

“Community Schools and University-Assisted Community Schools: Partnerships that Change Schools, Communities, and Universities for the Better.”

Conference Welcome Remarks

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Welcome to “Community Schools and University-Assisted Community Schools: Partnerships that Change Schools, Communities, and Universities for the Better.”

It is so good to see so many friends, old and new.

It is difficult to overstate the disturbing impacts of last Tuesday’s election results. But that is not something to dwell on. The salient question is, to quote the powerful, evocative title of Dr. King’s last and most prophetic book, *Where Do We Go From Here?*

I do not have the answer to that question. That is something all of us will have to work on together. But I do have thoughts on why community schools and university-assisted community schools are so important at this time and going forward. One of the things that community schools and UACS do is to bring people and groups together across difference, which is something we desperately need in a climate of division and conflict. How do community schools do this?

In the 1950s, social psychologists Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn Wood Sherif developed “superordinate goal” theory. It is a theory, really a concept, that might be useful as we attempt to answer that question. According to the Sherifs’, superordinate goals are

“goals which are compelling and highly appealing to members of two or more groups in conflict, which cannot be attained by the resources and energies of the groups separately. In effect, they are goals attained only when groups pull together.” (Sherif, 1958)

Partnerships, which are the very basis of a community school, are formed because of a common focus among all partners on achieving the superordinate goal of improving the education and development of young people and the quality of life in a specific community.

Community schools, therefore, can function as centers of collaboration and forums for deliberation and decision-making. As such, they help develop and strengthen local democratic communities that, as John Dewey emphasized, are essential for democracy itself.

The community schools movement has been working to create and support community schools that do just that. With some 400 people gathered together here – from across diverse higher education institutions, school districts, teachers’ unions, and community organizations as well as government agencies – to share ideas and learn from one another, I am certain this conference and all of you will contribute to taking the movement to the next level during these uncertain and troubling times.

Before concluding these brief remarks, let me provide a bit of historical context and highlight another reason why community schools and university-assisted are needed now more than ever.

To be direct, we largely have 19th and 20th century institutions that are failing and have failed to respond effectively to the needs of our young people and our communities in a 21st century world.

Community Schools, while dating from the late 19th/early 20th century, and UACS from mid-1980s, are organizations that have particular relevance for our current situation. They provide a participatory democratic response to creating successful, democratic schools and thriving democratic communities.

John Dewey is often thought of as the parent of the community school idea. Although he did not invent the concept of community schools, he extended the work of other scholars and added his own distinctive interpretation. As is widely known, he came to the idea largely through his close association and friendship with Jane Addams and her colleagues at Hull House, the famous social settlement that Addams and Ellen Gates Starr had founded on Chicago's poverty-stricken West Side. They and other settlement house pioneers also understood that while settlements were scattered, schools were everywhere. That understanding led them to introduce the bringing of health as well as other services and resources to the school. The practical activities of the feminist leaders of Hull House, and the powerful theories and insights that animated their work, helped Dewey to understand the central role that local communities played in American society and also to see that public schools could function as strategic agencies to help develop participatory democratic communities.

In 1902, inspired by Hull House and settlement houses in other cities, Dewey presented a significant, prescient address, "The School as Social Centre," at a National Education Association conference. Viewed in historical perspective, the talk clearly anticipated some of the community school movements that episodically rose and fell in the United States after 1902. The modern community school movement, which can largely be traced to the formation of the Coalition for Community Schools in 1997, has taken Dewey's vision and gone much, much further, connecting learning to community assets and needs and creating diverse multi-sector partnerships in which each partner (for example, social service agencies, medical centers, arts organizations, government agencies, unions, local businesses, foundations, universities) contributes to and benefits from working together at the community school.

Simply stated, community schools are comprehensive neighborhood centers built on partnerships that improve student learning and development and community wellbeing. They educate, engage, activate, and serve all members of the community for the benefit of all members of the community. And in so doing, in my judgment, community schools, at their best, attempt to realize in practice Dr. King's vision of the "beloved community," in which *all* belong, living together in a space of equity, justice, peace, and sisterhood and brotherhood. Our children and communities deserve no less.

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