

School-Based Community Centers

A Guide to Developing Your School-Based Community Center

Prepare

1

- ❖ Things to Think About When Opening a Community Center
- ❖ Frequently Asked Questions
- ❖ What Community Centers Can Provide
- ❖ Developing an Action Plan

Things to Think About When Opening a Community Center

- What is your goal in establishing a community center?
- What is your vision as to what the community center will look like? How will it function?
- What school, community and additional resources and support are available to you to establish and implement your community center?
 - Neighborhood Empowerment Grant
 - Keep Denton Beautiful grants
- What is your timeline for implementation?
- What is your space availability/limitations?
- Who will staff the parent center? (Parent liaison, parents, volunteers?)
- Who will be part of the planning committee/action teams? (Community groups, parents, PTA members, school staff, etc.)
 - Do you have a school-based champion at the table (Principal, Counselor, etc.)?

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a school-based community center?

School-based community centers (SBCC) are specific locations where community members and parents from the surrounding community can gather to learn, share information, volunteer and meet with others.

Who can get involved in the development of the school-based community center?

Once you establish your goal for the SBCC anyone who shares a similar goal should be welcome to join your action team or committee.

What are the benefits of school-based community centers?

School-Based Community Centers build the relationship between the school and the surrounding community. Many times the center can have programs, activities, and resources that support parents, community members, and children.

Who runs the school-based community center?

Consistent coordination of an SBCC may take the dedication of the school staff members, parent liaisons, parents and a dedicated community agency. The collaboration and resulting coordination of these groups will determine the stability of the SBCC.

What expenses are involved in opening a school-based community center?

Some schools, Title I schools, have designated funding that can be used to alleviate staffing costs.

Additionally, there are funds through the [City of Denton Neighborhood Empowerment Program](#) that can help alleviate costs of materials and furnishing for the center.

Where should the school-based community center be located?

The SBCC should be located in an easily accessible location within the school. The center should also be located in a visible area, such as near the main entrance to the school. However, each school's space availability/limitations will be different.

What should the space look like?

The area should be comfortable, cozy and inviting for community members and potentially their pre-k children. The center might include a sofa, adult chairs and tables, a toddler area and a television. Additional materials, such as books, paper supplies and educational materials should be provided if possible. In the end, materials within the SBCC will depend on the population that it serves.

When should the center be open?

School-based community center hours depend on the flexibility and collaboration of the school. For example, some schools may have limited hours because of staff availability. While others may have more flexibility because of parents, community member and staff collaboration. SBCC hours should be posted in a highly visible area, online and on all marketing materials.

Should someone always be present in the school-based community center?

Evers Park Elementary School utilizes interns, parent volunteers and a parent liaison to ensure that the community center always has someone present. Each of those individuals will help visitors identify and use available resources. However, each school differs when it comes to staff availability and resources.

What information and resources should be available in the school-based community center?

Informational brochures and resources are great to have in the community center. It is useful to have a good gauge of your community's needs, wants and available/limited resource. Visitors to the SBCC might find it useful to have easily accessible information relating to free or low cost community resources.

How do I know if the school-based community center is meeting the needs of community members?

Evers Park Elementary School in Denton ISD developed a needs assessment survey to determine the needs of the surrounding community, what educational resources they would find useful and what times would be most effective for educational programs. Surveys can be delivered by canvassing the surrounding neighborhood, by giving them out at community events or by making them available online.

How can I promote the school-based community center?

Brochures, flyers and announcements can be made through the school and information can be given to parents, guardians and community members.

Additionally, the community can be reached through collaborations between the school, churches, parent organizations, community organizations and non-profit organizations.

Community members can also be informed of center activities through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter.

What School-Based Community Centers Can Provide

Resources and Support

- Meeting space for community groups
- Location for parent-teacher or parent-principal discussions
- Encouragement from volunteers, staff and peers to pursue volunteering in the school
- Resource lists for community involvement
- Resource lists for educational information
- Staff members to assist parents with strategies to help with children's learning experiences
- Education games and toys for pre-k children
- Resource lists for mental health services
- Computers to assist community members in various tasks

Activities

- Community support groups
- Parent support groups
- Clothes closets
- Training
- Mentoring programs
- Computer training
- Community center educational events
- Teacher volunteer tasks
- Toddler playtime activities
- Family nights

Community Connections

- Information on community based programs such as nutrition, drug abuse, counseling, etc.
- Present health-related workshops on nutrition education, flu prevention, medication, etc.
- Invite local librarian to come in to present community members with information about library resources and help them apply for library cards
- Plan community activities such as donation baskets for needy families in the surrounding community
- Engage and support the local, county, and district Parent Teacher Association
- Work with local neighborhood groups/associations to develop programs
- Ask community groups and organizations to make presentations within center

Developing an Action Plan

1. Create an Action Committee

Creating an action team/committee insures that school staff members, community members and parents will be involved in establishing the goals and take ownership of the school-based community center.

- **Meet with school administrators and key community groups** to ensure buy-in and support. Who will lead the group? Is there dedicated staff from the school to support the efforts? Does that person have the time to support the group? Will a community organization lend support through interns?
- **Identify key stakeholders.** Make sure to include a diverse representation from parent groups, community groups, non-profit organizations, staff groups and the surrounding community who have similar interest in the success of the school-based community center. Insure that this group is composed of dedicated and invested individuals.
- **Identify potential resources and barriers, limitation, or obstacles** that need to be addressed before moving forward, such as space limitations, staffing, funding, etc.

2. Establish a Vision and Goals

- **What do you want to accomplish and why?**

3. Examine Current Practices

- **Review what is currently being done in your district.** Contact Linda Tucker at Evers Park Elementary School for more information about the School-Based Community Center in that school.
- **Survey staff members, parents and community partners** to get a clear understanding of the current resources and partnerships that are available.
- **Keep everyone in the loop:** Provide the group with frequent updates on the progress of the center. Delegate responsibilities and ensure that those involved feel supported.
- **Assess community assets** in order to build on skills and trades within community.

4. Develop a realistic timeline for implementation based on the schedule of the school, staff availability, community events, etc.

5. Visit existing parent centers for ideas and talk to those involved to learn from past mistakes.

6. Create a Mission Statement

Design

2

- ❖ To Do List
- ❖ Check List for Inviting Space
- ❖ Examples from Evers Park Elementary School
- ❖ Example timeline

To Do List

- Find a location that is visible and convenient for potential visitors
- Meet with community groups, parent groups and school personnel for guidance and help getting materials in the center (via grants, donations, etc.)
- Furnish the center so that it is welcoming and inviting for the purposes that you've outlined in your mission
- If possible, create a toddler area for small children to utilize while parents attend center events or volunteer
- Collaborate with community organizations to purchase learning kits and resources for visitors to borrow (this involves developing a check out system)
- Make flyers advertising the school-based community center
- Utilize volunteers and interns to build a presence in the community center

Check List for School-Based Community Center Set Up

Below is list of ideas for the kinds of things that can be included in the design of a School-Based Community Center:

Furnishings

- Sofa
- Ottoman (with storage)
- Chairs
- Adult tables
- Storage bins
- Other

Equipment/Technology

- TV/DVD Player
- Projector
- Computer
- Printer
- Telephone
- Other

Displays and walls

- Resource flyers, brochures, cards, etc.
- Magazines
- Hanging racks
- Pictures/posters
- Other

Volunteer Area

- Volunteer system description
- Volunteer assignments
- In/Out boxes
- Other

Toddler Area

- Toys
- Children's books
- Children's chairs
- Area rug
- Other

Advertising

- Multi-lingual
- Website
- Newsletters
- Brochure
- Open House
- Marquee
- Bus system

Optional

- School supply bank
- Clothes closet

Work with community organizations, staff personnel, parents and community members to develop a "wish list" of items that the community feels would benefit the school-based community center.

Examples from Evers Park Elementary School in Denton ISD



Implement

3

- ❖ Example timeline
- ❖ Bringing People Into Your Center
- ❖ Promoting Your Center
- ❖ Tips for Building Your Partnerships
- ❖ Ideas for Community Programs

Example Timeline

This is the timeline that was used in the development of the Evers Park Elementary School Community Center:

- April
 - Discussion about School-Based Community Center
- May
 - First Action Team meeting with Evers Park ES staff, Kiwanis, Robson Ranch, United Way of Denton County, Target Distribution and Big Brothers Big Sisters at the table.
 - Principal shares ideas and plan with teachers and staff
 - Weekly action team meetings to establish goals for the community center.
 - Principal asks community organizations for volunteer support (interns, etc.)
- June
 - Submission of Neighborhood Empowerment Program grant proposal.
 - Volunteer event to clean out room that will be community center.
 - Continual action team meetings.
 - Development of guidelines for community center
- July
 - Approval of NEP grant funds.
 - First round of shopping for community center.

- Volunteer event to furnish and decorate community center
- August
 - Principal gives teachers and staff information about community room
 - Soft open of Evers Park Elementary School Community Room
- September
 - United Way of Denton County lends intern support for community room sustainability
 - Open House at Evers Park Elementary School highlights Community Center

Bringing People Into Your Center

- Schedule events in conjunction with the school's event calendar
- Create a survey to gauge the communities interest in events
- Ask local businesses and community organizations to hold meetings and events within the community center (ex. Robson Ranch Mentoring program)
- Invite the Health Department to the community center to provide a resource to surrounding community members

Promoting Your Center

Work with your staff, volunteers and community members to continually promote the community center and bring in new visitors.

- Encourage teachers and staff members to utilize the room for volunteer opportunities
- Promote the center during all school events
- Encourage parents to visit the community center by offering their children homework passes
- Publicize the community center through parent and neighborhood group newsletters
- Notify local newspapers, community agencies and local businesses about upcoming events.
- Build community partnerships with organizations, churches and businesses

Tips for Building Partnerships

- Communicate your mission and goals to coalition groups and organized groups (Pre-K Coalition, Healthy Children's Coalition, etc.)
- Involve parents, teachers and community members in the planning process
- Invite community organizations to community center events
- Encourage surrounding community and neighborhood groups to hold workshops in the center
- Open a small clothes/supply closet at the school that is accessible to anyone in the community
- Organize volunteer task boxes to encourage teacher/volunteer opportunities

- Invite local businesses, agencies and organizations to talk about the resources that they provide
- Hold parent and family workshops
- Involve specialists and resource teachers to provide targeted workshops (counselors, social workers, school psychologists)

Ideas for Community Programs

- Health Education (WIC, daily nutrition & exercise, etc)
- Flu prevention/vaccination (Health Department)
- Financial literacy
- Back to school preparation
- Computer literacy
- ESL
- Resume writing
- Managing stress
- Buying a home
- Cultural programs
- Internet safety
- Creative classes (SCRAP)

Additional Information

4

Interested in School-Based Community Centers? Contact Us

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