Parents and Community Schools: strengthening each other?

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Community Schools (Brede School) are schools in which collaboration between different partners linked to the lives of children and their families is central. In Flanders (Belgium) a framework for community schools was developed in 2010 (Joos & Ernalsteen, 2010; Joos, Ernalsteen, et al, 2006): "A community school aims at encouraging the broad development of all children and youngsters by supporting and/or creating a broad learning and living environment in which children and youngsters can gain a wide range of learning and living experiences. In order to achieve this goal, a broad network is established between organizations and authorities from the various sectors that jointly shape and support the learning and living of children and youngsters." An important partner in these networks are parents. Research on community schools indicate that such schools can make a difference to the lives and life chances of children and families and that it has a positive effect on parental involvement (Cummings, Dyson & Todd, 2011). In this paper we will discuss the results from a study starting in January 2015 of an analysis of 28 community schools in Brussels. We will analyze the documents of these community schools (program, goals and evaluations) (Rapley, 2007) and conduct semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders about their program theory, including their implicit and explicit assumptions about what action is required to improve parental involvement (Chen, 2005). In our analysis we look at the way parents are (or are not) included in community schools: • What activities are organised by the community schools and how are parents (formal and informal) involved in these activities? • What theory of change do stakeholders demonstrate in relation to parental involvement?

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