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Design Pattern 5.2: Be More Than Just a School

**Problem:**
Educational facilities built as stand alone, instructional buildings that restrict community access and require knowledge and materials to be dispensed only from within the classroom are unsupportive of the local community and its needs.

Historically schools have served as anchors in their communities. Reaffirming the relationship between school and the community charter schools need to make their school serve as a center of the community. It should stand out as a local landmark so that everyone can look toward the school as the heart of the community where many events and celebrations can take place. As community members visit the school complex for services and events, it functions as a community hub. Sharing resources within the school building establishes norms of community support, to the benefit of all.

**Solution:**
Make the school a community center in the minds of the citizens. Encourage community use by creating a welcoming, comfortable, and enjoyable place for people of all ages to congregate. Provide spaces, times, and programs for community access to education as well as places to be used for receptions, meetings, and athletic events. Health and family life services and continuing education opportunities can all be accessible through one building, while the focus of every activity is on the promotion of children’s learning. Extend the school day so that the facilities are open very early in the morning and late into the evening. Historically schools have served as anchors in their communities. Reaffirming that relationship between school and the community is an essential characteristic of public charter schools.

**Best Practices**

The school can provide important spaces for the community. Communities enjoy the benefits of the spaces that schools contain; some of these resources include a cafeteria, a place for sports, reception halls, auditorium for guest speakers, daycare, meeting rooms for conferences, health clinics, and social services. Charter schools could also establish tennis courts, basketball courts, and playgrounds that the community can use after school hours.

**John A. Johnson**
John A. Johnson Achievement Plus Elementary School has partnered with numerous social service agencies that have established their presence at the main floor level of the school. Intramural sports are a great opportunity for members of the community to interact with the school and the students, the faculty, and the administrative staff. Sports, in general, are a great extracurricular activity that allow people to gather and enjoy the entertainment. The community should be given the opportunity to use these recreational spaces after hours.

**Campagna Academy**
Campagna Academy Charter High School has boarding and supportive service on site in Schererville, IN for “at-risk” students. Reaching out to the community in support of these youth achieving a high school degree, the academy shares use of its large paying fields and gymnasium hosting community wide sporting events and providing use of the facility to the community.

**Imagine MASTer Academy**
Imagine MASTer Academy takes advantage of offering a daycare center and after school tutoring to the community and its programs. Many people have young children that they are unable to care for if they have to work during the day, therefore, if schools offer a daycare, it helps the families to create a relationship between the school and the community. It also allows the families to see what the school offers and decide if they would like to send their children to the facility when they reach the appropriate age. By allowing members of the community to use social services established in offices in the school a comfortable and strong partnership between the school and the community can be established. It is imperative for the community to see the school as an asset to the community because it will strengthen the cooperative relationship. It is detrimental when a community...
does not accept a school. It could cause tension and unnecessary conflicts between the school and the members of the community that would like to share the school’s facility.

**Gary Comer College Prep**
Gary Comer College Prep Academy is an example of a school mindful of community needs in the creation of its school. As charter schools grow and expand, it is important to keep in mind the needs of the community. Charter schools need to make sure their expansion does not replicate other community assets. They should attempt to strengthen their community by improving their facilities and filling in the necessary gaps.

The partnership between the charter school and the community will promote goodwill and stability in the community. It can provide people the opportunity to gain leadership experiences, adult education opportunities, computer literacy, or other valuable skills for today’s world. A school and community partnership can improve the educational environment for life long learning, allowing students to collaboratively work with people in the community.

Collaborating with the community will also assist the students to develop skills to work with others. The school environment is a place for students to advance their social skills by interacting with other students and faculty members. However, students should also develop their social skills by interacting with members of the community. This will give students the opportunity to mature as students and develop relationships with members of the community. These relationships will help students understand the value of networking and it can offer them more opportunities that are not available from the school.

Open communication is the key to developing and promoting a healthy and a stable alliance between the community and the school. Communities are often developed when there is a common interest or need that a group of people feel is necessary and want to implement. Education and schools are important entities that the majority of people in the community want in order to develop good citizens that will give back by participating in the community.

**Design Recommendations**

- Take every opportunity to bring community members into the school.

- Designate clearly accessible areas in the school open to the community.

- Improve and update facilities to be used by the community.

- Create spaces that will allow communities to participate, such as reception halls, conference rooms, sports facilities, extended learning classrooms, libraries, and cafeterias.

- Utilize spaces beyond primary purposes and allow for flexibility and adaptability.

- Allow for community input on the facility needs that they have.

- Keep in mind security as the community is allowed to enter the school and use the facility.

- Facilitate easy navigation through the school with posted maps and signs.

- Make tutors or mentors, parent volunteers or teacher aides, and invited speakers and experts feel welcome and comfortable in the charter school.

- Community based organization can become partners, contributing to, and sharing the vision and design of the school.

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**Figure 3.5.2.5:** In addition to recreational uses, schools also provide a great environment for meetings for businesses and organizations in the community.

**Figure 3.5.2.6:** A great use of the school facility is to provide a daycare center for families that have young children so that the children can develop good social skills (www.mikesavage.ca/page.aspx?id=165).