PARTNERING

Full-Service Community Schools: Creating New Institutions

Community agencies can become partners with schools to help overcome barriers to learning, Ms. Dryfoos notes. Many people see the school site as the potential hub of education and services in the community. Parents want their children to be in safe places after school, and they welcome the personal assistance with child rearing that they can get in school-based family and health centers. Thus community schools offer an excellent alternative to traditional schools for students, families, teachers, and service providers.

BY JOY DRYFOOS

FULL-SERVICE community schools are proliferating in many different forms. Schoolpeople, child advocates, youth workers, and university faculty members are putting their heads together and coming up with designs for new types of school/community institutions that directly address the problems in contemporary life that create barriers to learning. The operating principles are simple. Children cannot learn unless their basic needs are met; support services for children and families will have little impact unless cognitive development is taken care of. Programs that incorporate high-quality education and support services are arising independently from various endeavors at the local, state, and national levels. They are known by many names: Beacons, Bridges to Success, Caring Communities, University-Assisted Schools, Communities in School, COZI (Comer/Zigler), Schools That Never Close, or just plain Community Schools. No two are exactly alike, but all share many similar characteristics.

The sum of these efforts is impressive. We do not know exactly how many full-service community schools have been developed, but surely the number is well over a thousand.

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What is most remarkable about these initiatives is that they seem to fall outside the domain of school reform and are rarely referenced in the school reform literature. Yet community schools are committed to school transformations that lead to improved academic achievement along with other goals related to youth development and family and community well-being. This should not be taken to mean that educators are not interested. Indeed, the recently formed Coalition for Community Schools includes all the major national educational organizations among its 170 partners.[1] Nevertheless, I believe that many *Kappan* readers might be unfamiliar with these developments. Therefore, I will summarize what is going on, why it is happening now, what difference it is making, what has been the experience with replication and sustainability to date, and what to expect in the future.

A COMMUNITY SCHOOL ENCOURAGES STUDENT LEARNING THROUGH COMMUNITY SERVICE.

DEFINITION

What is a full-service community school? The Coalition for Community Schools labored long and hard to come up with a satisfactory definition. The vision the group arrived at includes a number of features. A community school, operating in a public school building, is open to students, families, and the community before, during, and after school, seven days a week, all year long. It is jointly operated and financed through a partnership between the school system and one or more community agencies. Families, young people, principals, teachers, youth workers, neighborhood residents, college faculty members, college students, and businesspeople all work together to design and implement a plan for transforming the school into a child-centered institution.

Oriented toward the community, a community school encourages student learning through community service and service learning. A before- and after-school learning component encourages students to build on their classroom experiences, to expand their horizons, to explore their cultural heritage, to engage in sports and recreation, and just to have fun. A family support center helps families with child rearing, employment, housing, and other services. Medical, dental, and mental health services are also available on site.

A full-time community school coordinator, working alongside the school principal, oversees the delivery of an array of support services provided by local agency partners and participates on the school management team. Over time, most community schools consciously link activities in such areas as high-quality education, positive youth development, family support, family and community engagement in decision making, and community development.

Community schools are more likely to be located in disadvantaged communities where the population is racially and ethnically diverse. I have had the opportunity to visit many of these schools, and they seem to be very lively places, with stimulating and enriching classrooms and other spaces filled with activities and helping hands. As one student summed it up, "They respect us here."

EVOLUTION OF THE MODEL

Although these ideas are being marketed as new, the concept of community schools can be traced back to the early 20th century, when John Dewey brought the school into the community and Jane Addams brought the community into the school. The public school building has always been a place to locate a whole array of programs. The components of these "add-ons" come and go with changing social views about the role of the school and the needs of the people in the community. Early on, school-based medical inspection, immunization, and dentistry were delivered to needy immigrant children. For more than 65 years, the idea of school-based community education has flourished with the strong support of the Charles S. Mott Foundation. In 1935, Flint, Michigan, initiated "lighted schools" under the leadership of Frank Manley, who saw these community schools as "based upon the democratic ideal of respect for each individual person and his right to participate in the affairs of the community . . . a program characterized by change in response to changing needs, continuous experimentation to seek out satisfactory ways of achieving common goals, and careful evaluation of the results of its activity."[2] Some 50 school buildings in Flint eventually offered after-school and summer recreation pro-

grams, health and nutrition services, and a large community education program. Today, thousands of schools across the country have community education programs, bringing educational enrichment and cultural experiences to many children and adults. Of course, many schools that call themselves "community schools" do not conform to the definition above.

Beginning around 1980, a number of new programs were begun that led to the current movement for full-service community schools.[3] Concern about prevention of adolescent morbidity (sex, drugs, violence, and stress) led to the establishment by outside public health agencies and hospitals of primary health-care clinics in the schools, mostly in secondary schools. Clinics in elementary schools soon followed, reflecting significant unmet needs for medical, dental, and mental health services. Family resource centers were added to schools to help parents do a better job of child rearing and, more recently, to help welfare mothers get back into the labor force.

The focus on "one-stop" service integration was a reaction to the proliferation of fragmented and often inaccessible programs for children and families. More than a decade ago, the state of Florida came up with the concept of full-service schools, using the lever of state funding to get public agencies to move their services into school buildings. Other states, such as California and Missouri, followed with large-scale health and mental health initiatives that awarded grants to school systems to subcontract with public and nonprofit health-service providers. New Jersey created school-based youth services by awarding direct grants to community-based organizations.

Beginning in 1985, the University of Pennsylvania sought to enhance its relations with the surrounding community through the development of "university-assisted community schools." Currently, the university's Center for Community Partnerships works in collaboration with the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC) and is actively involved in 13 local schools. During school and after-school hours, these schools offer a variety of activities selected by school personnel in conjunction with university faculty members and students. WEPIC's general approach calls for program-based, hands-on learning that focuses on community improvement. Special areas of interest include health, the environment, nutrition, conflict resolution and peer mediation, desktop publishing, apprenticeships, entrepreneurial skills, and horticulture. Nearly 100 courses link Penn students to work in the university-assisted community schools.

Another movement toward community schools emanated from the profession of social work. In 1991 the Children's Aid Society (CAS), a substantial child-serving agency in New York City, created a new prototype of the "settlement house in the school." In collaboration with Community School District 6, one of the most overcrowded and neediest districts in New York, CAS organized a "seamless" learning and development experience for children, families, and communities. In school buildings that are open almost all the time, students can find a stimulating classroom curriculum connected to an extensive after-school program as well as on-site health and mental health services. Their parents and other community residents can find a wide range of supportive, educational, recreational, and cultural activities. The CAS model relies heavily on a strong community-based lead agency to take the initiative to plan, find the resources for, and implement the array of services.

Around the same time that CAS schools were being opened, the New York City Youth Bureau created a model called Beacons — "lighted schoolhouses." In this initiative, community-based agencies were awarded grants by the city to create school-based community centers that offer a wide range of recreation, social services, educational enrichment, and vocational activities that involve family and community. The programs differ according to the capabilities of the provider agencies and the particular cultural and socioeconomic needs of the community. Many have health clinics and employment programs; others encourage family participation, the arts, and recreation.

The United Way also sponsors a school/community initiative called Bridges to Success (BTS), which was pioneered in Indianapolis. This effort created a partnership of 300 major public and nonprofit agencies with a view toward integrating education with the delivery systems for human and community services. It established schools as lifelong learning centers and community hubs. The program has a two-tiered structure for governance. Under the auspices of the BTS Policy Council, the program is implemented in 43 schools by neighborhood-based site teams. At these demonstration schools, outside agencies provide health care, dental care, case management, recreational and cultural after-school activities, mental health services, community service learning, tutoring, and job-readiness training.

Some community schools were created by individuals. The Molly Stark School in Bennington, Vermont, is open year-round to provide a wide range of health and family services. The before- and after-school program is staffed by volunteers and offers all sorts of classes and activities, along with intensive mentoring. A Family Resource Center has been built adjacent to the school that features early childhood development, play groups, home visits, and

a preschool. Parents are drawn to the school through literacy programs, a lending library for books and toys, and family activity nights. All of this was accomplished through the efforts of the principal, Sue Maguire, who was determined to turn the school around and make it a vital child- and family-centered institution that draws upon resources of more than 40 different community organizations and individuals.

No one knows for sure how many Molly Stark Schools are being developed across the nation. We can hope, though, that articles such as this one will bring forth more examples.

THE PARTNERSHIP

In all these efforts, the primary responsibility for high-quality education rests with the school authorities, while the primary responsibility for "everything else" rests with the outside agencies. The school system pays for education; the other services are supported by an array of non-school sources of funding. It is important to make this distinction clear because some have misinterpreted these community school concepts to mean that the school is asked to provide and to pay for added health and social services or extended hours or parenting education. Quite the contrary, the idea is to divide up the responsibility among a number of agencies, with one set of services devoted to helping children learn and another devoted to helping children and families gain access to the supports they need. The goal is to take some of the burden for rearing and nourishing children off the school systems.

At least to an educational outsider, no strong consensus appears to be formed around the components of high-quality education. Readers of the *Kappan* are all too familiar with the ongoing debates about techniques for teaching reading, the new versus the old math, class size, teacher preparation, English as a second language (ESL), and the ever-present standards and testing. Still, certain approaches appear to be successful, and community schools have access to the latest thinking about how to reorganize their academic approaches and improve the outcomes for children.

The services that fall under "everything else" are broadly construed. Experience is showing that almost anything can be provided in a school as long as it meets the needs of the school/community and as long as resources can be identified to bring it in. The most frequently mentioned supports are related to health, mental health, and social services. These services supplant those provided by school support personnel, who are in short supply in disadvantaged communities. Case management is often provided by youth workers relocated from a local agency, particularly in the Communities in School model. Demand is always high for such basic needs as food and clothing; before- and after-school programs are almost always included, along with mentoring and tutoring. Educational programs for adults, such as ESL, computer use, and career preparation, are also very popular.

New thinking about old problems can also be worked into the design. One community school that was having difficulty getting parents involved (a common concern) asked parents what they most needed. The answer was access to a laundromat. No such facility existed in the neighborhood. Two washing machines and dryers were installed in the basement of the school, and parents came in droves. The teachers were happy, too, because they could do their own laundry at the school. And the parents and the teachers got to know one another by chatting over the washing machines.

The creation of a miniature golf course is another good example of "community school thinking." A seventh-grade teacher in an inner-city school determined that the students in that neighborhood had no access to miniature golf. An empty lot across the street from the school became available for a school project. Over the course of several years, the teacher, in conjunction with university faculty members and students, worked with middle-schoolers to design, construct, and, finally, operate the golf course. Students learned about golf, measurement, building, imagination, landscaping, and running a small business. They also had a good time.

Entrepreneurial approaches are integrated with classroom materials. One school features a Recycle-a-Bicycle Program, in which old bikes are collected from the neighborhood, restored, and sold to the community. The technical work is done under the auspices of an accredited industrial arts course. In a middle school health academy, students run Fruits R Us and Vegetables Too, purchasing produce and promoting its nutritional value. Other schools have gardens or hydroponic laboratories that yield produce for sale.

The integration of what goes on during extended school hours with what goes on in the classroom is an important operating principle of community schools. The students continue to learn and are not aware of whether they are "in school" or in the extended hours provided by outside agencies. When the Advertising Council of America selected community schools as its major focus in the year 2000, publicists came up with the theme "schools that the children never want to leave."

DO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WORK?

Both policy makers and practitioners want to know what kinds of positive changes community schools can make. The question is often posed in terms of the "value added" to the educational experience by surrounding students with support services. Given the definition above, what indicators of success should be looked at? Because those of us in the community school movement believe that community school concepts belong in the domain of school reform, we also believe that improved academic achievement must be the long-term objective of this emerging movement. Additional school-related indicators include attendance, promotion, and graduation rates. Community school models also encompass a wide range of support services that should produce other outcomes, such as improved social behaviors and healthy youth development, better family functioning and parent involvement, enhanced school and community climate, and access to support services.

I recently attempted to summarize the "state of the art" and found 49 school/community programs that had produced recent evaluation reports.[4] Few of these papers have been published. Six of the programs that had generated research were specifically after-school initiatives. Reports on large-scale initiatives, such as California Healthy Start, aggregate findings from hundreds of schools. Other programs, such as Communities in Schools, have submitted reports at state, community, and site levels (counted as one report). Other reports focus on one school only. Thus the count of reports is rough, and I present it merely to give an estimate of the large quantity of information that is becoming available. No two initiatives are alike, nor are the research protocols that have been used.

In 46 of the reports some positive outcomes were cited. But the quality of the reports varied enormously, from evaluations that relied on very small, nonrepresentative samples to those that that were based on carefully designed management information systems and control groups. In the other three cases, the students in the schools with programs did not do better than those in comparison schools, or the students in the programs did not improve their performance or behaviors over time.

Achievement. Thirty-six of the 49 programs with any form of documentation reported academic gains. These were generally improvements in reading and math test scores, looked at over a two- or three-year period. Many of these successful programs were in elementary schools. At least eight of the programs that reported gains in achievement pointed out that the outcomes were not schoolwide. Rather, they were limited to those students who received special services, such as case management or intensive mental health services, or they were experienced only by high-risk students or by those who attended the extended-day sessions.

Attendance. Nineteen programs reported improvement in school attendance. Several reported lower dropout rates; one reported lower rates specifically among pregnant and parenting teens. Several mentioned improvement in teacher attendance, suggesting higher rates of teacher satisfaction.

Suspensions. Eleven programs reported reductions in suspensions. This may reflect changes in policies regarding suspension, rather than changes in behavior. As schools transform into more child-centered institutions, they are likely to change their practices regarding suspensions and expulsions as part of the general change in school climate. One program referred to a decrease in referrals for disciplinary reasons.

High-risk behaviors. Eleven of the reports showed reductions in substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and disruptive behavior in the classroom or a general improvement in behavior.

Access to services. Better access to health care, lower hospitalization rates, higher immunization rates, and access to dental care were reported at least once. After-school programs cited access to child care as an outcome.

Parent involvement. At least 12 programs specifically showed increases in parent involvement. In other programs, parents said that they "felt better." Providers reported lower rates of child abuse and neglect among participants, less out-of-home placement, better child development practices, less aggression, and generally improved social relationships. Students reported a heightened sense of adult support from both parents and teachers.

Neighborhood. Six programs noted lower rates of violence and safer streets in their communities. A unique finding was the reduction in student mobility reported by one program, which suggested that adding services to the school encouraged families to stay in the neighborhood.

Multiple outcomes. Most of the programs showed impacts on more than one outcome, reflecting the design and comprehensiveness both of the research and of the program. For example, the Caring Connection Program in Marshalltown, Iowa, appeared to affect both academic achievement and youth development. Children's Aid Society had an impact on school performance as well as on parent involvement and community safety. Elizabeth Street in Los Angeles also improved school performance, lowered the dropout rate, and brought parents into the school.

This first-cut summary of findings about community schools should not be viewed as conclusive. The programs

described here cover a broad continuum, from fully realized community schools to schools that are just beginning to open their doors and add programs such as after-school activities. Moreover, evaluation is difficult and expensive, and it takes time. Only a few programs can produce what would pass as "scientific" results. Many others can offer "preliminary findings," early returns on long-term projects. Nevertheless, the weight of the evidence suggests that community schools are beginning to be able to demonstrate their positive effects on students, families, and communities.

IMPLEMENTATION REALITIES

Almost all the full-service community school models mentioned above have been replicated or adapted for use in schools around the country. The DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund supports an Extended Services Schools initiative to transform school buildings in low-income communities into neighborhood centers that offer both educational programs and a range of youth services. Some $13 million has been awarded to organizations in 17 communities with 60 school sites to adapt Beacons, Bridges to Success, University-Assisted Schools, and Children's Aid Society Community Schools. Each of these programs has an intermediary organization that provides technical assistance to grantees and other schools and community organizations that are interested in the model. A major evaluation is being conducted to examine the implementation, use, and cost of the after-school components. Several of the large-scale programs, such as California's Healthy Start, Kentucky's Youth and Family Service Centers, Missouri's Caring Communities, and New Jersey's School-Based Youth Service Program, already have extensive evaluation findings to guide further expansion of the programs. Technical assistance is also available from the Collaborative for Integrated School Services at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and from the Center for Mental Health in Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles.[5]

From these many efforts at replication, we are learning that it is not easy to create complex partnership models. What happens at the school level is shaped by policies and practices of cities, counties (including school districts), states, and the federal government. At the school site, governance is a key issue. The Coalition's vision calls for authority to be shared collaboratively between the school principal and a community school coordinator who works for the lead outside agency. The decision-making body includes school staff members, parents, other community and business representatives, and even students. Together, such a council plans the initiative, agrees on policies and practices, establishes mechanisms for accountability, and oversees the implementation of the program.

In reality, few school/community partnerships have achieved such a high level of collaboration. The picture may differ depending on whether the school or the community agency is the grantee. When the school is the grantee, the authority tends to rest with the principal, who then decides with whom to subcontract. When the community agency gets the direct grant (as is true of Beacons), the coordinator has more authority, but the principal is still the gatekeeper and facilitator who must buy into the program if it is going to be successful. Most problems appear to be at the "nitty-gritty" level. Bringing outsiders into the school to use school facilities after school hours and in the evening opens a Pandora's box of potential trouble. Teachers do not like to share their classrooms, particularly if they find a mess in the morning or if their supplies have been touched. Custodians' schedules have to be shifted if the building is to remain open for more hours. Already overcrowded schools may have limited space available for family resource rooms and health clinics.

Many of the outsiders come into the school building with a "do-gooder" mentality that threatens school personnel. Issues can arise over, say, how to treat aggressive behavior. Confidentiality is another issue. How much can a case manager reveal about a student or family to a school counselor or teacher? Experience with these partnerships is helping universities think through their own transformations, suggesting the need for cross-disciplinary training. Schools of education are adding courses in child and family development, while schools of social work and psychology are exposing graduate students to a better understanding of educational issues. Principals are learning about collaboration, and consideration is being given to how to certify and train community school coordinators.

As in so many areas of human behavior, open communication is fundamental to the success of community schools. From the outset, teachers and other school staff members have to be well prepared and well integrated into the program. They have to believe that bringing outsiders into the school will make their jobs easier. The outsiders who come into the school have to respect the teachers and must be willing to learn the culture of the school. Everyone has to tread carefully and keep in mind that the goal is to create a child-centered — rather than a professional-centered — institution. Practitioners have compared the complexity of such partnerships to the vicissitudes of a marriage.

SUSTAINABILITY

Skeptics want to know whether community schools work better than traditional schools, while community school advocates want to know how to keep them going. Continued funding is, of course, essential to the future of full-service community schools. We have arrived at this juncture — with an unknown but increasing number of sites — as a result of a potpourri of public, nonprofit, and foundation supports at the local, state, and national levels. Some of these resources are expanding, while others are disappearing.

Most of the financing of support services can be garnered from the many categorical state and federal programs and foundations. Just to mention a few sources: Medicaid and Child Health Insurance may be tapped for health and mental health services; Safe Schools and Healthy Students and Drug Free Schools and Safe Communities can provide for prevention programs and counseling; 21st Century Community Learning Centers can help support after-school programs; and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (welfare-reform funds) can help provide for child care and community school activities. Many states — for example, California, Kentucky, Missouri, and New Jersey — have growing initiatives, while such local governments as Portland/Multnomah County, Oregon, are providing support.

Combining such resources to create a full-service menu requires extensive knowledge and administrative skill. The coordinator at the school level needs technical assistance either from an intermediary organization or a government agency. A minimum of $100,000 a year is required to create the infrastructure for a community school that would at least support the coordinator, planning, council meetings, and accountability efforts. Title I grants might be the most reliable source of funds to begin the process of transformation. The 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program is growing rapidly, reflecting the popularity of extending school hours.

THE FUTURE

Many forces have combined to produce a strong movement toward full-service community schools. Changing demands for the labor force require that children be better prepared for the future and increase the pressure on schools to demonstrate high performance. The widening gap between social classes and races has increasingly isolated poor children in troubled schools. Immigrants flood some school systems and require special attention. Schoolhouse doors are now open to outside agencies that want to help children and families and can bring resources with them. Everyone agrees that services need to be integrated rather than fragmented, and many people see the school site as the potential hub of education and service in the community. Families want their children to be in safe places, both after school and in the early evening, and they also welcome the personal assistance with child rearing that they can get in school-based centers. Thus community schools offer an excellent alternative to traditional schools for students, families, teachers, and service providers.

Up until recently, the emerging field of community schools has evolved somewhat serendipitously, often one school at a time. Now advocates are talking about "going to scale" in response to requests from the superintendents of several large-city school systems to transform their entire networks into full-service community schools. This calls for systemic changes not only in the education system but also in the public and nonprofit feeder systems as well.

In 2001 Congressman Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) drafted a "Full-Services Community Schools Act," but it was not introduced during the tumultuous Congress of that year.[6] A federal grant program that would integrate fragmented federal resources at the top level would be helpful. By requiring joint applications from school/community partnerships, some of the tensions between the "sides" would have to be negotiated in the early planning stages. A specific grant program would give community schools the visibility they need to gain a foothold in the tempestuous world of school reform. As a strong advocate for these programs, I can say that the movement toward full-service community schools is well under way. Caring, imaginative, strong, and hard-working practitioners from across the disciplines are coming together to transform schools into neighborhood centers that are responsive to children, youths, families, and communities and that serve as places where everyone learns.

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1. The Coalition for Community Schools is located at the Institute for Educational Leadership, 1001 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Suite 310, Washington, DC 20036. Its website is www.Communityschools.org.

2. Quoted in Larry Decker, *The Evolution of the Community School Concept: The Leadership of Frank J. Manley* (Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic University, National Community Education Publication Series, 1999), p. 6.

3. Joy G. Dryfoos, *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

4. Joy G. Dryfoos, "Evaluation of Community Schools: Findings to Date," June 2000, available at www.Communityschools.org or from the author at jdryf65322@aol.com.

5. Information about the Collaborative for Integrated School Services can be obtained by sending e-mail to Margot_Welch@harvard.edu. Information about the Center for Mental Health in Schools can be obtained on the Web at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu.

6. Joy G. Dryfoos and Sue Maguire, *Inside Community Schools: Vision and Reality* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, forthcoming). **K**