

Schools as community hubs

2017

“Our school opens its doors and welcomes the entire community in general, not just our school community.”

Elementary school, CS Viamonde³

Publicly funded schools can play an important role in strengthening the communities they serve.¹ In recent years, the province has made modest investments to support Ontario’s schools in acting as community hubs, including \$28.1 million dollars to help with the costs of keeping schools open after hours for community use.²

Ontario’s strategy for community hubs

In 2015, the provincial government released the recommendations from the Premier’s Community Hubs Advisory Committee—*Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*.⁴ The recommendations provided a framework to support the creation of community hubs throughout Ontario, as a means of improving access to services and providing more efficient use of government resources.⁵ While libraries, neighbourhood centres, and other community-based organizations can serve as community hubs, the province has identified schools as an “ideal location” for them.⁶

In 2017:

Among schools that indicate community use,

- 9% of elementary and 21% of secondary schools offer integrated health and/or social services.
- 65% of elementary and 25% of secondary schools are used for childcare and family resource centres.
- 85% of elementary and 93% of secondary schools are used for recreational programs.

As a community hub, a school can be a focal point for health and social services, cultural and recreational events, and other home–school–community partnerships.⁷ While 69% of elementary and 64% of secondary schools report serving as community hubs, access to the school is, for the most part, limited to childcare, sports and recreation activities.

Of schools that report community use of their space:

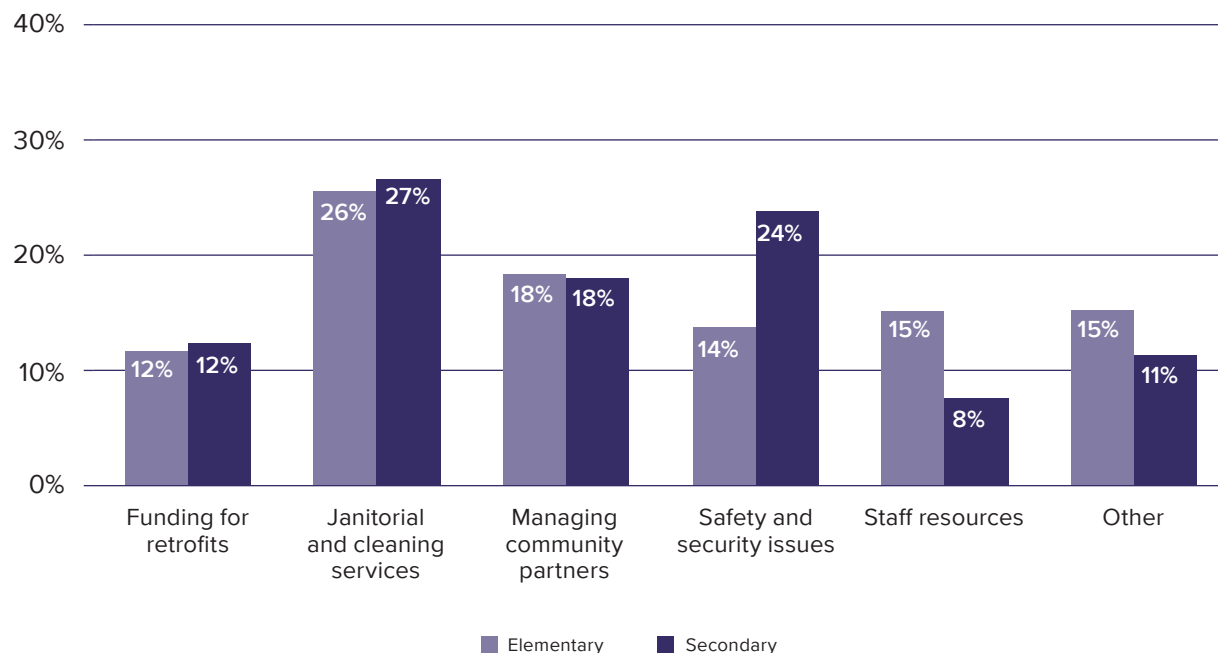
- 9% of elementary and 21% of secondary schools offer integrated health and social services.
- 13% of elementary and 29% of secondary schools are used for cultural programs and events.
- 5% of elementary and 19% of secondary schools are used for the arts.
- 65% of elementary and 25% of secondary schools are used for childcare and family resource centres.
- 85% of elementary and 93% of secondary schools are used for recreational programs.

“The school gym is used every night to provide extra-curricular activities for children in the community. We host a literacy program for parents of children 0–6 years old on Thursday mornings. We have a very successful day care and before- and after-school programs at the school.”

Elementary school, York CDSB

Figure 1

The primary challenge to developing a school as a community hub



“The school gets run down quickly with so many other users, and caretaking services [are] not able to keep up with [the] demand.”

Secondary school, Toronto DSB

“Being rural, there doesn't seem to be anyone to really partner with. Knowing who to reach out to [is a challenge]. Nothing is close by.”

Elementary school,
Upper Grand DSB

Challenges to developing the school as a community hub

Schools report a range of challenges to developing the school as a community hub, but the most frequently cited impediments are janitorial and cleaning services, safety and security issues, and managing community partners (see Figure 1). A number of schools commented that scheduling cleaning and maintenance, and finding ways to ensure security after school hours, were challenges that they were unable to resolve.

Many principals also commented that a lack of school space restricted partnering capabilities. They report that their schools are already over-capacity, and that space constraints limit the potential for increasing community use of the school.

One of the challenges identified by schools in rural locations was a lack of community partners for them to engage with.

Notes

1. Glenda L. Black et al., “Evaluation of a Family and Community Engagement Strategy in Three Ontario Communities,” *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 59, no. 4 (2014): 569-90; Martin J. Blank, Atelia Melaville, and Bela P. Shah, *Making the Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*. (Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, May 2003).
2. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2016-17*, 112.
3. This quote has been translated from French. Original quote: “Notre école ouvre ses portes et accueille toute la communauté en général, et non seulement notre communauté scolaire.”
4. Premier’s Community Hub Framework Advisory Group, *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan* (Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario, 2016).
5. *Ibid.*, 34.
6. Government of Ontario, “News Release—Ontario Helping More Schools Become Community Hubs—Province Investing in Schools to Better Serve Communities,” *Government of Ontario Newsroom* (Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario, May 6, 2016).
7. Premier’s Community Hub Framework Advisory Group, *Community Hubs*, 7.