Improving Community Performance by Reexamining Public Schools[1]

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Quick Facts

- Two-thirds of US students report that school violence is a concern for them (Garcia, 2003).
- The majority of students (54%) attending schools that take preventive actions to reduce deviant behavior indicate that they feel safer in school as a result (Garcia, 2003).

Terms to Help You Get Started

Community: The neighborhoods, public schools, and public services found in a specific area

Overall community performance: How well neighborhoods, public schools, and public services address citizens' needs and desires

Supplemental programs: Activities sanctioned by schools that occur during non-instructional hours

Outreach activities: Programs intended to increase the public's involvement in schools

Keywords

Community performance, citizen behaviors, neighborhoods, public schools, public service

Introduction

This series of EDIS publications introduces readers to the concept of overall community performance and suggests minor modifications to neighborhoods, public schools, and public services that could help citizens improve their communities. This publication is for a general audience and provides a list of changes to public schools that, if enacted, may help improve a community's performance. The other three publications in this four-part series are:

- *Improving Community Performance by Re-examining the Neighborhood* (https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1372)
- *Improving Community Performance by Re-examining Public Services* (https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1373)
- *Improving Savings, Health, and Happiness by Making Small Modifications to Your Community* (for an academic audience) (https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/fy1371)

Reexamining Behavioral Policies in Public Schools

Although Garcia (2003) found that slightly more than half (54%) of students attending school feel safer when preventive action is taken to reduce deviant behavior (e.g., reporting those who disregard school rules), it is possible that perhaps as many as 46% of students do not feel that reporting incidents or "ratting out" other students results in punishments comparable to the incident. Perhaps they

are too intimidated to become involved. As an example, a cyber-bullying incident was reported by a student. The victim had been taught that specific words and phrases were "out of bounds" regardless of the media in which they were presented and had to be reported to school authorities. He did so just to learn that the accused was able to continue until yet another incident occurred even after agreeing to comply with the school policy regarding cyberbully and bullying in general. He reported the student again to the school authorities, and the assailant continued to remain in school. These incidents resulted in the victim feeling confused and having a general lack of faith in the system's rules. There was much reason to doubt, quite likely rightfully so, that the student would pursue the same course of action, if any, in the future if confronted with a similar situation.

Since the time of the incident regarding the victimized student described in the cyberbullying/bullying scenario, there has supposed been time for events to "smooth over" and heal themselves. Actually, the accused desired to be accepted again into the friendships originally established but compromised as a result of the bullying incidents. The "gatekeeper" to enabling these friendships to be re-established was the victim who was appealed to by the accused so he could regain access to group activities as had been the case in the past. The victim agreed to put it all behind them, and he approved in their both joining a group activity—not together but in general. This seemed to be the beginning of a new chance, but a bully is motivated by deeper issues and will act again when given an opportunity. As predicted, and as mentioned previously, though not a cyberbullying incident, another bullying incident occurred. This time it was presumed safe and between "friends," but regardless of not having a digital record of it, it was repeated and could not be denied. In the end, trust was ultimately compromised that could not be regained regardless of any type of intervention because grace had been extended, and it had been taken for granted.

This story is one anecdotal example of how school policies may affect the community and may have future implications for the community's overall performance. However, in this study, it was found that the modifications to public schools did not represent a statistically significant category and may represent a disconnect between the public and public school systems, which may need further research.

Figure 1. School policies can have an effect on the community and making modifications to them may help to improve the community's performance.
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How might your family benefit by improving overall community performance?

The concept of overall community performance has much to do with re-thinking how people can be happier, which is not necessarily the same as being comfortable. Finding ways for students to share the same learning environment in a relatively peaceful state is not an easy task. Reaching agreements rather than spending time resolving conflicts is an attainable goal and one worthy of pursuit. If citizens focus on the various factors comprising their overall community performance, people in the community may be able to save time and money and also strengthen the neighborhood and community. However, improving overall community performance sometimes takes place in small increments and often requires time before results are noticeable.

How are school considerations chosen to improve overall community performance?

Respondents from a representative sample in the United States were asked to rate multiple items—as identified in the academic literature—that could improve overall community performance (Cantrell & Stafford, 2013). The goal was to determine which of 81 items the respondents thought had the greatest likelihood of improving their community's overall performance. The public school considerations were categorically found to be statistically non-significant factors for increasing overall community performance, but many of the listed items represent important considerations for homebuyers in most communities.

School Considerations That Nominally Impact Community Improvement

List 1 shows the public school considerations that sample participants felt would have little to no improvement on overall community performance.

List 1. Public School Considerations with Little to No Impact on Overall Community Improvement

- Children attending a school located within 20 minutes' driving time from home
- Having better maintained schools (inside and outside)
- Having better policed/monitored schools
- Having security cameras located on all school property, including buses
- Having more enforceable programs that separate unmotivated students from motivated students
- Having more stringent and enforceable dress codes
- Having more stringent and enforceable student codes of conduct
- Having regularly scheduled time for citizens to meet with school administrators
- Planning programs that reward parents for visiting classrooms after receiving permission
- Planning programs that reward citizens for volunteering as after-school tutors
- Planning programs that reward schools for hosting industry partners in the school
- Planning programs that reward citizens for judging science fair projects
- Planning programs that reward schools for sponsoring events that bring students and citizens together
- Having (or improving) a foreign student-exchange program
- Enabling and allowing all classrooms to access the Internet
- Having programs that enable students to learn lessons from reformed juvenile delinquents
- Having programs that enable students to learn lessons from recent college graduates
- Having programs that reward students for attending classes on Saturday morning
- Offering onsite after-school programs to supervise students until parents pick them up
- Having required quiet stretching time for all students in the school
- Having required quiet stretching time for all adults in the school
- Dedicating at least 30 minutes for all students and adults in the school to eat lunch
- Requiring all students to perform community service
- Not allowing "junk food" or soda vending machines on school property
- Allowing citizens to use the athletic facilities when not in use by students
- Having achieving students receive more acknowledgement in the community
- Having achieving teachers and administrators receive more acknowledgement in the community

Summary

As previously mentioned, in this study's survey, the public school considerations did not represent a statistically significant category. The study only measured the items for public schools and not private ones, which may have affected the results. It seems counterintuitive for citizens (especially with minors residing in the home) to not believe that improvement in the public school items measured could potentially improve the overall performance of their community.

One explanation may be that citizens and public school systems have grown more disconnected as performance requirements have become more stringent in public schools. Many public schools have become complex and are difficult to comprehend without actively pursuing information about their mandates and agendas. Citizens may find it easier to simply trust that elected officials are employing tax dollars in a manner that is effective and consistent with the students' and community's needs. Research should be conducted to further examine whether the citizens' trust is well-earned by public school systems. Successful business models are based on understanding what paying customers desire and then making certain that paying customers understand they are receiving what they desire. One way to view tax-paying citizens is as paying customers of public school systems, and they have a right and responsibility to ensure that they are receiving the services and outcomes desired.

Note that some residents might not align with this statistically representative sample. That is, some people prefer to be highly involved in their local public schools and believe many of the items measured have a direct impact on their community. Thus, this sample speaks to a general overall belief, but there are certainly many who do not align themselves with these general beliefs. In fact, these issues can be contentious among those who are highly motivated by their views regarding what type of issues govern their local school. The majority appears to prefer a "hands-off" approach and would go to great lengths not to be engaged in these matters. So, they seemingly are willing to leave many of these issues for the school system to determine.

References

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