficial and trusting relationships between students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community (Haines, et al., 2015). The activities also seek to discover the root cause of poor academic and attendance performance by introducing students and their families to empowering resources that promote sustainability (Heers, et al., 2016).

Organizations providing resources and social services to those living in poverty are abundant in cities as it is believed this is where the concentration of those in need of a hand up reside; however, it fails to address the population of people living in poverty in suburban and rural communities.

Poverty in Suburban Communities

Living in the suburbs has often been associated with success; however, Pavlakis (2018) identified an upward trend of poverty and homelessness in metropolitan areas since the 2008 recession. Pavlakis discovered that the poor population in the country was growing most abundantly in suburban communities, and by 2010, it was reported that over half of the metropolitan poor lived in suburban communities (Pavlakis, 2018). This revelation prompted the researcher to look into community school outcomes in suburban areas as students and their families are facing the same obstacles as those in urban communities.

Poverty in Rural Communities

Counterurbanization is the shift of people and businesses moving into rural communities; this has increased as people are seeking the slower pace and peace that accompanies country living and there is limited space for individuals and businesses no longer have the space to grow in urban and suburban communities (Berry, 1980). It is estimated that one in three students attend schools in rural communities and urban to rural and suburban to rural migration has resulted in the long overdue identification of not only inequitable funding of rural area schools, but the lack of resources available for students and families (Clark, 2019). Cultural quotient, often referred to as simply CQ, is an individual's ability to be comfortable working with people outside of what is their norm and more importantly being culturally competent and taking the time to understand what is normal for others (Hamilton, 2019). In Tennessee advocates have

been endorsing evidence-based interventions such as community schools to address barriers to education for students living in rural communities (Faison & Bailey, 2021). In 2019, Communities in Schools (CIS) partnered with Governor Bill Lee's administration along with the General Assembly to design a plan of action to "reduce chronic absenteeism, improve educational outcomes and raise graduation rates in 23 high schools" (CISTN, n.d.). There was noteworthy progress made in the 11,589 students living in rural communities who had access to CIS programming (655 received direct case management from CIS) as 82% had improvements in their attendance, 75% improved their SEL skills, 94% were promoted to the next grade, and 97% of seniors graduated (CISTN, n.d.).

Upon unsuccessfully locating scholarly articles and research specific to this demographic, the researcher sought to locate a community school program in a suburban community to evaluate its effectiveness in producing positive student outcomes by addressing the in and out of school factors they were facing by using qualitative and quantitative research methods. This led to the discovery of a well-established nonprofit organization which specifically works with suburban families that developed a partnership with the public school system to pilot a community school program in 2015. The organization's goal is to provide after school programming which consisted of tutoring, social empowering activities, supper, and wraparound support for families with their stability work and partnership with a mental health organization for children and families living in suburbia.

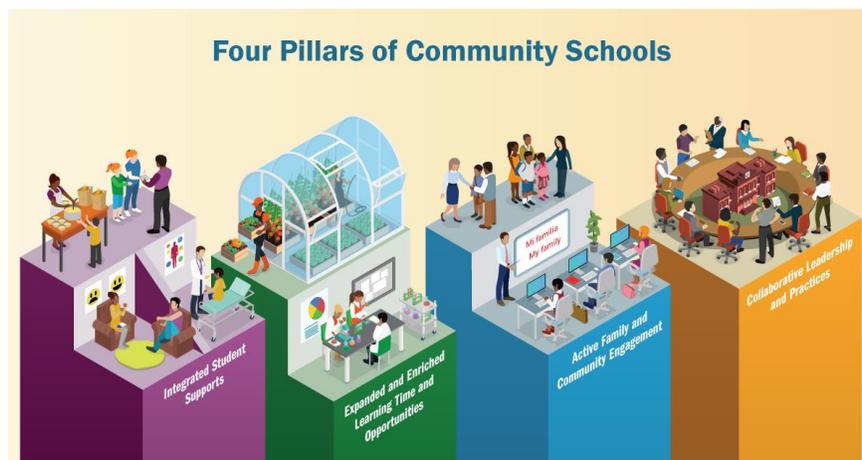
Four Pillars of Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools has developed an evidence-based intervention for addressing student barriers to education and is a guiding entity that provides the knowledge and support for new and established community school programs by ensuring they have access to

available resources to implement their unique program (Community Schools, 2022). The Coalition for Community Schools has developed a *Community Schools Playbook* which is a strategic guide for advancing community schools; the four pillars, which are considered the fundamental were identified: integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices (Community Schools, 2022).

Figure 1

Four Pillars of Community Schools



Note. Four Pillars of Community Schools according to the Community Schools Playbook by Community Schools, 2022. Copyright 2022 by Community Schools.

Integrated Student Supports

Emotional quotient, also known as EQ, refers to an individual's ability to recognize the emotions and irrational behaviors in themselves or others; healthy conversations are held with program coordinators which make it a teachable moment where adjustments and improvements of the undesirable attitudes and behavior can occur safely (Hamilton, 2019). Community school programming has a member that is dedicated to coordinating services that address the needs of

the “whole student” by addressing their academic, social emotional learning, and ensure they have life skills that can be applied in and out of the classroom (Community Schools, 2022). Food and housing insecurity are two major factors that over twenty-five million students are faced with and although the program is not equipped to solve poverty, they are able to connect students and their families with resources to overcome these barriers and provide mental and physical health services that may result from experienced trauma (Community Schools, 2022).

Expanding and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities

Ensuring that students have equitable access to enriching learning opportunities may impact their overall ability to understand all aspects of life and improve their ability to solve problems – this is known as intellectual quotient or IQ (Hamilton, 2019). One of the unique aspects of community school programming is their ability to provide enrichment activities that incorporate critical thinking skills that participants can use in their communities; these learning opportunities typically occur after-school, over the weekend, and even during the summer (Community Schools, 2022). In flourishing community school programs, these opportunities will take place in various community settings which expands the students’ sense of community to include resources outside of their physical school.

Active Family and Community Engagement

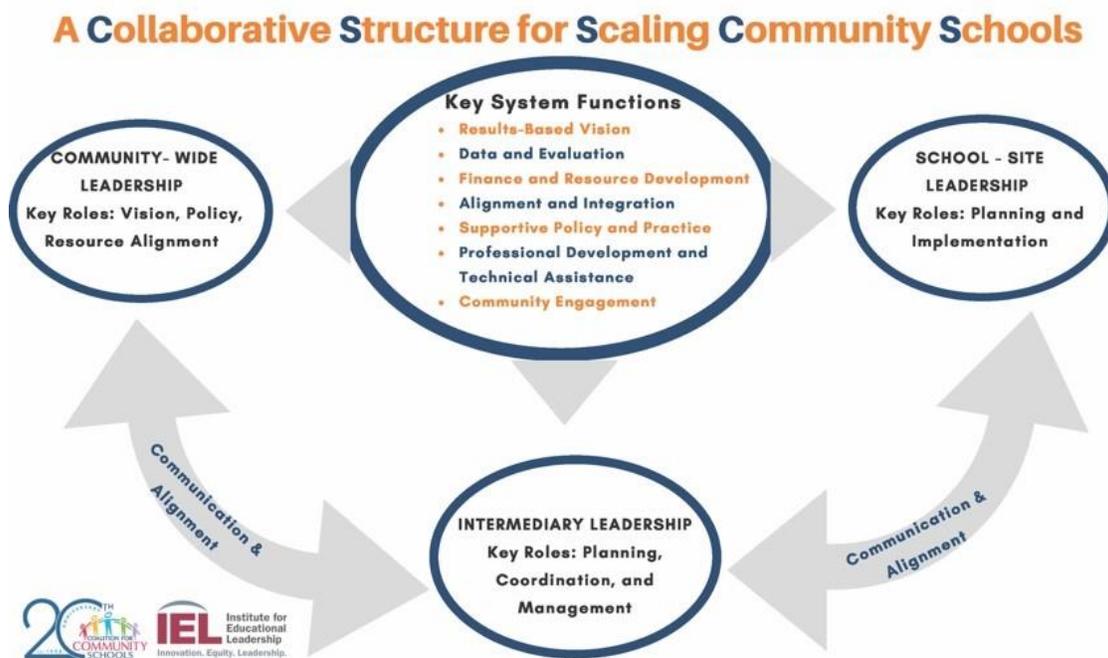
Promoting involvement from families and the community is critical as it creates transparency by encouraging interactions between families, school staff, and the community to identify barriers and create partnerships and interventions to support students and their families. The program contributes the importance of having culturally competent school staff as being an intricate part of creating a positive learning environment that improves student outcomes and overall learning environment (Community Schools, 2022).

Collaborative Leadership and Practices

Creating community wide leadership involvement consisting of students, parents, school staff, and community partners which includes a shared vision, policies, and resources that are aligned with addressing barriers for students and their families is the foundation of the community school program as it supports the other pillars of community schools (Community Schools, 2022).

Figure 2

Unpacking the Fourth Pillar of Community Schools



Note. The fourth pillar of community school programming in the Community School Playbook Community Schools, 2022. Copyright 2022 by Community Schools.

The proper implementation of community school programming is considered to be a key component of developing relationships with stakeholders to identify and address barriers to education. This research will evaluate a suburban community school program's effectiveness by determining the program's success at addressing in and out of school factors that create barriers

to education for students by analyzing the program's deidentified data and interviews with program stakeholders.

Literature Review

Due to the shortage of current research related to community school programs in suburban schools, this literature review will focus on the effectiveness of program implementation in an urban school setting. Primary focus areas are academic and social outcomes, effectiveness at addressing truancy, attendance, and out of school factors that impact the family and their environment. The purpose of this approach is to identify any common trends in student in and out of school factors that are barriers to education to demonstrate that similar programming such as what is used in urban schools would be useful in all school systems.

Academic Outcomes

Educators, social workers, and community partners in urban areas are of an abundant influence of school violence, mental health trauma, and drug use which interferes with a student's ability to focus on classroom activities and have therefore created interventions such as community schools to combat the issue (Proctor, 2002). Historical data of Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) in the Tulsa and Union Public Schools in Oklahoma show a trend of student outcomes like that of the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI) where there is an increase in reading and math achievement; however, there is still a lack of getting to the root cause within the communities which put students at disadvantage and inhibits their likelihood of success beyond secondary education (Adams, 2019).

Full-Service Schools (FSS) or FSCS have a mission to collaborate with community agencies to provide students and their families with academic, health, and social service

resources; the programs also provide 2-3 hours of after school time in which student in and out of school barriers to education are evaluated and addressed (Valli et al., 2016).

Over the course of a nine-year study data from six FSCSs were analyzed, and it was discovered that students who belonged to a TACSI school had a 32+ point increase in their math and 19+ point increase in reading achievement over their peers who did not belong to a TACSI school (Adams, 2019). Teachers also preferred teaching in the FSCS learning environments as they felt a sense of cohesiveness amongst the teachers and support from school administration which they believe attributed to their professional growth and development in educating their students (Adams, 2019). Qualitative research conducted by the Providence Full-Service Community Schools shows evidence of how innovative teaching approaches intensifies the learning experience which results in a sustained impact on students (Daniel et al., 2019). Their approach to teaching takes the focus off testing and redirects it on creating an intense learning environment with unique teaching techniques.

Principal leadership is an impactful role in school reform and community development in urban schools as they advocate for their student population; the intimate relationship they have establish with the constituents of the school gives them security in communicating their needs to the principal (Green, 2018).

One of the major obstacles community school programming encounters is securing funding from a combination of grants, private, and/or public endorsements, or partnerships with other organizations. The Harlem Children's Zone spends an average of \$5,000 per child in their program, but there are cases, although rare, that programs have reported spending \$16,000 per child (Heers, et al., 2016). There are FSCS Program funds available through federal Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education which will distribute a maximum

award of \$2.5 million dollars over an entire project period which can must not exceed 5 years; the estimated awards range from \$275,000-500,000 annually and are no less than \$75,000 per year (Department of Education, 2021). The grant proposal requirements to secure funding from the Department of Education are extensive as the goals, necessary tools to achieve the goals, change agents and decision makers roles must all be identified along with plans of execution (Holme, et al, 2020).

The FSCS Program funds are reliable source of discretionary grants being utilized to empower marginalized and oppressed communities; however, the reality is only an estimated thirty programs have benefited from the grants (Department of Education, 2021). The miniscule number of recipients, in comparison to eligible schools in the United States alerts another problematic area, as the vehicle for change is fueled by funds that will not be available after 5 school years, which could result in a loss of staff and other mandatory resources necessary to run an effective community school program that addresses student in and out of school factors.

Social Outcomes

Initially designed as an effort to provide a structured and safe environment in which students ages six to fourteen could thrive while their parents were working, after-school programs became successful by being able to address the needs of the program participant which encouraged beneficial relationships amongst students and program facilitators (Nawrotzki, 2004). According to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine these types of environments which also provide a sense of belonging, support, a system approach to addressing the micro, mezzo, and macro needs of the students and their families, and addresses physical and mental health are critical in promoting positive social and emotional learning skills (SEL) amongst student populations (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017).

Community school programming that offers an after-school services is an ideal setting to improve SEL skills by giving students a comfortable space in which they can cultivate their talents, learn to express themselves in a healthy manner, and develop strong relationships with their peers and adults (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017). After-school programming also promotes peer learning in which students can use their perspective and understanding to assist one another homework assignments and, the school setting provides a safe and structured environment where there will be supervision. The hours of such after school programs typically last from 3-6 p.m. between three and five days out of the school week, some programs even offer summer camps to keep the students engaged year-round (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017). Successful nationally known after-school programs such as the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and 4-H seek to enhance student SEL skills by encouraging students to be leaders that change the world through philanthropy and creative thinking; this framework is proven to be an effective framework used in creating positive SEL outcomes (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017).

Despite the considerable expectations of community school programming, one of the greatest limitations to after-school programming such as that provided with community schools is that students are not required to attend and without mandatory attendance, it is incredibly difficult to gauge the effectiveness in the program's ability to address student outcomes in and out of school (Hurd & Deutsch, 2017).

Truancy and Attendance Outcomes

Absenteeism in schools is so problematic that truancy officers have become imperative in the school setting. By analyzing the data from 3,428 students attending fourteen schools that had adopted the transformative school-community collaborations (TSCC) framework, it was

determined that implementing out-of-school time (OST) through programs such as community schools is significantly effective in reducing absenteeism (Kim & Gentle-Genitty, 2020).

Out of School Outcomes

To effectively address the student needs from a person-in-environment perspective, out of school factors such as political and socioeconomic forces must also be addressed. The lack of equitable resources and marginalization in impoverished areas continues to thrive as programming that transforms oppressed people does not exist, even in community school programs (Green & Gooden, 2014).

Parental Involvement

An effective FSCS creates a positive, inviting, and inclusive school culture that welcomes both families and community partners into the school setting. Transparency and developing a trusting relationship with administrators were a similar trend amongst families and community partners with an emphasis on the principal being a key player in ensuring the teachers and staff share this vision (Haines et al., 2015). Parents and community partner perspectives often do not feel welcomed into the schools which result in their absence when opportunities arise to volunteer for classroom or after school events in grades 6-12.

Strong and healthy relationships between schools and parents are also a necessary component of community schools as FSCS seek to involve the students, parents, teachers, and community services. The Providence Full-Service Community Schools (PFSCS) conducted quantitative research utilizing a 5-point Likert scale to show a positive correlation between PFSCS programming and parent interaction by showing that 85% of the parents were comfortable initiating or holding a conversation with a teacher about their students' progress at school (Chen et al, 2016, p. 2273). Research such as that conducted on the PFSCS proves that

changing the school culture minimizes the gap in parent involvement and encourages reciprocal partnerships not only with parents but with community partner as well (Haines et al, 2015).

Community Involvement

In his pursuit to save failing school systems, James Comer created “Comer Schools” in 1988 which was a collaboration of parents, teachers, administrators, and mental health practitioners to support the students; although this concept produced positive student outcomes it sparked the interest of businesses as it was a reminder that the students of today were the workforce of tomorrow (Van Deusen, 1991). The development of partnerships between students, families, schools, and the community allow for a unique learning experience that could potentially change the trajectory of a student as it may open the door for internships, volunteer opportunities, or even employment in the future (Stefanski et al., 2016). Cultivating these relationships also allows an opportunity for the community to empower the children whose families and schools support their business as it gives people a sense of pride to be able to support those who support them.

Theoretical Perspective

Theory guides effective practice in community school programs as it provides an opportunity to use it in conjunction with evidence-based practice to create programming that will be effective with the population the program serves. Social Learning Theory, Theory of Change, and Person-in-Environment perspectives were used to analyze student barriers to education and community school programming which seeks to strengthen students, their families, and community.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory consists of four foundational principles: attention to the environment and subject, retention of the event and subject, reproduction which speaks to the observer's ability to reproduce the behavior, and the motivation that observers desire to practice that behavior (Sheridan et al., 2011). The act of learning from observation is something that occurs early in infancy when babies mimic the things their parents or siblings say or do. This can produce desirable or at times undesirable behaviors; however, in the social work profession it is used to encourage positive outcomes by the use of peers and positive enforcements (Sheridan et al., 2011). Community school programs use social learning theory to observe student behavior and turn deficiencies into peer-led, program driven learning experiences which include using role-playing, modeling, and positive reinforcement to encourage positive behavior that convey into the community in which the student resides (Sheridan et al., 2011). Applying social learning theory in this study was beneficial in understanding how social anxiety in adolescents and personality development is influenced by the student's environment.

Theory of Change

Theory of change used in community school programming as its believed that cultivating relationships with partnerships in the community will provide the support necessary to help students and their families have equitable access to resources and develop a healthy quality of life. The five key components of theory of change are inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact, these components are critical as they show not only the intended impact programming may have on students, but it can also prepare for any implications that may impede on the goal of the program (Tancred et al., 2018). One of the unique characteristics of the theory of change is its simplistic approach to complex solutions which invites stakeholders from various demographics

to participate in implementation and advocating for change when necessary to overcome obstacles or produce a higher volume of preferred results. Utilizing theory of change during this study allowed the researcher to identify the vision of this community school, interventions that the program has implemented to address barriers to education, and result in a testable hypothesis that determines if organization's goals were achieved.

Person-in-Environment

Person-in-environment (PIE) suggests that people are heavily influenced by their environment and is used by social work generalist to understand their experiences, reasons they respond the way they do, and to develop a comprehensive approach to the clients' social role, their environment, mental and physical health (Jacobson, 2018). Exploration of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers establishes higher academic achievement in students who participated in community school programming than those who did not, and similar trends were discovered in Cincinnati, Ohio where Community Learning Centers (CLC) have transformed the worse schools in the district into those receiving state recognition as being effective models of community schooling (Jacobson, 2018). While conducting this study, the researcher was able to apply PIE to identify the student's interpersonal relationships with their family and peers on a micro-level, connections with small groups such as their school, peers, and church on a mezzo level, and systemic connections on the macro-level such as policy and legislation that had led to the oppression and inequalities. Being able to identify all the components creates an opportunity to gain experience all aspects that are potentially influencing the student's environment.

Measure

Purpose

The social work profession has a responsibility to advocate for programming that will improve the learning experience for students, teachers, and administrators by addressing the genuine issues that students are facing. Currently the school systems are plagued with unresolved issues of violence, lack of mental health services, food and housing insecurities, and drug abuse; programs such as community schools seek to address barriers to education from a person-in-environment perspective with the goal of allowing the student to focus on their studies.

The research that is currently available focuses on student outcomes in urban schools with community school programming; however, there is a gap on research that explores similar outcomes in suburban areas. This research will focus on analyzing a community school program for middle school students in grades 6-7 to determine whether the program is effective in creating positive student outcomes and seek out the feedback of parents, teachers, school administrators, and the community school program coordinator to determine if they feel the program is successful at transforming student outcomes. Establishing a trend in positive student outcomes might encourage other schools in suburban and rural areas to adopt the community school framework to empower the student, their families, and the communities they live in.

Methods

A mixed method approach to research, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative measures were executed to explore the effectiveness of a community school program in a suburban neighborhood.

Data Collection

Quantitative research was based on secondary data collected from the agency that facilitates the community school program and was used to gather descriptive statistics such as demographic information which identified the population the program serves.

Qualitative research consisted of structured one-on-one interviews of community school program constituents in which they were asked a series of open-ended questions specific to their role to capture their perspectives of the effectiveness of the program. Interviews were conducted with parents, school principal, teachers, school resource officer (SRO), school social worker, and community school program coordinator to identify what works and any potential gaps in programming. The shared questions asked to all community school constituents were:

1. What changes have you observed in students since participating in the community school program?
2. What are the most successful components of the community school program?
3. What areas of the program should expand or improve to increase positive student outcomes?

Due to unexpected school closures as a result of COVID-19, I was initially unaware if the interviews would be in-person or via video conferencing; however, approximately 67% of the interviews were conducted at the school which allowed for the opportunity to make unstructured observations of the interactions between students, teachers, parents, and the community school program coordinator.

Recruitment

The community school program that is being analyzed is located in a suburban community in the southeast region of the United States. The school is a middle school with

students grades sixth through eighth and has a student enrollment of approximately seven hundred students. The school is considered to be a Level 5 school which is the top rating in their state for academic growth and also has a STEM School Designation in their state.

To begin the process a formal request was sent to the executive director of the agency that facilitates the community school program explaining the research concept and requesting access to deidentified program data and permission to interview the on-site program coordinator. After receiving a letter of full support from the executive director, a formal request was submitted to principal at the middle school explaining the research concept and requesting permission to conduct interviews with program constituents such as parents, teachers, the school social worker, and SRO.

Upon receipt of the principal's consent and IRB approval for the research, flyers were sent electronically from the school administration to all school staff and the community school program staff to alert them of the research opportunity (see Appendix A).

Sample and Study Participants

The agency that facilitates the community school program securely transmitted program data beginning with the 2018-2019 school year and ending with 2020-2021. The data contained demographic information such as age, grade, gender, race, and zip code along with program specific information such as the students' school attendance, classes enrolled in, classes passed, after-school program attendance, and whether any referrals were made for additional services for 293 students.

Table 1: Student Demographic Characteristics (n=293)

Race		%(n)
African American		20.8% (61)
White		54.6% (160)
Asian		2.0% (6)
Hispanic		8.2% (24)
Bi-Racial		2.4% (7)
Unspecified		11.3% (33)
Gender		
Male		43.0% (126)
Female		45.7% (134)
Unspecified		11.3% (33)

Table 2: Racial Make-up of Student Participants

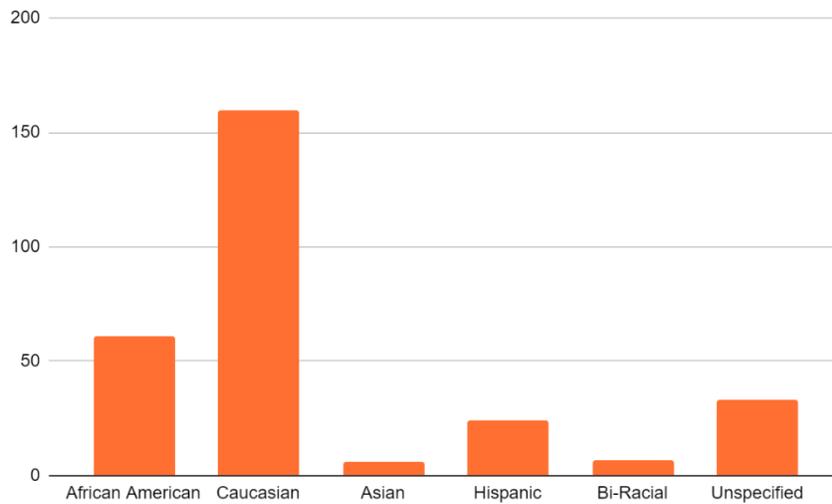
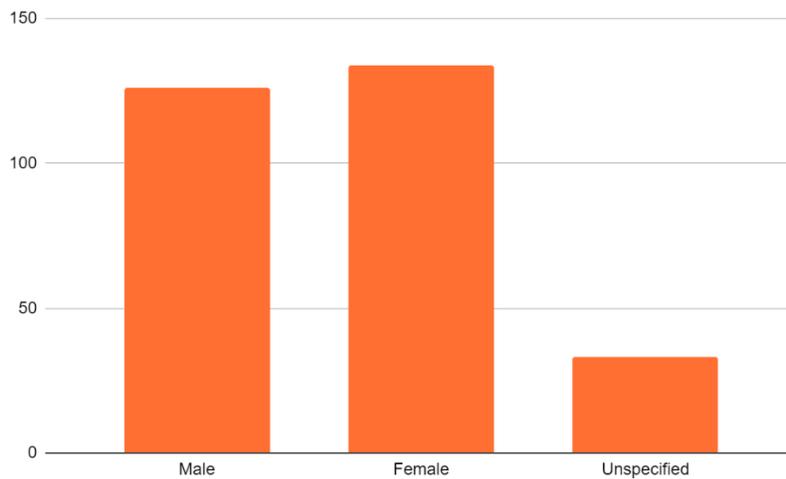


Table 3: Gender Make-up of Student Participants



The quota sampling technique was applied when selecting interviewees as I wanted to ensure that I was obtaining various perspectives from stakeholders of the program. In total, there were nine in-person interviews conducted with individuals who have a connection with the community school program. Other than the principal, community school program coordinator, SRO, and school social worker, there were four teachers representing the sixth, seventh, eighth, and exceptional education students, and two parents. The exceptional education teacher gave a unique perspective as she was also able to share her experiences as a parent of an autistic child who enrolled in the community school program.

Results

The structured interviews provided unique perspectives from community school stakeholders as they identified changes in students who utilize the program's services, the most successful components of the program, and areas where the program should expand or improve to increase student outcomes. The interviews yielded in three themes: Educational Resources, Access to Resources, and Social Emotional Learning Skills.

Educational Resources

One of the most mutually applauded components of the community school program is the free after-school program that occurs held Monday-Friday from 2:30-5:30 p.m. which has proven to be a great asset to our working parents. One of the emerging subthemes identified was Structured Environment in which the exceptional education teacher expressed:

“The after-school program lifts the burden off of working parents.”

Commitment from the school administration is an essential component of the community school programming in which this school has a principal who is willing to go the extra mile for

students and their families even when school is not in session. The principal believes that the community school gives students a:

...place to connect, or a place to belong and opportunity to connect, and the structured environment makes it a valuable time for students.

The program also provides academic enrichment activities that occur during non-school hours and provides a structured environment in which students have the opportunity to receive homework assistance from community partners, teachers, the program coordinator, and volunteers. The teachers have seen an increase in students participating in the programming returning in classwork and are in support of there being multiple outlets in which students can get the tutoring they need; a seventh-grade teacher said the following:

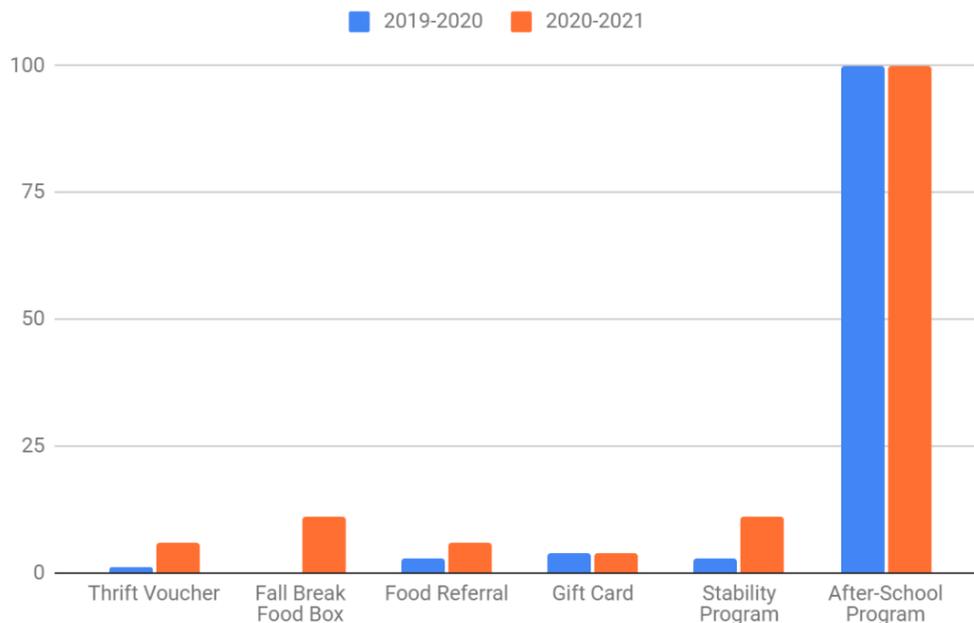
Even if we offered tutoring, they did not want to come because they had been with us all day...the program helped ease that by allowing students to get help from a different perspective.

Access to Resources

Community school programs are known for their ability to provide wrap-around services to students and their families. After the completion of a thorough assessment of students and their families, community school program coordinators are able to mobilize resources in the community that have the capacity to address the identified barriers to education. The primary services or programs provided by this particular program are the thrift program, food referrals, fall break food boxes, gift cards (for specific items not available), after-school program, and stability program. During the 2018-2019 school year this information was not captured; however, based on the program utilization data provided by the community school program, the after-school program has been the most utilized. This program also has other services on-site such as a

food pantry, clothing closet which provides new and gently used school uniforms, laundry facilities, and a mental health partnership which provides services on-site daily; unfortunately, data was not available to determine the use of these services.

Table 4: Community School Program Utilization



The community school program has developed a school-based mental health partnership to provide assessments, counseling, and referrals for additional services if necessary to students while they are at school. This partnership allows for an on-site counselor to develop prevention plans that helps students at-risk for Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) and behavior problems by serving as a liaison between the student, their family, and the school. Throughout the interviews there was significant support for the increased need of mental health services as the principal stated:

Having the partnership with a mental health agency we have seen some real improvement with kids who have more trauma related issues.

Also, in support of the partnership, a sixth-grade teacher expressed:

I love the fact that we have a counselor that is available at any time during the school day or after school.

The school social worker praises the mental health liaison partnership; however, shares that there is an increased need for services as we emerge from COVID-19:

More access to mental health counselors as we more than ever utilize this service as we make more referrals annually than they can serve.

One of the unique qualities of the community school programming is its ability to alter their programs and services to meet the needs of students and their families. In March 2020 when the school district was closed, and students began learning virtually due to COVID-19 their after-school efforts went virtual as well to ensure students had assistance with their homework and the continued encouragement and emotional support they received throughout the day at school. In Table 1 you can see how the need for the after-school program declined from the 2019-2020 to the 2020-2021 school year and request for services increased including the need for fall break food boxes. As a result, basic needs support was a trending subtheme in which one parent stated:

If we actively needed the services, I know we could have gotten them with no hesitation.

An exceptional education teacher expressed:

I have noticed an increase in the need for the services especially since the pandemic as we have more students using the clothing closet and food pantry.

The ability to create partnerships and extend the access of resources to students and their families all relies on the community connections and support which was another identified subtheme from the interviews as the school resource officer noted:

Community schools need the support from the community; local businesses, churches, or anyone that can get involved in any way shape, or form.

The community school coordinator echoed the school resource officer's comment and added that:

A big portion is local organizations putting in work and support from school administration and teachers as well.

The feedback from the various constituents of the community school program establishes the importance of engaging students, families, school staff, and developing community partnerships to ensure that the whole student is encompassed in services necessary to deter any barriers to education.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Skills

Based on the responses given by those interviewed the third emerging theme of Social Emotional Learning Skills resulted in the subtheme of relationships and decision-making as students are developing healthy relationships with adults outside of their family and teachers, and also with their peers of all grade levels at the school. The feedback from the parents was:

He is very introverted which is a struggle for me because I am not. I would argue that he enjoys this more than actual school.

Another parent shared:

We have done after school programs before, and our autistic son would be agitated when I picked him up as he was asked to do something he was not comfortable with...everybody knows him here and he is super comfortable and always happy to go.

Both parents shared that they were confident that the community school coordinator would address any concerns on behalf of the student and the parent should anything arise and in support of those statements, the principal expressed that the program is:

Using social stories or social situations to think through what happened...the program staff is a great asset.

Cultivating these skills in an environment that the students feel is a safe environment has proven to improve social and emotional skills both in and out of the classroom according to parents and school staff.

Discussion

The primary goal of this research was to determine whether the community school program was effective at addressing in and out of school barriers to education for students attending suburban area schools. Based on the major themes extrapolated from the structured interviews, the community school program in this suburban city is effective in that it provides educational resources outside of normal school hours, access to resources during and outside of school hours that the student typically would not have access to, and an environment which promotes the development of SEL skills.

Previous research into community schools in suburban communities resulted in the discovery of Union Public Schools (UPS) which is located across the street from the Tulsa Public Schools District in Tulsa, Oklahoma which is similar to the program in this study (Ellen Ochoa, n.d.). All of the schools in UPS are considered to be community schools and eight of their elementary schools are considered to be FSCS as they provide wrap-around services not only to students and their families, but also to members who live within the FSCS's zone (Ellen Ochoa, n.d.).

The UPS is a perfect example of the demographic shift as the poverty and homelessness results from the 2020 Pew Research Center indicates that in the year 2000 UPS poverty rates were 15% and the student body was primarily white as of 2020, 70% of the more diverse student body live in poverty (Ellen Ochoa, n.d.). One thing to note is that the leading race/ethnicity in UPS is Hispanic and Latino in which there has been a steady increase of this community across the nation (Ellen Ochoa, n.d.). Although the community school program that was analyzed for this research is located in the southeast portion of the United States, the increase of diversity, poverty, and homelessness in the suburbs is all too familiar. As communities such as the suburban and rural areas of Tulsa, Oklahoma is becoming more blended and the term counterurbanization becomes more of a reality, becoming culturally competent and developing take a noticeable form for everyone, developing EQ and CQ skills will be critical when creating a community where people feel a sense of belonging.

Based on the identified trends in counterurbanization, poverty, and homelessness in suburban and rural communities, there is an increased need to expand wrap-around services to students outside of the traditional urban school setting. The lack of services available to oppressed students regardless of their geographical location, further impedes their ability to focus on the classroom as they are naturally overwhelmed with the reality of not having equitable access to basic needs.

Limitations

Sample

The students that have participated in the program over the previous three school years is significantly small ($n=293$) in comparison to the school's enrollment of approximately 700 students. For the 2020-2021 school year, roughly $1/12^{\text{th}}$ of the student population participated in

the community school program and the students do not have any obligation to remain in the program for any length of time, so it is extremely difficult to accurately track student outcomes.

The participants of the structured interviews granted the perspectives of parents, school staff, and the community school program coordinator which credit the program for its positive impact on direct and in-direct program beneficiaries; however, it would have been valuable to get the perspectives of students, the mental health liaison, and community partners.

Data Collection and Secondary Data

As previously mentioned, there were emerging themes that developed throughout the interviewing process which prompted the need of follow-up questions regarding SEL skills and mental health services which would have given the perspectives from a community partnership that diagnoses and develops treatment plans for students.

There was a significant amount of necessary scrubbing of the secondary data in order to create a workable data set that could be used to run analysis and obtain descriptive statistics. Demographic, attendance, or academic information was unspecified for thirty-three students that have received services and clarification of keying errors within the secondary data limited the ability to run data analysis. Developing a working relationship with the community school data analyst would have been beneficial as gaps within capturing the data would have been identified and addressed for future purposes and clarification may have resulted in statistically significant correlations between students and interventions.

Implications and Recommendations

What We Know

Community schools are a demonstrated evidence-based intervention that is executed across the country with schools primarily located in urban communities identifying loopholes and

creating individual intervention plans to meet the needs of the student in and out of school factors by making resources equitable.

According to a Pew Research Center report there has been a 55% increase in suburban families who are living in poverty from the year 2000-2018 which is more than twice the amount of the 23% of urban residents living in poverty (Fry, 2020). With the rise of counterurbanization being a factor, the same concept of community schools is being advocated for by social workers, school administrators, parents, teachers, and legislators across the country in suburban and rural communities to close the gap between students, families, communities, and resources. However, research is needed to determine the impact this shift has had on students and whether the interventions from community school programming is effective; this would require consistent observations and data collection of student grades, attendance, services used, and commitment to the program so there is a significant amount of time in which the interventions can be evaluated.

Policy

As an indicator that the current administration is acknowledging the need for evidence-based strategies to address student barriers, the Biden Administration's 2022 fiscal year budget proposed a \$413 million increase to create eight hundred new FSCS which would expand wrap-around services to approximately 2.5 million students in urban, suburban, and rural communities (Department of Education, 2022). The expansion of funding for community school programs will encourage schools to maintain accurate records as the U.S. Department of Education will require specific information to evaluate student outcomes as a result of funding for FSCS programming. Establishing a need of services and advocating on behalf of marginalized populations to policymakers is critical in ensuring that funds are allocated to support programs such as community school programming beyond urban communities.

Data Collection

The information that is collected from programs such as this community school program are beneficial when it comes to developing policy and it informs future practice, theory, and the way professionals conduct future research. Currently this program is funded privately; however, if they want to expand the reach of the program, competitive grants may be necessary which would mean the data has to show program effectiveness and identify the need of funding. Furthermore, funders will want to see how their funds are used and identify any impact by the collection and analysis of data, which may include raw data being sent to the donor for analysis.

Social Work Practice

It is imperative that advocacy surrounding the need of School Social Workers becomes a priority in each school as it has become a widespread practice for multiple schools to share a school social worker which makes it impossible to properly develop meaningful relationships with students, families, and school staff. Having daily access to an on-site school social worker broadens the approach and brings systematic change by implementation of evidence-based practice which helps students meet their goals (Raines, 2004).

Research Skill Set

Future research regarding the long-term impact of community school interventions will be critical in identifying program gaps and the overall effectiveness of program; not having a professional in this capacity will never allow schools the opportunity to coordinate interventions that specifically meet the needs of their students and their families. A social work professional with research skills is also a critical component when measuring evidence-based interventions as they are able to detail the scope of the issue communities are facing, the goals of interventions, a model,

such as the Generalist Intervention Model that will be used to achieve that plan, which are all necessary components when applying for grants or discretionary funds for programming.

Research is also needed to explore inequities and gaps within systems in rural communities. Counterurbanization indicates that current resources are not enough to sustain the increase of population which is often accompanied with the need of accommodations on various levels. Being Identifying the needs, creating interventions is necessary and it all begins with research.

Conclusion

Community school programs have been identified as a critical component in students' education as it gives them a sense of belonging, addresses social emotional learning, and creates a safe and structured environment where students can develop healthy relationships with their peers and adults. This structure is needed at different capacities based on the school yet needed in all school settings as there is an emerging need to help students overcome various levels of experienced trauma which creates a barrier in the classroom.

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Appendices

Appendix A



RESEARCH OPPORTUNITY



Do you have a student enrolled in the ROAR CommUNITY School Program?



Share your experiences during a CONFIDENTIAL open-ended question interview!!!

Purpose is to examine:

- Areas of needed improvement or expansion
- Barriers when seeking resources
- Parent involvement
- Student behavior (in/out classroom)
- Academic performance

IRB Protocol #21-149

Who is eligible to participate:

- **School Administrators**
- **ROAR Program Staff**
- **Parents**
- **Guidance Counselor**
- **Teachers**
- **ISS Facilitators/SROs**

***We NEED
Your Voice!!!***

For further details contact:

Tiffany Patterson hsr672@mocs.utc.edu - Researcher

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Dr. Susan Davidson susan-davidson@utc.edu - UTC IRB Chair

Appendix B

IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board

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TO: Tiffany Patterson **IRB # 21-149**
Dr. Cathy Scott, Prof. April Wilson, Dr. Junrong Shi, Prof. Owen Foster

FROM: David Deardorff, Interim Director of Research Integrity
Dr. Susan Davidson, IRB Committee Chair

DATE: 11/5/2021

SUBJECT: IRB #21-149: The Effectiveness of Community School Program Efforts at Addressing Student in and out of School Factors in Suburban Communities

Thank you for submitting your application for exemption to The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Institutional Review Board. Your proposal was evaluated in light of the federal regulations that govern the protection of human subjects.

Specifically, 45 CFR 46.104(d) identifies studies that are exempt from IRB oversight. The UTC IRB Chairperson or his/her designee has determined that your proposed project falls within the category described in the following subsection of this policy:

46.104(d)(2)(ii): Research only includes educational tests, surveys, interviews, public observation and any disclosure of responses outside of the research would NOT reasonably place subject at risk

Even though your project is exempt from further IRB review, the research must be conducted according to the proposal submitted to the UTC IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an Application for Changes, Annual Review, or Project Termination/Completion form to the UTC IRB. Please be aware that changes to the research protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exempt review and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the UTC IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the UTC IRB as soon as

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possible. Once notified, we will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval.

For additional information, please consult our web page <http://www.utc.edu/irb> or email instrb@utc.edu.

Best wishes for a successful research project.

The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga is a comprehensive, community-engaged campus of the University of Tennessee System. 