

A Preliminary Evaluation of the Evans Community School and the Extant Literature on Community Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide a general overview of the literature on community schools, to present some initial suggestive empirical evidence regarding some aspects of the performance of the Evans Community School, established in 2010, and to offer professional impressions of the work of the Evans Community School gleaned from a day-long site visit that I conducted in December 2015.

The fact that there is no uniform definition of a community school has limited the degree to which there have been large-scale rigorous evaluations of the community school model. However, while most of the extant literature on community schools does not meet modern standards of research evidence, the existing case studies provide suggestive evidence that community schools have been successful in a variety of locations. The most scientifically sound quantitative studies of community school models (those pertaining to Communities in Schools programs) find that these programs boost academic achievement and reduce dropout risk. Other evaluations of component programs, such as school-based health centers and programs promoting positive youth development, also find improvements in academic outcomes as well as emotional and physical health. Therefore, while still limited, the extant literature affords a great deal of optimism regarding the likelihood that Evans Community School and similar community schools will be successful.

It is not possible to formally evaluate Evans Community School using state-of-the-art methods. However, a careful comparison of Evans High School academic outcomes before versus after the establishment of Evans Community School indicates that Evans High School has improved over time relative to the twelve most similar high schools in Florida. In 2012-13 Evans High School had experienced relative improvements in 9 of the 14 academic metrics included in Florida high school grades, as compared with pre-implementation levels, and in 2013-14 Evans High School had experienced relative improvements in 12 of the 14 academic metrics. The data do not currently exist to conduct similar analyses regarding social, emotional, and physical outcomes, but the extant literature provides reason to believe that these outcomes would have improved as well.

My professional judgment based on a day-long site visit conducted in December 2015 provides corroborating evidence regarding this likely success. I found the community school to be very impressive in its governance and management

structure, the commitment and collaboration of key institutional partners, its quest for continuous improvement, its range of programs aimed at promoting whole child development, its deployment of a range of high-quality programs and services, and its efforts at community and family engagement. While I have some concerns about the degree to which reduced school district support to Evans High School might reduce the community school's future efficacy and I have some worries about the potential for staff burnout, I believe that the community school program is replicable and I have a high degree of confidence that this same model will yield considerable successes elsewhere in Florida.

I also lay out some suggestions regarding more formal future evaluations that can be conducted were the state to invest in the reporting of more extensive data and following the rollout of more community schools in different parts of the state over the next several years. I recommend that the Legislature support the conduct of a formal evaluation in the medium-run time period, and support data collection and intermediate analyses to provide early indicators and facilitate continuous improvement in the near term.