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IT TAKES A VILLAGE: AMERICANS' VIEWS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Oren Pizmony-Levy

Aaron Pallas

Nancy Streim

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE: AMERICANS' VIEWS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

1. Why study community schools?

Community schools offer children an integrated set of educational and social services to promote student development. Sometimes called “full-service” schools or community learning centers, community schools create an array of partnerships – in the areas of health, social services, academics for children and adults, sports, recreation and culture – transforming schools into vital hubs that benefit students, their families and the surrounding community. According to the Coalition for Community Schools, a national alliance of more than 170 organizations, at least 5,000 U.S. schools have been transformed into community schools.¹

The community schools movement offers new direction for educational reform in the U.S. The past two decades witnessed educational reforms that focused almost exclusively on the instructional side of the teaching and learning equation. These instructional reforms – including curriculum revision, aligning assessments, and improving teaching effectiveness – are all critical elements of school reform. However, they have produced modest results with respect to student achievement. The community schools movement offers a complementary approach that addresses the whole child. The complementarity lies in addressing factors that underlie students’ success in engaging in learning, such as social skills, emotional regulation, mental and physical health; also family issues such as housing and food security, and parental involvement in their children's schooling and development.

Community schools are based on a solid body of research about what it takes to promote student success.² This study seeks to extend our understanding of public views of community schools. Specifically, we explore the extent to which a representative sample of American adults knows about and supports the idea of community schools. For the purpose of this research, we use the following definition: “A community school creates partnerships between the school and community resources that integrate academics, family support, health and social services to promote student development.”

2. Familiarity with the community school model

After reading our definition (see above), respondents were asked how much, if anything, they have heard about community schools. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) say they have heard about community schools (Figure 2.1). One-third of respondents (34%) say they have heard “a lot” or “a fair amount” about community schools and additional one- third of respondents

¹ http://www.nccs.org/sites/default/files/resource/NCCS_BuildingCommunitySchools.pdf

² For example: (a) Basch, C.E. (2010). *Healthier Students are Better Learners*. New York: The Campaign for Educational Equity, Teachers College; and (b) Bryk, A.S., et al. (2010). *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

(33%) say they have heard “a little.” The remaining one-third of respondents (33%) say they have not heard about this school model.

Respondents' familiarity with the community school model varies across gender, race/ethnicity, age groups, parental status, and community type (see Figure 2.2):

1. **Women are more likely than men to have heard about community schools.** Close to two-fifths of women (38%) and slightly less than one-third of men (30%) say they have heard “a lot” or “a fair amount.”
2. **People of color are more likely than Whites to have heard about community schools.** Close to half of Asian Americans (48%) and Blacks (46%) and slightly more than two-fifths (42%) of Latinx say they have heard “a lot” or “a fair amount” about this model. Among Whites, this figure drops to 28%.
3. **Younger adults are more likely than others to have heard about community schools.** Half of respondents age 18-24 (50%) and two fifths of respondents age 25-44 (41%) say they have heard “a lot” or “a fair amount” about this model. This figure drops significantly for respondents age 45-64 (27%) and respondents age 65 and above (21%).
4. **Parents of school-aged children are more likely than non-parents to have heard about community schools.** Slightly more than two-fifths of parents (44%) and less than one-third of non-parents (30%) say they have heard “a lot” or “a fair amount” about this model.
5. **Respondents living in urban communities are more likely than respondents living in suburban and rural communities to have heard about community schools.** More than two-fifths (44%) of residents of urban communities say they have heard “a lot” or “a fair amount” about community schools, compared to 32% of suburban and 30% of rural, respondents, respectively.

3. Support for the community school model

To gauge public support for community school model, the survey asked respondents to express their views on a spectrum between two opposing statements: (A) students cannot develop basic academic skills without community resources, health and social services, and (B) community schools distract teachers and students from the mission of developing basic academic skills. The first is a more favorable or positive perspective towards community schools, whereas the second is less favorable.

Figure 3.1 shows the distribution of opinions towards community schools among respondents who say they have heard about the model. Two-thirds (65%) of respondents support statement A, thus recognize the benefits of the community school model. A relatively small share of the

sample (18%) support statement B, thus oppose the community schools model. The rest, slightly less than one-fifth (17%), express a neutral opinion towards the issue.³

Respondents' support for the community school model varies across gender, race/ethnicity, and political ideology:

1. **Women are more likely than men to support community schools** (Figure 3.2). More than two-thirds of women (69%) and three-fifths of men (61%) recognize the benefits of the community school model (statement A).
2. **Blacks are more likely than others to support community schools** (Figure 3.3). Approximately three-quarters of Blacks (73%) recognize the benefits of the community school model (statement A). This figure drops among Asian Americans (66%), Latinx (66%), and Whites (62%).
3. **Liberals are more likely than conservatives to support community schools** (Figure 3.4). Three-quarters of those identifying themselves as liberals (75%) recognize the benefits of the community school model (statement A), compared to 58% of conservatives and 64% of moderates.

4. Teaching the whole student

The community school model includes more than partnerships and services. Community schools also promote a shift in the ways in which teachers approach their students. In community schools, teachers and other school staff members are concerned with all aspects of students' well-being (e.g., health, socio-emotional needs, etc.), not just their academic performance. To gauge public support for this extended teachers' role, the survey asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: "Teachers should use an approach that looks beyond a student's current academic performance to all aspects of a person's well-being."

The vast majority of respondents (92%) agree that teachers should look beyond a student's current academic performance to all aspects of a person's well-being. More than two-fifths (44%) indicated they "strongly agree" with the statement, and close to half (48%) indicated that they "somewhat agree" with the statement (see Figure 4.1). This is true across the board, even for those respondents who oppose the community school model (85% of whom strongly agree or agree with the statement), or express a neutral attitude towards the model (84% of whom do so).

³ Even among respondents that have not heard about the community school model, we found high support for the model. More than half (55%) of respondents that have not heard about the model support statement A, and approximately one-fifth (18%) support statement B. The remaining one-fourth (27%) express a neutral opinion.

Respondents' support for teaching the "whole student" varies across gender, race/ethnicity, age groups, parental status, community type and political ideology (see Figure 4.2):

1. **Women are more likely than men to support teaching the "whole student."** Half of women (51%) and about two-fifths of men (37%) strongly agree that teachers should look beyond a student's current academic performance.
2. **People of color are more likely than Whites to support teaching the "whole student."** Three-fifths of Blacks (59%), more than half of Latinx (52%) and close to half of Asian Americans (46%) strongly agree that teachers should look beyond a student's current academic performance. Among Whites, this figure drops to 38%.
3. **Younger adults are more likely than older ones to support teaching the "whole student."** Half of respondents age 18-24 (50%) and more than half of respondents age 25-44 (54%) strongly agree that teachers should look beyond a student's current academic performance. This figure drops significantly for respondents age 45-64 (37%) and respondents age 65 and above (33%).
4. **Parents of school-aged children are more likely than non-parents to support teaching the "whole student."** Half of parents (52%) and two-fifths of non-parents (40%) strongly agree that teachers should look beyond a student's current academic performance.
5. **Respondents living in urban communities are more likely than respondents living in suburban and rural communities to support teaching the "whole student."** Half of residents of urban communities (50%) strongly agree that teachers should look beyond a student's current academic performance, compared to 43% of suburban and 37% of rural, respondents, respectively.
6. **Liberals are more likely than conservatives to support teaching the "whole student."** Half of those identifying themselves as liberals (50%) strongly agree that teachers should look beyond a student's current academic performance, compared to 38% of conservatives and 45% of moderates.

5. In their own words: Why do respondents support or oppose the community school model?

In order to gain further insight this on public views towards community schools, we asked respondents to explain in their own words their views on the topic ("In your own words, please explain your views towards these statements. Why did you place the pointer at this location?"). The question was presented to a random group – one-fifth – of the whole sample (n=565).

Why do people support the community school model?

The most common reason for supporting community schools is the understanding that these schools offer access to various services. One-third (33%) of respondents indicate that access to

these services is important. For example, a 31 year-old Black mother from Pennsylvania said, “I support community schools because these schools focus not only on academics but also through the partnerships with outside organizations family support, health, youth development and social services.” And a 34-year-old White mother from Utah echoes this message: “I think community support of schools would be a great benefit. Many students need resources to meet their basic needs.”

While some respondents simply mention the availability of these resources, others stress the importance of these resources to level the playing field. About one-fifth (18%) of respondents indicate that health and social services are a necessary condition for all students, especially for students from disadvantaged family background. These respondents adopt a holistic approach and advocate for schools to look at the “whole child” (see above). For example, a 67-year-old White man from California noted that if you do not treat the all aspects of the child you will not make a real impact: “Without basic academic skills [or] community resources, health, and social service, you have a catch 22 [and it will] never get any better.”

Similarly, a 44-year-old White father from Kentucky argued that children can only begin to learn when they are free from basic obstacles and hurdles. “Many people don't understand the difficulty in helping kids learn. So many children come to school facing barriers to learning. Most of these barriers are what you would consider educational (learning disorders), but simple results of poverty (lack of health care, dental care, hunger, mental health). If we don't do something to remove these barriers, school staff will spend more time addressing behavior problems than actually educating. Then ALL students suffer. Schools must transition into looking at the whole child. Community partners can help with this. They have a lot at stake here, too.”

A 56-year-old Black woman from Ohio acknowledged that community schools have the ability to help fill in gaps that might be missing at home due to external forces. “Although students have the ability to develop academic skills without community resources, I think that in economic situations where their home life could be distracting and possibly hinder their educational goals. For example, if a student is homeless or dealing with parents who are drug addicts, that is probably a circumstance where community resources, health and social services could help.”

Why do people oppose the community school model?

The most common reason for opposing community schools is distrust in the model and the educational system. Only 6% of all respondents expressed opposition to community schools in the open-ended responses. These respondents—who were overwhelmingly White men—seem to distrust any educational initiative. For example, a 60-year-old White man from Louisiana said “I don't trust anyone to do the right thing with the educational system.” Similarly, a 66 year-old White man from Michigan expressed concern with the liberal agenda for schools: “Every time some wanna be social engineer or liberal comes up with these bright ideas for schools, most of which have little to nothing practical to do with education for kids, they turn into disasters with poorly educated but brainwashed kids.” Other respondents question the motivations and

interests of those involved in community schools. For example, a 25-year-old White man from New Jersey questioned who community schools actually serve. “This sounds like it would very quickly come to serve interests of sponsors and the whims people who have no background in education. I don't think education on a local level should be an open forum to sponsor interests or the opinions of people who have no academic background.”

6. Conclusion

The community school model is an expanding approach to educational reform that seeks to strengthen the resources and supports available for children's academic learning and social and physical development. Familiarity with the community schools model remains uneven, and reflects where community schools have taken root, primarily in urban communities populated by the young and people of color. Survey results indicate that those who have heard of the model are generally supportive of it, regardless of their personal characteristics. There is also widespread support for teaching the whole child in ways that extend beyond students' academic performance. Supporters of community schools believe that the extended services provided by community schools meet students' basic needs. Detractors are wary of government intervention in schools that is not directly connected to academic achievement.

7. Methodology

Results are based on online survey conducted August 28 – September 6, 2017 among a national sample of 3,117 adults 18 year of age or older using the Qualtrics Panel. Qualtrics, a marketing research firm, partners with a variety of online panel providers to supply a nationally representative sample. The sample is compiled using overall demographic quotas based on census percentages for representation (i.e., age, gender, race/ethnicity, household income, and census region). To allow greater power for analysis, we over-sampled people who identify as Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and/or Latinx. The sample is weighted to represent the U.S. adult population living in households or group quarters. For socio-demographic composition of the sample see Technical Note (available on <http://www.tc.columbia.edu/thepublicmind>).

The survey included several quality assurance measures, including attention checks and a speed check. Attention checks asked respondents to mark a specific answer. Respondents who failed one or more of these checks were removed from the final sample.

Most of the survey items were developed by the research team and colleagues at Teachers College. Other survey items were adapted from the General Social Survey (GSS), Gallup and Pew. The survey also included a detailed battery of survey items on sociodemographic characteristics. In addition to close-ended items, the survey asked several open-ended questions, allowing respondents to contextualized and explain their responses in greater detail.

To test for framing/wording effects, the survey contained several experiments. For example, we vary the term used for describing educators as stakeholders in education. We used the term “teacher unions” to situate educators as an organized and political entity. And we used the

term “teachers” as a more neutral reference. That is, the experiment included a total of two conditions. Respondents were randomly assigned to each condition.

All surveys are subject to various forms of error. One form is sampling error: the variation in results that is attributable to chance in which members of a population are randomly selected to participate in the survey. For percentages based on the entire sample, the approximate margin of error is +/- 1.8%. For subgroups, the margin of error is larger. For example, the margin of error for Black respondents is approximately +/- 4.5%.

Variables used in this brief:

1. Exposure to the community school model. The survey presented a short definition of the term: “A community school creates partnerships between the school and community resources that integrate academics, family support, health and social services to promote student development.” Then, the survey asked respondents: “How much, if anything, have you heard about community schools?” Responses are on a 4-point scale: 1 = a lot, 2 = a fair amount, 3 = a little, and 4 = nothing at all.
2. Support for the community school model. The survey presented two statements: “Statement A: Students cannot develop basic academic skills without community resources, health and social services; Statement B: Community schools distract teachers and students from the mission of developing basic academic skills.” Then, the survey asked respondents: “Which statement comes closest to your views? Please slide the pointer to the position along the line that best describes your views.” The slider went from 0 (closest to statement A) to 10 (closest to statement B). We recoded the data from the slider into three categories: 0-3 as support for statement A, 4-6 as neutral, and 7-10 as support for statement B.
3. Attitude towards teaching the whole student/child. The survey asked respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: “Teachers should use an approach that looks beyond a student’s current academic performance to all aspects of a person's well-being.”

Figure 2.1: How much, if anything, have you heard about community schools?

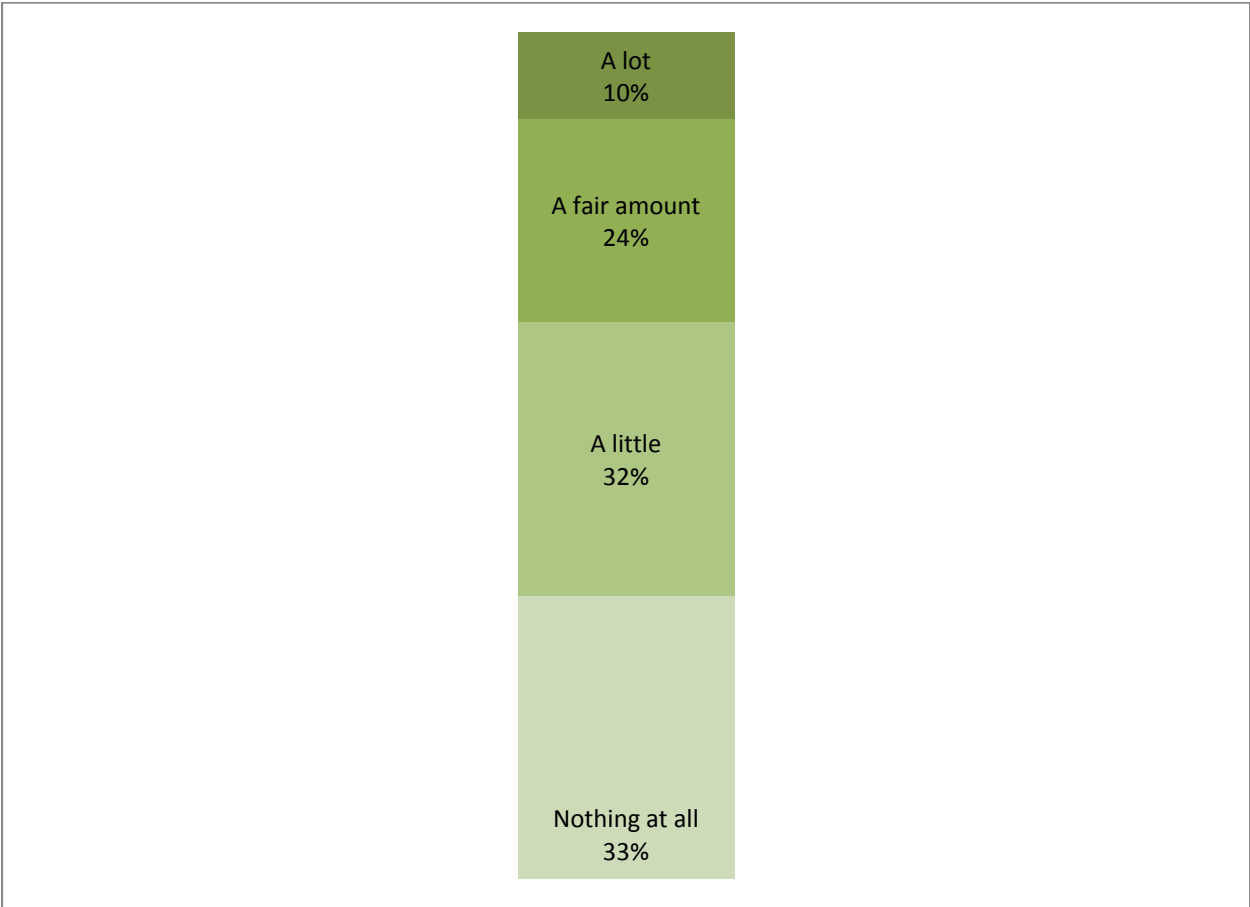


Figure 2.2: How much, if anything, have you heard about community schools?
By key socio-demographics

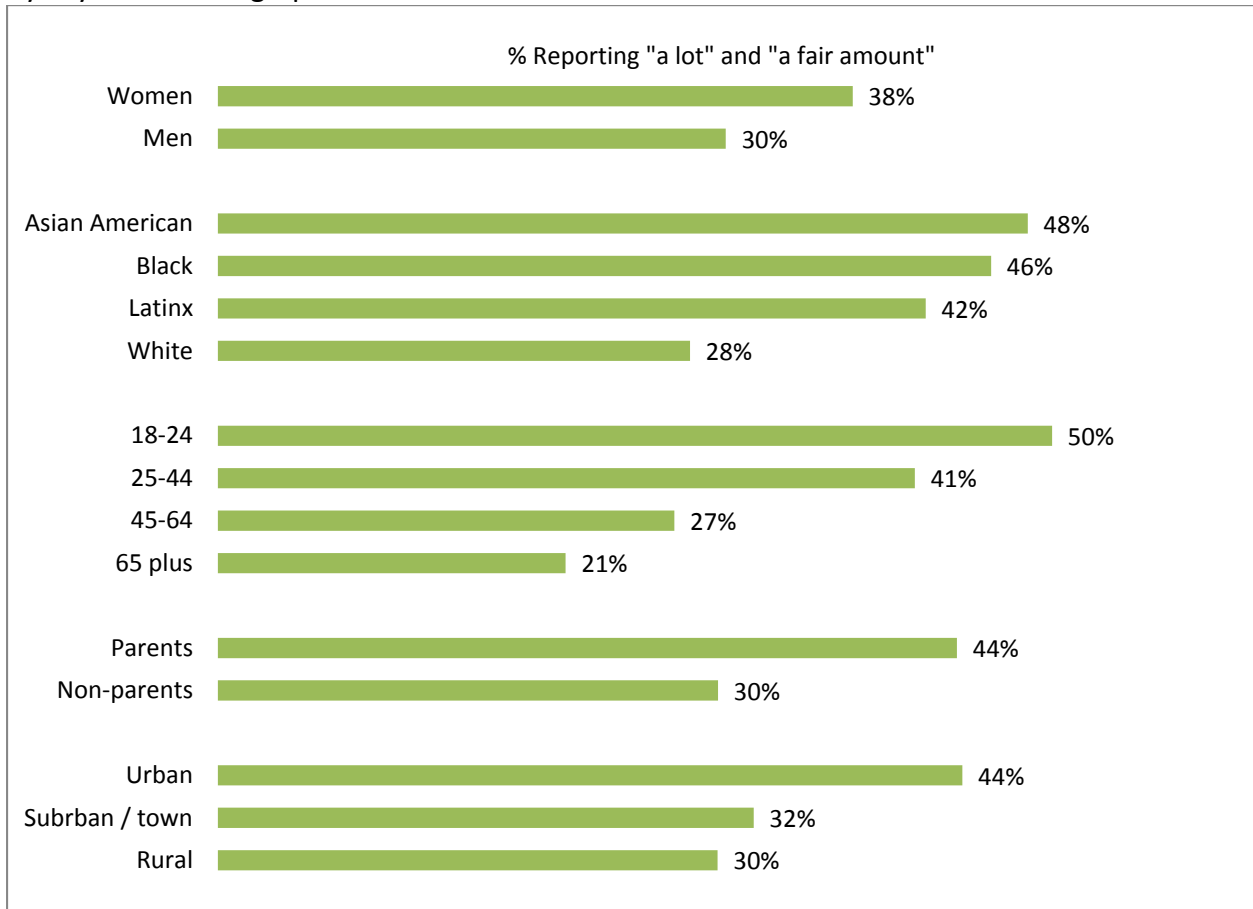
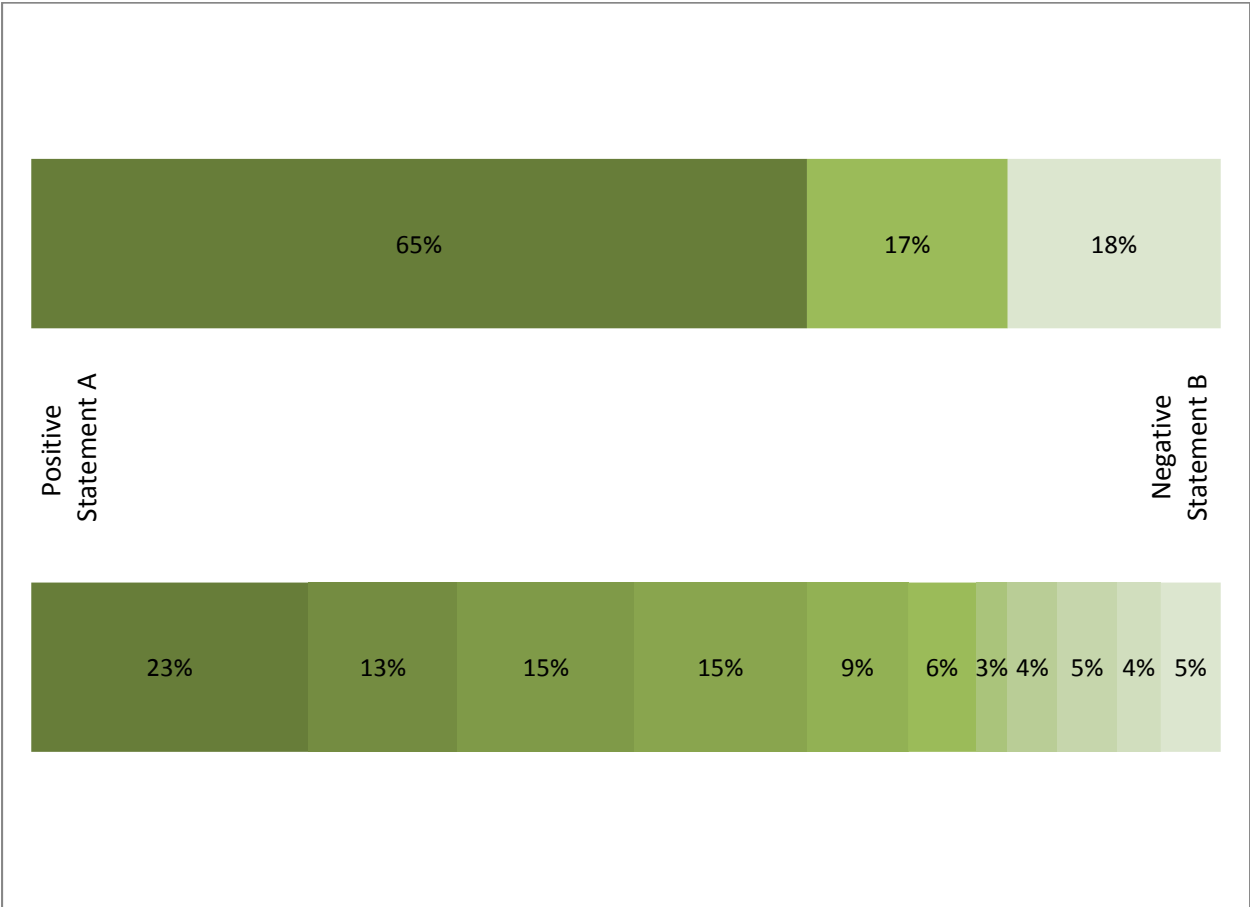


Figure 3.1: Attitudes towards the community school model



Note: Statement A: Students cannot develop basic academic skills without community resources, health and social services; Statement B: Community schools distract teachers and students from the mission of developing basic academic skills.

Figure 3.2: Attitudes towards the community school model, by gender

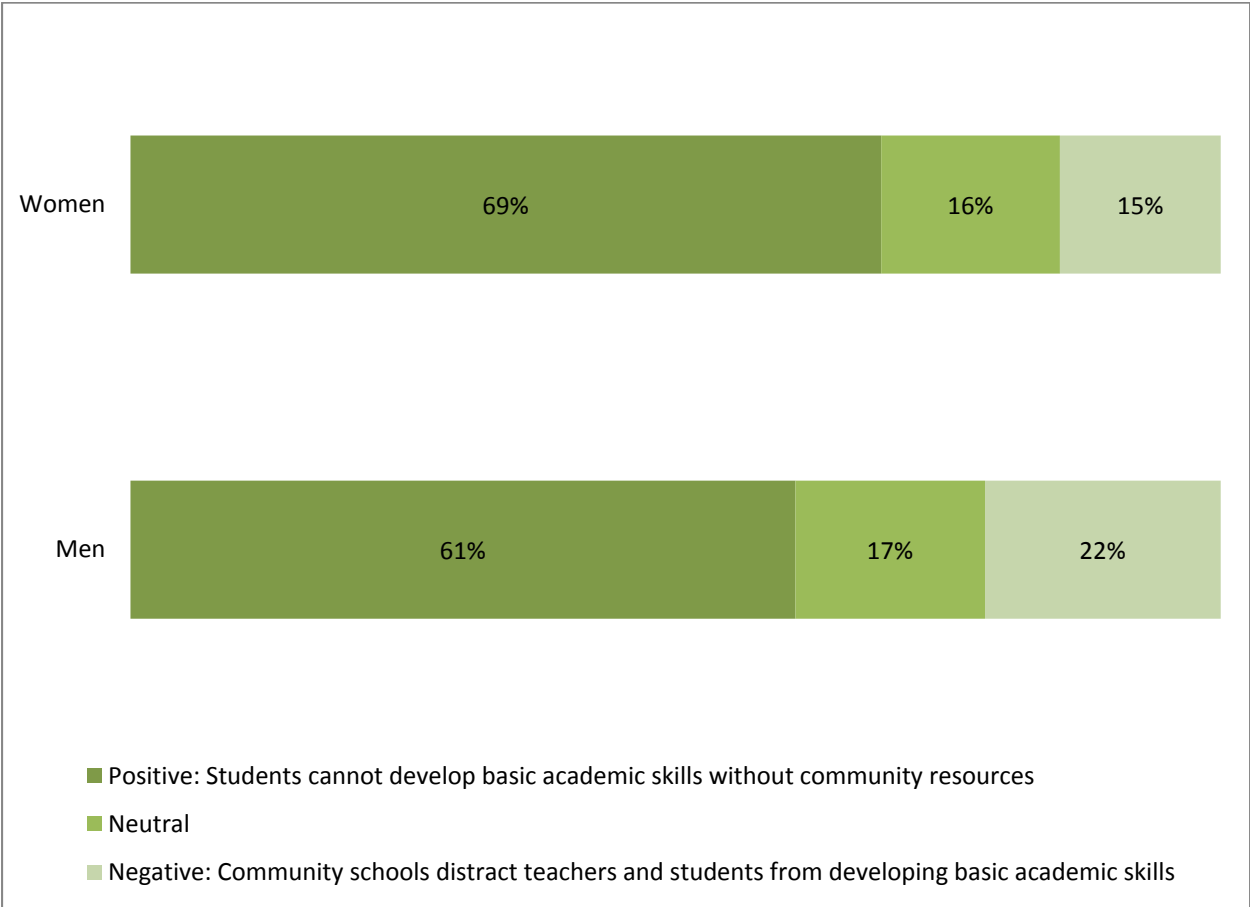


Figure 3.3: Attitudes towards the community school model, by race/ethnicity

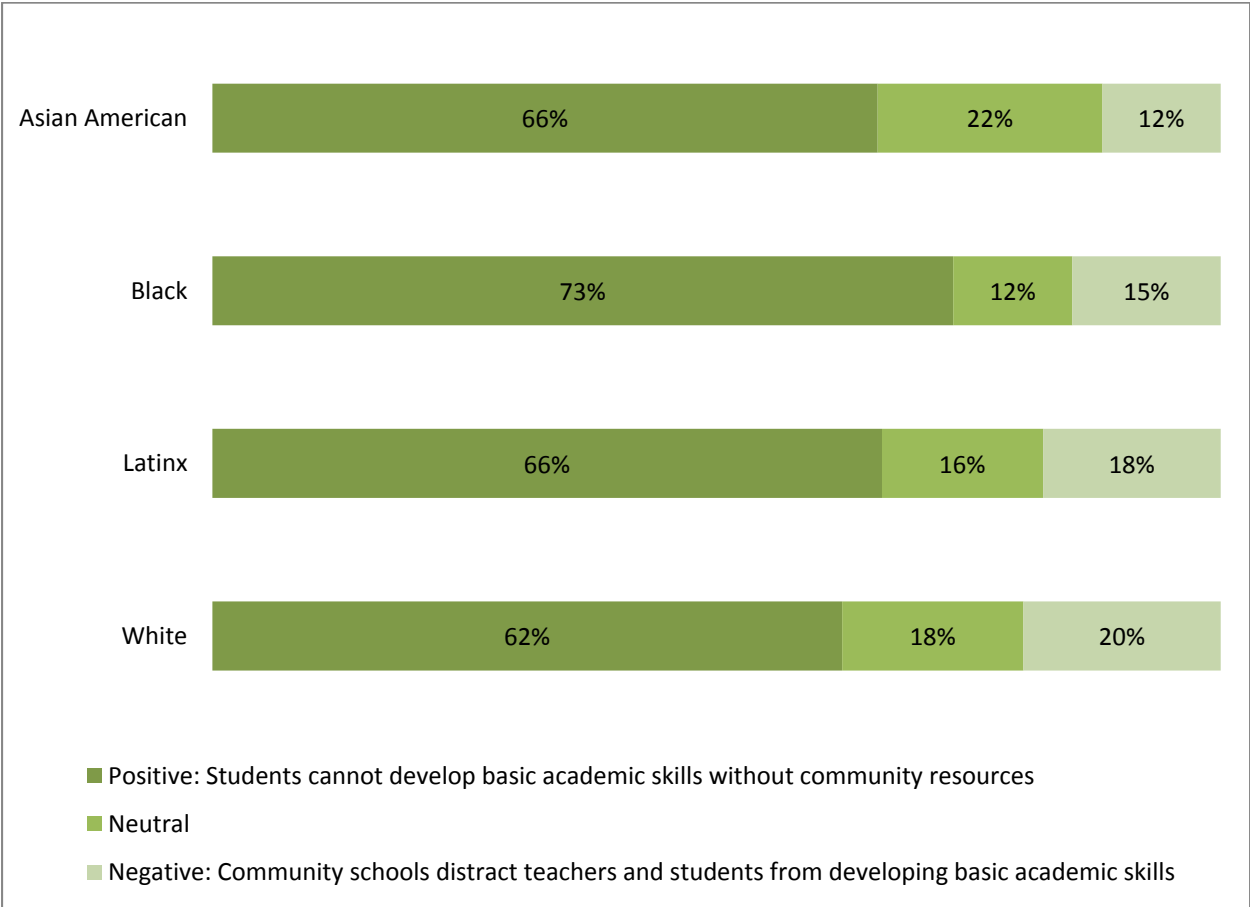


Figure 3.4: Attitudes towards the community school model, by political identity

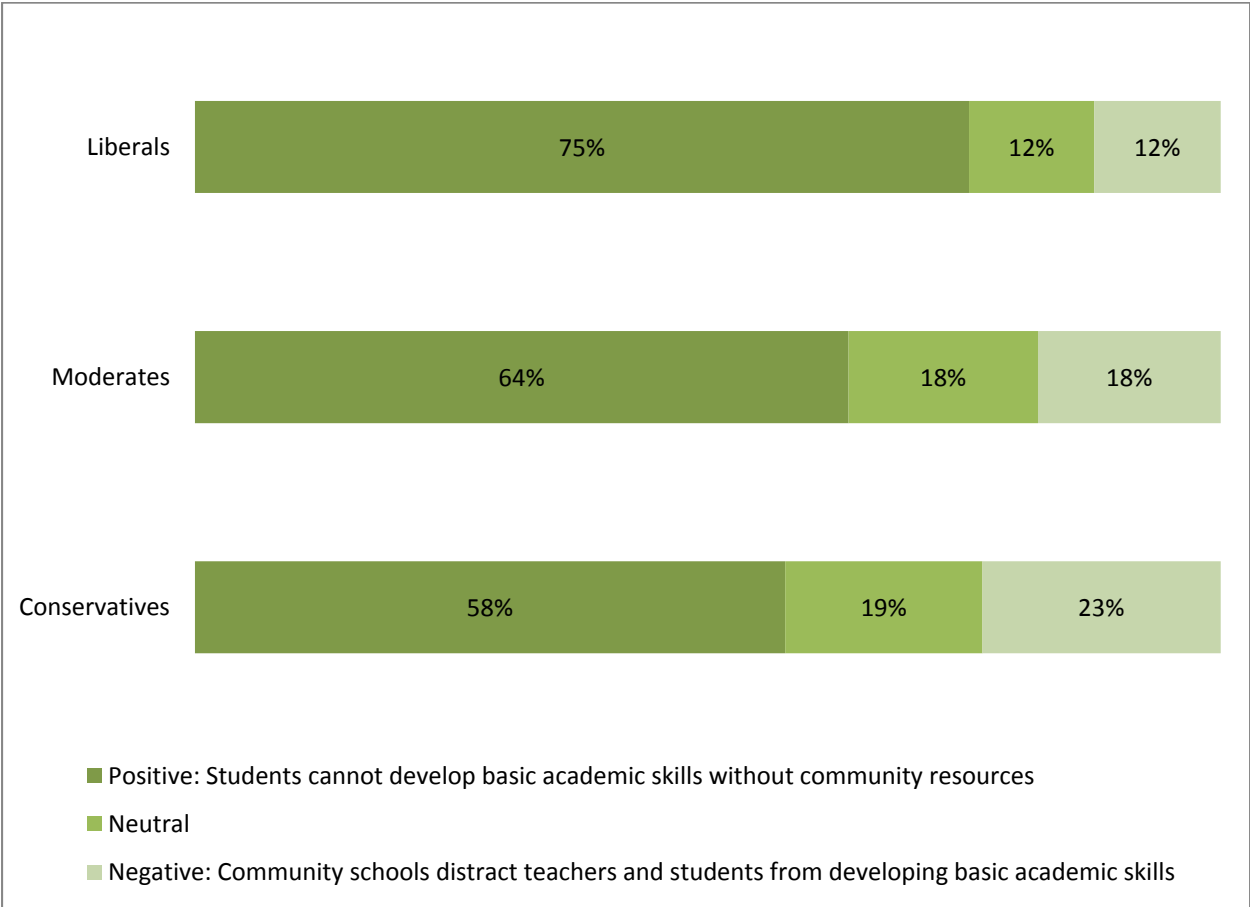


Figure 4.1: Support for teaching the whole child

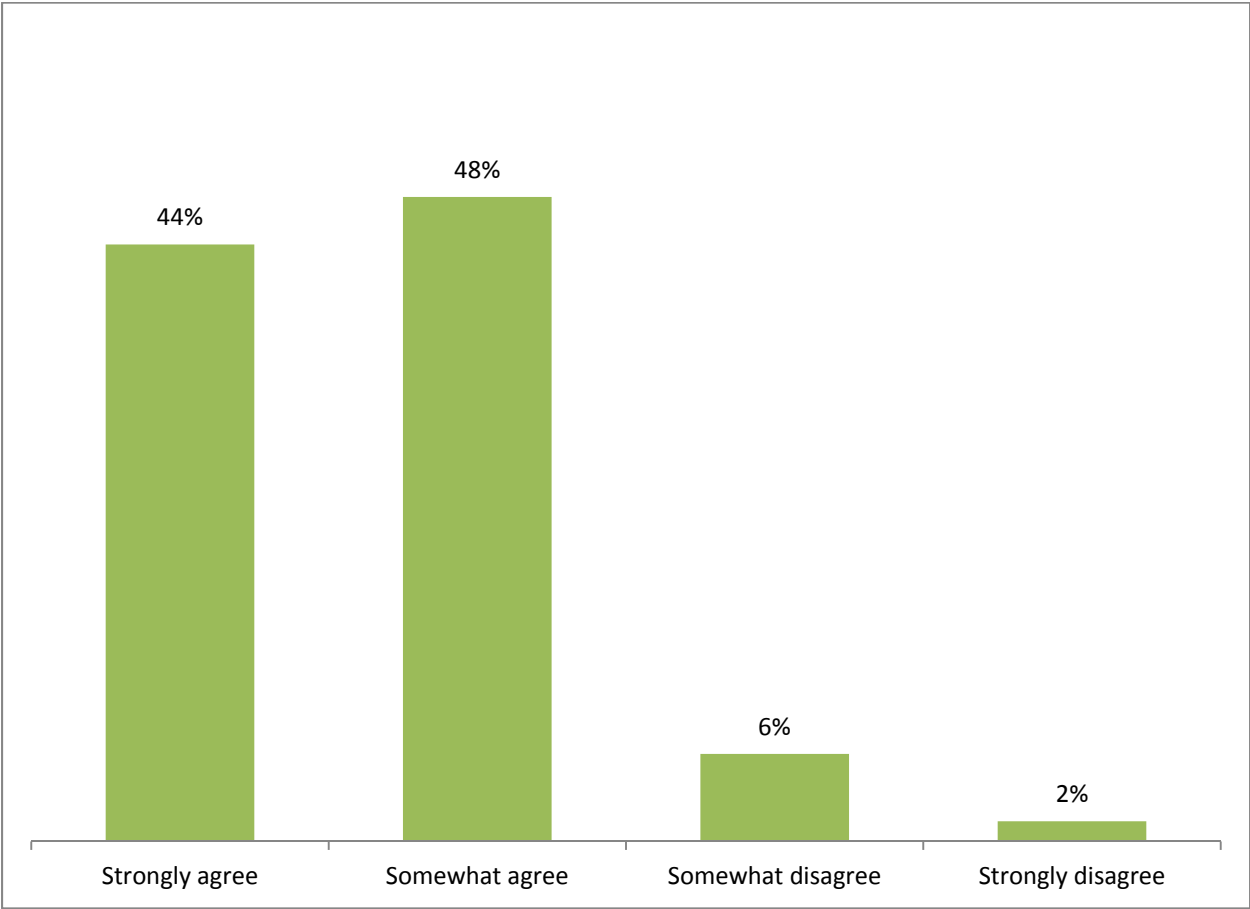


Figure 4.2: Support for teaching the whole child by key demographic characteristics

