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Lightening the Load

A Look at Four Ways that Community Schools
Can Support Effective Teaching

Theodora Chang, with Calyssa Lawyer January 2012

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

The job of a teacher these days seems to stretch beyond the walls of a classroom, especially in primary and secondary schools in high-poverty communities. We hear stories of teachers purchasing food for hungry students, going door to door in neighborhoods to boost parent involvement in school, and referring students and families to health services. Teachers in these communities know how important these types of nonclassroom activities are to improving the educational performance of their students. So, too, do education experts and policymakers, who call for including these “wraparound services” in high-poverty schools.

While there is research on the potential for wraparound services, including health care services, family involvement programs, and expanded food assistance programs to eliminate barriers to student learning, there is little known about the possible connection between wraparound services and teacher efficacy. This report examines specific examples of schools where wraparound services are benefiting teachers in addition to students.

This paper draws on phone interviews conducted with teachers, principals, or site coordinators at 14 schools across the country that integrate wraparound services with a strong academic focus to serve large percentages of low-income students. These types of schools are known as “community schools” among education professionals. Four main trends emerged from these conversations:

- Providing wraparound services at school helped reduce health-related issues that would otherwise cost students instructional time.
- Wraparound services help students and families stay in the community by meeting basic needs, and the resulting decrease in mobility benefits teachers by creating classroom stability.
- Offering family programs, such as English language learner classes, can encourage parents to communicate more with teachers and empower them to

help their children with homework and support the work that teachers do in the classroom.

- Enlisting the help of community partners and service providers, such as onsite health professionals, can free teachers to concentrate on instruction with fewer worries about nonacademic student needs, which reduces their stress levels and burnout tendencies.

These four findings lead us to recommend several steps that schools, districts, and states can take to maximize the benefits of wraparound services for teachers. Specifically:

- Creatively combine multiple funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels and align school services with any existing commitments to provide wraparound services.
- Incorporate teacher input when aligning instructional strategies with wrap-around student services, and provide opportunities for teachers and service providers to sit down and collaborate.
- Include strategies for data collection and analysis whenever possible.
- Conduct further research to explore the impact of wraparound services on teacher effectiveness to see whether there is an optimal mix of services to provide at high-poverty schools, and whether the presence of these services makes a high-poverty school more attractive to teacher candidates.

In the pages that follow, we explore the ways in which wraparound services help teachers in high-poverty schools focus on student achievement by addressing the nonacademic needs of students. We conclude with our detailed recommendations—steps that we believe would help teachers and students alike perform to the best of their ability.

Community schools

One teacher, many hats

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “teacher” as “one that teaches; especially one whose occupation is to instruct.”¹ Most educators would agree that this definition omits a few other roles that teachers play, especially those who work in high-poverty schools. In fact, Washington, D.C. Teachers Union President Nathan Saunders was recently quoted as saying that “teachers have to be parents, priests, lawyers, clothes washers, babysitters, and a bunch of other things.”²

Indeed, a recent national survey found that 61 percent of teachers purchase food for their classrooms and spend an average of \$25 out of pocket each month.³ Seventy-four percent of teachers say they have helped families sign their students up for free or reduced-price lunches, and 49 percent say they have referred students and their families to other services and resources.

The results from a series of teacher surveys administered over the past two decades suggest that the unmet needs of students, combined with teachers’ additional noninstructional activities, may have detrimental effects in the classroom.⁴ Fifty percent of first-year teachers think that “many children come to school with so many problems that it’s difficult for them to be good students.” Of the teachers who report that at least a quarter of their students face health problems, almost 40 percent say they are not well-prepared to deal with such issues. Among the top reasons that teachers gave for leaving their schools were lack of parental support (40 percent) and poverty-related problems faced by students (25 percent).

A teacher has 180 days to shape human potential

There is little doubt about the importance of teachers, especially those who are highly effective and work in areas of high need. In a 2009 speech to newly minted education school graduates, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan

praised the work of individuals and called for more teachers to reach students in high-poverty schools, saying:

Every year, a teacher has 180 days in the classroom to shape human potential – to make that personal connection that transforms lives. So go to the rural hamlets like Lyndon Johnson’s school in Cotulla. Go to the barrios. Go to the inner-city neighborhoods. Help a child with disabilities conquer their doubts. Ease the load for a student who speaks little English. Teach science and math with expertise and passion in a school where it has enjoyed neither.⁵

Research shows that highly effective teachers are the most influential in-school ingredient in raising student achievement, and high-quality instruction can substantially offset disadvantages associated with low socioeconomic background.⁶ Three years of highly effective instruction can boost student achievement by as much as 50 percentile points, while the detrimental effects from being assigned to an ineffective teacher persist in later years.⁷ This makes it all the more imperative to support and retain effective teachers in the schools where they are needed most.

Community schools provide one-stop services for students

Strategies for encouraging good teaching range from monetary incentives to mentoring initiatives. Now, though, a growing number of schools are turning to a different plan—supporting teachers by supporting their students. One approach to addressing student needs is through a community schools strategy, which aims to meet the academic and nonacademic needs of students by pairing “wraparound services,” such as health care and parent education programs, with a strong academic focus.

According to the Coalition for Community Schools, community schools are both physical places and sets of partnerships between schools and other community resources.⁸ The Center for Community School Partnerships at the University of California, Davis, describes community schools as central hubs “where an array of public and private agencies collaborate with the school and its staff to provide a comprehensive set of integrated services designed to meet the full range of learning and developmental needs of the students.”⁹

While each community school is designed to meet the specific needs of its community, most emphasize a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a

challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students. They also include some or all of the following components:

- **Additional learning opportunities.** This includes afterschool and summer programs, longer school days, and early childhood programs.
- **Health services.** This includes primary health care, dental care, mental health services, nutrition counseling, and referrals to community providers.
- **Family support and engagement.** This includes family literacy, adult education, job skills training, and English as a Second Language classes.
- **Coordination of services.** This includes a dedicated coordinator or support teams to handle logistics and match services with student needs.
- **Data systems.** This includes tracking student needs and progress, measuring academic success, and capturing early warning signs of academic failure.¹⁰

Lane Middle School in Portland, Oregon, is an example of a community school that has an onsite teen clinic, mental health services, food-and-nutrition services, clothing, and adult education programs on topics such as English language classes, home buying, and tax preparation. “Lane is like a Super Wal-Mart,” says former school principal Karl Logan. “It’s a one-stop shop that provides many services that our community needs.”¹¹

The idea of a one-stop shop approach has already found broad support among teachers. According to the 2009 MetLife Survey of Teachers, a majority of teachers and principals believe student access to integrated social, health, and educational services is very important for improving student achievement.¹² In particular, the survey finds that teachers and principals in schools with high proportions of low-income students are particularly likely to believe in the importance of these supports, often referred to as “wraparound services.”

It makes sense to pair antipoverty strategies with schools to produce positive student outcomes. Saba Bireda and Joy Moses in a Center for American Progress report note that schools have unparalleled access to low-income students and their families because they are located in neighborhoods and are familiar community institutions, and thus are well-positioned to be effective central connection points.¹³

Can wraparound services help teachers teach?

Until now, research on schools enrolling large concentrations of low-income students yields two seemingly separate conclusions. We know that great teachers can lead to academic achievement gains, and we know that wraparound services help create conditions for students to excel.¹⁴ What has yet to be explored is the possible connection between teacher efficacy and wraparound services.

A 1999 study commissioned by the Children’s Aid Society found teachers consistently reporting that the presence of other professionals, who specialized in addressing children’s nonacademic needs, allowed them to focus on teaching during their classroom time.¹⁵ This report builds on that foundational work to examine specific examples of ways in which community school strategies may benefit educator practice.

To gather information for this report, we contacted schools identified by the National Coalition for Community Schools and the U.S. Department of Education as “community schools,”¹⁶ and interviewed teachers, principals, or coordinators by phone at 14 different schools during the months of April–August 2011. We defined “coordinators” as individuals who are either employed by the school or by a partnering service provider to align wraparound services with academic instruction. Coordinator duties ranged from creating a master schedule for the available afterschool programs to organizing parent meetings and arranging for health providers to come to their schools.

Although interviewees worked at schools spread out across the country, all had significant percentages of high-poverty students and have been implementing a community schools approach for at least one school year. Table 1 lists the schools where we interviewed individuals for this report.

TABLE 1
Community schools programs examined in this report

Name	Location	Additional learning opportunities?	Health services	Family engagement	Coordinator and data systems	Unique features
Lane Middle School (6th–8th)	Portland, OR	Afterschool programs	Onsite clinic	Family Center	Yes	Part of a larger Schools Uniting Neighborhoods community schools network
Brooklyn Center High School (7th–12th)	Brooklyn Center, MN	Afterschool programs	Two district health centers; also in the process of developing a teen parent child care center	Parents of Power program	Yes	Is an Arts Magnet school and is part of a districtwide community schools initiative
John A. Johnson Elementary School (PK–6th)	Saint Paul, MN	Extended school day	Providers come to school; dental clinic on site	Community family center	Yes	Partnership with local YMCA to provide physical education to students
Ethel Taylor Academy (PK–8th)	Cincinnati, OH	Afterschool programs	Providers come to school	N/A	Yes	Fresh fruits and vegetables grant to increase availability to students, plus fresh salad bar
Pleasant Ridge Montessori (PK–6th)	Cincinnati, OH	Afterschool programs	N/A	Community Learning Center	N/A	“Backpack” food program—students receive backpacks filled with food
Rosa Parks Elementary (K–5th)	Tulsa, OK	Afterschool programs	Onsite clinic	Parent GED and ESL classes	Yes	Food 4 Kids program; Klothes Kloset program
Marshall Elementary (PK–6th)	Tulsa, OK	N/A	Providers come to school	N/A	Yes	“Backpack” food program
Roosevelt Elementary School (PK–5th)	Allentown, PA	23 different mentoring and tutoring programs; programs before and after school and summer enrichment	Weekly health clinic and dental van visits	Monthly “Book Blast”—students and parents work on reading strategies at school; adult education program	Yes	“Backpack” food program; bike program that teaches bike repair, safety, and communications skills
Glenciff High School (9th–12th)	Nashville, TN	N/A	Onsite clinic	N/A	Yes	Student leadership teams; Healthy Garden project

Carlin Springs Elementary School (PK–5th)	Arlington, VA	21 different afterschool enrichment programs offered year round to reinforce curriculum	Onsite health and mental health providers available to students and their families; linkages to dental care	Bilingual parent coffees, workshops, home visits, computer classes, monthly family evening events; parent room with two bilingual parent liaisons; twice-weekly developmental playgroups for parents and their toddlers	Yes	In-school, student-run branch of the Arlington Federal Credit Union; evening Cyber Café for parents and students; onsite soccer program run by Arlington Soccer Association as an incentive for students to participate in tutoring
George Washington Community School (7th–12th)	Indianapolis, IN	Afterschool programs	Onsite clinic	N/A	N/A	Monthly Community Advisory Council that provides feedback
Latino Studies Academy at Burns (PK–8th)	Hartford, CT	Afterschool programs and summer school—students work with Professional Youth Developers and teachers	Mobile health unit and onsite clinic	Additional bilingual psychologist for families; parenting and other workshops	Yes	Instrumental music program for students—partnering with Hartford Symphony; mentoring program
Gardner Pilot Academy (PK–5th)	Allston, MA	Before-school and afterschool programs, and summer school	Onsite clinic	Adult education program	Yes	Visual and performing arts education through partnerships with professional artists; schoolwide literacy initiative focused on social justice
Green Dot – Locke High School (9th–12th)	Los Angeles, CA	Afterschool programs	Referrals for health services; new health clinic opening in fall 2012	Parent support and education workshops, including English as a Second Language	Yes	Schools are open until 5:00 p.m. daily to accommodate the schedules of working families; community groups can also use school facilities after school hours

Findings: Four ways wraparound services impact teaching

Four observed trends emerged from the insights shared by representatives of the 14 community schools. First of all, interviewees noted that a wraparound services and community schools strategy at their schools helped reduce health-related obstacles that would otherwise cost their students instructional time. Secondly, decreased student mobility rates also improved classroom continuity because fewer families had to move to get the services they needed.

Thirdly, the presence of family services such as English language learner programs helped parents support the work that teachers were doing in the classroom. And finally, such services also freed teachers to concentrate on instruction with fewer worries about their students' nonacademic needs, which reduced stress levels and burnout tendencies.

Let's now examine each of these findings in more detail.

Reduce health-related obstacles to learning

Some of the most overt barriers to teaching and learning are rooted in student health issues. A comprehensive longitudinal study of students in California finds that student health risks impede the progress of schools in raising student achievement.¹⁷ Asthma, for example, is one of the leading causes of school absenteeism and disproportionately affects children in communities of color and low-income children.¹⁸ One out of every seven low-income, preschool-aged children is obese, which puts them at risk of having high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and Type II diabetes.¹⁹

In addition, the National Institutes of Health estimate that 51 million school hours per year are lost to dental-related illnesses.²⁰ For older students, teen pregnancy and childbirth contribute significantly to dropout rates among high school girls.²¹ At the most basic level, providing health services supports student wellness, which sets students and teachers up for success in the classroom.

This understanding of the connection between achievement and wellness spurred leaders at Green Dot Public Schools, a charter school network, to partner with mental health and wellness professionals in 2008 when they took over and sought to turn around the chronically low-performing Locke High School in Los Angeles. Now they are taking the next step—opening a wellness center in fall 2012 for their students and the broader community of Watts in the city.²² Green Dot reports encouraging success with increased student proficiency rates in all subjects,²³ but quickly realized that more coordinated social services could further support the academic gains they were making.

“When we first started, it was more about focusing on the academic piece, and as we refined our academic model, we realized there were so many other issues that our students were dealing with,” explains Erica Gonzalez, Green Dot’s director of public policy and community partnerships.²⁴ “We saw needs outside of the classroom that were so important for their success.” The wellness center will include a broad range of services, including but not limited to:

- Tutoring and academic enrichment activities
- Programs for students who are chronically absent, truant, suspended, or expelled
- Nutrition services and physical activities
- Primary health, mental health, vision services, and dental care
- A teen legal clinic
- Parent education and adult education, including English as a Second Language instruction

The idea behind this approach is that students who stay healthy are more likely to come to school ready to learn, which allows teachers to focus on classroom instruction.

Similar to Green Dot, Glencliff High School in Nashville, Tennessee, partners with a health service organization to operate an onsite community health clinic. The clinic serves approximately 1,000 patients each year, many of whom are students.²⁵ In an area of Tennessee where half of young black males are borderline hypertensive, diabetic, or overweight,²⁶ easy access to health services is a significant asset when it comes to keeping students out of emergency rooms and in the classroom with their teachers.

Coordinated health care can be essential for keeping students in school. This is especially important for addressing high teen-pregnancy rates; only 50 percent

of teen mothers achieve a high school diploma by age 22.²⁷ Glencliff Assistant Principal Adrienne Battle Koger describes a situation where a pregnant student was not obtaining health care from outside sources. “After teachers and school administrators noticed this, our health clinic staff provided services and also connected her with external providers,” she says. “The community schools model enabled clinic staff to work with her teachers to ensure that she would stay on track to receive her diploma, which she eventually did.”²⁸

Another key way that poor health can hinder effective teaching and learning is through attendance. With the exception of innovations in virtual and distance learning, students must be physically present in a classroom in order to receive instruction from a teacher. Students in schools without health centers must leave their classrooms and miss instructional time to travel to a doctor’s office, even for something as routine as an eye checkup, and teachers may have to adjust lesson plans or spend extra time catching students up if there are lengthy absences.

Wraparound services remove these obstacles to education. Case in point: Students at George Washington Community School in Indianapolis, Indiana, were able to meet nearly all of the district’s immunization requirements without missing classes at the beginning of the school year through the services offered through their onsite health clinic. According to Principal Deborah Leser, many other schools in the district struggled to get all of their students immunized at offsite clinics.²⁹

Or consider Pleasant Ridge Montessori School in Cincinnati, Ohio, where onsite health services are seen as a key way to help students maximize their time in the classroom. “If I have a health concern about a child, I go straight to the nurse and she handles it, which really frees me up to handle the academics because I know the other stuff is taken care of,” says teacher Maureen Simon. “We have services in our building, so rather than have the children miss a day for health reasons, they can just get the services they need and then they’re right back in the classroom.”³⁰

Students are able to receive mental health, dental, and immunization services—all at no cost to them. Simon also notes that the services are a good way to establish connections with parents. “It’s nice to be able to say to parents that there are resources available here at the school,” she says. “You don’t have to take your child someplace else for counseling or health care. We can do it right here, and I can introduce you to the providers.”

Create stronger connections between teachers and families

Research on families and students demonstrates that student achievement increases when parents are actively engaged in their child's education.³¹ Surveys also show that although teachers are aware that family engagement is critical for improving student achievement, many report that effective family engagement is one of their biggest challenges.

For schools with large populations of students who are English language learners, effective family engagement is difficult when there are language barriers between parents and teachers. At Roosevelt Elementary School in Allentown, Pennsylvania, where 84 percent of students are eligible for government-funded free and reduced-price lunches, and where more than 20 percent of students come from families that speak English as a second language, teachers pushed for a transition to a community schools model because they wanted to improve parent involvement.

According to Community School Director Katherine Jackson, Roosevelt addressed the language challenge by setting up an adult education program that includes English classes and parenting seminars. Classes have helped teachers connect with their students' families and can also help parents who are interested in continued learning opportunities. "One of our teachers heard that the father of a student wanted to help out with his son's homework, but he was struggling because of the language barrier," Jackson says. "So the teacher connected him with our school's adult education program, which enabled him not only to help his son with his homework but also to improve his own English as well."³²

The Gardner Pilot Academy in Boston, Massachusetts, also established an English language program for its students' families that now serves 100 families. There are five levels of classes, ranging from Basic Beginner to Advanced, offered on weekday evenings to accommodate the schedules of working adults. Classes are free of charge, and child care is provided. In addition to helping parents better connect with their child's teachers, the program aims to help parents and other adults in the community build language skills "for independence and life-long learning."³³ "Many of our families were anxious to learn more English so they could go to the store without being concerned about language, so we designed the Adult Education Program as an empowerment program for families," says Lauren Fogarty, Gardner's director of extended learning time.³⁴

Both families and teachers benefit from Gardner Pilot Academy’s focus on family engagement. The school has a Family and Community Outreach Committee, which hosts several major family events every year, and a bilingual parent and family engagement director who recruits students to the school and then works with their families to ensure their participation in the school community. These support systems work for teachers as well. “Teachers at Gardner have the resources to ask our social worker and parent coordinator if they can let a student’s family know that it’s really important for them to come and talk to their teacher(s) about a certain issue,” says Fogarty.

While successful family engagement can be hard to measure quantitatively, there is at least one indicator of early success. Staff at Gardner have seen dramatic improvements in family participation since the school’s conversion to a community school model: While only 25 percent of Gardner families attended parent-teacher conferences in 1997, 98 percent of families participated in the 2010-11 school year.³⁵ “One of the best parts about the Adult Education Program is that it helps parents build that confidence that will help them advocate for their child more,” says fifth-grade teacher Kristin Shadford. “For some parents, it’s really hard for them to speak up during our parent-teacher conferences, but I’ve seen a couple of parents who have been in Adult Education Program classes for years really grow and become more confident.”³⁶

Indeed, parent-teacher conferences are a key opportunity for teachers to meet parents and discuss their student’s progress—and the dramatic improvement in participation rates at Gardner demonstrates a positive step forward.

The bottom line for Shadford, however, is that the wraparound services benefit students and their families the most. “Teachers are so motivated at my school that they’re going to do whatever they need to do,” she explains. “The services benefit our students and families first and foremost; they don’t have as much of a direct impact on us, but they impact us on a larger scale when kids are coming to school prepared and families are more involved.”

Decrease student mobility

The Great Recession of 2007-2009 and the subsequent tepid economic recovery caused families to tighten their budgets, relocate their children to different schools

due to the need to seek employment elsewhere or because of housing needs, and drove up numbers of homeless students across the country.³⁷ Families struggling to afford rent, food, clothes, and gas move from location to location as parents look for work and more affordable housing. For students, these changes are academically as well as personally disruptive. Teachers experience similar disruption as new students join their classrooms and current students leave abruptly in the middle of the school year.

According to a report by the Coalition for Community Schools, the presence of wraparound services may influence whether a family needs to move to a different community.³⁸ One example is the Tukwila School District in Washington state, where the mobility rate of students in community schools is 5 percent—a dramatic difference from the district average of 23 percent. Like many other community schools, Tukwila’s community schools provide services for immigrants, breakfast and lunch for students even in summer, and health services in an area with a dearth of local hospitals. These services encourage and enable families to stay in the community.

Some teachers mentioned that their schools help students and families stay in the community by meeting basic needs. One example of this is a “backpack” program, where students are sent home every Friday with a backpack filled with nonperishable food so they are less at risk of skipping a weekend meal if their families are struggling financially. Marshall Elementary School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, sends approximately 150 students home with these weekly backpacks, which are an important part of the school’s comprehensive services. “As a teacher, I’ve become more aware of my students and their needs because I teach at a community school, and it’s great that Marshall is a place where families know they can find help,” says Katy Jimenez, who teaches English language learner students.³⁹

Decreased student mobility can benefit teachers by creating classroom stability and reducing distractions caused by students entering and exiting the school in the middle of an academic year. According to Nick Faber, a science specialist at John A. Johnson Elementary School in Saint Paul, Minnesota, “if you can keep student mobility stable and keep kids comfortable and concentrated on learning while they’re in the building, then we as teachers can just do our jobs a whole lot better.”⁴⁰

John A. Johnson Elementary partners with a local family center so teachers and staff can refer families who need assistance with meeting food, clothing, and other daily needs. Families that have experienced long-term homelessness are

connected with housing specialists and can receive rent subsidies. Parents also have access to employment services and adult mental health services.

There are a number of reasons for student mobility, some of which may be unrelated to services that can be provided by a school. But in cases where community schools are able to step in, the provision of wraparound services can serve teachers and students by ensuring consistency throughout the school year.

Reduce stress and burnout

Educators in community schools say that in addition to helping teachers address their current challenges, wraparound services can help prevent teacher burnout and alleviate stress. This is particularly helpful at a time when teacher turnover rates at high-poverty schools are almost twice as high as the turnover rates at low-poverty schools.⁴¹ Retaining effective teachers is important for every school but it can be especially important in high-poverty schools where students are struggling academically.

Lane Middle School has been using a community schools strategy for more than six years. The school improved from a 40 percent proficiency rate in reading before its transition from a traditional school to a community school, to 75 percent proficiency now.⁴² Karl Logan began as a principal at the school when it adopted a community schools approach and only recently transitioned out of the position in June 2011. While it's difficult to attribute the achievement gains directly to the community schools approach, Logan sees the wraparound services provided by the school as having a strong influence on teachers' stress levels:

These services impact teachers at Lane a great deal. It helps their mental health because teachers know and see the needs of their kids whether it's academic, social, mental health, or physical health. They are going to meet their kids' needs because that is who they are and what they do, but they will burn out without help. If teachers have organized, systemic supports that can help them meet the needs they see every day, then to a certain extent it relieves the pressure and stress on teachers.⁴³

Logan also emphasizes that wraparound services can be especially beneficial for teachers working in low-income schools. "The more we can lessen the impact of the reality of a student's challenges, the more of an impact we can make in the classroom," he says.

At Carlin Springs Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia, students have a wide range of afterschool opportunities where they can interact with adult mentors and get access to academic enrichment or remediation help. Eric Sokolove, who leads the school's reading and math tutoring clubs in addition to teaching third grade at Carlin Springs, believes that these opportunities are correlated with increases in student achievement and decreases in teachers' stress levels:

We're seeing more and more kids pass the state exam every year, and this year we had more at the advanced level than we've had before, which shows that we're not just pushing for minimum proficiency. As teachers, we get a lot from the community schools strategy – better-prepared students, mentors for our students, interventions and exposure to new things for them. That's all huge. When I taught at my former [traditional] school, I was doing a million things and trying to solve the world's problems, and I burned out fast. At Carlin Springs, a lot gets taken off teachers' plates when we can refer students and families to services.⁴⁴

The benefits of wraparound services for improving teacher effectiveness and student learning are clearly evident at these 14 community schools. But how can these wraparound services be introduced on a larger scale in high-poverty communities across our nation? We turn to this question in the following section.

Recommendations

Teachers, principals, and coordinators who were interviewed for this report noted that there are several opportunities for expanding or improving their existing wrap-around services strategies. We recommend that schools, districts, and states take the following steps to maximize the benefits of community schools for teachers:

- Leverage federal, state, and local funding opportunities.
- Design school-specific strategies with input from teachers and service providers.
- Capture data and conduct further research on the impact of wraparound services.

We'll now examine each in turn.

Leverage federal, state, and local funding opportunities

Even in strong fiscal times, finding funding for wraparound services can be tricky. The current fiscal climate causes school and district leaders to cut back on resources, which in turn puts a strain on many teachers who have to make do with less. Providing wraparound services to students can be one way to alleviate the demands of teaching by allowing teachers to focus more attention on instruction. Several coordinators and principals noted in their interviews that they secured funding through opportunities at the federal, state, and local levels that support the continuation or expansion of wraparound services in schools.

At the federal level, \$10 million was made available through the U.S. Department of Education's Full-Service Community Schools Program in 2010. And there are bills in Congress—the Full-Service Community Schools Act of 2011, sponsored by Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Sen. Ben Nelson (D-NE)—to support its continuation. Green Dot applied for and was awarded \$1.85 million in federal funds after receiving a Full-Service Community Schools grant in 2010. George Washington Community School also received a \$2.5 million Full-Service Community Schools grant in 2008.

The Promise Neighborhoods initiative, another Department of Education program, also supports strong academics combined with wraparound services. Five organizations were recently awarded the first Promise Neighborhoods implementation grants, and another fifteen organizations received planning grants. This is in addition to the 21 planning grants made available in 2010. The Promise Neighborhoods Act of 2011, sponsored by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Rep. Donald Payne (D-NJ), was also introduced in Congress recently to secure continued funding for the initiative.

States can creatively combine other federal funding streams to offer wraparound services. 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, for example, are allocated to states by formula and then awarded competitively to districts. In Evansville, Indiana, these funds are used to provide afterschool and summer programs. In several New York City community schools, medical and dental health services are partially funded by Medicaid dollars. According to the National Assembly on School-Based Health Care, Medicaid is a critical source of revenue for school-based health centers, many of which are located in community schools.⁴⁵

Schools can also do research to identify existing state and local commitments to provide wraparound services, and coordinate a community schools strategy accordingly. After realizing that the Los Angeles Unified School District issued a proposal for the establishment of school-based health centers, one of which was slated to be in Locke High School's neighborhood, Green Dot partnered with the school district to bring mental health and wellness services to students during its first few years of operation. And Lane Middle School is part of a larger Portland Schools Uniting Neighborhoods Initiative, and saves money by co-locating services. The county's health department set up a health clinic in the school, which is supported by county and federal funding and is open to all youth in the community. The school also receives in-kind donations and volunteer hours from local partners.

Design school-specific strategies with input from teachers and service providers

Districts and schools that are interested in implementing or expanding wrap-around services should incorporate input from teachers and government antipov-erty service providers when aligning instructional strategies with student services. As demonstrated by interviewees in this report, teachers often have valuable insights into their students' specific needs and are key partners in the community schools model. And government service providers bring expertise from their field

into schools and can be another set of eyes and ears on the ground. Collaboration can lead to healthier and more focused students, which helps both providers and teachers by allowing them to make the most of the time spent with their students.

Roosevelt Elementary School is one example of a school proactively seeking teacher input. School staff recently compiled qualitative data based on interviews with Roosevelt teachers on aspects of their school's model that work well and those that need improvement. At Glencliff High School, teachers share planning time once a week where they meet with each other and their administrators to talk about student instruction and interventions. They also have a monthly support and intervention meeting where all service providers and school personnel come together to ask questions, review the situations of specific students, and take care of any service referrals for students all at one time.

“Instead of having a big lag in time and trying to figure out what to do and how to address things, bringing teachers together with the school psychologist and health care providers helps us be more intentional and more efficient in getting students' needs met,” says Glencliff Assistant Principal Adrienne Battle Koger. “We discuss everything that a student needs to achieve, which is better than dealing with things in isolation, where you might fix one part but miss a bigger underlying issue.”⁴⁶

Schools can also benefit from facilitating close partnerships between teachers and service providers. At Lane Middle School, teachers and service providers keep track of each student's progress in a shared planner, which is what Karl Logan calls “the main line of communication between educators and community partners.” The planner contains information such as learning goals and assigned homework, and community partners have full access to the curriculum and classroom materials that teachers use. “Over time,” Logan says, “this strategy works so that teachers and community partners use the planners in rigorous and strategic ways to meet specific learning needs and coordinate services to students.”

It is important to note that the schools discussed in this report used varying strategies to bring teachers and service providers together and meet the needs of their students. A key asset of a community schools strategy is the flexibility for schools to align services and instruction in ways that meet the needs of specific student populations. As Kayla Robinson, principal of Marshall Elementary School, observes, “Every school finds that their beginning point is based on what they need in their own community, because it isn't going to look the same in every school, and then it grows differently. At Marshall, it has grown into both site-based

programs and services for families, but then we've also made some connections in community networks that are outside of schools."⁴⁷

Capture data and conduct further research on the impact of wraparound services

All of the schools surveyed for this report made gains in student achievement, and many are embarking on new efforts to better synthesize quantitative and qualitative data on student outcomes that can be used to evaluate the impact of wraparound services. But several individuals at these schools mentioned that they wished they had collected data from the beginning of the initiative and will need a few more years before they have enough data to draw more definitive conclusions about the ways in which services might influence academic achievement.

The upshot: Districts and schools that are interested in initiating school-based wraparound services strategies should include strategies for data collection and analysis into their plans, and leave time in the workday for teachers to review and analyze student results. Existing community schools should maintain a strong focus on improving data collection and analysis of nonacademic student outcomes and achievement results. Better data can also strengthen efforts to secure more funding. These data can be used to demonstrate the efficacy of wraparound services and make the case for continuing current programs or initiating new ones.

Although this report aims to start the conversation around wraparound services and their benefits for instruction in the classroom, further research is needed to better understand their impact on students and teachers. Future studies could explore whether certain services have a greater impact than others do, or compare the experiences of teachers who work in schools with wraparound services to the experiences of those working in traditional schools. More information is also needed about whether the presence of wraparound services makes new teacher candidates more likely to apply for a job in high-poverty schools, and best practices for helping teachers in community schools maximize the potential of wraparound services.

Conclusion

Sarah Onorato teaches fourth- and fifth-grade students at Rosa Parks Elementary School in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where 85 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches.⁴⁸ She completed her teaching internship at a traditional public school in an affluent neighborhood but when she started teaching at Rosa Parks Elementary, she could see that her students were worried about life situations that “kids their age shouldn’t have to stress out about, like paying the rent.” Unlike her experience at the more affluent school, where “all you have to focus on is teaching,” Onorato now has to worry about a myriad of other student needs in a high-poverty school, ranging from a lack of health care to a lack of food security. Onorato, however, credits the wraparound services at her school for helping her focus on raising student achievement:

I had a student who was living in a homeless shelter. Once we got her everything she needed, like food and clothes, and she didn't have to worry about it, and I didn't have to worry about it, we were able to really focus on her academics. She started off with me over a grade level behind in reading, and now she's above her grade level in reading. So she's jumped over two grade levels this year, and I think a lot of it is because we were providing food and clothes and we were involved in her life and her family's life.

Onorato is one of many educators who have seen their students thrive in the classroom because they are better equipped in terms of their nonacademic needs. The benefits to students can double as benefits for educators. Providing access to health services means that students miss less instructional time, and teachers are able to deliver instruction more effectively when their students are present in the classroom and free from any health-related problems. Increasing parental involvement at school might translate to better attendance at parent-teacher conferences, where teachers have an opportunity to review a child’s progress with his or her family and enlist their help in targeting that child’s academic weaknesses. Finally, a key way to help effective teachers do their best work is through making their work in the classroom more sustainable in the long run.

Many teachers in high-poverty schools make extraordinary efforts to meet the nonacademic needs of their students. In the end, one of the biggest contributions of wraparound services to student learning may actually be that they enable teachers to simply focus on their specialty—teaching.

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