

Summary of Visit from Kyle Serrette, Director of Education Justice Campaigns, Center for Popular Democracy

Background:

On April 12 and 13, 2016, the State and Local NEA invited Kyle Serrette to visit Doña Ana County New Mexico after a coalition was organized to pursue community schools in all local public schools throughout DA County. On April 12, Kyle presented to a packed room of 79 community leaders that included parents, teachers, students, school district leaders, health and service providers, higher education representatives, elected officials, and community leaders. Kyle also had several smaller conversations with community members on topics such as authentic community engagement, wrap-around services, governance and structure, and community school policy. Altogether, attendance at these meetings totaled over 100 people.



Major Takeaways

- Kyle is willing to help us pair our community schools with rock star community schools throughout the country
- The Federal Every Student Succeeds Act includes funding streams for community schools and new ways to define student success beyond proficiency. However, we need to advocate at the state level, with other community school stakeholders around New Mexico, to value community schools as an option for a turnaround strategy.

Subject Specific Notes:

Community Engagement

- Change within schools works best when it come from the bottom.
- The community has to be informed--develop a plan to engage the entire community each year
- Also find ways for members of the community without children to find buy-in at the community school(s)
- Community engagement begins with a community needs assessment

Community Needs Assessment

- The NA should start from within the school - with the teachers, students, and administrators. Then speak with the neighbors, neighborhood organizations, churches, service providers and the nearby business.
- It is important that all stakeholders vet the Needs Assessment.
- When you do a needs assessment 80% of the information you already know and 20% will surprise you.
- A typical timeline for a community engagement and/or needs assessment can span from 8 to 12 months
- Once people identify their needs don't let them immediately start working towards solutions. Get input, plan, strategize, and develop goals.
- A complete or condensed version of the needs assessment should be done annually.



On Evaluation

- The main concepts for evaluation will come from the needs identified in the needs assessment (here are 20 things we found to be needed in the community---are we helping with these things?)
- Data for assessment could come from lots of places, such as school enrollment, student attendance, and health data
- Asses youth in a way that is useful – be mindful of social emotional learning and development.

Governing/Structure and Funding

- First and foremost the groups needs to develop trust with all agencies.
- Financial controls should be in place early on and should be developed with shared ownership in mind
- Develop a stakeholder board that brings the community together in a meaningful way.
- Give parents ownership within the community school.
- How can city services that are already in schools become better aligned?
- Develop a strategy for the district to use Title I funds to support community schools – primarily for a coordinator
- Determine liability factors -- Who is ultimately liable for programs?
- Stakeholder board could have general classifications and member quotas i.e. 1/3 parents, 1/3 Business, 1/3 service providers
- The coordinator is often accountable to the stakeholder board.
- Scaling and quality could be designated to a steering committee.
- Part our plan should include a waiting list of schools that want to be community schools.
- How do we make decisions before we have a decision making model?
 - o It might be a good idea to bring in a completely neutral facilitator
- The group should make a decision regarding Ngage's role within the community school.
- Funding: partner buy-in should stream money to community schools in conjunction with a sustainable funding source. (rivers and streams)
- Be intentional in our process and think about how we will tell our story



Community Schools Coordinator

- The community school coordinator should be in each and every committee, action team, and group at the school. They should meet with the leaders of programs and initiatives on a monthly basis and this practice should start as soon as a coordinator is on board. The Coordinator should be able to bridge any silos that exists in school/community
 - Within the community school problem solving will also come from the teachers who have direct communication with the kids and the parents.
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- The Community School Coordinator is tasked with building the capacity of the school to meet its needs. The coordinator should not be the one meeting every need. For

example, the coordinator should work to bring in a financial literacy program, not develop and teach one by her/himself.

- What are the characteristics of a great coordinators: a rockstar, someone who is able to transform things , someone who can talk to parents and community as well as business and have the ability to data or find someone who can do data
- A community school coordinator should be in the same pay range as an assistant principal.
- Who employees the community school coordinator?
 - o Successful models include:
 - o Braided funding streams between organization
 - o United Way as the employer
 - o School districts as the employer
- ** It is popular to create space between the district and the community school
- Austin, TX – Vice Principals became Community School Coordinators
- Often groups want to make a teacher a coordinator – if this is the case create an executive/ admin. position through the district
- Consideration for moving a teacher should include helping them keep their benefits through the school.
 - o An coordinator from NMSU could work contractually while still keeping their benefits
- It is possible to create a larger community school stakeholder board to manage multiple districts’ initiatives (the Family League in Baltimore is an example).
- Think about how space can be consolidated within the school
- Conditions of employment matter. Coordinators need to be able to meet the changing needs of the community school and not be limited to policy and procedure of the employer.

Policy

- In other communities it has helped when the school board passes a resolution and continues to pass polices that help community schools thrive.

Schools we should visit/learn from:

- o Social Justice Humanitas Academy in Los Angeles
- o Evans High school in Florida
- o Ben Franklin school in Baltimore





Doña Ana County truly appreciates Kyle's assistance as we pursue community schools in every school, county-wide.

For more information regarding Kyle's visit/this report, feel free to contact david@ngagenm.org or 575-521-1957