Center for American Progress

Achieving Results Through Community School Partnerships

How District and Community Leaders Are Building Effective, Sustainable Relationships

Coalition for Community Schools
Because Every Child Deserves Every Chance

IEL
Institute for Educational Leadership

Martin J. Blank, Reuben Jacobson, and Atelia Melaville   January 2012

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About the Coalition for Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education K-16, youth development, community planning and development, higher education, family support, health and human services, government, and philanthropy as well as national, state, and local community school networks. The Coalition advances opportunities for the success of children, families, and communities by promoting the development of more, and more effective, community schools.

About the Institute for Educational Leadership

The Institute for Educational Leadership is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, D.C. Since 1964 IEL has worked to build the capacity of people, organizations, and systems—in education and related fields—to cross boundaries and work together to attain better results for children and youth. IEL envisions a society that uses its resources effectively to achieve better futures for all children and youth.

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Introduction and summary

A community school is a place and a set of partnerships connecting a school, the families of students, and the surrounding community. A community school is distinguished by an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. Community schools extend the school day and week, reaching students, their families, and community residents in unique ways. Community schools are thus uniquely equipped to develop their students into educated citizens who are ready and able to give back to their communities.

The community school strategy is central to efforts to improve America's public schools. Community schools use partnerships to align school and community resources in order to produce successful students, strong families, and engaged communities. They combine quality education with enrichment opportunities, health and mental health services, family support and engagement, early childhood and adult education, and other supports.

Research shows that low-income families regularly experience economic and material hardship. Missed rent, utility shutoffs, inadequate access to health care, unstable child care arrangements, and food insecurity are common experiences that inevitably affect students' readiness, attendance, performance, and completion rates at school.[1]

By sharing resources, expertise, and accountability, community schools can address challenges related to economic hardship and create essential conditions for learning by concentrating on a single access point—public schools—to effectively target their efforts. Any type of public school can become a community school, including traditional, charter, alternative, magnet or others. The vision of a community school must be at the heart of emerging place-based initiatives, including Promise Neighborhoods, Choice Neighborhoods, cradle-to-career programs, and P-20 networks integrating educational opportunities from preschool through college.

This paper outlines how school and community leaders develop a common vision for a community schools strategy and explores six key strategies that successful community school initiatives use to build effective partnerships with local government agencies, teachers' unions, and other organizations. It begins by describing the elements of a community school strategy, then draws on the experiences of several community school initiatives that use the following strategies to form and maintain key relationships:

- **Ensure that all partners share a common vision.** The entire community and all involved partners should agree on the same goals and expectations.

- **Establish formal relationships and collaborative structures to engage stakeholders.** Initiating and sustaining stakeholder participation often requires creating structured opportunities ranging from developing taskforces to creating formal agreements.

- **Encourage open dialogue about challenges and solutions.** To foster shared ownership, stakeholders must engage honestly and constructively with each other to solve problems and make midcourse corrections.

- **Engage partners in the use of data.** Sharing data enables all stakeholders to understand where things stand and hold each other accountable for making measurable progress.

- **Create and empower central-office capacity at the district level to sustain community school work.** Continued capacity can be created through establishing a high-level management position within a district's central office or through creating an office dedicated to supporting a community school agenda.

- **Leverage community resources and braid funding streams.** Community schools capitalize on the financial assets of community partners and funding streams to support programs and activities aligned with their common vision.

Successful community school partnerships deliver strong results

The community school strategy is already proving to be effective around our nation. Research shows that students in community schools in and around Tulsa, Oklahoma, for example, are outperforming noncommunity schools on state tests

in math by 32 points and reading by 19 points.[2] What's more, another study found that community schools outperform matched noncommunity schools on measures of dropout and graduation rates.[3]

Then there are the students who regularly participated in the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods community schools initiatives in Portland, Oregon, and nearby Multnomah County. These students showed strong gains in academics, attendance and behavioral areas, with increased state benchmark scores in reading and in math.[4]

And in Cincinnati, Oyler Community Learning Center graduated more students over the past three years than in the previous 85, improving its Ohio Performance Index (which measures student achievement) each year. The reason: Oyler is part of a districtwide community school initiative that is seeing results: In 2010–11 Cincinnati Public Schools earned an "Effective" status on the state's rating system for the second straight year.[5]

This paper demonstrates the effectiveness and importance of community schools to reforming our public school systems in ways that are creative, enduring, and based on measurable results.

The importance of partnerships in a community school strategy

Every community school begins under a different set of circumstances and develops its own distinctive culture. What community schools have in common is a belief in the basic principles of collective impact: a commitment to partnerships, accountability for results, respect for diversity, belief in community strengths, and high expectations for all. Collective impact is created when two or more organizations realize that they can accomplish more by working together and sharing resources than they can by working alone.

A community school strategy recognizes that many public and private community institutions share responsibility for helping:

• Children develop socially, emotionally, physically, and academically
• Students become motivated and engaged in learning
• Families and schools work effectively together
• Communities become safer and more economically vibrant

Community schools establish "cradle to career" conditions for learning that make it possible for every child to succeed. This strategy works by creating a collaborative leadership structure, embedding a culture of partnership, and aligning resources. Partners set and achieve high standards of accountability across multiple outcomes.

In a time of declining fiscal resources and greater demand for public services, districts with fewer dollars to spread around have learned that forming partnerships can also be fiscally prudent. A recent Coalition for Community Schools study finds that, on average, districts leverage three dollars from community partners for every dollar they allocate. Partners can contribute dollars or in-kind support in the form of access to family programs, health services, and more.[6]

The structures and functions associated with building a community schools strategy are built on a deepening foundation of collective trust. That trust is vital

to achieving the collective impact that emerges when school and community partners share responsibility for the education of our children and youth.

While a wide range of community stakeholders across the country are engaged in developing systems of community schools, this paper focuses on what a selected but growing number of communities are doing to build and maintain strong partnerships over time. The seven communities described here were selected because they represent community school initiatives that have established robust partnership networks with districts, unions, local government agencies, and other organizations. The authors conducted interviews and reviewed documents for all of these communities and recently visited four of them. Brief descriptions of these communities are highlighted in this report can be found in the table below.

Building strong community schools

Key attributes of communities building strong community school initiatives

Initiative name	School districts	Sample partners	Year started	Number of community schools	Partnership structures
Tulsa Area Community School Initiative, or TACSI *Tulsa, OK*	Tulsa Public Schools Union Public Schools	Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa; Quality Counts/Ready by 21; Tulsa Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce; Tulsa Community College	2007	23	The TACSI Management Team, composed of school district superintendents the University of Oklahoma at Tulsa, and other stakeholders works to align its partners' visions on the ground. The community-wide Steering Committee represents the broader community including funders, school board members, and representatives from early childhood, health/health education, out-of-school time, mental health/social services, family and community engagement, youth development, neighborhood development, and lifelong learning.
Schools Uniting Neighborhoods, or SUN *Multnomah County (Portland), OR*	Centennial School District David Douglas School District Gresham-Barlow School District Parkrose School District Portland Public Schools Reynolds School District	Multnomah County Department of Human Services; City of Portland Children's Levy; Portland Parks and Recreation Bureau	1999	64	The SUN Coordinating Council includes the City of Portland, high-level district administrators from six participating school districts, the director of the City of Portland Children's Levy, the director of Portland Parks and Recreation, members of the Coalition of Communities of Color, community and nonprofit partners, the Multnomah County Department of Human Services, the Commission on Children, Families and Community of Multnomah County, and others.

| Initiative name	School districts	Sample partners	Year started	Number of community schools	Partnership structures
Chicago Public Schools Community Schools Initiative *Chicago, IL*	Chicago Public Schools	Federation of Community Schools; University of Illinois at Chicago; University of Chicago; local Neighborhood Councils	2001	102* Budget cuts have reduced the number of schools directly funded by CPS. Partnerships remain strong at most of the original community schools	Chicago Public Schools, or CPS, is the primary coordinating institution for community schools at the community level. CPS staff are responsible for professional development, funding, and selecting lead partners (along with school personnel). The Federation of Community Schools in Illinois advocates for community schools in Chicago and statewide.
Evansville Community Schools *Evansville, IN*	Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation	Evansville Teachers Association; Evansville Education Roundtable; Public Education Foundation; Department of Parks and Recreation; Southwest Indiana College Access Network	2000	38 (district-wide)	The School-Community Council, also known as the "Big Table," includes over 70 partners and engages school leaders and community partners. A smaller steering committee guides the ongoing work of the initiative.
Oakland Full Service Community Schools *Oakland, CA*	Oakland Unified School District	County Public Health Department; SF Foundation; Bay Area Community Resources; Urban Strategies; City of Oakland, Bechtel Foundation; Safe Passages	2010	Plan to implement across the district	A community leadership team is being formed to guide the Full Service Community Schools Initiative.
Cincinnati Community Learning Centers, or CLCs *Cincinnati, OH*	Cincinnati Public Schools	Cincinnati Community Learning Center Institute; United Way; YMCA; Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center; University of Cincinnati; City of Cincinnati Health Department; Project Grad; Adopt a Class	2001	55 (district-wide)	The CLC Cross-Boundary Leadership Team consists of leaders representing partnership networks including afterschool, health, mental health, nature, college access, early childhood, tutoring, mentoring, parent engagement, and other types of collaboratives. It helps to organize services at each community learning center. CLCs select the partners from among these groups that best align with their needs. The CLC Funders Network includes the Cincinnati Public Schools, the Hallie Foundation and the Schiff Foundation, the United Way of Greater Cincinnati the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and the Cincinnati Community Learning Center Institute.
Say Yes to Education *Syracuse, NY*	Syracuse City School District	Community Folk Art Center; Syracuse Teachers Association; Onondaga County; Boys and Girls Clubs; 100 Black Men of Syracuse, Inc.	2007	35 (district-wide)	The Community Advisory Group is comprised of local, county, state, and federal leaders including the county executive, mayor, and school board president. The Operating Group is comprised of the school district, Syracuse University, Say Yes, union, city, and county leadership.

Source: Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership

Organizing collaborative leadership structures

The collective experience of these and other communities illuminates a basic strategy and set of institutional arrangements that can assist other localities to begin and expand community school initiatives.[7] The ongoing work of a scaled-up community school initiative takes place through the Collaborative Leadership Structure. This is where shared ownership takes root and where the initiative's vision and results are set. Figure 1 identifies common participants, including school districts and unions, and shows how leadership is shared across key functions.

FIGURE 1

Collaborative leadership structure for community schools
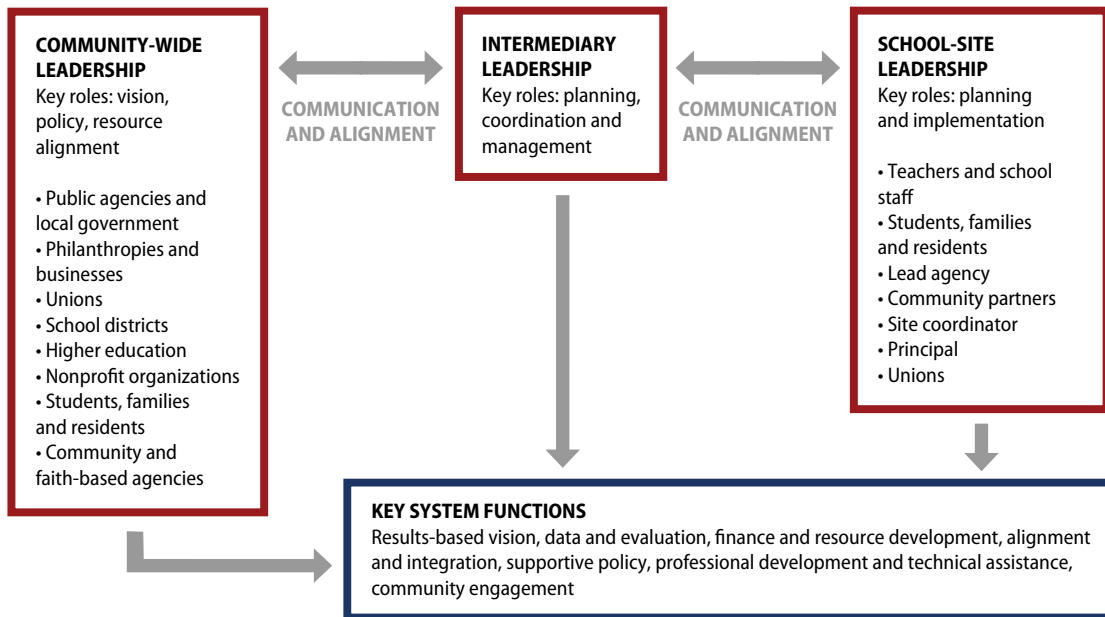
Source: Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership

A *communitywide leadership* group develops a shared vision, builds a common policy framework, and aligns their resources. A similar entity at the school site, with strong parent and neighborhood participation, is responsible for planning, implementation, and continuous improvement. In most initiatives, a community

school resource coordinator manages day-to-day community school activities. An intermediary entity provides planning, coordination, and management, and ensures communication between communitywide and school-site leaders.

Forming partnerships

Collaboration matters greatly in school reform. Successfully implementing a community school strategy is impossible without the active involvement of school districts and their local partners. Research shows a positive correlation between average student academic achievement and superintendents who engage all relevant stakeholders—including central-office staff, building-level administrators, and school board members—in creating goal-oriented districts focused on teaching and learning.[8] School leaders involved in community schools recognize that "all relevant stakeholders" includes community partners. (see below box)

Who are community school partners

Community school partners can be any organization in the community that is concerned with the education of the community's children. They can be:

- Local government agencies such as the county health department
- Teachers' unions
- Nonprofit organizations such as the local

Boys and Girls Club
- Private agencies serving youth and families
- Community-based organizations
- Faith-based institutions such as churches, temples, and mosques
- Neighborhood groups
- Businesses in the community
- Civic organizations such as United Way

- Higher education institutions such as nearby universities or community colleges

Partnerships may vary by community but they share a common purpose: to involve all stakeholders interested in improving academic achievement and social outcomes for children.

The experience of local community initiatives suggests that collaboration between school districts and community partners are initiated by districts or by partner organizations. Either way the ultimate goal is collaboration toward a common vision and shared results. Districts and their union partners play an essential role in planning and implementing a communitywide strategy. Together, they also have the ability to dramatically scale up the number of community schools and students being served. Indeed, collective impact results from the organization of key stakeholders into communitywide leadership groups that have a shared vision, build a common policy framework, and align their resources.

Community partners can initiate relationships with districts

Until recently most school districts have become involved in community school initiatives through efforts initiated by external stakeholders. Nonprofit organizations, government agencies, United Ways, philanthropies, and others often seek out school district involvement. They recognize the potential of reaching children through schools and the greater effectiveness of educational strategies that link academic and nonacademic competencies.

One example is Tulsa, Oklahoma's Metropolitan Human Services Commission, a collaborative of community partners who realized in 2005 that their work in a variety of child abuse prevention, family support, and early childhood-development activities had limited effect. Members envisioned a more comprehensive approach, including a school-reform strategy that would start from birth and continue through entry into the workforce. The collaborative decided to make education a priority, and chose community schools as their reform strategy.

At that point the superintendents from the Tulsa and Union school districts, which both serve the city of Tulsa, became actively involved in vetting reform strategies throughout their systems and in building ownership in what is now the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative, or TACSI. Staffed by the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa, TACSI developed 23 community schools in the Union and Tulsa school districts, with eight schools preparing for implementation and two nearby districts in the initial phases of developing their own community schools initiatives. Both Union and Tulsa school districts are contributing Title I federal funds and other state and local school funds to TASCI schools and are fully invested in their success. As Union Public Schools superintendent Cathy Burden says, "By partnering with outside agencies and opening ourselves up to understanding the needs of the whole child and his family and community, we become a more integral part of a child's life and can be more effective in the classroom."

Another example is Schools Uniting Neighborhoods, or SUN, in Multnomah County, Oregon, which includes Portland. In 1998 local governments in Portland and Multnomah County were facing shrinking budgets, growing cultural and linguistic diversity, and a widening achievement gap in schools. To make matters worse they had no clear sense of where and how resources supporting school-age students and families were being used. The county, together with the city, approached six local school districts for a conversation about community schools. A consensus emerged among school, city, and county leaders to launch a

coordinated community schools strategy as a way to respond to these concerns; target resources more effectively; and increase educational success and self-sufficiency for children, families, and communities.

These initial partners decided that visibly co-locating community services in schools would counteract the isolation of schools and help residents appreciate the centrality of schools and their importance to the entire community. Schools Uniting Neighborhoods began in 1999 with eight schools with the county acting as an intermediary. The city and county reached out to school leaders and now representatives from six school districts serve on a communitywide Coordinating Council that includes city, county, and state leaders, as well as businesses and community organizations. Since 1999 the number of SUN schools has grown to 64 across six districts and the SUN Council has embraced the vision that all 150 county schools will become community schools.

Another approach was taken in Chicago in the 1990s, when the Polk Brothers Foundation funded and implemented a community schools model at three Chicago schools that improved parental involvement, student outcomes, and school climate. Encouraged by those successes, corporate and philanthropic leaders realized that school-district involvement was essential for expanding this promising model.

In 2001 these leaders invited the Chicago Public Schools system to join in a public-private partnership to scale up community schools by matching private dollars with city funds. Then city superintendent Arne Duncan agreed, and a goal was set to develop 100 community schools in five years. Chicago's Community Schools Initiative, or CSI—housed within the city's public school system—eventually met and exceeded that goal. By 2010 CSI had grown to 154 schools, each of which works in partnership with a lead community agency skilled in youth and adult programming to meet the specific needs of each school community. Due to severe budget constraints CPS now funds 102 community schools, though many of the initial schools are using other funds to remain community schools.

Most recently, in 2007 the Say Yes to Education initiative started to work with partners in Syracuse, New York with the goal of increasing high school and college graduation rates for urban youth. Say Yes, a national nonprofit organization, mobilizes community resources to support early childhood education, out-of-school time programming, mentoring, academic support, primary and mental health care, as well as other services. It convened a leadership group that included the school district, the local teachers union, Syracuse University, the city, and the

county, to share ownership of the initiative. The school district has made Say Yes the core of its strategy to improve outcomes for children.

"That's where the rubber meets the road," says Kevin Ahern, president of the Syracuse Teachers Association, who serves on this group "You need to have decision-makers from all these places at the table." Speaking to the sustainability of the initiative under this collaborative structure, he adds, "We've managed to get this done [Say Yes] under two different mayors, two different superintendents, three different union presidents. That's the kind of commitment it takes."

Districts initiate collaboration with community partners

In other instances school districts have taken the first steps toward a community school vision. This is most likely to happen when school leaders personally experience the positive benefits that result from partnership efforts. As the number of community school initiatives grows, many more school leaders are learning firsthand how collaborative partnerships can help educators do their work—and many more are taking steps to organize, coordinate, and institutionalize community school relationships in their own districts.

In Evansville, Indiana, for example, a principal at a single elementary school in the Evansville Vanderburgh School District sought community support to better meet the economic, social, and learning needs of students and families at her school. In the early 1990s, building on a United Way afterschool initiative, principal Cathlin Gray set out to develop a more comprehensive vision of a "full-service" community school. With United Way's continuing aid, she eventually involved over 70 organizations at her Cedar Hall Elementary.

Convinced by Cedar Hall's strong family involvement and community support, the district expanded the approach systemwide. A community school strategy is now a district priority, and is included in school-improvement plans and budgetary allocations, and implemented in all 38 Evansville Vanderburgh schools. It has lasted through four superintendents and has become part of the district's culture. When asked whether he would change strategies just one day after being hired, David Smith, the newest superintendent, said, "The change is going to be we're not going to change. We're totally committed to early childhood, family, school, community partnerships. … quite frankly, we can't solve or resolve [school] issues in isolation. It takes a community effort."

Similarly, a number of assets set the stage for a comprehensive community school strategy in the Oakland Unified School District in Oakland, California, including having many community agencies already working in schools and even an existing Department of Complementary Learning to coordinate their work. But it took the vision of new superintendent Tony Smith and his decade of experience implementing a community school approach in another school district to convincingly engage the community in a collective effort and plan for district-wide implementation. In 2010 the school board institutionalized a community school strategy as the central part of the district's reform agenda. While still in the early stages of its work, the Oakland Unified School District has buttressed its new school motto—"Community Schools, Thriving Students"—with staff and policies to support the new strategy.

Strategies for building and maintaining successful partnerships

Collaborative leadership structures in community schools are designed to connect communitywide leaders—including union leaders, superintendents, and other local stakeholders—to school-site operations. But how can that be achieved? Individuals in the communities we interviewed shared six main strategies for building and continuing partnerships:

- Ensuring a common vision among all partners
- Establishing structured opportunities to engage stakeholders
- Encouraging open dialogue about challenges and solutions
- Engaging stakeholders in the use of data
- Creating central-office capacity to sustain community schools work
- Leveraging community resources and braiding funding streams

Let's examine each of these strategies in turn.

Ensure a common vision among all partners

Partners must be invested in a common vision and set of expectations for community schools. This will help to sustain partnerships in the long run, enhance community school efficacy, and encourage each stakeholder to clearly define its role in meeting specific goals. District leaders, including superintendents and school boards, must work to ensure the initiative's results-based vision is aligned and integrated with the district's overall school improvement plan and other core guidance documents. Community partners must adapt their mission to align with the community school vision.

Since 2006 district leaders from both Tulsa and Union public schools have worked with other key stakeholders on a Management Team to ensure the TACSI strategy aligns well with their school districts' missions. These superintendents were visibly involved and encouraging of community school efforts, inviting their schools

to become community schools as a vehicle for school reform. Significantly, in its 2010-2015 Strategic Plan, Tulsa Public Schools has included the expansion of community schools as a strategic objective to meet its core goal of improving student achievement.[9]

Evansville, Indiana, illustrates how school districts make community schools a part of their results-based vision. The district, after engaging the community in numerous listening sessions, developed a strategic plan around five core areas:

• Early childhood education
• Technology
• Professional development
• Innovative school models
• Family, school, and community partnerships

As they write in their "2011 State of Our Schools" report, "The EVSC is committed to the Full-Service Community Schools strategy as a way to wrap supports around children to help them physically, mentally, and emotionally." The Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships is primarily responsible for the last core area and aligns its strategies, including the community schools strategy, with the set of long- and short-term results laid out by the district in its strategic plan.

When Superintendent Tony Smith came to Oakland, for example, he saw that existing partnership efforts were fragmented in a district struggling with the challenges of violence and poverty. He was determined to streamline these efforts so he worked closely with the school board to establish a plan for Oakland to become a full service community school district—a district comprised entirely of community schools. The board initiated an eight-month fact-finding process with 14 taskforces and broad community participation. The Full Service Community Schools taskforce included representatives from the Oakland Community After School Alliance, East Bay Asian Youth Center, and the Oakland Unity Council, among others, and met weekly for over seven months.

These taskforce members visited existing community school sites to understand implementation, consulted with key stakeholders, and held numerous community gatherings to hear local feedback on the idea of developing a districtwide community schools strategy. In the spring of 2011, the school board voted unanimously to move forward with this approach, and the Oakland United School District is now in the process of building up an effective system of community schools.

Establish formal relationships and collaborative structures to engage stakeholders

A successful community school initiative depends on the active involvement of families, school boards, unions, local organizations, and state and local government agencies. Initiating and sustaining involvement often requires creating structured, collaborative opportunities ranging from developing taskforces to creating or modifying formal agreements. The school districts and surrounding communities we researched for this report took a variety of steps in pursuit of these goals.

Cincinnati's superintendent, school board president, and union president embraced a slightly different approach. They worked together to maximize the impact of their "community learning centers," which have become part of the district's culture. Each school is home to a Local School Decision-Making Committee comprised of school staff, partners, and community members. The committee identifies school needs in specific areas—health, mental health, after school, the arts and others—and works with networks of providers to coordinate services requested by schools so that appropriate resources are distributed as efficiently as possible. The networks of community partners come together in a Cross-Boundary Leadership Team to integrate these efforts.

In Syracuse the school district committed to a six-year sustainable plan and agreed to serve on leadership and operating groups that would engage numerous community partners. The president of the Syracuse Teachers Association is an active member of the operating group. These groups meet regularly to review data, have frank discussions about progress, and make decisions about implementation. They are designed as stable leadership structures to guide the community schools initiative as it transitions from being funded primarily through philanthropy to being funded primarily by community partners.

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods in Portland, Oregon, and nearby Multnomah County worked with districts to create intergovernmental agreements that create policies governing the work in community schools under a number of areas including building use, alignment with instruction, the school's improvement plan, and partnerships. The agreement requires the district to provide partners with rent-free access to school sites, and requires all partners to align their activities with existing services and school improvement plans. It further stipulates that each SUN Community Schools Site Manager will act as coordinator for collaboration and integration of all extended-day activities and partners within a school

building and requires that other agencies link with the SUN community schools site manager.[10] The superintendent and relevant city and county leadership sign each agreement.

Encourage open dialogue about challenges and solutions

Shared ownership is critical for sustaining community school work. While schools are primarily held responsible for ensuring that every child is well-educated and prepared for productive adulthood, districts know they must engage constructively with other stakeholders to achieve better outcomes. Successfully sharing ownership among multiple partners requires collective trust and the ability to discuss issues openly in order to find solutions. Leadership structures with top-down and bottom-up communication flow make it possible for stakeholders to push back and negotiate to meet both community and district goals. Again, the subjects of our research built on their foundation of trust to find creative solutions to emerging tensions.

The Tulsa Public Schools, one of two districts involved with the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative, or TASCI, planned to hire additional school-site resource coordinators through the district with Title I funds and hire a director for community schools. Since coordinators worked directly for TASCI up until this point, there were questions about how the districts would select new coordinators, what their job description would be, and how they would be supervised. TACSI staff brought their concerns to both the superintendent and school board. Frank discussion ensued, resulting in TASCI staff receiving assurances that school-site coordinators hired by schools would continue to work in line with TACSI goals, be supervised by TACSI and be part of the TACSI coordinators' network. The district, as it always has, continues to sit on the TACSI management team and share responsibility for setting direction for the initiative.

A community school strategy also creates a space for union representatives, partners, and the district to discuss priorities and ensure that the strategies being used aren't top down and lacking in teacher input, but rather are the best ideas of all partners and are sustainable. Gambill makes sure that teachers have an opportunity to give input in community decision-making. He says of these efforts:

> *We have great community partners but what we've found at times is that a*
> *partner outside of the school may believe that item A is a problem and if they*
> *define that and it really isn't, then they have invested in developing a program*

*for a problem that doesn't exist. And that's where that connection to the voice
of teachers is: 'Here are some places where we're struggling, and what can you
provide as a community partner to assist in it?'*

Highly involved community partners in Evansville's 70-member School-
Community Council have welcomed the school district's increasing efforts to insti-
tutionalize a full-service community school agenda—and have pushed back when
they saw the need. When a superintendent transition was about to occur, commu-
nity partners voiced concerns about having a new school superintendent who would
be supportive of the work. Their efforts led to the hiring of a superintendent who
was a strong advocate for community schools. These partners consistently commu-
nicated with the new superintendent about sharing responsibilities and roles, and
are now in the middle of assessing the responsibilities of the School Community
Council and creating a steering committee to more robustly guide the initiative.

Engage partners in the use of data

Generating targeted and useful data on community school initiatives can be
challenging but necessary for measuring student, school, and family outcomes.
School districts we researched work with a range of partners to design data
collection and analysis strategies and make data more accessible to educators.
Sharing data enables all stakeholders to understand where things stand at vari-
ous points, and helps them hold each other and themselves accountable for
making measurable progress on outcomes.

In some circumstances external partners can bring a wealth of data expertise that
can help schools evaluate partnerships and activities based on goals for achieve-
ment, attendance, behavior and more. Cincinnati Public Schools and its data
partners, Microsoft Corp. and Proctor & Gamble, are in the process of designing
a Learning Partners Dashboard—a database that will connect the district's data
system with partners' data systems to generate information in four goal areas:

• Academic
• Parent involvement
• Community engagement
• Wellness

The system will be updated nightly with district academic, behavioral, and attendance data and linked to data on student participation in community-partner programs.

Reports generated from this data-collection system will show student-risk factors, service-utilization rates, and connect activities and partnerships to student achievement. CPS actively involves Proctor & Gamble and Microsoft in school visits so that their data experts can help resource coordinators and educators use the data system in the most effective ways. According to superintendent Mary Ronan, this links back to sustainability and funding because "if we can show impact, then we can go ask for additional dollars because we can say that this model is working."

In Portland and Multnomah County, community school and district leaders sat down to discuss and agree upon a common set of measures that they could report on as a function of students' participating in SUN Community School activities. These included standardized test scores, attendance, credits earned, and others. They wrote data-sharing agreements signed by partners. Annually, Multnomah County extracts from its database, ServicePoint, the relevant demographic and participation data for students participating in SUN Community School activities, and sends it to the school districts, who then match it and send back the corresponding academic data.

This early agreement and process provided the foundation for SUN to collaborate on other data related issues such as chronic absenteeism. When SUN analyzed attendance data they found that early chronic absenteeism was rife in both early childhood and elementary settings. Consequently, leaders in all six participating districts worked with SUN and other partners in the community to address the problem.

In other cases collaboration with outside partners can steer community school leadership toward a stronger focus on data and results. In Tulsa staff from TASCI worked with an external evaluator to answer questions about the development of their community schools as well as their impact. Initially, TACSI staff were interested in implementation fidelity and thus used findings from the first study to redesign their training for implementers at the school level. The findings then prompted them to examine the impact of community schools and they found that community schools implementing their strategy with high fidelity significantly outperform noncommunity schools on measures of reading (+19 points) and math (+32 points).[11]

Reflecting on these results, Tulsa superintendent Keith Ballard said, "We now have research that proves that community schools work. The very schools that

have the most success, that have brought children to achievement levels above and beyond what other schools have done, are the community schools. You have to meet the needs of the whole child."

Create and empower central-office capacity at the district level to sustain community school work

Creating a sustainable community school initiative requires continued capacity within a district's central office to coordinate community school work. One way to ensure this capacity is through creating a high-level management position within a district's central office; a senior official dedicated to community school work would ensure that community school principles are embedded in practice and policy, as well as in strategic-planning documents. Another way could be through combining existing resources to create an office dedicated to supporting a community school agenda. The school districts and communities we researched took both approaches.

In 2002 then-superintendent Bart McCandless elevated the status of community schools in the Evansville Vanderburgh Unified School District to a new level by creating a position to address community school issues, and naming Cathlin Gray, a community school leader, to the position. In 2007 new superintendent Vince Bertram acknowledged the increasingly central position of a community school strategy within the district by appointing Gray to be the associate superintendent for families, schools and community partners.

Gray now sits on the district's leadership team and her team assumes responsibility for all school-financed health and social services, early childhood programs, after school programs and related activities, and the coordination of federal, state, and other monies. This organizational shift bundled together the funding and coordination of school-managed resources, allowing the school district to use its funds strategically to coordinate with community partners.

Rather than adding a new office, Oakland school district leaders decided to merge two existing offices that worked on issues related to their community schools strategy and create a stronger, more cohesive office. The purpose of this new Department of Family, Schools, and Community Partnerships, led by a new associate superintendent, is to align resources so that partnerships better meet the needs of children and families and advance the district's five-year plan to improve outcomes.

Creating internal district capacity to support community schools was central to then-CEO Arne Duncan's plan for making every Chicago Public School a community school. He created the Office of Afterschool and Community School Programs to pull together disparate afterschool programs under a comprehensive Community Schools Initiative. After Duncan left Chicago to become the U.S. Secretary of Education, the district reorganized, but the community school strategy remained intact because the Community School Programs Manager and associated staff stayed on to carry on the work of the initiative and provide a stable point of contact for their partners.[12]

Leveraging community resources and braiding funding streams

Community schools garner financing and programmatic support from multiple sources. On average only about one-quarter of all resources in community school initiatives come from school districts. The remainder is leveraged from other sectors including local, state, and federal funding streams; foundations; and a mix of public agencies and community-based organizations—a 3-to-1 ratio in support of school success. School districts commonly provide space and cover maintenance and overhead costs at no cost to community partners, while community partners provide needed services, staff, and capacity through their own funding sources.

Community schools and their partners also braid multiple funding streams to support their common vision. Title I funds as well as various private sources are often used to hire resource coordinators at individual school sites. Competitive grant funding from all levels of government provides important flexibility in meeting school site costs such as startup costs for a health clinic or expanding learning opportunities. Local foundations, local government, and others support the work of the intermediary and other community partners.

Community schools use these and other funding sources to focus on sustainability and growth.

Evansville's early decision to install a community school leader as associate superintendent for Family, School, and Community Partnerships provided an opportunity to begin coordinating and strategically deploying a raft of school resources. Rather than looking for funds to support specific programs, Evansville demonstrates how partnering with the federal government can yield a variety of

revenue streams that can be blended to advance a comprehensive community school strategy. The district was able to obtain formula and discretionary federal funds from the following sources:

• Title I
• School Improvement Grants
• 1003 G—School Improvement
• IDEA; Title II—Professional Development
• Title III—English Language Learner
• Title IV—Safe and Drug Free
• Even Start and Head Start
• Centers for Disease Control
• 21st Century Community Learning Centers
• Carol M. White Physical Education Grant
• Grant to Reduce Alcohol Abuse
• Safe School/Healthy Students
• McKinney Vento Homeless Grant
• Full-Service Community Schools Grant
• Other local, state, and philanthropic sources that support key partnerships.

Taking a different approach, organizations participating in Cincinnati's partnership networks redirect existing resources to provide services at Community Learning Centers. Agencies and organizations in the partnership networks assume the responsibility for financial sustainability including third party billing where appropriate. For instance, a partnering organization that works on mental health issues can bill Medicaid for mental health services that students and families receive. The school district directly funds a Director of Community Schools to oversee district-wide implementation and uses Title 1 monies to underwrite the costs of resource coordinators at approximately 31 schools.

The Greater Cincinnati United Way, the Greater Cincinnati Community Foundation, the Community Learning Centers Institute, and other private donors pay for school site coordinators at the additional schools. The initiative is exploring expanded financing strategies to provide a coordinator at every school and to ensure the initiative's continuing growth and development. Julie Sellers, president of the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers, describes the advantages of coordinators saying, "I think it is beneficial for the students and it gives the support to teachers so that they can focus on instruction. I wish we had one in every school."

Syracuse's Say Yes initiative was intentionally started with sustainability in mind. The district's commitment to the initiative required it to take on an increasing share of the overall budget for the work, increasing nearly 10 percent each year till it is fully responsible for funding within six years. The district and union have had fiscal audits and made the changes necessary to organize the district and work-force to do the work required to improve results. This included changing staffing ratios and patterns in schools. City and county funds are also being retooled to align with the Say Yes strategy and nonprofit are redirecting resources as well.

Recommendations for local stakeholders

Nearly every school district has partners in its schools. But most do not have a coherent framework and strategy that lays out how the district and its community partners will work together to support student success. The recently issued guide from the Coalition for Community Schools, "Scaling up School and Community Partnerships: The Community Schools Strategy," lays out a detailed plan of action that local stakeholders can take.

Here are a few recommendations for getting started:

- **Reach out.** Talk with each other, with principals and teachers, with families, and with key leaders whom you know are involved with schools and concerned about young people and your community.

- **Look at the data.** Review data on school and nonschool factors that influence student achievement. Attendance, chronic absence, suspension, truancy, parent involvement, health, and other indicators should be examined and discussed.

- **Learn from other schools.** Arrange to visit a nearby community schools initiative with a strong record of success. Nothing can substitute for seeing the energy, focus, and commitment of educators and community partners in an effective community school.

- **Review existing partnerships.** Awareness of existing school and community partnerships can lead to a more coordinated strategy. Look closely at a few examples of strong partnerships and see what you can learn from them.

- **Get started.** Together, school and community leaders should craft an initial plan to approach key challenges that must be addressed to improve educational life outcomes for students.

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Acknowledgements

Endnotes

1   Heather Boushey and others, "Hardships in America: The Real Story of Working Families" (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2001), available at www.epi.org/publications/entry/books_hardships/.

2   C.M. Adams, "The Community School Effect: Evidence from an Evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community School Initiative" (Tulsa, Oklahoma: The Oklahoma Center for Educational Policy: University of Oklahoma, 2010).

3   ICF Consulting, "Communities in Schools National Evaluation: Five Year Executive Summary" (2010).

4   "Results," available at http://web.multco.us/sun/results.

5   "2010-2011 School Year Report Card," available at http://ode.state.oh.us/reportcardfiles/2010-2011/BUILD/029009.PDF; Cincinnati Public Schools, "Cincinnati Public Schools Again Rated Effective By State," Press release, August 17, 2011, available at http://www.cps-k12.org/media/releases/Aug11StRptCard.pdf.

6   Blank, M, Jacobson, R, Melaville, A, and Pearson, S, "Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources To Support Student Success" (Washington: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership, 2010).

7   For more detail about the experiences of local communities see the Coalition's interactive guide, "Scaling Up School and Community Partnerships: The Community Schools Strategy," at http://www.communityschools.org/scalingup. The guide includes a six-stage process for implementing a community school strategy and a benchmark chart that districts and partners can use to track their progress.

8   J. Timothy Waters and Robert J. Marzano, "School District Leadership that Works: The Effect of Superintendent Leadership on Student Achievement." Working Paper (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2006).

9   Tulsa Public Schools, "Tulsa Public Schools: 2010-2015 Strategic Plan," 2011.

10 See, for example: "Intergovernmental Agreement between the David Douglas School District, Multnomah County and City of Portland," available at http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Multnomah_Cty_Policy.pdf.

11 Adams, "*The Community School Effect.*"

12 The Chicago Community Schools Initiative now sits in the district's Office of Student Support and Engagement in the Office of Pathways to College and Career.

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