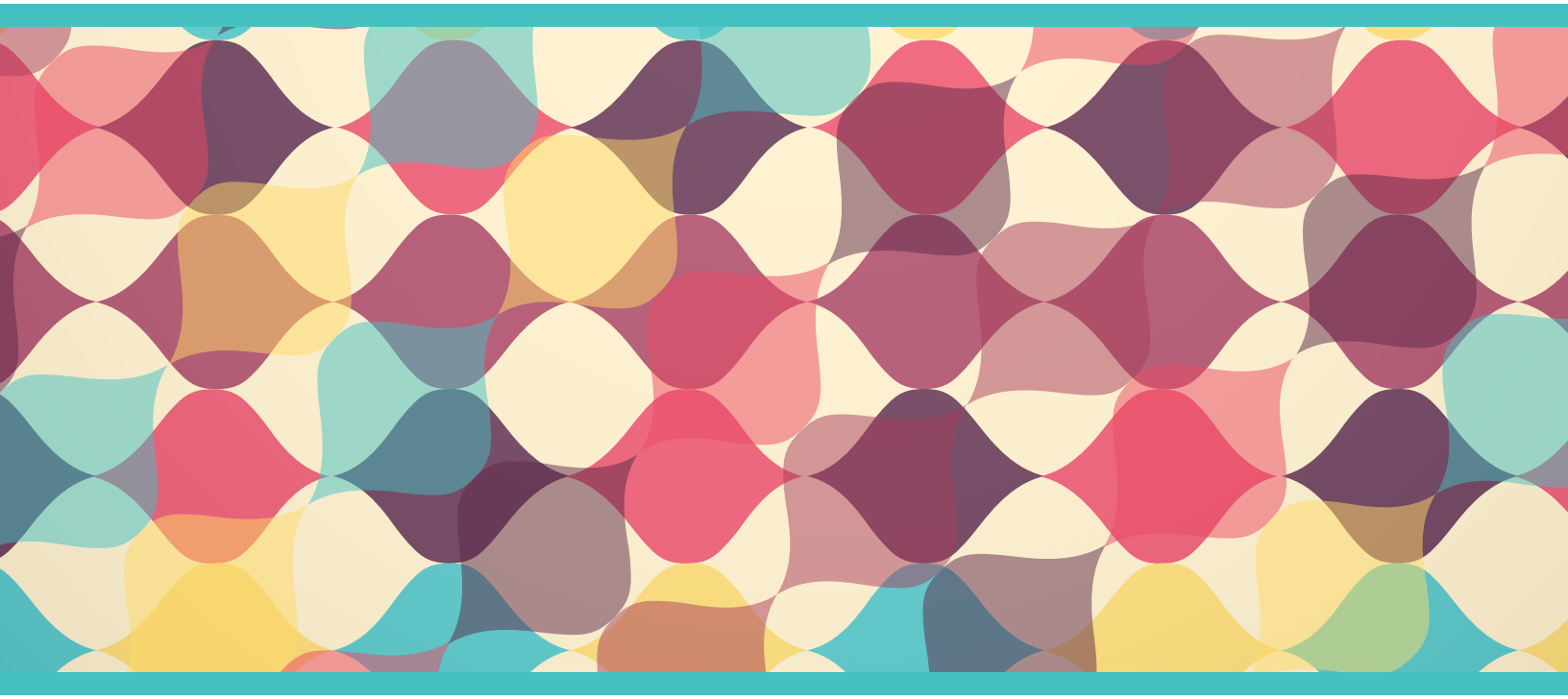
PATTERNS OF PRACTICE



Institute for Educational Leadership
Leading Across Boundaries

Case Studies of Early Childhood Education & Family Engagement in Community Schools

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is home to the Coalition for Community Schools, which supports deep level and integrated practices to serve the needs of vulnerable children and families. IEL has developed this report to help inform community school leaders, early childhood practitioners, program developers and education policymakers about promising approaches to quality early childhood education and family engagement in the community school context. IEL has documented a broad range of early learning initiatives over the past five years in various community school initiatives across the United States. Through this report, we analyze emerging patterns of practice in community schools that ensure quality throughout the birth-to-eight continuum, including transition, elementary schooling and supports for family efficacy for their children's early and lifelong learning.

In 2011, the Coalition conducted site visits to four community school initiatives in Cincinnati, OH; Evansville, IN; Multnomah County, OR; and, Tulsa, OK. Each of the initial four sites studied had well-developed early learning initiatives that integrate health and early intervention, infant, toddler and pre-k programming, transitional learning activities, kindergarten readiness, early reading and family support. Across all four initiatives, IEL also found robust relationships between the early-childhood program staff and community schools' staff where shared values around authentic engagement of families and communities led to shared program spaces, professional collaboration and multiple opportunities for participation among family and community stakeholders.

IEL shared its initial findings through *Building Blocks: An Examination of the Collaborative Approach Community Schools Are Using to Bolster Early Childhood Development*, published in 2012 and a short paper, *Theory of Change and Early Learning in Community Schools*, published in 2013. IEL subsequently hosted

What is a Community School?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources to make sure kids and families have what they need to be successful - in school and in life. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools make collective impact more than just a concept - the collective efforts of youth, parents, educators, businesses, faith communities, libraries, and community-based organizations create a network of supports that ensure academic success, family self-sufficiency, and economic prosperity. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone–all day, every day, evenings and weekends.

an Early Learning Institute in Providence, RI, which was attended by over 100 leaders of community school initiatives and provided a range of opportunities to examine evidence-based approaches to comprehensive partnerships that address early learning.

This *Patterns of Practice: Case Studies of Early Childhood Education & Family Engagement in Community Schools* report updates the community school case studies through a description of ongoing developments in Cincinnati OH, Evansville IN, Multnomah County OR, and Tulsa OK and adds to that knowledge base of early learning and family practices in community schools through the additional case studies of early childhood education and family engagement efforts in Albuquerque NM; Hartford, CT; Palm Beach County, FL; Providence, RI; and Los Angeles, CA.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

As national efforts to scale up quality early childhood education programming expand, community schools have enhanced their early learning initiatives to provide deeper and more interconnected programming reflective of evidence-based practices. And while family support and engagement has always been a core standard of practice in community schools, there is now renewed consensus that family engagement needs to be transformative through an emphasis on shared responsibility and leadership for children's success among families and educators. Such a transformational approach is needed to ensure that low-income families and families of color have educational opportunity and

The Important Role of Engaging Families

Families have always been an integral part of early-childhood education programs and community school initiatives. Families are not only made aware of what is happening in their children's classrooms and activities, but are also part of the decision-making body. Once an afterthought, mounting research points to vast returns on investment particularly when family engagement is authentic and linked to learning.

Over the last few years the family engagement field has made several advances both in terms of new knowledge and guiding frameworks. Another indicator of advances in the field is the recently released Joint Policy Statement on Family Engagement issued by the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services. Issued in December 2015, the joint policy statement provides recommendations on "systematically engaging families in their children's development, learning, and wellness."

Additionally, networks like IEL's District Leaders Network on Family and Community Engagement and the State FCE Directors Network (convened by SEDL, publisher of the Dual Capacity Building Framework) have created fertile ground for improving systemic FCE practice by engaging and supporting the leaders responsible for operationalizing these frameworks and guiding implementation.

Each case study demonstrates the importance of this work. Additionally, in the context of linking early learning to community schools, the most important group to have open communication with and buy-in from is families. A supportive two-generational approach creates systems that ultimately increases positive outcomes for children.

Every Student Succeeds Act

After years of tension and controversy, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced No Child Left Behind as our main federal education law, presenting a number of opportunities for expanding community school initiatives, strengthening early childhood education and family and community engagement. As state departments of education are required to actively seek community input as they work on their ESSA implementation plans. Districts will only be able to receive Title I funds if they "conduct outreach to all parents and family members" and incorporate a written parent and family engagement policy into their district plan. States and districts must incorporate non-academic indicators in their accountability systems, such as school climate and safety, chronic absenteeism and student engagement. Key provisions in ESSA advance the vision of community schools such as supportive programs including Full Service Community Schools, Promise Neighborhoods, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. ESSA also offers a new set of tools and resources to strengthen results-focused school-community partnerships for young people's success.

are able to meet goals for children and to overcome gaps in equity in our educational system.

Throughout this case study update, IEL examines patterns of practice in shared leadership, collaborative partnership and the critical role of relationship-building to better understand core lessons that guide community schools to carry out the complex work of early learning and family engagement that spans the pre-primary years, the early grades and beyond. Information gathering for the case studies took place in the fall of 2014. IEL staff and consultants conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups in Evansville, Multnomah County, Providence and Los Angeles. Phone interviews were conducted with leaders, practitioners, community partners and parents in Tulsa, Albuquerque, Cincinnati, Hartford, and Palm Beach County. Interviews gathered the perspectives of over 100 key staff members and stakeholders, representing a wide variety of roles and expertise. Interviews were augmented with site visits and small group discussions with staff, parents, the community, and leaders in the work.

Building upon the core lessons from initial case studies of early learning efforts in community schools, this report on patterns of practice adds additional lessons on family engagement that enable deeper understanding. The following pages of this document discuss these core lessons and how community schools nationwide are using similar approaches to expanding early childhood and family engagement efforts.

CORE LESSONS FROM PRACTICE

While there is no single roadmap that community schools follow to implement high-quality early childhood programs, there were nine initial findings from the first four case studies that have informed three overarching lessons around structuring efforts to optimize the development of high-quality early learning and systemic practices. Those lessons are:

1. **Leveraging system-level collaborative practice at all levels is a key to success.**

- Community school and early learning systems engage in a wide variety of activities to strengthen connections or linkages to school.
- Community school systems provide a platform for not only strengthening

connections but for garnering credibility for schools and creating partnerships with the early childhood community, local government and other key partners.

- Collaborative leadership structures with a shared vision of providing more opportunities for early learning experiences help reduce competition among early childhood education providers including the school district, especially as districts increasingly use resources for more early childhood slots.

2. Distributed leadership at the local level helps drive program alignment and quality.

- Intermediaries represent an important resource for bringing together early childhood education providers and school partners at the community level.
- Community school coordinators represent an important resource for bringing early childhood education providers and school partners together at the school site.
- Community- or city/county- wide early childhood collaborative groups connect community schools to a collaborative leadership structure that enables stakeholders to align strategies and provide ongoing support for young children.

3. Sharing of resources, such as data and space, ensures greater opportunity to realize early-childhood program goals.

- Data helps focus community schools and early childhood education providers on specific challenges, such as early absenteeism, and lead to shared solutions when discussed in a collaborative setting.
- Collaboration in the community school system provides early childhood education providers with access to a larger set of resources.
- In some community school settings, co-location of early childhood education providers within schools means that the school staff members and providers share resources and work together toward a common vision and align strategies.

As IEL delved more deeply into family engagement practices in these sites, two additional lessons emerged that helped to inform programmatic and interpersonal approaches.

4. Family support enables access and addresses parents' expressed goals and needs.

- Community schools embrace family support as a standard of practice that builds upon families' strengths, goals and visions for their children's futures.
- Families in community schools benefit from being part of a system designed to meet their expressed needs and can access a range of supportive services from health care to assistance with material needs.

5. Relationship building promotes quality practice and honors family and child diversity.

- Community school family engagement efforts are based on the development of high-quality relationships that serve as a model for quality relationships in the classroom and place a high value on parent perspectives and their roles as leaders in their communities.
- Families of diverse backgrounds influence unique approaches to early learning and engagement, reflecting the importance of culture in children's development and community cohesion.

In addition to the five core lessons of **Systemic Collaboration**, **Distributed Leadership**, **Shared Resources**, **Family Support and Relationship**

Building, there are patterns of practice across the birth-to-eight continuum that seamlessly cut across and connect the pre-primary system with schools through kindergarten transition opportunities and then continue in the early grades and beyond. Community school patterns of practice bring together a broad cross section of stakeholders to ensure ongoing family engagement during and beyond the early grades.

EARLY LEARNING SYSTEMS BUILDING

Overview

In order to ensure a more streamlined system of high-quality programs for children across the birth-to-eight continuum, community school initiatives are working toward systemic integration of early learning programs at the local and state level. Local community school efforts partner across all settings, including early intervention, health and mental health, family child-care homes and quality early learning centers. At the state level, community school initiatives are often hubs for regional early learning initiatives. Community school initiatives' early learning leaders sit on city and state collaborative entities that guide systemic improvement in programs for young children. The following case studies demonstrate that community schools are not only at the forefront of efforts to improve program alignment and promote high-quality practices, but that they are also enabling the early-childhood field to develop fruitful collaboration, align practices across early learning and other pre-primary systems and settings and engage all early-childhood education stakeholders in the community.

Community schools are developing effective links between early learning settings and the primary grades that help ensure seamless and ongoing transition support for families and young children. Families and young children also benefit from the way community schools prioritize ongoing continuous improvement and wrap-around programming throughout the elementary years. This approach sets a positive tone for family engagement early in the learning process, laying a foundation for ongoing family engagement throughout children's education. Many community school efforts also continue to support families even into high school and through to postsecondary transition.

Key Patterns of Practice

The case studies below illustrate the work community school systems—in very different parts of the country—are doing to partner with the early-education sector, connect families with young children to early learning services and support children's successful transition into school. Here we highlight some of the model programs and practices being implemented in the case study sites.

Linkages between Early Learning Programs & K-3 Community Schools

- Community schools provide a structure that links the school with community-based early-childhood education providers.
- Some sites are providing joint professional development sessions for preschool and kindergarten teachers to create alignment between the levels.
- Through a partnership between IEL and the Families and Work Institute, a number of community school initiatives engaged in a series of training and facilitated learning sessions inspired by the book *Mind in the Making* (MITM) by Ellen Galinsky. The book focuses on the seven essential skills, rooted in neuroscience, that help children succeed in school and life. Bringing together early learning providers, parents and elementary teachers to learn how to foster these skills, which include skills such as focus and self-control, taking on challenges and critical thinking. MITM workshops create a common

language between those working with younger children and teachers at the elementary level.

Transitions from Early Childhood Settings to Kindergarten & 1st Grade

- Summer transition programs help young children without prior preschool experience become comfortable with the school and work on some basic skills. These efforts also significantly cut down on the time kindergarten teachers spend at the beginning of the year helping children adjust to routines.
- When parent groups learn about classroom and behavior rules, they can reinforce those expectations at home and help smooth their children's transition into school.

Improvements in Primary Education across Community Schools

- A focus on regular attendance, beginning in preschool, can carry over to reducing absenteeism in the early grades, leading to increased student engagement, achievement and success.
- Collaboration between teachers and after-school/extended-day providers can help ensure that students' academic needs are being addressed and that after-school activities supplement instruction in regular classes.

Family Engagement in the Early Years & Ongoing Opportunities

- Community schools' extended day programs, such as the Homework Diner in Albuquerque NM, are open to families with preschoolers, creating early connections with teachers and comfort with the school.
- Instructional rounds give parents a glimpse into how classrooms are changing and what their children will need to be successful at the next level.
- Informing parents of online portals where they can track their children's grades—and training them how to use these systems—can increase their awareness of their children's progress.
- Parent leaders can serve as the bridge between families in the community with young children and the school.

CASE STUDIES

ALBUQUERQUE-BERNALILLO COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOL (ABC) PARTNERSHIP

When Albuquerque became part of IEL's Coalition for Community Schools' (CCS) Linkages Project in 2009, there was already a history of collaboration among early learning providers on behalf of young children.

What they did not have at the time was a strong community school infrastructure to connect with the Albuquerque Public Schools (APS). With a growing number of schools now part of the Albuquerque-Bernalillo County Community School (ABC) Partnership, however, that gap is beginning to disappear and ensuring that young children have positive learning experiences before kindergarten is seen as an essential part of a community school's work.

"That's always part of the conversation," says José Muñoz, the executive director of the ABC Partnership, which brings together leaders from APS, the county, the city and the Albuquerque Business Education Compact (ABEC) to oversee and provide direction for community schools in the city.

The community school model in the Albuquerque area stretches back at least 20 years, with the University of New Mexico and APS initially focusing on engaging families and coordinating services through after-school programs. Atlantic Philanthropies, another early supporter, provided funds for five sites in New Mexico as part of the nationwide Elev8 initiative, which has the core components of extended learning time, school-based health services and family engagement and support services. Three of those schools are in APS.

Youth Development, Inc., which provides tutoring, counseling, gang prevention and a wide variety of other youth services, is the lead partner agency for those schools, which are now part of the ABC Partnership.

ABC was formed in response to a study showing the benefits of various school improvement models—all of which included core elements of the community school approach. Ten schools—seven elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school—are now part of the ABC Partnership, but interest has been rapidly spreading. Six more are in the early stages of development and several others are heading that direction.

"We don't support just one model," Muñoz says. "The one constant is to fund the coordinator position."

As with most community school initiatives across the country, funding for the coordinator positions, as well as for services at the schools, comes from multiple sources, including grant funding, county funds that flow through APS and support from ABEC. Many of those funding streams run out, but Muñoz says he knows that in the community school world, there really is no such thing as sustainability.

"It may change with an election," he says, adding that it's important to focus on continuous improvement.

He is now working on a flexible funding model that would tap into a source that has long been available to Albuquerque schools. Schools can currently apply to the school district for after-school programming funds that are provided from the city. Muñoz's plan is for schools to access those funds at four different

levels: $10,000 if they only want to provide after-school programs; $20,000 to include students' and parents' input in deciding what after-school programs are offered; $30,000 to cover a part-time community school coordinator and establish some partnerships based on families' needs in additional areas, and finally $50,000 for full-time coordination and partnerships focusing on early learning, health and other areas of need. The plan would still allow schools flexibility, but would support the community school model at those sites that wanted to participate.

In addition to envisioning a more efficient funding process, ABC's role, Muñoz says, is to "seal up the disconnect that may happen between high-level elected officials and what happens on the ground." This includes providing professional development to coordinators and addressing common issues. One of those is how to better align schools' multiple partnerships. The coordinators, he says, are receiving training on how to determine if the work of partners is supporting a school's improvement plan.

EARLY WORK IN KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION

Even before the Linkages Project, which was funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and focused on strengthening ties between early learning providers and schools, New Mexico was one of eight sites around the country that received a Kellogg SPARK grant. SPARK, which stands for Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids, also focused on building connections between the early-childhood community and elementary schools.

"We had this opportunity to look at the elementary school from the continuum of learning that starts at birth," says Lois Vermilya, the director of the Family Development Program (FDP) at the University of New Mexico, which works with families and communities to improve early learning opportunities. That work set Albuquerque up as strong candidate for a Linkages grant.

"When you're a very lean, poor system, what gets done is an interesting story," Vermilya says.

> "We had this opportunity to look at the elementary school from the continuum of learning that starts at birth" — LOIS VERMILYA, DIRECTOR, FAMILY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

Most of the Linkages work focused on three elementary schools in APS—Pajarito, La Mesa and Manzano Mesa. Helen Cordero Elementary was also an "early-childhood focused" school. These schools are in the city's international district and the South Valley area—known for both rich diversity and concentrated poverty. On the heels of the Linkages funding, ABC then received additional funding from Kellogg for an initiative called Success by 8, to continue supporting the same efforts.

MIND IN THE MAKING: EXECUTIVE FUNCTION & LIFE SKILLS

Meanwhile, FDP received a companion grant called Circles of Support, which was used to build a stronger understanding of child development among elementary school educators and increase early learning opportunities before children enter kindergarten. The primary vehicle for accomplishing this has been Mind in the Making (MITM) modules. FDP, which is legislatively funded, was one of the initial partners across the country involved in delivering MITM training alongside the CCS partnerships.

As it has in other sites, MITM was a way to build a bridge between the early-childhood education community and elementary schools. Typically,

Vermilya says, initiatives focused on the birth-to-eight age span are not relevant to teachers of fourth and firfth graders. But even teachers in those grades, she says, were "equally interested" in MITM because they knew students were entering school without the skills they needed to be successful.

From 2010 to 2014, FDP provided MITM professional development with staff and parents at La Mesa Elementary and Emerson Elementary. MITM is "a common language that can cross boundaries," Vermilya says, adding that principals' leadership teams were also involved in the training. "It started shaping an understanding of children's learning from a developmental perspective."

Calling it a "paradigm shift," Vermilya says one principal spoke publicly about her realization that she needed to be concerned not only with the needs of students in her school, but to also begin looking "beyond the chain link fence."

As part of Circles of Support, FDP also led what was called a Neighborhood Leadership Academy, which was designed to build collaborative relationships among parents, grandparents, early learning providers and community school staff members—all for the purpose of improving children's transition into school and ensuring their success in the primary grades. Over a three-year period, the academies and follow-up gatherings reached 150 participants from four community schools.

Vermilya's next priority is to work more closely with the community school coordinators so they are aware of early-childhood resources in the community and can be part of efforts to better align services for families. She would like to revive the Leadership Academy model as a way to connect the schools with families with young children. Coordinators can also tap into FDP's "Weimagination Resource Center," where recycled materials, such as beads, paper, and caps from perfume bottles in all sizes and shapes, are available for early science and math activities and to support young children's learning through creative play. In a classic example of the opportunities that can be created for children and parents through community schools, the members of a parent sewing cooperative at La Mesa Elementary were hired to make small tote bags with "weimagination" materials that are now given to families with young children.

Over time, additional schools, including Hawthorne Elementary, also in the international district, have asked to be a part of the MITM and early learning work. With the end of both Linkages, Success by 8 and Circles of Support funding, the challenge now is to keep the schools from "slipping back to only thinking about K to 5," Vermilya says.

CRADLE-TO-CAREER INITIATIVE

One initiative that is occurring simultaneously with the growth of community schools in Albuquerque, and also includes a focus on early childhood, is Mission: Graduate, a cradle-to-career effort that is part of the Strive Together Network. Communities in 28 states are now part of Strive, a "movement" in which government, education and business leaders monitor and report on outcomes from school readiness through college performance.

One of Mission: Graduate's four "collaborative action networks" is the Early Childhood Accountability Partnership (ECAP). ECAP aims to improve early learning opportunities in Bernalillo County so that every child enters kindergarten ready to succeed in school. The other three networks are High School Graduation, College Completion and Employment.

In some communities across the country, there has been a climate of competition between community school initiatives and these Strive-affiliated partnerships. But Vermilya says there is more "symbiotic energy" in Albuquerque because the participants help lead each other's organizations. "We're all the same people," she says.

Muñoz, however, says that the ABC Partnership and Mission: Graduate are still "hashing out" how they can work together. He says Mission: Graduate's greatest strengths are data collection, packaging it and getting business leaders interested in how they can support schools and students. But he would like to see some more evidence that Mission: Graduate supports the community school model.

Angelo Gonzales, the executive director of Mission: Graduate, first got involved with community school work when he worked for U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman. He also served as the Associate Director of the University of New Mexico's Center for Education Policy Research.

"We see community schools as a huge part of the strategy for improving outcomes for students," Gonzales says, adding that one of the most exciting things about community schools is "a real recognition of the need for tighter integration between support services and school-day activities." He stressed that the coordination aspect of community schools can be more effective at meeting students' needs than simply providing more services.

The Mission: Graduate networks are already working together on common projects. In January, for example, ECAP and the High School Graduation network pulled together a Community Summit on School Attendance as part of a new initiative to raise awareness about the importance of attending school every day and reducing absenteeism. The networks are involving early-childhood centers, healthcare providers, after-school programs, faith leaders and other community partners in the effort. As in other Linkage Project sites, partners are working to instill in families of young children a commitment to attendance, beginning in the preschool years. Attendance toolkits for families, schools and healthcare providers have also been created.

"We're trying to educate the community that every day matters," Gonzales says, adding that community schools have been particularly effective at positively impacting attendance rates across the country.

A targeted focus on improving students' middle school experiences—in order to better prepare them for high school—is another area where Mission: Graduate and ABC will be working together. Two APS middle schools—Garfield and Hayes—will become STEM-focused, English-Spanish dual language schools in the fall of 2015. But they will also be transitioning into community schools, which Gonzales says can help "mobilize community partners" to support the innovative learning opportunities intended for those schools.

"ABC really has the infrastructure to help those schools," he says.

> **"We're trying to educate the community that every day matters."**
> **—ANGELO GONZALES,**
> **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, MISSION: GRADUATE**

Albuquerque is also participating in the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, a foundation-supported effort that, like community schools, focuses on local partnerships between schools, nonprofits and other agencies to help children be successful. And in 2013, the Community Schools Act was signed into law in the state. The legislation hasn't provided any funding, but Gonzales says it provides a framework for how community schools should operate. When the bill passed, Muñoz, who helped push it through the legislature, told the Albuquerque Journal, "I'm hoping the bill gets the state to recognize community schools as a viable vehicle for academic achievement."

MEETING FAMILIES' NEEDS AT MANZANO MESA

As Vermilya noted, the major grants that focused on connecting schools, families and the early-learning

community, have expired. But ABC and its partners are still looking at creative ways to keep the momentum going—even in schools that aren't built yet. The district is currently constructing a new pre-K-8 school adjacent to Atrisco Heritage Academy, the state's largest high school. Giving high school students who are interested in the education field the opportunity to gain experience and college credit by working in the preschool and early grades at the new school is one idea being discussed.

Muñoz adds that when a "boatload of money" is available to support programs and training—as it was with the various Kellogg grants—leaders tend to stop having difficult conversations about how to solve problems. It's when the funding goes away, he says, that coordinators and partners find innovative ways to address the needs of children and parents.

Engaging parents in the ABC network begins in the beginning of the year when school leaders ask parents what they need help with, such as housing, food, clothing or medical care. They also ask parents how they would like to be involved in the school, such as in the classroom, during family nights or in a leadership role. And they ask what parents want to learn more about, such as basic education, college, employment, financial literacy or computers.

Community school coordinators bring parents' responses to a Community School Council, which includes parents, and then coordinate how to work with partners to best meet those needs. The Council "has the names of all these parents so they are able to quickly get them engaged in the areas of their needs and/or interests," Muñoz says.

Schools also have family resource centers which are able to target families' individual needs and access ABC's Opportunity Fund, which prevents families from going homeless by providing assistance with housing or utility expenses. New parent leadership groups are being formed at some schools and growing at schools that already had them. Coordinators also connect teachers with parents who want to help out in a classroom.

> **"There were day cares, but that was not what they were looking for. They wanted to know 'How can I get my child ready for kindergarten?'" —**
> **DEANNA CREIGHTON COOK,**
> **Coordinator, Manzano Mesa Elementary**

The type of innovative solutions Muñoz describes is certainly being demonstrated at Manzano Mesa, where Deanna Creighton Cook serves as the coordinator. When she began to assess the needs for families in her school community, the lack of early learning programs, especially for Spanish-speaking families, emerged as a significant need. The child development center on the school's campus maintains a long waiting list, and most of the mothers didn't have transportation or couldn't afford to take their young children to centers outside of the neighborhood. "There were day cares, but that was not what they were looking for," Cook says. "They wanted to know 'How can I get my child ready for kindergarten?'"

The school has long held a weekly story-time session for parents and young children, where the mothers learn how to support early literacy skills and receive books and other learning materials to take home. At one of those sessions, Cook heard about a parent-run preschool cooperative model called Joy School in which parents would visit each other's homes to teach their young children.

The Manzano Mesa mothers were not interested in opening their homes, but they were very open to the idea of running a co-op at the school. The school found a spare kindergarten classroom, and Parent's Preschool Co-op began during the 2011-12 school year. The program meets twice a week for four hours and serves

17 children. One mother, who was a teacher in Peru, has been hired by the district to coordinate and oversee the classes, but the mothers, Cook says, have taken ownership of the program and turn in timesheets with as many as 40 volunteer hours a month.

The program has received attention from Univision, which broadcast two features on the program, as well as from the Clinton Foundation's Too Small to Fail initiative. Another Kellogg grant recipient, Central New Mexico Community College, also began to take notice and offered the mothers' full scholarships to be part of its TEACH program. TEACH, which originated in North Carolina, stands for Teacher Education and Compensation Helps and aims to improve the education and retention of the early-childhood education workforce. Scholarship recipients make a commitment to work in the field while they are earning an associate's or bachelor's degree. The FDP has also provided the mothers with professional development on topics including emergency procedures, classroom management and planning a curriculum.

"This is economic development for them because they want to start their own center," Cook says. The mothers are also taking English-as-a-second-language classes to improve their English skills.

Meanwhile, Cook says, the kindergarten teachers—who initially grumbled when asked to provide some training for the mothers—now say that children from the program are coming into kindergarten three months ahead of other children

The parents involved in the preschool class—along with their children—also regularly attend the school's Homework Diner, a weekly family engagement and academic support event in which parents and children gather with teachers to focus on learning and build a greater sense of community. The concept of Homework Diner was born at Manzano Mesa and has now spread not only across the district to eight more schools, but also across the country in other cities with community school initiatives, such as Providence, R.I. Two high schools have adapted the idea for their population with a College/Career Diner. "These venues are for the entire family where parents learn how to support their children's education, and learn how they may build their own capacity," Muñoz says.

At Manzano Mesa, the weekly event is a true demonstration of partnership, with chefs in the culinary arts program at the community college preparing meals, someone from the New Mexico Asian Family Center working with Vietnamese families, and members of Kiwanis Club-supported student council working as peer tutors with kindergarten students. The school is also a pilot site for a New Mexico PBS "Ready to Learn Transmedia" grant that focuses on delivering math and literacy games, suitable for preschoolers, on iPads. One teacher from each grade level, as well as the school's instructional coach, attends the events. They receive stipends, supported in part by funding from Albuquerque Mayor Richard J. Berry, who is also pledging to donate proceeds from a charity gala to support Homework Diner.

> **"That's my vision of it. Let's get the parents and the teachers working together as a team." —DEANNA CREIGHTON COOK, COORDINATOR, MANZANO MESA ELEMENTARY**

Having an informal setting in which to talk with teachers about what their children are doing in school is boosting parents' confidence, Cook says. "That's my vision of it," she says. "Let's get the parents and the teachers working together as a team."

CINCINNATI'S COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

Cincinnati's community learning centers (CLC) have each developed around the needs and characteristics of the neighborhoods in which they are located. They are true reflections of the diversity and personality of their local communities.

The same has held true in the growing effort to expand early learning opportunities for Cincinnati's young children in partnership with the CLCs. Lisa Garofalo learned this when she made a presentation to the CLC resource coordinators about partnering with early learning providers in their community.

"I realized I had to let them come to me. Not every school was in a place to have a deeper conversation about linking early childhood education and community learning centers," says Garofalo, who had retired from her position as early child program manager for the Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) before joining 4C for Children as school and community facilitator. "In some ways, it's so individual to that school community. No two are the same."

While working in the district, Garofalo says she often wondered how to encourage more collaboration with community providers and partners. "There was no ongoing systemic way to link child care in a formal way with the district," she says. "It was always on my list."

Then she got a call from Darlene Kamine, the executive director of Cincinnati's Community Learning Center Institute (CLCI) and a leading figure in the growth of the CLCs in the city. Kamine wanted to explore with Garofalo ways to fill gaps in early learning opportunities for children in collaboration with the CLCs.

CROSS-BOUNDARY LEADERSHIP FOR EARLY LEARNING

Garofalo says the early-childhood landscape is unlike the other networks represented on the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team, a committee which addresses issues that affect all of the provider networks. With most networks, consistency across CLCs is a goal. But with early childhood, the partnerships needed to develop more "from the community up," she says. "After the first few months it dawned on me that there was no way to make it into a program."

Since beginning this work at the end of 2012, Garofalo has taken on the challenge of working with CLCs to forge stronger connections between the schools and the variety of providers, programs and agencies within the surrounding communities that serve young children. These of course include centers and family child-care providers, but can also involve children's librarians, home-visiting programs and others focusing on early literacy.

From that initial gathering of resource coordinators, Garofalo began working with the six who expressed interest and has since added four more. She and the coordinators are assessing the early childhood needs in the community and developing partnerships with providers to meet those needs.

Garofalo uses a variety of strategies to learn about the personalities of the school communities, the dynamic among providers and the gaps in services for young children. In one community, for example, she described the child-care providers as "unbelievably hard to engage." They didn't seem interested in coming to the meetings. But then, she says, she realized that the providers didn't live in the community. Once the children in their centers left for the day, they would drive out to other neighborhoods, or outside the city. She still sends them minutes of the meetings to keep them informed, but she says she has to "take the lead" from them. In some communities, the family child-care providers are reluctant or have no time to get involved, while in other places, they are the most active members of the network.

Garofalo also picks up a wealth of information from school secretaries and attends a lot of community council meetings to get a feel for the concerns of the residents. "It's time consuming and there's no short cut around that," she says, but adds that the process is necessary. "It gives me another opportunity to listen to what the general community has to say. It's bigger than just education."

LOOKING AT DATA

The network meetings at these 10 schools range from being held monthly at one site to twice during the school year at others, and the number of participants in each network ranges from six to more than 10.

Before trying to determine the early learning needs of the community, the networks look at the data that is available on young children that would be feeding into the school. One source that schools had been using was the Ohio Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L), which in 2014 was replaced with a new Kindergarten Readiness Assessment. While it's still just a snapshot, Garofalo says, the new assessment will cover language and literacy as well as math, social skills, science, social studies and physical and motor development. The network members also look at their school community's Preschool Experience Survey results. The survey was designed by the Southwest Early Learning Leaders collaborative and asks parents about their children's learning experiences before kindergarten.

Ilene Hayes, the resource coordinator at Mt. Washington School, conducted her own review of data even before Garofalo began working at 4C for Children. She had been hearing from kindergarten teachers about how many of the entering students were unprepared for school—some lacked even basic toileting skills and many couldn't recognize letters and numbers.

"I looked through all the records and found out that over 50 percent had little or no exposure to an early-childhood program," Hayes says, adding that those who were in formal care were not necessarily gaining school readiness skills.

So she applied for and received a grant from Success by 6 to run a three-week summer transition program for incoming kindergarten students. The program targeted those who either had not had any early-childhood program experience or who scored low on a developmental screening. Parent workshops were also held. Right away, she saw the benefits. Students' KRA-L scores went up, and the children's parents were getting involved in the parent organization. While funding for the program has not remained consistent, Hayes hopes to use Title I funds in the future.

Now with the network of community-based providers, preschool directors and teachers are learning about what is expected of children once they enter kindergarten. "The center directors are like sponges," Hayes says, adding that they are also now partnering with Mt. Washington's preschool and kindergarten teachers to organize events, such as the "Twinkle, Twinkle Pajama Party," a story-reading event held in January. The center directors are also promoting Mt. Washington School to the families they serve, and the school—located in the farthest eastern part of

Cincinnati—is starting to draw kindergarteners from other districts, Hayes says.

ONGOING GROWTH AT OYLER

In some ways, what is now occurring at the 10 schools is what initially took place at the Oyler CLC in Cincinnati's Lower Price Hill neighborhood, where early-childhood providers and school partners came together in 2011 to brainstorm ways to attract families to the school's child-care and preschool center—the Robert and Adele Schiff Early Learning Center.

Cincinnati Early Learning Centers (CELC), a high-quality provider in the city, operates the Schiff center. And the program has been so successful that additional space was needed to serve children from the neighborhood. So CELC acquired a long-abandoned house adjacent to the school, which has now been remodeled into classroom space on the first level and meeting space on the second floor. The meeting space can be used for provider network meetings, playgroups or parent gatherings.

Meanwhile, the CLC has received "massive amounts of donations" of food, clothing and household items, Kamine says, so Oyler's resource coordinator has created a small store where families can pick up items they might need. The refurbished house is "tangible evidence of when we talk about revitalizing the neighborhood," Kamine says.

But Kamine envisions much more of that type of work taking place in the Lower Price Hill and East Price Hill neighborhoods as part of a new grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to make sure families with young children not only have access to high-quality care and education, but that they also have housing and economic opportunity. Currently, many of the properties in the area are abandoned, and of those where families are living, 15 percent don't have functioning bathrooms or kitchens. The "town square" project—with the CLC representing that town square—will bring together developers and other community partners to participate in a community-wide planning process. The effort will look at the importance of early childhood education, but through a wider lens of what families need to thrive. "We need to be genuine about what is going to be helpful," Kamine says. "It's the quality of life that is important."

DIFFERENT VISIONS FOR DIFFERENT NEIGHBORHOODS

Ohio's recently revised quality rating and improvement system—called Step Up to Quality—is giving early-childhood education providers an added incentive to form relationships with schools. In the "Family and Community Partnerships" piece of the rating system, providers earn more points for having policies and practices that support children's transition into school and for having formal and informal agreements with community partners.

The partnerships with early-childhood education providers being formed at Mt. Washington and other CLCs, however, also serve as an example of why there is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating more early learning opportunities in Cincinnati's neighborhoods. It's what Kamine describes as "different visions for different neighborhoods."

Oyler, for example, opened a center serving infants and toddlers because there was a need. But Hayes points out that if she had tried to do that at Mt. Washington, it only would have created competition with area providers and threatened the partnerships that had been created. "We would step on so many toes."

In other areas, however, there are almost no providers. In the vicinity of Sayler Park School—in the farthest western area of the district, along the Ohio River—Garofalo could find only one family child-care provider in operation. The district was able to bring in a Head Start classroom, but that served only 20 of the 50 preschoolers in the neighborhood. When she began interviewing families, however, Garofalo learned that

they were more comfortable with an early-childhood educator coming into their homes instead of sending their children to a center. So Garofalo turned to Santa Maria Community Services, a social service agency serving the Price Hill area. She asked them to bring their Promoting Our Preschoolers home visitation program to the Sayler Park families. Kamine says she's also excited about the fact that a "high-end housing developer" recently asked if he could locate a sales office for a new community within Sayler Park School, showing that even developers are "connecting the dots" between quality schools and a way of life.

A partnership between Cincinnati Christian University and Roberts Academy in East Price Hill is another example of how needs can be met through the CLC approach. The university has a strong early-childhood training program but has been lacking sites in which the college students can intern or gain student teaching experience. So with a planning grant from the Haile/U.S. Bank Foundation, the university is working with the school to build an early-childhood center that will accommodate the community's growing Hispanic population in Price Hill and serve as a teaching facility for the university. The building will be connected by a walkway to the school and will also house the International Welcome Center, which was created in partnership with Santa Maria Community Services and has outgrown its space at Roberts.

This diversity in community needs is also demonstrated by the extent to which the early-childhood networks are approaching the topic of transition to kindergarten. One group, Garofalo says, merely wanted to improve their school's on-time registration rate for kindergarten. Other groups have been more enthusiastic, working together to schedule joint events for families that involve preschoolers, kindergarteners and teachers from both the school and the local centers.

The network meetings are also an opportunity for community-based providers to make connections with kindergarten teachers so they can gain a stronger awareness of how to help children be prepared for school. At one meeting, a kindergarten teacher met with the network members to talk about the Common Core standards.

The providers "keep hearing about it, but they don't know what it means," Garofalo says. "It's an opportunity to have that dialogue. It's not a structured training, but it gives the providers a chance to talk to the teachers."

As the CLC infrastructure in Cincinnati continues to expand, Garofalo is thinking about how to foster the development of early-childhood networks at more sites. Thirty-nine—and soon 40—of the districts more than 50 schools now have a resource coordinator. And 22 schools have on-site health clinics. There are also two school-based dental clinics.

Garofalo has considered creating one network that would involve three schools that are located in the same area, because it's not always clear which school a child will enter for kindergarten. But she says she doesn't want the providers to get "connection weary." And even though the schools are separated by only a few miles, she says it "could be the Grand Canyon" in terms of how different the communities are from each other.

SHARING WISDOM

While Hayes worked at 4C for Children as a social worker before being a resource coordinator at Mt. Washington, not all of the coordinators have background knowledge of the early-childhood education field. So the network meetings are also an opportunity for them to learn about the variety of early learning programs available, policies regarding eligibility for families and efforts to improve quality. In turn, Garofalo says she is gaining knowledge of the communities and the other CLC partners.

"It's a learning experience for me to hang out with the resource coordinators," she says. "I can bring some things to them and they can bring some of their wisdom to me."

EVANSVILLE-VANDERBURGH SCHOOL CORPORATION

The cafeteria at the Culver Family Learning Center is well suited for the preschoolers who eat lunch there each day. Small chairs surround low tables that are invitingly decorated with fresh flowers donated every morning by a local market. But this space could soon be stretched to accommodate the additional preschool classrooms that are coming to the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) after the Indiana state legislature's move to begin providing funding for prekindergarten.

The passage of the Pre-Kindergarten Pilot Program and the creation of a new Early Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC) is especially meaningful for EVSC leaders, who have long been using Title I funds to provide prekindergarten at Culver and other district schools, and advocated alongside community partners for the bill.

In fact, Vanderburgh County is represented on each of the seven workgroups the ELAC has created to plan for improvements and future expansion of early childhood education, and Kevin R. Bain, executive director and CEO of the Wellborn Baptist Foundation—a longtime partner in EVSC's community schools—has been appointed ELAC chairman. This work is a major step for a state that for years held back on providing any public money for early-childhood education. The new pre-K pilot will be delivered in the form of vouchers for low-income families in five counties, including Vanderburgh.

IMPACTING STATE POLICY

Early learning programs have been a significant piece of EVSC's community school effort, which began in the 1990s and has expanded district-wide under the leadership of Cathlin S. Gray, associate superintendent for family, school and community partnerships.

But Bain believes a major turning point in the push for state pre-K funding was a 2012 early learning summit in Evansville organized by the community's Early Childhood Development Coalition (ECDC). The event brought together business leaders to learn about research related to the importance of the early childhood development and sparked interest among policymakers.

Bain notes that even with the ECDC's commitment to improving the quality of early learning settings in Evansville and its focus on the transition into kindergarten, the group was not playing the fundraising or advocacy roles that were needed to get lawmakers to pay attention. That's where the business community stepped in.

"As the group came together, they decided they wanted accessible, affordable, quality early childhood," Bain says.

The pilot program is designed as a public-private partnership, which was the only way to convince the state Senate to approve the bill, which will provide $10 million over two years. Scholarships will go to families in five counties to incentivize enrolling their children in high-quality centers. Initially, schools weren't going to be eligible to serve children receiving the

scholarships, but due to a last-minute change, schools will be able to participate if they become licensed by the state, just like other child-care providers.

For elementary schools that weren't originally built to accommodate young children, meeting licensing standards can be a challenge—what Bain calls "hoop-jumping 101." That's why even though EVSC has shown leadership in serving preschoolers, Superintendent David B. Smith says bringing facilities such as bathrooms and playgrounds into compliance is a "huge undertaking." While office spaces in the Culver center could be converted into additional classrooms, Smith says he would like to see the students housed in regular schools, and added that a lot of principals have shifted from viewing preschool classrooms as "this is something I have to contend with" to "this is something I want." In addition to Culver, Title I-funded pre-K classrooms are also in four additional elementary schools. A few schools also offer fee-based preschool.

CREATING A MODEL

Even if the additional classrooms are placed in schools, Culver will continue to be a hub for families with young children and serve as an example of how families, community partners and schools are collaborating to create welcoming environments and a strong foundation for children in school.

Taking advantage of the building's wide hallways and open common areas, Culver has implemented Minds in Motion, a curriculum that encourages physical activity such as rolling down the ramps in the hall and uses obstacle courses to build children's sensory and motor development, which in turn improves their focus on academic learning. The center is also beginning to implement Reggio Emilia, an early-childhood approach born in Northern Italy which views children as competent, curious learners, fosters relationships between children and teachers, and considers the physical environment as an additional "teacher." Guided by teachers, children work together on long-term projects, and their work is documented through photographs and note-taking to show their ideas and progress.

Using Title I funds, Culver serves 120 children in eight classrooms. There is also a class for children with autism and another for children with physical disabilities, both of which are also mixed with typical children. Two additional classrooms serve infants and toddlers whose mothers are enrolled in Even Start, a year-long family literacy program that EVSC now pays for with grants after Congress stopped funding it. The mothers receive parenting education and support toward receiving their GEDs. Through Culver's partnership with the University of Southern Indiana (USI), Margaret Felton, a professor of adolescent and child psychology, spends time every other week with the participants to answer their questions and engage them in a discussion about parenting skills.

But USI is just one of a long list of partners involved in Culver, demonstrating how children, parents and other local residents can benefit from being part of a community school. The Children's Center of Dance, for example, has donated a dance floor, which was installed on top of the center's large auditorium stage and serves as a platform for dance lessons and children's performances. Early-childhood education students from the University of Evansville organize a literacy night for the families. And Leadership Evansville, a nonprofit organization focused on developing community leaders, has adopted Culver's hoop house—a large garden that is producing pumpkins, tomatoes and other produce faster than the children can harvest and give them away in the neighborhood. Culver's site council organizes a watering schedule and other maintenance of the "big forest," as Paulnetta Barner, the community and family outreach coordinator at Culver, calls it.

The Culver Center also has an active Parent Volunteer Group, which has taken on projects such as getting preschooler-sized caps and gowns for "graduation

photos," planning a movie night and organizing a "treat stop parade" through the school at Halloween.

The parent group is also learning about the district's implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), which sets behavior expectations for all students in schools and then provides more targeted support when students need help. Students at Culver are learning what it means when a teacher says their voice level should be a "0"—instructions that will stay the same when they get to kindergarten and will help with children's transition into school.

"It gives our parents consistency of what to expect out of their kids," says Barner. "It's reinforced by everyone."

While more community partners are finding ways to support families at Culver, one important partnership is no longer in place—the one with Head Start grantee Community Action Program of Evansville (CAPE). Three years ago, CAPE was providing wrap-around programs, including health and family advocacy services, while EVSC was hiring the pre-K teachers. The collaboration allowed non-Head Start students to receive the additional support and allowed Culver to serve 3-year-olds as well. But in the midst of leadership changes at both Culver and CAPE, the arrangement was not sustained.

"It was a wonderful model that should have worked but didn't," says Terry Green, EVSC's executive director of early childhood education. "I have respect for Head Start. I know it can work."

She said she is currently working to re-establish a relationship with the new director at CAPE through having lunch, and said that partnerships take shape when people know each other—not just because meetings are scheduled. "No one wants to go to another meeting," Green says. "You need something to do together."

TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Giving kindergarten teachers information about the young children coming into their classrooms has been one of the ECDC's top priorities. It worked to develop a readiness checklist for early childhood providers to complete and pass on to the schools where children enroll. Now the Coalition has been working to administer the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), a universal screening tool, in sites throughout Evansville serving families with at-risk children such as shelters and meal locations. Over half of the young children who enter kindergarten in Evansville have not been in any formal early learning program, so reaching informal settings has been a priority.

Parents are also given information on how to conduct the screening themselves. The Coalition chose to use the social-emotional version of the ASQ because of the signs that incoming kindergarteners need the most help in that area.

"That is the number one reason kids are coming to school unprepared," says Jamie Madigan, a program coordinator for the ECDC. As the mother of a first grader, she adds that she thinks there is still a significant gap between the learning environment in preschool and the academic structure and expectations of EVSC's kindergarten and primary classrooms. Even if children attend preschool, some are still not prepared to make that leap, she says.

There have been a few examples across the district to improve the transition process by giving preschoolers early exposure to the kindergarten classroom and by building connections between preschool providers and kindergarten teachers in order to use common practices. For example, in the state's first round of funding for pilot pre-K programs, schools were not allowed to offer the program because of the licensing requirements. So EVSC's Delaware School partnered with the St. Vincent Center for Children and Families, a longtime provider in Evansville, to open a pre-K

class. The district also provided transportation to St. Vincent for the students. As part of the collaboration, kindergarten teachers from Delaware School began meeting with the St. Vincent pre-K teachers to discuss how to prepare children for kindergarten.

A few of the community schools have also held summer transition programs for incoming kindergarteners, but organizing these programs has been left up to the schools. Plans were in the works for an even longer, four-week summer program at one school this year with the help of a United Way grant, but the program did not take place, in part because the planning started late, Green says. There have also been a few opportunities for pre-K and kindergarten teachers to have joint professional development on topics such as Reggio Emilia, but Gray says, "We can certainly do more."

Smith adds that with the new pre-K funding from the state, attention to transition should increase. "I think this is the leverage we need to make more of that happen," he says. "This is a huge responsibility."

MEASURING KINDERGARTEN READINESS

In addition to launching the pilot pre-K program, the ELAC is also working on a new kindergarten readiness assessment, which will provide EVSC and other districts across the state with more data on the skills and knowledge children are bringing with them into kindergarten.

EVSC has been using the Indiana Standards Tool for Alternate Reporting of Kindergarten Readiness, but found that the data could not be aggregated and that a family-friendly version of a child's assessment was not available. Gray says the district began developing its own instrument, but decided to wait on what the state is developing.

The district is also going to begin using another assessment called "Got It, Get It, Go!" Focusing on early literacy, the tool will provide the district with baseline data. Green was also asked to administer the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment, but the tests sit boxed up against the wall in her office because she didn't think it was a good match for her students and called it "culturally off-base."

"There are things in there that our kids have no idea about," she says.

The issue came up when Gray's department—the Center for Family, School and Community Partnerships—was the topic of a performance management session during which her team presented data related to areas of responsibility, such as health and wellness, family engagement and after-school programs. Previously these sessions—which Gray says have been "life changing for this district"—were held only for schools, but have now been extended to district departments as well.

Gray notes that the push for assessment data on young children was due in part to some officials in the district not understanding how early-childhood instruction is different from that of the primary grades. And even Smith says, "Some principals thought pre-K should look like K."

In a compromise, Green agreed to give the assessment at the end of the year. She will also give the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test to a sample of children.

Mind in the Making and Museum Partnerships

As part of the same performance management session, information was shared on the district's implementation of Mind in the Making (MITM) training. Thirty-two facilitators from 12 organizations in Evansville were trained to provide the modules. They delivered the training to over 230 people including parents, educators, social workers and other professionals. In the second round of training, a team from the Children's Museum of Evansville is participating and is even planning to incorporate MITM into children's experiences in the museum.

"We want to see how our exhibits can connect to the essential skills," says Emily Endress, the director of education and community outreach at the museum. For example, one idea would be to redesign the map of the museum to show which exhibit would relate to which skill.

But blending MITM into the museum's interactive exhibits is just one way in which the museum collaborates with the school district and demonstrates how partners across the city and county are working to support EVSC students and families.

> **"Having the health center is a key component of education. All these things do impact educational success." —DIANA BUTLER,**
> SUPERVISOR, HEALTH SERVICES & WELLNESS, EVSC

The museum recruits teachers to serve on its education committee, brings activities to afterschool programs, offers free family nights and has been holding an annual "Kindergarten…Here I Come" event to give young children a preview of their new school experience. Museum staff members ask themselves "Are our field trips in line with what teachers need?" Endress says.

COMMUNITY HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

Other community partners have also made changes to their organizations, influenced in large part by their experience with EVSC's community schools and in collaboration with other organizations. And many of those changes involve serving young children.

For example, Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare Inc., a mental health agency, has added a department of Child, Adolescent and Family Services, largely because of its participation as a community partner, and has increased its services delivered in schools. The provider has also started organizing parent groups to provide support and information on various topics and is responding to needs among younger children.

"We're serving more children 0 to 6 than ever before," says Donna Culley, the director of Child and Family Services at Southwestern. And Amy Walker, the executive director of the Public Education Foundation of Evansville, says that her organization, which had always focused its grant-making on programs that would increase students' academic performance, has started to expand its support of efforts that improve social-emotional health and development as well. It's a common scene here in Evansville. Staff members from community organizations will arrive at 123 Main Street—the site of the district's Center for Family, School and Community Partnerships—meet someone new, and before long they start talking about how they work together or support each other's work.

St. Mary's Health System, another partner, has also added programs and launched new initiatives, in part because of its involvement at the "big table," the term used here to describe the diverse mix of community partners involved with EVSC schools. It has added a diabetes camp, a respiratory therapist and registered dietician that work in the schools. Janet Raisor, the executive director of case management, community outreach and rehabilitation services for the hospital, also mentions a new initiative—a team of close to 40 people, including law enforcement, judges and doctors, working together to prevent child abuse cases.

In partnership with the University of Southern Indiana (USI), St. Mary's and Southwestern, the district has also been able to open three school-based health centers at Glenwood Leadership Academy, Cedar Hall Community School and Lodge Community School. The centers provide both primary and acute care for uninsured and underinsured families and serve as a medical home for many children.

"Having the health center is a key component of education," says Diana Butler, EVSC's supervisor of health services and wellness. "All these things do impact educational success."

Some needs, however, still remain. While St. Mary's still sends a dental van to schools for students, there is a lack of dental services for adults. The school-based centers also don't provide prenatal care.

Partners here, however, are excited about a new resource coming to Evansville; Indiana University is building a medical school near downtown. Not only do leaders hope to get the medical students into the schools as part of their training, but they also see an opportunity for local businesses, such as restaurants and shops, to benefit.

There have been additional changes in how EVSC and its community partners are supporting students' postsecondary plans and preparing them and their parents for the transition to college.

SUPPORTING COLLEGE ACCESS FOR STUDENTS & FAMILIES

Three years ago, the Southwest Indiana College Access Consortium had funding to put advisors in middle and high schools to help create awareness about preparing for college. That work, however, could not be sustained. In a new initiative, however, the Indiana Youth Institute is supporting the position of a "college connection coach" who will work for Ivy Tech Community College, but be based at the Center for Family, School and Community Partnerships. Initially, the coach will focus on Harrison and Central high schools, but district leaders and partners hope to expand that effort to all high schools.

Some EVSC students are also receiving one-on-one support—and have the potential to earn a four-year scholarship—through the state's 21st Century Scholars program. Volunteers mentor the participants to make sure they take the SAT or the ACT, complete a "senior affirmation," and maintain a 2.5 grade-point average. Over five years, more than 250 Evansville students have been through the program, and Tracey Williams, EVSC's mentoring manager, continues to follow their progress. The district also partners with the United Way to offer financial aid workshops for parents, and Williams never turns down opportunities—sometimes as late as 11 p.m. or on Sundays after church—to answer questions about completing the forms.

DIVERSIFYING APPROACHES TO MEET DIVERSE FAMILY NEEDS

EVSC is also taking a more coordinated and planned-out approach to family engagement. Three years ago, the district trained over 100 school staff members on topics such as cultural diversity and effective parent engagement practices. They in turn were expected to identify parent liaisons in their schools. But Gray says the effort was not as successful as it should have been because it was a separate initiative that was not integrated into how schools operate.

So under Patricia Weinzapfel, EVSC's executive director of community schools and family engagement, the district is borrowing the approach used in PBIS and applying it to building partnerships with parents. This means that as PBIS sets behavior expectations for all students in schools and then provides more targeted support when students need help, guidelines will be set for how all parents can be involved in schools and support their children's growth and learning.

"At a universal level, we want to prevent disengagement," Weinzapfel says. "We do that through creating a positive, welcoming environment."

While family engagement is difficult to measure, the district is beginning with two indicators—monitoring student attendance and tracking how many parents regularly log in to RDS Parent Access, the district's

online system for displaying grades, assignments, attendance, behavior and other student information.

Several schools have very active PTA chapters, some of which are taking steps to involve parents who might not be able to pay dues or who otherwise are not likely to become PTA members, says Alana Fligor, the president of the area PTA council. For example, instead of holding a vendor fair recently, the PTA sponsored a resource fair so parents could find out about services and programs in the community. And some chapters are holding events that any parent can attend.

While she represents the PTA, which has specific guidelines regarding membership and how PTA funds can be used, she also has been part of the district's efforts to engage all parents.

"Ultimately, we want parents in the school," she says. "There are some people that if you never stick your hand out and say 'come in,' they'll never come in."

There are also some discussions about how to involve preschool parents even though the PTA has historically been only a K-12 organization. Fligor says she is exploring how the Culver center parent group can become a PTA and at her school, Scott Elementary, parents of preschoolers in the school's fee-based program are invited to school-wide events.

Efforts have also increased to fully involve Hispanic parents and make sure their needs are met. Alma Dabrowski, EVSC's social worker for diverse populations, says that when she started working in the district in 2007, she sometimes saw eyes roll when she would attend parent conferences or other meetings, in order to translate. Now materials are printed in English and Spanish and she feels schools have made a transition in welcoming and accommodating Spanish-speaking families. The Culver center also has a Hispanic parent group that has organized cultural events at the school.

The PTA also plays a significant role in meeting the needs of low-income families through Hangers, which provides new and gently used clothes for EVSC students. Counselors, teachers or school nurses will refer students for a "shopping experience" at Hangers if they notice that the student is lacking appropriate clothing for school, says Fligor. Partners donate clothing, toiletries—even jewelry—so students can get a complete outfit. In fact, they are able to take home several outfits. Last school year, Hangers, which operates out of a wing of a middle school, served 1,400 students, and by October of 2014, the program had already served almost 800 students.

Services such as Hangers and bringing mental health providers and medical care to schools helps to increase student attendance. Stephanie Crandell, the district's director of Student Support Services, says that counselors and school social workers also help to uncover issues such as disabilities, health problems or transportation barriers that might be affecting whether a student gets to school. "You have to look at the whole picture," she says.

But the district has also stepped up its efforts to make sure all families understand the importance of consistent attendance. "We're trying to establish early on that it's so important that they are in school," Crandell says. "Academics increase when kids are in school."

An attendance "toolkit" has been created to give schools a way to communicate with parents. This includes explaining the steps that will be taken if a child misses too many days, such as a "pre-court" conference after 10 unexcused absences to alert the parents or guardians to the situation and explore what might be keeping the child out of school. Some situations might also involve a home visit by an EVSC employee. Crandell says she also urges local school counselors not to "come on so hard" and to try to work with families to avoid the pre-court meetings. Those sessions were also moved from being held at a district office back to the schools so they would not seem as intimidating.

The attendance effort is another example of establishing consistent practices and messages across the district. But even with the work on alignment at the district level and the ongoing willingness of partners to meet the needs of the community, Gray says one of the biggest challenges going forward remains sustaining the work at the school level—especially when there is turnover among principals.

"It can't be about people," Gray says. "If it's about a person, then the work doesn't get embedded in systems."

PARTNERS FOCUS ON MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS

The work in EVSC's community schools is supported by a mixture of district, private and federal dollars, including Title I, a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, a Carol M. White Physical Education Program grant and the final year of Full-Service Community Schools funding. There is a strong belief here that even if one source of funding runs out, or if a particular program is not sustained, something else will take its place or another source of funding will be found—as with Even Start and the new Ivy Tech partnership.

And Gray asserts that when the district puts energy into writing a grant proposal, that plan is used to give the district direction and set priorities, whether or not the grant is ever received.

"We write it not just to get the money—it's our strategy," Gray says. "If you depend totally on grants, you can't plan for sustainability."

Gray mentions the K-8 Glenwood Leadership Academy as an example. The low-performing school was close to being taken over by the state when the district brought in Mass Insight Education, a school turnaround group, and the school received a federal School Improvement Grant (SIG), which helped pay for a site coordinator to organize how community partners would support the school. But when the SIG funding ended, so did the coordination, and partners, Gray says, grew frustrated and began to leave. And when officials looked at how many students at Glenwood were participating in extended learning opportunities, they saw a significant decline. Now things have begun to turn around again, and school leaders are thinking about how to align partnerships to the goals for students.

ALIGNMENT DISTRICT-WIDE

In strong community school initiatives, partnerships match the priorities and needs of the schools. That why with partnerships continuing to expand, EVSC leaders are going through that same process of making sure that the programs and services brought into the schools will benefit families and support what's best for students. Even if certain presentations or activities—such as student surveys—are for a good cause, they can take away from instructional time.

"As a result, some things will go away," Gray says. "They don't belong as part of the school day."

Without a focus on alignment, schools can just take on more and more partners without having a clearly identified plan for how those partners are supporting learning, Gray says.

Her office has since embarked on a plan to re-evaluate how all of the district's partnerships fit into the responsibilities of her department—including early-childhood, health and wellness, afterschool programs and family engagement. A simple color-coded flowchart makes the concept easy to understand. The next step is to share the plan with community partners so they understand the district's direction.

"Until we have this intentionality and we have outcomes, they are just two systems operating next to each other," Gray adds.

HARTFORD, CONN.

Many large urban areas lack enough high-quality early learning centers to meet the demand. That's not the problem in Hartford, Conn. Since 2007, city leaders have made a deep and ongoing commitment to increasing access for young children to school-based and center-based early-childhood programs. But strong connections have been missing between those early learning programs and the Hartford Public Schools' (HPS) seven community schools.

Supporters of the city's community schools work, however, see the hiring of a new superintendent last year as a key step toward bridging that gap. "This is our moment," says Sara Sneed, the director of education investments at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, which provides funding for community schools, along with Mayor Pedro E. Segarra's office, the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, and the school district.

Community schools in Hartford evolved from an after-school initiative at the middle school level. So the providers delivering services in the schools had expertise in serving youth—not young children. As the schools went to a K-8 configuration, and then to preK-8, "it was a huge challenge to begin serving lower grades," Sneed says.

Even though many of the schools have on-site preschool classrooms, those programs are just beginning to be viewed as part of the work of the community schools. But the focus on older students hasn't been the only barrier to increasing the attention on younger children. A past contentious relationship between the city—which administers funding for early-childhood programs—and the school district hasn't helped.

That climate, however, is now expected to change under the leadership of Superintendent Beth Schiavino-Narvaez, with more alignment in priorities between the district and the city. The mayor is a voting member of the nine-member Hartford Board of Education and appoints four additional members. District leaders, Sneed adds now "have a strong vested interest in bringing the wall down" between community schools and early-childhood programs. She added that Schiavino-Narvaez "really gets that if you're going to have strong K-12 outcomes, you've got to have good early-childhood."

The superintendent is also increasing the focus on partnerships in general. She has created a cabinet position for a chief engagement and partnership officer, who oversees efforts including family engagement and community schools. Past turnover among school principals has hampered efforts to create partnerships with parents that go beyond surface-level involvement activities.

The Hartford Partnership for School Success (HPSS), which leads the community schools work, is now part of the district's Office of Engagement and Partnerships, which also includes the centralized Welcome Center and local school family resource centers, which focus on meeting family's needs and connecting them with services in the community, including early-childhood programs.

HARTFORD'S EARLY LEARNING LANDSCAPE

Stretching back to the mid-1990s, the Hartford Public Schools—as one of the state's priority school districts—has received state funding for preschool as part of its School Readiness Program. But beginning in 2005, Mayor Pedro E. Segarra wanted to bring more attention to young children's education, across the birth-to-eight spectrum. He established the nine-member Mayor's Cabinet for Young Children, which includes elected and appointed public sector leaders, and oversees the city's policies related to young children.

"We were the first city in the state to have a comprehensive 0 to 8 plan in place," says Jane Crowell, the assistant director for early childhood and family and community engagement in the Hartford Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation's Division for Young Children—also the first of its kind in New England.

Roughly $12 million a year in state funds flows through the Division for Young Children to cover tuition costs in early-childhood programs. Approximately 3,000 young children in the city are served in either center-based or school-based early programs, which represents about 73 percent of preschoolers in the city.

"We have done a lot of work with increasing the availability of preschool," Crowell says. "We have more capacity than children whose parents want them in programs." Spaces are actually available to serve more than 80 percent of preschoolers in the city.

FOCUSING ON QUALITY & DATA

Increasing access to early-learning programs in Connecticut's capital has not taken place at the expense of quality. The Division for Young Children has also led several efforts to improve the instructional skills of early-childhood teachers and to create a more coordinated, uniform system of measuring what children are learning before kindergarten.

The Division began by offering professional development to providers across the city in the Cycle of Intentional Teaching, an ongoing routine of planning and implementing, observing and assessing, and then starting the process over. Crowell says, however, that the training would not be effective without follow-up coaching. After the second year of deploying instructional coaches to the programs, however, it then became clear that preschool teachers were growing too dependent on the coaches, Crowell says.

"Programs would hit these bumps and not know what to do. So they would revert to what they used before," she says. To address those obstacles, instructional leaders were designated within centers to coach other teachers. But then even that model needed tweaking after officials noticed that across all classrooms, children were all performing at about the same level. So now monitors work with programs to ensure teachers are using effective practices and using data to inform their instruction.

The Division for Young Children, in partnership with the school district, has also worked to convince providers to use the same assessment instrument in order to create a more common language across the city about children's early development and skills. The data would not only help teachers improve their instruction, but also "provide a citywide profile of how kids are doing," Crowell says, adding that for many at-risk children "the gap between preschool and kindergarten is so huge. Those children fail very early."

Three times a year, programs submit data, including observation notes, instructional quality rubric scores and even individual child assessment data to Metro Hartford Information Services. And community-based programs bought into the system because it's user-friendly and helped teachers become more effective, Crowell adds. "No one else has the level of data we

have," she says. "But it had to have benefits" for teachers.

School principals, Crowell adds, have also been eager to review that data, but lacked an understanding of the context in which the assessments were given and on children's backgrounds—such as how long they attended an early learning program and whether their attendance was consistent. "We needed to build an awareness with administrators." she says. "They can't move forward until they have understanding of best practices in early childhood."

Networks of leaders and providers also ensure that there is a focus on continuous improvement and a structure in which to address issues that stretch across programs. An administrators' forum meets four to six times a year, there is a monthly Early Childhood Provider Network gathering of about 50 providers, and there is a separate family child-care provider network of mostly Latino providers.

CREATING CONNECTIONS

More recently, efforts to better connect this robust early-childhood system to the elementary schools these children will attend have increased. The city's organized focus on young children was also recently recognized in a "City Snapshot" by the National League of Cities (NLC). The profile discusses Mayor Segarra's efforts to streamline and align Hartford's efforts to strengthen families and facilitate optimal educational outcomes for young people.

Speaker's forums featuring early-childhood experts are one approach the city is using to strengthen these relationships. Sharon Ritchie, a University of North Carolina researcher who developed a preK-3 model called First School, spoke to a group of 100 educators in July 2014. "It was just groundbreaking for so many," Crowell says, adding that the goal is to break down the walls between community-based providers, who "are well-versed in play and fun," but not as much in academic content and K-12 educators who "have a tendency to apply what they have always known" to work for older students with younger children.

"We want to marry both of these worlds together," she says. "There are strengths of both."

Hartford is also one of five sites that participated in NLC's Educational Alignment for Young Children initiative, which has provided technical assistance to cities to create stronger partnerships focused on early childhood, improve professional development for teachers and early learning leaders and support parent engagement. The initiative highlights the role of mayoral leadership in creating a more seamless system that supports children and families as they move from early-childhood programs into schools.

Ritchie was also scheduled to return to Hartford for another session in which one day would be devoted to superintendents, principals and other school leaders, and the second would be geared to instructional leaders and teachers. And during 2015, three schools partnered with three early-childhood programs, family engagement providers and the Hartford Public Library to begin implementing the First School model.

In Hartford, as in many cities, Mind in the Making (MITM) has been an effective mechanism for bringing together members of both the early-childhood and K-12 communities. Hartford was one of several community school initiatives to participate in the MITM-Community Schools Projec. Sneed says she saw MITM as a valuable opportunity to bring the early-childhood and K-12 communities together in spite of the other barriers that existed. "There's a common thread between pre-K and grade 3," Crowell says. "We see that common thread as being executive functioning."

Instructional leaders in Hartford's early-childhood programs have received MITM training, community school directors and lead community agencies have trained their staff, and one school held a book club focused on the book. Information on MITM has also been featured at school events that involve school

staff, but limited time for additional professional development has made it difficult for teachers to participate in MITM workshops, says Jackson.

In fact, Crowell says she also is looking at other ways to provide joint professional development opportunities for early-childhood and elementary school teachers. "We like MITM, but if it means we are not able to bring the right people together, we might look at other models," she says.

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTERS

Jackson says she sees family resource centers, now in two of the seven community schools, as the natural place where the overlap between early-childhood and the community schools—and more attention to children's transition into school—can begin to take place. "A lot of that work is going to come," she says.

The resource centers already provide early-childhood services, such as home visiting and training for both parents and child-care providers. Jackson adds that one way to begin strengthening the ties between community schools and early learning would be to provide extended day services for preschoolers, especially if a family has an older child who could attend the after-school program. As is the case in many school districts, after-school programs often don't serve young children because of staffing limitations and the challenges of designing programs to meet the needs of a wide age range. But families often don't enroll even their older children in after-school classes because picking up children at different times in different places poses logistical and transportation problems. "We have to look at how we're serving families," Jackson says.

INCREASING CHALLENGES FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Even if the community schools increase their attention to early-childhood, that doesn't mean families within those local school boundaries will necessarily benefit. In Hartford, it is becoming increasingly common for children to attend kindergarten outside of their local school's attendance boundaries and even outside of the district, making efforts to smooth children's transition into school and connect educators more challenging.

"We have a challenge when it comes to looking at how we build a pre-k-to-third grade continuum because we don't have these nice, clean feeder systems," Crowell says. "It was easier when children went to their neighborhood schools, but right now we have children going all over the city and out into the suburbs."

The greater metropolitan region has seen an increase in magnet schools, related to the Sheff v. O'Neal civil rights case addressing inadequate educational opportunities for Hartford's children. The wider availability of magnet schools has created a competitive landscape with children being bussed to the suburbs to attend their school of choice. In fact, many parents don't even register their children for kindergarten in their local school because they are hoping to secure a spot in a magnet through a lottery process. But then if they are not assigned to a school, there is no guarantee there will still be space for them in their neighborhood school, Crowell explains. "This causes disruption for the neighborhood school because they don't know their whole roster," she says.

Community schools, Jackson adds, can also help to create for families a "sense of community outside of their community," by meeting family's needs for after-school learning opportunities, nutritional food, and health care.

These challenges, she adds, make it that much more important to work with both community-based providers and school districts across the region so that regardless of where children enter school, they will have access to high-quality "aligned educational experiences," Crowell says. "It's essential for all of us to be on the same page in regard to having access to good research."

MULTNOMAH COUNTY SUN SYSTEM

Sitting on the classroom rug, the boys make three-dimensional figures by snapping together PolyConstructo pieces—tools used as part of the Portland Public Schools' math curriculum.

"I made a bridge," announces one child, inspired by hearing that morning's story, "Three Billy Goats Gruff." The folk tale is the theme for this week's Early Kindergarten Transition (EKT) class at Whitman Elementary School in Portland—a three-week program designed to introduce incoming kindergarten students to teachers, classmates and the rhythm of the school day. The program targets children who haven't had a preschool experience, drawing primarily from Head Start waiting lists.

Meanwhile, as the children work on fine motor skills and practice writing their names, their parents gather in the library to get to know each other and talk more about what they can do to create learning experiences at home. The twice-a-week parent groups, which include translation for those who need it and child care for younger siblings, are considered an equally important part of EKT classes—not only because they give parents suggestions on how to foster early math and literacy skills, but also because they create opportunities for parents to build relationships with each other.

EKT is delivered as part of a partnership between the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Community Schools and six Multnomah County districts—Portland Public Schools, and the school districts of Centennial, David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose and Reynolds. The program has now expanded from two original sites in PPS to 32 sites across the county, with districts using general funds to support it. And PPS expects to add even more sites next year.

"The whole idea is to have your routines to be the way they would be on the first day of school," says Leslie O'Dell, the program director of funded programs for Portland Public Schools. When she was a principal at Jason Lee K-8, she would attend the parent meetings so the parents could ask her anything on their minds. And then once school actually started, the EKT parents were less anxious about the first day, some offered to volunteer and their children helped other classmates adjust.

"They are the leaders of the class," O'Dell says about the EKT students. "They are the role models."

In the David Douglas School District, EKT is also an opportunity for behavior specialists and speech pathologists to observe the students with special needs and determine what strategies might work well when the regular school year begins. Barbara Kienle, the director of student services and special education for the district, was able to use some special education funding to support their time.

The Multnomah County Library has made a strong commitment to the EKT program and in building awareness among parents about early learning through literacy. The library provides free books for the teachers to read in class as well as the books that the children get to take home with them. Just as important are the relationships being created between the families and the library staff, says Renea Arnold, an early childhood

specialist with the library system. "They feel like they know you, so they want to come in," she says.

At the EKT program for Shaver Elementary in the Parkrose School District, parents and children gathered in the school library for a story time provided by Barbara Head, a Midland branch librarian. The students sit attentively on the floor, as if they have been in school for months. EKT teacher Neressa Bennett suggests they simply put their hands on their heads to signal that they are familiar with Eric Carle's "A Very Hungry Caterpillar," instead of shouting out.

After the students return to class, Head continues to talk with the parents, signs them up for library cards and encourages them to take part in the final weeks of the summer reading program. She also demonstrates reading to young children and tells them not to worry about getting through every word on the page. "It's wonderful to engage your children in conversation about books," she says. "Give them some time to think."

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS TO KINDERGARTEN

The growth of EKT is just one of many changes involving SUN that focus on improving young children's readiness for kindergarten and strengthening the connections between schools and families—and between schools and early-childhood programs.

For example, teachers with Mt. Hood Community College's (MHCC) Head Start program have long provided information on EKT, but that was about the extent of their relationship with the schools where their students would be going. "Our teachers didn't even know what was expected in kindergarten," explains Traci Mitchell, Disabilities Manager of MHCC, which has 15 Head Start sites in the eastern part of the county. So to strengthen that connection, the MCHH Head Start teachers began visiting kindergarten classrooms last year to encourage more dialogue between the preschool and public school teachers.

Another important component is a campaign to register children for kindergarten by June 1. Posters, flyers and other materials are made available to organizations that work with young children and their parents. It was a campaign that Home Forward, Multnomah County's public housing agency, decided to begin supporting about two years ago.

"We know where our kids are," says Melissa Sonsalla, a project coordinator at Home Forward. "We will reach out if you give us the materials."

The agency gets registration and EKT information and then customizes it for individual districts and schools. In fact, taking on this task became a relatively easy and low-cost thing for the agency staff to do in public housing developments. Resident service workers—who work on community engagement and plan events such as taking children to the zoo—also inform residents of events at SUN community schools. Because low-income families can be transient, Sonsalla said she learned it's also important to follow-up with those that might have registered early, but then moved into another school attendance zone.

Instead of having to work with each individual school district, partners such as Home Forward can also now receive school attendance data from the Multnomah Educational Service District so they can determine where absenteeism is a problem.

EARLY LEARNING MULTNOMAH

At both the state and local levels, policy changes are also taking place in order to create a stronger infrastructure for early-childhood education and increase efforts among multiple partners to reach families that might be disconnected from early learning opportunities, especially those among immigrant and refugee communities.

A major development is Early Learning Multnomah (ELM)—one of six early learning "hubs" created by Oregon's Early Learning Council. The Council, with 18 members appointed by Gov. John Kitzhaber, was created by legislation in 2011 and is part of the governor's effort to better coordinate all of the services and programs that contribute to a young's child's early success in school, says Molly Day, early learning director at United Way of the Columbia–Willamette. The United Way, along with SUN, co-convene the ELM collaborative—a combination of providers, investors and parents.

The hubs are charged with identifying the young children in their area that need the most help, connecting families with services that can meet their needs and working across traditional boundaries between programs.

Day recalls that Kitzhaber urged various public agencies to learn how to collaborate "so that if a child is coming to a WIC clinic you're thinking about how I'm getting them ready for kindergarten. You need to know what school they are going to attend and how to help get them there."

Two existing initiatives have been wrapped into what is now ELM. The first was the Linkages Project—a grant from IEL's Coalition for Community Schools to SUN. In fact, even though Linkages was only a three-year initiative, leaders here continue to talk about how effective the project was for raising the issue of transition for young children and for bringing together those who had not previously been communicating. The second network that is now part of ELM was the Ready for Kindergarten Collaborative, organized by All Hands Raised—a business- and government-led effort to improve outcomes for youth from "cradle to career." Three advisory councils are also part of the ELM structure in order to have representation and input from parents, early-learning providers and investors.

As part of the transition into ELM, a "stakeholder gathering" was held involving Hedy N. Chang, one of the authors of a 2008 report that drew attention to the problem of chronic absenteeism in the early grades. Chang is also director of Attendance Works, an initiative that works with states to raise awareness of the importance of attendance and work toward solutions. The event brought together staff from Head Start, other early learning programs, child-care providers, community-based organizations, community school staff and others investing in early-childhood work.

SUN is also co-convening a second collaborative for All Hands Raised called Communities Supporting Youth. This partnership focuses on increasing attendance rates—a priority that grew out of the emphasis placed on chronic absenteeism in the early grades as part of the Linkages Project.

All Hands Raised and SUN Community Schools first collaborated to implement the Ninth Grade Counts initiative—a summer learning program for rising high school freshman who are at risk for dropping out. At the time, SUN leaders had questions about how their system would align with the Cradle-to-Career Partnership. They didn't want SUN to be viewed as only a network of after-school program providers, but instead a primary vehicle and strategy for transforming the way services are delivered from birth through students' transition into college. With SUN now taking a leading role in ELM and Communities Supporting Youth, that uncertainty has been replaced with greater clarity around how SUN and All Hands Raised are supporting each other's goals.

"The core implementation of our work is happening in these [SUN] schools," says Nate Waas Shull, the vice president for partnerships at All Hands Raised.

KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT

Another significant change on the state level is the creation of a new kindergarten assessment, which was

implemented for the first time in the fall of 2013. According to the Oregon Early Learning System website: "The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment will provide parents, teachers, and early childhood providers with a common understanding of what children know and are able to do upon entering school. The common statewide assessment will also provide a statewide perspective that will allow us to track trends and progress over time."

Waas Shull says that the assessment—which takes about 15 minutes and covers early literacy, math and approaches to learning—will only provide schools with a snapshot of young children's readiness. But at least it will allow for comparisons between different groups of children to inform policy and practice.

"It does not cover the breadth of what it means to be school ready," adds May Cha, who led the Linkages Project for SUN and is now transitioning to a position with ELM. She added that the assessment is to be used as a "planning tool."

Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, the state will also begin funding full-day kindergarten. For the few schools and districts that were already paying for full-day, this could mean that they can now shift that money to other areas, such as early-childhood programs.

CREATING MODEL PROGRAMS

Across all six districts, a variety of initiatives are showing how community schools can provide early learning experiences as well as other services that improve the lives of children and families. For example, prior to the creation of ELM, the Ready for Kindergarten Collaborative identified eight demonstration schools in the six districts—all of them SUN Community Schools—in which to try out some practices that can improve young children's transition into school.

One practice that has emerged from the demonstration sites is the creation of a detailed timeline of activities that can begin six months prior to the start of kindergarten and stretch into the first 90 days after the school year begins. At the beginning of the timeline are activities such as sending registration flyers home with older siblings and the EKT program. Once the school year begins, activities include teachers visiting incoming kindergarteners at their homes and providing a few kindergarten-only events for families. Recommendations and specific examples for how to implement the EKT program have also been compiled into a comprehensive Early Kindergarten and Transition Program Toolkit. The Reynolds School District, for example, has provided training to all of its kindergarten teachers on the toolkit, and Waas Shull says ideally, all districts would do that.

At Highland Elementary School in the Gresham-Barlow School District, the home visits are simple—the teachers just drop by and leave a postcard if no one is home. But the effort helps make the statement to families that "we're in this together," says kindergarten teacher Kammy Breyer.

"For the parents, we always ask them and expect them to come to school," she says. "I think it's important to say, 'Hey, I'm willing to come to you.' "

Staggered starting days for kindergarten students are also being used at several schools to make the first week seem less overwhelming for everyone involved. At Highland, for example—where school started the day after Labor Day—Breyer's class was divided into four groups, with each group coming just for one day that first week. She reads stories and does other activities with each small group, as well as showing them the procedures, such as how to get lunch. Meanwhile parents gather with the principal and the counselor for a welcoming meeting. During the small group activities, she also conducts the new assessment "as low key as possible," she says.

Holding more than one orientation for kindergarten families, with one maybe being a fun, interactive event is another strategy being tried in PPS. "Transition

is really important," says Nancy Hauth, a program manager for PPS. "The work we do up front is going to make all the difference."

Data on the impact of these practices is being collected by All Hands Raised to inform how and whether they will be rolled out across the six districts.

Another set of six demonstration sites—four of which overlap with the kindergarten transition sites—are focusing on improving attendance rates across all grade levels, even though it was the data on early chronic absenteeism that created the momentum around the issue. Strategies being implemented in the demonstration sites range from a friendly phone call to the family if a child is absent to home visits and referrals to health or social services if the situation is more serious. Since implementation began in the 2012-13 school year in the David Douglas School District, the percentage of students who are not consistently attending school has declined in every grade level.

In the fall of 2014, through a partnership with the Department of Human Services, six case managers were also placed in the demonstration sites to work specifically on attendance issues and address problem areas that keep students from getting to school.

The state is also supporting some pilot projects to learn more about practices that could spread more broadly across the state. Shortly after ELM became the hub, it received a $523,000 grant from the Oregon Department of Education that will allow it to try out even more strategies on the ground to strengthen support for young children entering school. Some of the funds will be used for transition efforts at two of eight demonstration sites.

Another portion of the funding will be used to deliver joint professional development in early childhood Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) for both kindergarten and preschool teachers, including family child-care providers. The training will be delivered to two cohorts—one in PPS and one in the eastern part of the county, drawing from Lynch Wood Elementary in the Centennial district and Glenfair Elementary in the Reynolds district. PBIS focuses on establishing universal expectations for all children and providing more intensive support for those with "challenging behaviors." In the early years, secure and positive relationships between adults and children are emphasized.

Finally, the funds will be used to employee 10-12 people as "community education workers" in the same two areas as the early-childhood PBIS programs. These workers will focus on reaching families with children who are the least likely to be involved in any early learning programs, including children of color, English learners and children from low-income families. The program will be based on the "community health worker" model. These employees will be community health workers who receive additional training in early childhood education. They will also be supervised by culturally specific organizations that are already known among families, such as the Latino Network, the Urban League of Portland in partnership with Self Enhancement Inc., and the Native American Youth and Family Center. Additional cultural communities will be added during the second year of the project.

The community education workers will organize parent-child activities, seek to establish networks of parents for social support and make sure children's immunizations are up to date. They'll also work with SUN staff members to get isolated families connected to schools and refer families to other community services if needed. In the first year, it is expected that the community education workers will reach 115 families.

EARL BOYLES ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Earl Boyles Elementary School—a SUN school in the David Douglas district—is another site that is being closely watched for lessons on how to provide early learning services and create a sense of community

among families. As part of the Portland-based Children's Institute's Early Works initiative, the school has onsite preschool classrooms using Title I, Head Start and early childhood special education funds—a significant development in a state that doesn't have a lot of school-based preschool classrooms. A new "early childhood wing" at the school, built with district bond money, will have observation rooms for researchers or teachers in training as well as a lending library of children's books run by parents and supported by the Multnomah County Library.

Lessons are also being learned from the school's participation in Mind in the Making (MITM). In Multnomah County, parents and educators participated side by side in the lessons on the brain research that undergirds the MITM program. And the teachers learned how to "engage parents respectfully," says Andreina Velasco, the Early Works site liaison at Earl Boyles. "You don't have to water things down."

> **"This is a real poor district, but they have shifted their priorities. It's not impossible if you prioritize. You don't have to build a beautiful building to change the culture." —**
> **ANDREINA VELASCO,**
> **Early Works Site Liaison, Earl Boyle Elementary School**

The workshops also served as a bridge to other leadership roles for the parents. Some are now helping to conduct interviews for a community health assessment, which will be used to determine the health needs of the community. Velasco says that even though the school is held up as a demonstration site, the will to provide early learning programs and family services should inspire other schools and districts.

"This is a real poor district, but they have shifted their priorities. It's not impossible if you prioritize," she says, adding that it is the relationship between the families and the school that is the real model. "You don't have to build a beautiful building to change the culture."

She mentions a situation that occurred recently as an example of the trust that has been established between the school and the parent community. A mother, who had participated in MITM, brought her child to the EKT class, but the child was crying and refusing to enter the building. The EKT staff had to ask the mother to leave so they could settle the child down.

"She agreed to leave," says Meghan Gabriel, the SUN site manager at Earl Boyles. "The strong bond of having eight months of relationship removed that barrier."

Earl Boyles is also a strong example, in general, of an effective SUN community school. Gabriel, who works for lead agency Metropolitan Family Service, takes part regularly in at least seven school committees so she is fully aware of what is happening with students, their families and the district.

"It's a lot of work, but I think it's a huge part of our success," she says.

In PPS, another new model for serving young children is taking shape at the new Clarendon Regional Early Learning Center. Housed in a former elementary school designed in a '70s "pod" style, the center is the result of the work of several partners—PPS, Albina Early Head Start, the Oregon Community Foundation, Indian Education, Neighborhood House and the PPS Teen Parent Program. The center will provide pre-K classrooms through a mixture of Head Start and other funds. A "community space" will be available where family child-care providers in the community can gather to take advantage of resources or special events. The site is also a SUN community school with a site coordinator from Neighborhood

House, a social services organization that is one of the lead agencies SUN works with to hire site managers.

FOSTERING PARENT LEADERSHIP

The MITM training was delivered to 25 facilitators, representing different areas of expertise, including early-childhood programs, public schools, nonprofit organizations and higher education. In addition to the Earl Boyles group, four more cohorts participated in the full, eight-month program. Cha agrees that bringing teachers and parents together to learn is an effective strategy for building partnerships and is a lesson for other community school initiatives, even if they don't have MITM. "You can do that with so many other things," she says. "We should be looking at different ways to do that."

Throughout the SUN system, additional efforts to move from parent involvement and outreach to partnership and leadership are increasing. Helen Venk, SUN site manager for Shaver Elementary in the Parkrose School District, says that to her, partnership means acknowledging what seems to interest parents and then letting them run with it. For example, Claudia Carrillo, whose youngest daughter was in the EKT program this summer, was always willing to serve food at events. So when Shaver began offering a food pantry, Carrillo found her niche. She co-leads the Shaver Parent-Faculty Association, and she even helped secure a grant from East Portland Action Plan for nutrition classes.

Many EKT programs offer parent groups in more than one language, including Spanish and Vietnamese. Cha says it has also been important to make sure high-quality child care is provided during the parent meetings. Not only does the child care make it easier for the parents to attend, but it is also a way to get those younger children "connected to the school" they'll be attending in a few years.

One challenge is that parent attendance to the meetings is inconsistent, which can keep the parents from reaping some of the benefits of the program in terms of building friendships with other parents. But Cha says SUN and ELM leaders recognize that the group format doesn't work for everyone, and that other strategies, such as the home visits or family events, should also be considered as part of a range of opportunities for parents to get involved in their children's school.

Careful attention has also been played to seeking parent input as part of ELM and to making sure the parent voices are heard as much as those from the provider community and the investors, says Day with ELM. The parent advisory council draws from parent leadership teams at four community-based organizations representing six populations—African, Russian, Asian, Native American, Latino and African American. The four organizations have received grants to provide staff support for the leadership teams, and two representatives from each team are serving on the parent council, which meets monthly with translation provided. The parent leadership teams also get together at least quarterly so the council members can serve as liaisons between the teams and the council.

Going forward, Day expects the parent council to play an important role in reaching out to other populations and to make sure parents' concerns and experiences are understood. "We can envision the parent council traveling to meet other parent groups, such as Head Start policy councils, to broaden the parent voice into all cultural groups," she says.

RESEARCH FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Parent perspectives, as well as their participation in EKT parent groups, have also been part of a research effort at Portland State University (PSU) to better understand how the EKT program is being implemented and how it can be improved.

With a faculty enhancement grant, Associate Professor Andrew Mashburn, a developmental psychologist whose work focuses on early learning and school readiness, has been leading a feasibility study to determine the best way to design a randomized controlled trial of EKT. While that question has not yet been answered, this initial process, which began in 2012, has still provided a rich amount of information and recommendations on how to strengthen the program. Examples of the recommendations from 2012 and 2013 include:

- Host an orientation meeting for families to clarify expectations for parents' participation, complete paperwork, and build trust and relationships with program administrators, implementation, and school staff.
- Provide opportunities for parents to observe their child in the kindergarten classroom.
- Include parents who attended EKT during prior years as assistants in the kindergarten classrooms and as facilitators/interpreters in the parent education meetings.
- Include opportunities for formal and informal interactions between parents and kindergarten teachers.

Students working with Mashburn have also conducted a study of the implementation of EKT and have found wide variation in how children and parents experience the program. At one end of the spectrum, children are attending EKT classes in an actual kindergarten classroom with their future kindergarten teacher and in the exact school where they will be enrolled. But at the other end, children are in classrooms that weren't designed for kindergarten, with teachers who might work in another grade, and at schools they won't actually be attending in the fall. With school construction and repair work typically taking place over the summer, those situations can't be avoided. Such was the case in 2014 for the EKT programs at both Shaver and Earl Boyles.

Schools with EKT programs have also experienced turnover among principals, and sometimes, new principals begin without a strong awareness of the program and how it can benefit children in kindergarten. In PPS, Nancy holds a training day for the EKT staff and meets with school leaders to encourage "full buy-in."

To her, EKT is much more than just a summer learning opportunity and "should be part of a counselor's guidebook on how to engage new families," she says. "I don't want EKT to be just another 'siloed' piece."

SUN leaders have been very receptive to the recommendations and view the PSU team "as a partner," Mashburn says. Improvements to the program have also been made based on the team's findings, such as adding extra staff.

But in addition to improving the transition experience for Multnomah County's rising kindergarteners, PSU's work can also be used to encourage and improve similar efforts across the country. Many other communities have tried summer transition programs simply because they make sense, but having data on which practices work best can strengthen the case that schools can do more to make those first weeks of school run smoother for both the children and the teachers.

Breyer, at Highland, recalls for example an incoming kindergarten girl who "cried for three weeks" during EKT. But then on the first day there were just a few sniffles "and she was good to go. It makes my job so much easier" Breyer says. Without EKT, those kinds of separation issues might drag into the first month of school, she adds.

GROWTH OF THE SUN SYSTEM

The expansion and improvement of early-childhood services as part of SUN community schools is also occurring alongside growth in the system as a whole. With the beginning of the 2014-15 school year, the number of SUN schools will reach 80, an increase of

10 over the previous school year. With the added sites, SUN will also now be in place in over half of the 143 schools in the county.

In spite of a budget outlook in which funding for SUN was actually at risk, the county renewed its commitment to the system, allowing the growth to occur. Community schools are supported by a mix of funds from the city, the county, the school districts, and just within the city limits, the Portland Children's Levy. While there is strong political support for SUN, leaders of the system still work to make the case that community schools are much more than after-school programs. As part of the budget process, the Coordinating Council—the governing body that oversees the SUN Service System—examined the actual breakdown of services and activities provided through SUN schools. The data showed that the work of community schools is evenly split between social services, academic support and recreational activities.

In 2014, SUN leaders also implemented a change for the incoming site managers at the 10 new SUN community schools. Instead of having them jump right away into organizing after-school programs in the fall, SUN instead wanted them to spend the fall months holding community meetings and learning more about what the community needs and wants at the schools.

"We don't want the whole focus being after-school," says Diana Hall, program supervisor for SUN Community Schools.

In addition to making sure principals understand and support the EKT program, SUN leaders also continue to work with principals on how they view community schools and integrate site managers into all aspects of the school.

"We tell principals what we like to have happen," Hall says. "The sites that do the best have site managers involved at an administrative level." This access for site managers creates stronger alignment between the academic goals and auxiliary programs and services at the school, she says.

Another change involving afterschool programs involves the participation of kindergarteners. Up until recently, most after-school activities were only open to children who were at least in first grade. This is typical of many after-school programs because there are not enough staff members for younger children and because it can be difficult to design programs that meet the needs of both younger and older elementary-age students.

But some SUN community schools are beginning to allow kindergarten students to take part in afterschool programs. This is due in part to requests from parents, as well as the belief that some students could benefit from the extra academic help provided through the SUN program, Cha says.

ATTENTION TO EQUITY

The SUN Service System has always worked to target its programs to Multnomah County's increasingly diverse population, especially to the immigrant and refugee communities who have settled in the region over the past several years.

For example, the Parent-Child Development Services (PCDS) program—which includes both playgroups and home visits using the Parents as Teachers model—is delivered to culturally specific groups including Asians-Pacific Islanders and African immigrants. "We don't even have to call parents; they just come," says Chau Huynh, who is coordinating the ELM parent advisory council and works as a parent advocate at Portland's Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, one of SUN's lead agencies.

The groups have been important vehicles for informing parents about the EKT program, says Huynh. The Parents as Teachers curriculum, which focuses on parents' role in their children's learning, was also recently adapted to focus on children up to age 6. This

will allow the families to receive additional support as their children enter public school.

SUN is also now applying a more analytical approach to determining whether its programs are serving the diverse mix of families they should by using an "equity and empowerment lens" developed by the county. The tool asks probing questions about who benefits from services and whether the concerns and voices of all racial and ethnic groups are included. Schools in the county had been ranked based on free- and reduced-price-lunch rates. Now race is being added to that index as well.

One visible change that would improve equity would be more diversity among the SUN site managers, suggests Pam Richardson, a PCDS supervisor and parent educator at IRCO.

"They need to hire site managers that understand the kids," she says, adding that a bachelor's degree and understanding the culture of the families could possibly substitute for SUN's requirement that site managers have a master's degree. A call for "cultural competency" is also being expressed by the Portland Parent Union, one of the first parent unions in the country. The organization pushes for "restorative" practices, advocates against discipline policies that push students—particularly African-American students—out of schools and represents parents at meetings with school officials. Founder Sheila Warren is a strong supporter of the SUN system, but she believes the staff should represent the students they are trying to help.

The Portland Parent Union is also working to raise awareness among educators about ways to support young African-American children in school. In fact many of the suspension hearings the union participates in involve children in the early grades, and even Head Start. The union began a process of holding "listening dialogue" sessions in which parents and educators come together to discuss race and personal stories. "We're trying to emphasize that the listening is just as important as the dialogue," Warren says.

She adds that SUN leaders are working in partnership with the union. "They understand that they need the parents' voice and they need people of color's voice," she says.

Hall agrees that increasing diversity throughout the SUN system is a goal. "Ensuring that the folks hired by the SUN lead agencies (both site managers, part-time staff and volunteers) reflect the communities served is a priority and an area where we anticipate applying the equity and empowerment lens," Hall says.

In addition, All Hands Raised is convening another collaborative called Eliminating Disparities in which the superintendents of the school districts meet regularly with leaders of local cultural organizations to discuss issues such as equity in hiring practices and disproportionate use of discipline.

WHAT A SCHOOL SHOULD BE

Whether it's at the local school level or among Multnomah County's education and government leaders, there continues to be a growing sense of awareness that community schools are an effective way to get children and families connected to education and other services. SUN leaders, together with All Hands Raised, also have a well-thought-out and data-informed plan for how to learn from pilot efforts at the local level and spread those practices across the system and even broader.

Breyer, who has been teaching in the Gresham-Barlow district for 16 years, says she has seen "a total shift in community involvement in her school," mentioning the donations of clothing and boxes of food as examples of how the families have pulled together to help each other. "I just feel like it's a place where people, if they need assistance, we can help them," she says. "It's what I believe a school should be."

PROVIDENCE, R.I.

When Dr. Gara B. Field arrived as the new principal of Pleasant View Elementary School in 2011, the school was far from the welcoming, energetic learning environment it is today.

Some teachers didn't even know the names of other faculty members. It was like "people lived on their own islands," Field says. Student performance was dismal, with only 17 percent of third graders testing proficient in math. But now the school is receiving national attention because achievement has been on a steady upswing and the school has met all of its student performance targets for two years in a row.

"Our data is up there with typical schools," Field says. And the gap is closing between students with Individual Education Programs (IEP) and those without. But the increase in test scores is just one example of how the culture at Pleasant View has changed. The school recently held its first Homework Diner—a dinnertime gathering of students, teachers and parents. Thirty families attended along with some of the school's prekindergarten teachers, many of which would not have participated in school events in the past. Now, Field says, "They show up and do things because they are part of a community they care about."

Implementing a full-service community school model is one of the factors contributing to the school's transformation. Multiple partners are working together to improve the lives of both students and their parents. As the full-services community school site director at Pleasant View and an employee of the YMCA of Greater Providence, Ashley Hogan works to coordinate out-of-school and support services for students and families and to connect those services to the classroom.

It's a model that Superintendent Dr. Susan F. Lusi would like to see in place across all of the district's schools. "I really do think schools could and probably should be a hub for the community," she says. "We've gotten better, but we're not there yet."

The number of community schools in Providence has actually dropped from seven to four because the federal Full-Service Community School grant the district received in 2008 has expired. This has resulted in a decrease in funding for community schools, from about $1.53 million for the 2013-14 school year to about $1.2. But in spite of the drop in schools and funding, there is a stronger focus on how partners can work in alignment with schools to improve outcomes for students and families.

When Lusi previously worked in the district as chief of staff, schools had "lots of little contracts" with outside providers, she says, but the district lacked clear guidelines on "who was in the schools" or how their programs connected to teaching and learning. Now, with the district taking more of a leadership role as a funder and a partner in community schools, there is a framework for creating partnerships around common goals.

In addition to the YMCA, which also hires site directors for Fortes Elementary and Bailey Elementary schools, other major community school partners in Providence include Dorcas International Institute of

Rhode Island, a family literacy organization, Family Service of Rhode Island, which provides a range of intervention and counseling services, and Capital Good Fund, which focuses on empowering low-income families through financial education and services. Family Service also has a leadership role with community schools, serving as the intermediary organization. Victor Arias of Family Service, works as the community schools project director and provides support to the site directors and helps manage data on outcomes among students being served by community school programs. The site directors meet as a team regularly and "learn from each other," Arias says.

THE VIEW AT PLEASANT VIEW

Another part of the full-service team at Pleasant View is Ariel Castillo, a family care coordinator for Family Service who provides case management and mental health intervention for students both in and outside of school. Teachers refer students to Castillo if they think students might be struggling emotionally or experiencing a crisis in their family.

The school is also part of City Year, a national organization working to provide additional tutoring and mentoring services to students in low-income communities. Six AmeriCorps members work in third through fifth grades to provide behavior and academic support and identify any issues that might be contributing to absenteeism.

In a classroom around the corner from the main office, adults are discussing a piece of text as part of a family literacy course held by Dorcas International. The class meets three mornings a week with breaks for "parent-and-child time" in which the parents spend time in their child's classroom.

The school is creating a garden in partnership with Farm Fresh Rhode Island—a project closely tied to Hogan's background in sustainable food production and urban farming. She envisions the garden as a place where parents will be able to gather to work together. And just as the parents in the family literacy class go into their children's classroom, the children would get to work alongside their parents in the garden. Pleasant View parents also want to start a "spirit store" to help raise money for the school.

Because the school houses many of the district's prekindergarten students, Pleasant View is also the site that demonstrates how preschool children benefit when they attend a community school.

"I think the parents have a lot more support," says Mindy Mertz, the district's prekindergarten manager. If a pre-K child or family has a need, they are referred to Hogan or someone else that is part of the full-service team. "There is a lot of great follow-through," Mertz adds. "If you say, 'Someone from full-service is going to call you,' it happens."

The school district has 34 pre-K classes, which serve either all special education students or are integrated with both special education students and typical-developing children who are "peer models" chosen through an application and lottery process. Pre-K classes are also located in five other district schools—Leviton, West Broadway, Gregorian, King, and Lauro.

Mertz also oversees outreach screening services in local child-care centers to help identify children who need early-intervention. But even with that advance planning, and with centers referring children to the program, many still show up on the first day of school. She would like to see Pleasant View modernized or find a location that could be developed into an early learning center, but right now that is just a wish.

As is the case in many cities, however, just because they attend Pleasant View or another pre-K site for preschool doesn't mean they will remain there for kindergarten. This reality makes it difficult for schools and teachers to implement practices that might help better prepare children for their transition into kindergarten. Currently, "every school does their own

thing," such as giving students a chance to meet their teacher over the summer, Mertz said.

Demonstrating how community schools can help improve the transition process into kindergarten for young children, the staff from all four schools collaborated in 2014 to run a summer program for 40 incoming kindergarteners at Bailey Elementary. The Providence Children and Youth Cabinet (CYC) and its Grade-Level Reading workgroup, described below, also supported the effort.

"We found that almost none of [the children] had had early-childhood," says Marissa DelBarone, the site director at Bailey. The four-week program met for four days a week. Children spent time with a Bailey teacher on skills such as letter, color and number recognition, writing their names and general classroom expectations, and partner organizations provided enrichment in the afternoon. All of the students made gains on an assessment, and in August when school started, the children who had participated were already mastering standards that would be taught in October, DelBarone says, adding that the students' social skills also improved and they became leaders in their classrooms. Because the community school partners were involved, they were able to identify families that might need additional services.

Another effort to strengthen connections between early-education providers and schools has been led by Ready to Learn Providence (R2LP), a nonprofit organization that provides professional development and other programs to improve early-childhood education in the city. R2LP developed a "Child Information Sheet" that was designed to "create a dialogue," says director Leslie Gell. While it sounds like a simple concept, the process took over a year to complete because it was difficult to get buy-in from both providers and schools at the same time. Superintendent turnover in the Providence Public Schools—six superintendents since 2002—also contributed to many stops and starts. "We would get some traction, and then there would be a leadership change," Gell says. Mertz adds that even with the form, sometimes teachers don't even want to look at it and prefer to make their own judgments about incoming students.

One service that pre-K students in Providence aren't able to benefit from is after-school programs, which, as in many districts, is due to staffing limitations and the challenges of designing extended learning programs for both younger and older children. Mertz says she tried to tap into Title I funds to "start small," but indicated that the idea was not well received by district leaders and that Title I funds are used primarily for remedial programs.

HOPES OF EXPANSION

Even though Mertz says "there's no more room at the inn" for preschoolers at Pleasant View or any other school in the district, she's still thinking about how to accommodate more.

Rhode Island was one of the first states to receive a Race to the Top -Early Learning Challenge grant in 2011. The state received $50 million to improve access to high-quality early-learning experiences for low-income children, but most of those funds were directed toward system-level improvements. The state has also applied for a federal Preschool Development Grant, which could provide up to $40 million over four years to add slots for low-income children in high-quality programs. If the state receives the award, it's likely that some of the classrooms would be located in public schools. That's why, Mertz says, planning for classroom space would need to start immediately.

PROVIDENCE'S MIND IN THE MAKING STRATEGY

As the community school model was growing in Providence with the help of the federal Full-Service Community School grant funds, R2LP was simultaneously beginning to train local early-childhood providers and other professionals in Mind in the Making.

As one of the early MITM pilot sites, R2LP trained over 800 people, focusing on the early-childhood education workforce. Then in partnership with the school district, R2LP worked with Rebecca Boxx, who at the time was the district's full-service community schools' director, applied to become one of several community school initiatives in the MITM-Community Schools Project. Since 2013, close to 60 facilitators have been through the training, which is typically offered over an eight-week period.

Providence's MITM plan, however, is far more extensive than training facilitators. As Carrie Feliz, who replaced Boxx as the district's director of strategic community partnerships, describes it, the goal is to "saturate the city" with MITM. With a new $3 million Investing in Innovation (I3) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, awarded to both R2LP and the district, the plan is to deliver the training to almost 2,000 people in 21 schools. Partnering with the school district also allows R2LP to expand its work beyond the early years to the full 0-8 age range.

R2LP will try to hit that target in multiple ways. First, four "family ambassadors" have been hired—three by R2LP and one by the district—to recruit parents for MITM training, especially those whose children have not previously been in an early-childhood program. They are sharing space in the schools used by parent organizations, and the plan, says Yeimy Bakemon-Morel, one of the ambassadors, is to advertise the opportunity by "having a presence in every event that involves parents."

Dasiel Rondon, another ambassador, says most parents she meets think she works for the school. But she and Bakemon-Morel explain that they are parents and then talk about "how the [MITM] skills help the children," Rondon says.

An additional four AmeriCorps members are also working on the project. They'll work in schools, often alongside the community school site directors, to promote MITM and facilitate the training sessions, which includes organizing meals and child care in order to make it easier for parents to attend.

Parents in the family literacy classes run by Dorcas International are also referred to the program. And other partners in the schools, most who have been trained already, refer parents to the classes. "It's a learning experience," says Castillo, the family care coordinator at Pleasant View. "I encourage all my families to take it."

Probably the most creative approach for bringing MITM to parents came about through a partnership between R2LP and the district's registration office—a one-story building on the south side of Providence that Gell describes as about as inviting "as the DMV." Rows of plastic chairs fill the waiting room—a place where parents and young children can spend long periods of time waiting to turn in their registration forms—particularly during January and February when the district encourages all new families with children entering kindergarten to register. As with any waiting room, parents can sometimes get impatient and angry, and children can get fussy. So a small area was set up in the back of the room where R2LP staff could talk to parents about MITM, read to children, and make the whole experience more pleasant.

"The Ready to Learn folks were really soothing," says Jose Gonzales, the director of the student registration and placement center. "We don't have the staff to explain to parents why they are waiting."

In addition to recruiting parents for MITM, R2LP staff would also answer any questions they could about the registration process, such as whether a parent needed a different form or was standing in the wrong line. They would also help explain instructions for some parents that might have low literacy skills. Just through the registration office in 2014, 150 families were enrolled in the MITM course. Under the I3 grant, the goal is to reach 600 families.

"It was a great example of how we worked together with the district," Gell says.

The plan for the I3 grant also includes providing the MITM modules to kindergarten teachers, which would help to create a common language among families and educators around school readiness. In fact Gell says R2LP would now like to "resurrect" the use of the "Child Information Sheet," but target it instead to families and focus it on the MITM essential skills—further integrating the training and the message into the community.

R2L is also a managing partner of the Center for Early Childhood Professionals, which provides professional development and technical assistance to providers as part of the Early Learning Challenge grant. The Center was scheduled to hold a full-day conference on MITM for the early-childhood education community in December and to begin training providers in January, creating another avenue through which those working with young children can become aware of the essential skills and learn strategies for supporting those skills in the classroom.

THE CHILDREN & YOUTH CABINET

Growing alongside the school district's effort to expand community schools has been a "collective impact" initiative at the CYC. The cabinet began in Mayor David Cicilline's office in 2010, grew under Mayor Angel Taveras, and now is housed within Brown University. The CYC's "cradle to career" approach has five working groups, three of which focus on young children—Grade-Level Reading, Evidence2Success, and attendance, which, of course, applies to all age groups.

Like other organizations that are part of the Strive Network, the CYC is focused on bringing community leaders and organizations together as part of an infrastructure to make progress on a range of indicators, from birth through the transition into college or a career.

"We don't lack for resources," Boxx says. "It's about making it all come together to show impact for kids and families."

In some communities, tension has formed over how community schools fit as part of the cradle-to-career strategy. But that's not the case here. Boxx, the director of the CYC was the full-service community school director in the district and brought that mindset with her to the cabinet. In fact, she says, community school partners played a major role in the early work of the cabinet on improving reading. "The idea of wrap-around support is in every one of those plans," she says about the CYC's agenda. "I wish we could get it stronger."

A significant focus for the Grade-Level Reading workgroup is increasing access to high-quality early-childhood programs, signified by a center's participation in BrightStars, the state's quality rating and improvement system (QRIS). Similar to ratings from the health department for restaurants, these systems are designed to give parents a way to identify the features of higher-quality programs, such as teachers with formal education and a well-planned curriculum. These systems also give providers access to resources and technical assistance to improve their programs.

BrightStars applies to both center-based programs and family child-care homes, and as part of the Early Learning Challenge Grant, all providers serving low-income children or receiving any government funds must now participate in the system.

One of the unintended consequences of that requirement, however, is that fewer family child-care providers are becoming licensed. In fact, in recent years, the number across the state has dropped from 1,200 to just over 500, Gell says, adding that children in unregulated settings are harder to reach for screening services. And those providers would miss out on training opportunities, such as MITM and other professional development programs.

The goals of the Grade-Level Reading workgroup are also closely tied to addressing the risk factors that keep children from having a successful start in school. "When you peel back and you peel back, you see the underlying issues," such as chronic absenteeism in the early grades, asthma, and exposure to lead, Boxx says.

These issues were explored in detail with a survey conducted in the South Providence/Elmwood and West End areas. The Childhood Experience Survey was given to almost 1,600 parents of children from birth through age 8, and covered the five topic areas of positive relationships, behavior, education, emotional wellbeing and physical health. The results showed particular areas of need in the community, such as 20 percent of incoming kindergarteners with elevated lead levels and 19 percent of children ending up in the emergency room because of asthma. The survey also highlighted needs in the area of poor family management and emotional and behavior challenges.

The goal of the Evidence2Success workgroup is to implement evidence-based programs to address major areas of need among young children. Evidence2Success is based on a framework developed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in partnership with the Social Development Research Group at the Social Research Unit at Dartington in England. The school district, the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families, and the Rhode Island Department of Health are each providing funding to deliver proven programs in target neighborhoods. The Nurse-Family Partnership, a maternal and early-child health program, will focus on new mothers with infants and toddlers.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The Incredible Years, a social-emotional learning program for parents and children that has been shown to reduce challenging behaviors, has been chosen as the strategy for both preschoolers and elementary students. Positive Action, which encourages positive thoughts, feelings and actions, will also be implemented at the elementary level.

To bring Incredible Years training to parents and early-childhood education providers in the community, the CYC is partnering with the Providence Center, a mental health agency that also offers a preschool program for children in need of additional behavior and social-emotional support. Head Start teachers and 250 Head Start parents have already participated in the training, and an Incredible Years parenting group was formed at Beautiful Beginnings Child Care Center, located in the Elmwood area and one of only three state pre-K sites in the city. The families met for two-hour sessions over 14 weeks and continue to receive ongoing support through a "graduates group."

Now Providence Center would like to form a partnership with an elementary school to offer a similar group. "It would not be hard to mobilize," says Bryna Hebert, the manager of the Providence Center's Early Childhood Institute. "I passionately believe it can change our population." She adds that Incredible Years is a solution for young children who just need some additional support to have a successful start in a classroom environment.

"There is a whole gray area of kids who don't have enough of a disability to warrant a special education slot, but they still need more help to be ready for school," Hebert says.

One idea has been to recruit parents for Incredible Years at schools that are not targeted for the first round of MITM training. The school that Hebert wants to partner with is Fogarty Elementary School, which is no longer a community school—in part because of turnover in the principal's office—but still has a Family Service care coordinator because of the needs of the school's population. Having an Incredible Years group would be a way to keep parents engaged. Ideally, a program there would create a model for how Providence Center could partner with schools, which

Hebert described as "where people go everyday and where you can turnaround a city."

CONNECTIONS THAT ADDRESS OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Hebert works with Mertz, when possible, to pass on information about children in her program that might be helpful to teachers when the students enter pre-K or kindergarten. The district's outreach team will also observe children in the Providence Center program.

Rhode Island has also been a site for Project LAUNCH, which stands for Linking Actions for Unmet Needs in Children's Health. A federal grant program from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, LAUNCH integrates developmental and behavioral screening into primary care offices and allows providers to bill health insurance for evidence-based programs, including Incredible Years. "We're trying to get creative to move money around to do things that we know work," Hebert says.

Play and Learn—a service of Dorcas International—is another program in which parents learn how to support their preschool child's development and readiness for school. The two-hour sessions include free play, a circle time, an activity, and a "literacy bag" for parents and children to take home. The classes, which meet two to three times a week, give parents a chance to connect with other parents. The participants also receive a "parent education profile," which identifies what they might want to work on with their children. Erika Torres, who has participated in the program with three children, says in Spanish that her children learned songs and how to interact with other children. When her son started kindergarten, she thought he was going to cry, but he didn't, which she attributes to his time in Play and Learn.

Originally held in all of the community school sites, the groups also gave the families an opportunity to become comfortable in the school. The largest and most committed group was located at Lillian Feinstein Elementary School at Sackett Street. In fact, when Dorcas International had a drop in funding and considered eliminating that group, the parents wrote letters and lobbied to keep it going.

"They did exactly what you want parents to do," says Feliz. "I was impressed."

Julie Piccolo, the director of employment at Dorcas and a former community school site director at Sackett, says one advantage of having the groups meet in the community schools was that the parents became leaders in that school. Another benefit was that principals could engage with parents in that community. Play and Learn is no longer based in the schools, which was a decision made by Dorcas International as it was re-evaluating its mission as a family literacy program that merged with an immigrant and refugee resettlement organization. In spite of the move, however, Piccolo says the Play and Learn staff developed connections with other early-childhood partners in Providence and can call on that network to benefit families.

While in office, Mayor Taveras also continued to make early-childhood development a priority with Providence Talks, a $5 million initiative funded by the Bloomberg Philanthropies and the grand-prize winner in the 2012-13 Mayor's Challenge. The effort seeks to close the "word gap" between children in low-income families and those growing up in more affluent homes by offering families a free "word pedometer," coaching by a trained home visitor and information about resources in the community, such as story times at libraries and free exhibits at children's museums.

Healthy child development was also a focus last year of TRI-Lab, a program at Brown University that brings students, faculty members and practitioners in the community together to address complex social issues. The team focused on developing executive functioning skills in young children, which further reinforces the MITM training. "There was certainly synergy there," Gell says.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS

In addition to the multiple efforts to improve outcomes for young children, there is a growing awareness on the part of the district that relationships with parents are critical to giving children a positive start in school. Gonzales says he knows the current registration office is not the best facility in which to welcome new parents. The district also has a separate Parent and Family Resource Center, and there has been talk of combining both into a more inviting, one-stop-shop location for parents to interact with district. But that's just a vision at this point.

For now, the focus is on improving family engagement across the district. Lusi meets monthly with leaders of the district's Parent Advisory Committee, taking advice from them and in turn depending on them to share accurate information with other parents—especially those who can't attend school events. "Engagement isn't who just shows up," she says.

Recently, she has worked with the PAC to create a Family Impact Assessment—a protocol that school leaders are urged to follow when making decisions. The assessment poses questions such as: "Have you prepared reasons, facts, and data to support the decision in clearly understandable language to share with families?" "Have you asked parents how the potential decision may effect students and families?" "Have you included families' input in an action plan to assist students and families affected?" The assessment also asks schools to consider how they will communicate decisions to parents and who will respond to parents' questions or concerns. Lusi notes, however, that at some schools, this process would occur anyway—even without a protocol.

"Some principals are more naturally inclined to involve parents," Lusi says, adding that the lack of common practices speaks to the need for community school site directors. "That coordination role would make it more comparable from building to building." In fact, she recently had a principal at a non-community school turn down a partnership with a mental health agency because he and the leader of the school's parent organization were trying to manage all of the partnerships themselves.

The PAC, with 25 members, meets monthly to discuss a wide range of issues, such as transportation, curriculum, the graduation rate and the transition to the new Common Core-aligned assessments. The hope is that the PAC will become the "true voice of parents," says Janet PIchardo, the district's director of family and community engagement.

The district also has four parent specialists who are based in schools to help parents with any questions or concerns they might have and to help with translation if needed. They have been helping the new MITM ambassadors settle in to their roles in the school. Using American Recovery Reinvestment Act funds, the district worked with the Rhode Island Parent Information Network to create an extensive "Toolkit for Successful Partnerships," which provides parent and school leaders with direction on how to organize parent groups, hold school activities for families and support ongoing communication. Ideally, all schools would have Parent Zones, says Pichardo, where they can gather or work on projects. Parents volunteer to maintain the zones, but space is so limited in schools that sometimes all they get is a corner.

For the past five years, the district has held an annual parent conference—an all-day event with workshops that has drawn as many as 400 families. But Pichardo is now planning to take that concept in a new direction—organizing an experience in which parents and teachers can learn together. She has been exploring the Parent University idea, which is offered in other districts around the country, but she believes it would strengthen relationships if parents and educators could both participate. She has been working with a local charter school on the idea and would like to get the union involved in the planning as well.

"We still have to huddle and talk about it," she says, but added that she wants the topics to be appealing to teachers—maybe something on sharing data with parents in a non-intimidating way, she says.

The CYC has also worked to give parents a voice in Providence by holding a series of "community conversations" with over 250 local residents on what they think children need in order to be successful. The "Our Children, Our City" effort, which also involved small group conversations at four locations in the city, showed that parent engagement with schools was a strong theme. Of the nine statements that emerged from the data-gathering process, two focused specifically on parents—"Families who participate and volunteer in schools," and "Families who receive parenting and adult education that support learning at home." Residents also said that children need "schools with full-service programming to connect families to services that address children's physical, social and emotional needs from birth."

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

In addition to hiring three of the site directors, the YMCA also provides after-school programs at all 11 elementary schools, serving roughly 500 students, who are often recommended for the program by teachers and other staff at the school. In addition to time for homework, the students get one afternoon of science and engineering activities. Literacy and math specialists also collaborate with classroom teachers to make sure students are working on the appropriate skills after school. Arias talks about how the out-of-school-time staff works in partnership with the site directors and care coordinators to support children and use consistent practices. "The out-of-school-time directors see these kids for three years. They know how to handle challenging behaviors."

The Capital Good Fund's work in Providence schools is another approach to raising performance levels of students. The organization's philosophy is that improving parents' financial health, with indicators such as an increase in their credit score, can result in better academic outcomes for their children. The financial counseling, usually provided by college students, is being offered to families in 21 elementary schools, including the four community schools.

The organization is actually testing its hypothesis as part of a two-year randomized control trial involving 339 parents, with 214 of them in a treatment group and the rest as part of a control group. If the results are positive, Capital Good Fund will work to expand its model to other school districts in the country. In fact, determining whether a service is a "one off" or whether it can be scaled to multiple sites is one of the factors that the community school team considers when looking at whether to form new partnerships, Feliz says.

The YMCA also runs a six-week summer program in which certified teachers lead project-based lessons and partner organizations provide enrichment opportunities. Jeanine Achin, executive director of Providence YMCA Youth Services, says a clear difference between community schools and others is that community schools are "actively working to get parent support."

She describes a situation during the summer program in which a woman who was a guardian for her nephew was struggling with some of his behavior issues. The woman had never been a parent, Achin says, and needed some support. The community school staff was able to connect her with programs and people that could help. "If we had just handed her a brochure, she might not follow up," she says. "It was a perfect example of how it should work."

PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLA.

First-time kindergarten parents are often the least informed about how to navigate the school system and have a voice in the education process. But that's not the case for parents involved in BRIDGES —a 10-site initiative in Palm Beach County, Fla., to make sure parents not only have access to high-quality early health and learning programs but also know how to advocate for their children once they enter school.

Launched in 2010 by the Children's Services Council (CSC) of Palm Beach County—a special district established by voters in 1986—BRIDGES is a unique approach to creating connections between parents and schools and making sure "families have an understanding of what school systems are all about," says Marsha Guthrie, a program officer at CSC. "Ultimately when that transition comes, you already have the formula for success."

SERVICES AT BRIDGES

The CSC partners with two community agencies to operate BRIDGES, the Children's Home Society of Florida, which has four locations, and Community Partners, which oversees six sites.

Each site has a staff of six, including a director, a navigator—who helps families find the services they need—and a parent coach who uses evidence-based programs and strategies to strengthen families. One of those is the Positive Parenting Program, which focuses on communication skills, teaching self-control in children and learning alternatives to threats and yelling.

"A lot of our families come from different cultures and backgrounds," and have different traditions regarding parenting, Guthrie says. "We want to provide them with different options."

The intake process at a BRIDGES center involves a needs assessment to determine the gaps that might exist in services for the family, such as health insurance or meal assistance. A child development specialist on the staff also conducts the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, a screening tool used to monitor milestones in development and spot any areas of concern that might indicate a need for a referral.

While two of the BRIDGES sites are in schools within the School District of Palm Beach County, most are in different types of locations, such as a converted house, rented space in a church and a small shopping center. Jennifer Schneider, the director of program operations for BRIDGES at Children's Home Society, says the ideal arrangement is to have BRIDGES work integrated into the operation of a school, but close relationships have also developed between schools and off-site BRIDGES locations.

"This work can truly be done not being on a school campus," she says.

The sites are open every week day and on Saturday mornings. Workshops and other events tend to be offered during the evening hours. Parents—who are referred to as BRIDGES' members—have opportunities to attend support groups and parent-child classes. Over time, many take leadership roles, begin to recruit other families and help organize

events. A family might stay involved just until their child finishes the transition into kindergarten, while others might keep coming back after the children have graduated high school, Schneider says.

"We get some moms that just keep volunteering," she says.

Kerriette Cameron found the BRIDGES center in West Palm Beach when her daughter Kenneria was 5. They've participated in parent-child arts and crafts activities and summer literacy activities, and also benefitted from the children's clothing closet.

"I'm very grateful for BRIDGES. A lot of people don't know what's out there for them," Cameron says. "All of the services are free. All they ask you to do is to show up."

Now that Kenneria is in kindergarten, Cameron says she feels like she knows how to be involved in her daughter's education because of the "push" she received from the staff at BRIDGES.

Each BRIDGES site typically has one or two "linkage" schools in which children will enter kindergarten. The BRIDGES' site directors typically work to strengthen those connections with those school counselors, parent liaisons, kindergarten teachers and other school staff members that families will encounter once their children enter school. The BRIDGES team has also helped to organize a school visit day for local child-care centers to help take some of the stress out of the first day of kindergarten for parents and teachers.

The hope is that when BRIDGES members become part of a school, they will be involved and engaged parents who know how to work with teachers to help their children succeed. And because of BRIDGES, some schools that didn't have strong connections with parents are seeing that change.

"Through their relationship with BRIDGES, schools are benefitting from stronger partnerships," Guthrie says.

THE LINK TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The concept of community schools is still emerging in the Palm Beach district—one of the largest in the country, with over 180,000 students. Many schools are called community schools because they provide evening adult classes. But they don't operate as true community schools with a coordinator who oversees multiple partnerships with organizations providing wraparound services to benefit the health, educational success and well-being of students.

With a district that size, and with over 100 elementary schools, achieving any sort of district-wide implementation of community schools might never take place. But BRIDGES is helping to define parent engagement in the 10 communities where it operates and in a few schools where the community school concept is more of a reality.

The idea of having schools be the hub of their communities has been part of CSC for many years. In fact, for about 10 years, the agency ran "beacon centers" in 12 of the district's elementary schools. But those sites ended up being mostly after-school programs and did not have much of an emphasis on wrap-around services, Guthrie says.

Highland Elementary, located near I-95 in Lake Worth, exemplifies the model that CSC has hoped to create. In 2008, CSC was one of the first recipients of a Full-Service Community School grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which was used to support a "BRIDGES Beacon Center" at Highland, with early learning and parent education programs as a central component.

"We knew that to get a strong parental component, we could not be in all school locations," Guthrie says, adding that Highland is still "the closest thing we have to looking like a community school."

PART OF THE COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

When Brian Killeen arrived as principal at Highland Elementary 11 years ago, the school had a pre-K program, but most of the children attending were coming from outside the neighborhood. The school's families—mostly from Haiti, Guatemala and other parts of Central America—didn't have a tradition of sending their children to preschool. Meanwhile, CSC had a birth-to-5 initiative, but wanted to adopt a broader mission of focusing on the entire early-childhood period up to age 8. As Killeen and CSC learned of each other's common goals, the first BRIDGES center was born at Highland.

"Everyone comes to school at some point," Killeen says. "It should be a major part of the community structure."

Jaime-Lee A. Brown was running an after-school program down the street from Highland when she heard about the early development of a community school model at the school. She was hired to run the education component of it, which included pre-K classes, a mentoring center and the Parent-Child Home program. Brown's role was to bring local partners and service providers together to create some common practices that would make it easier for families to get the help they needed.

"We knew that people fall off going from agency to agency and program to program," Brown says, adding that coordination helps to build trust with families.

As part of participating in pre-K, parents also needed to be part of advisory council meetings or participate in classes such as cooking, sewing, English-as-second-language, or computer skills.

The BRIDGES center at Highland is located in a separate "public" wing of the building that visitors can access without having to sign in at the school office. But that doesn't mean BRIDGES and the school operate independently.

"Everything we do is integrated," Killeen says.

Killeen meets every two weeks with the BRIDGES director to make sure the staff is well informed about the goals and priorities of the school. And when teachers meet with parents for conferences, they listen for any issues that the BRIDGES staff might be able to address, such as housing or other social services. They have referral forms in their desks that they pass on to the BRIDGES center.

Brown—who is now the vice president of Community Partners—says she and Killeen worked together to embed BRIDGES into school policies as a way to build understanding and support for the program among teachers. For example, if a student was suspended, the family was referred to BRIDGES. She attended student study team meetings, faculty meetings and would just "sit in the front office and visit." She also had to learn to translate her work in social services to the teachers' work, such as showing how the Positive Parenting Program can also address classroom behavior and homework completion. "I needed to relate our outcomes to what they cared about," she says.

Highland, Killeen says, has the highest population of homeless students in the county. When families leave the school, it tends to be because they are doing better financially and have moved into stable housing. But Killeen decided long ago that he would allow families to keep their children in the school in order to maintain the stability of services as well. He emphasizes, as Schneider does, that the ongoing relationship between families and BRIDGES well after their children have entered kindergarten is an important component.

"It's a continuous process," he says. "In order to make an impact on birth to third grade, you need to continue to make an impact on the families."

CREATING MORE SYNERGY

Even though BRIDGES still operates in targeted areas of the district, significant steps are being taken to strengthen the relationship with the school district

as a whole. A new liaison position has been created—jointly funded by both CSC and district. The liaison, Victoria DelValle, will work to better understand the culture of the school district, Guthrie says, as well as to bring the BRIDGES perspective to the district so there's more "synergy" between the BRIDGES sites and their linkage schools.

Schneider says she's already seen a significant difference in the district's interest in BRIDGES work since DelValle started her job. "She is really trying to be that messenger of why BRIDGES is important," she says.

An event that was scheduled in January 2015 was also expected to bring more alignment between the early-childhood community and elementary schools around issues of school readiness. In partnership with CSC, BRIDGES organized a train-the-trainer workshop provided by experts from the University of New Mexico (UNM). The Family Development Program at UNM has developed an "Early Childhood Leadership Toolkit" based on Mind in the Making.

In Palm Beach County, the January event was expected to bring together both early-childhood and elementary school practitioners to participate in the training on the toolkit, which includes activities for developing early-childhood leadership teams, particularly in partnership with a community school. A follow-up event was planned for early-childhood and elementary school leaders.

Preventing summer learning loss is also a priority that BRIDGES was able to address in partnership with the schools and area summer camps during 2014. Working with the schools and summer program providers, BRIDGES brought a parent component to the programs. The parent sessions—some during the day and some in the evening—focused on literacy, such as choosing the right books for children and doing activities related to books. BRIDGES would also help provide meals for the families.

LOOKING AHEAD

For now, adding more BRIDGES sites in the county is not on CSC's agenda. The first priority is to learn about the impact that the program is already having. Since 2011, over 14,300 individuals have been served in BRIDGES sites, and the percentage of parents with children in the birth-to-eight range has increased from 63.5 percent to 78.6 percent.

BRIDGES also tracks the percentage of families that are "immersed" in the program, meaning that they return and participate in at least six workshops or activities within a six-month period. At the end of Fiscal Year 2014, 34.4 percent of the families served had met the immersion goal, up from 14.3 percent the year before.

"We have to understand what we've achieved," Guthrie says, adding that a formative evaluation is needed to gather data on outcomes.

BRIDGES is also keeping a close watch on Village Academy in Delray Beach, which receives support from the city and philanthropic organizations to function as a community school. Not only does the school provide pre-K through twelfth grade, but it also serves families with infants in an Early Head Start program. "We have a lot to learn from them," Brown says.

Brown and Schneider both agree that they would like to see parents, schools and partners begin to take more responsibility for the work that BRIDGES is doing. Schneider says if that were to happen, perhaps BRIDGES could move into other communities or expand in other ways.

Schneider says she knows that it's hard for schools to focus beyond their responsibility for children's academic achievement. "But if we show success," she says, "over time a school would want this on their campus."

TULSA, OKLA.

The Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI) was one of three sites involved in the Linkages Project, which sought to create stronger connections between early-childhood systems and community schools.

A three-year effort of IEL's Coalition for Community Schools (CCS), funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Linkages focused primarily on implementing practices and policies that created smoother transitions for children—and their parents—into kindergarten. Plugging families into the services provided through community schools as soon as possible was also a focus of the project.

TACSI hired transition specialists and formed transition teams between preschools and elementary schools to improve communication between teachers—not just about the needs of individual children, but also so they could share ideas about classroom practices and strategies that would help incoming kindergarteners.

But when the grant expired in 2012, the leaders of TACSI, which is part of the Community Services Council (CSC), knew they still had a lot of work to do.

MIND IN THE MAKING IN TULSA

Fortunately, TACSI also became part of the Mind in the Making (MITM)-Community Schools Project, training facilitators to deliver the MITM models. The first cohort of facilitators was trained in November 2012 and involved community school coordinators in both the Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) and Union Public Schools (UPS). They have then delivered the modules to all TPS teachers and to early-childhood teachers and principals in the Broken Arrow Public Schools (BAPS).

"We found that we might use [MITM] as a tool for conversations from all environments," says Paige Whalen, program manager at TACSI.

Whalen describes the workshops as an excellent strategy for promoting not only MITM and building children's executive functioning skills, but also for providing some education on child development in general. Too many K-3 classrooms, she said, were still pushing content down from the higher grades because teachers didn't have enough knowledge about how young children learn. Teachers, she says, are more receptive, to the topic of executive function than hearing about "developmentally appropriate practice."

The modules also help to connect professionals across the entire birth-to-eight early-childhood period, she adds.

"The hidden agenda there is to get people not to think in silos," she says.

The facilitators have also delivered MITM through Parent University and to a Latino parents group. And the modules have been shared with the Center for Family Resilience at Oklahoma State University, which further broadens the reach, Whalen says. Debbie McClellan, the principal of the Arrow Springs Early Childhood Center in BAPS and a member of

the TACSI steering committee, is another voice for MITM. She participated in a facilitators' institute in July 2014 and is continuing to help raise awareness about MITM among educators, Whalen says.

In all, there are about 35 facilitators who continue to provide the essential skill modules. The challenge, however, is that the full eight-module program requires a heavy time commitment from both facilitators and those participating. "There is something that will be missing if you don't allow it the time that it needs," Whalen says.

BUILDING SCHOOL READINESS SKILLS

Also being trained as MITM facilitators is a group of Latino "lay community advisors" called promotoras, who are part of another initiative at TACSI called the Power of Families. Also supported by Kellogg, the Power of Families is a three-year grant that aims to increase awareness of early learning experiences among parents and caregivers, such as friends, neighbors and relatives who are caring for young children before they enter kindergarten.

Too many young children, Whalen says, "are really coming not prepared for school." The five promotoras are expected to each have a caseload of about 30 families a year over the three-year period and work with the mothers and caregivers on building school readiness skills.

Even though Oklahoma is known for providing access to pre-K and other early-childhood education programs, the Power of Families initiative fills a gap that exists in a lot of communities.

"There are a lot of families that do value being home with their children until they are school age. There's nothing wrong with being at home," Whalen says. "But what is it we can do to help build those skills in the grocery store or wherever?"

Traditionally, promotoras—who are trusted members of their communities—receive training to provide basic health education to local residents and act as liaisons between community members and health professionals. The model dates back to the 1960s, but has gained attention in recent years in the U.S. with the growth of the Latino population.

What's unique about the grant to TACSI is that the promotora model is being adapted to focus on early education and the transition into school. The five women—two of which are bilingual—will share information with the families and caregivers that can help boost children's readiness.

Some Latino mothers, for example, don't read to their children in Spanish because they think this somehow helps the children acquire English skills quicker, says Lesley Gudgel, the program director for the Sprouts Child Development Initiative, also within the CSC. So the promotoras will encourage parents to teach children vocabulary and basic skills in their home language. "Then decoding is much easier when they get to school," Gudgel says.

> **"There are a lot of families that do value being home with their children until they are school age... [W]hat is it we can do to help build those skills in the grocery store or wherever?" —PAIGE WHALEN,**
> PROGRAM MANAGER, TULSA AREA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

Because the promotoras are affiliated with TACSI they will also be connected to the community schools in those neighborhoods—essentially serving as liaisons between the families and the schools. The six schools they are assigned to are Clinton, Cooper, Marshall and McClure elementary schools in TPS and Roy

Clark and Rosa Parks elementary schools in UPS. One promotora will work with both Marshall and McClure.

In addition to focusing on school readiness, the promotoras will also work with the community school coordinators to help the families connect to any services or programs they might need.

Rita Kukura, the community school coordinator at Cooper Elementary, sees multiple ways in which the promotora—who she had not met at the time of the interview—would be able to serve the Latino population at her school, which is now "47 percent and increasing," she says.

"I'm excited about it, and relieved," she says, adding that because she's not bilingual, the promotora will be able to better understand the needs of the Latino families.

She mentions a situation recently in which the school was collecting donations to help a Latino family with a pre-K student, a toddler and a third on the way. The mother had come home to find her apartment burglarized and just empty boxes where the Christmas presents had been. On top of that, the mother was having health issues and there were some concerns about the unborn child's development. "A promotora could be over there with that family," Kukura says. "You need that cultural closeness."

> "My hope has been that the districts would see the wisdom in [promotoras], build off this relational model instead of a program model and grow it into other populations." —JAN CREVELING, SENIOR ADVISOR, TULSA AREA COMMUNITY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE

Beyond helping in times of need, Kurkura also envisions having the families served by the promotora involved at Cooper through the school's garden club. They could plant their own food and learn from the gardener who teaches classes through the community school. "This promotora could be gluing the families to the school so they become part of the mortar of our school," she says

Jan Creveling, formerly the program director for community schools at CSC, and now a semi-retired "senior advisor" to TACSI, says the key to the promotora initiative is that trust develops between the promotora and the families they serve. She thinks the model has the potential to benefit families with older children as well.

"My hope has been that the districts would see the wisdom in this, build off this relational model instead of a program model and grow it into other populations," she says.

TACSI'S TRANSITION

Since Creveling stepped away from her full-time role, several changes have also taken place both within TACSI and the two districts.

First of all, attempts to replace Creveling with another director were not successful, so the organization is tapping into the expertise of the existing staff members and is providing training where any gaps remain. Also, instead of running the community school programs—and hiring all the coordinators—TACSI has redefined itself as a community schools resource center that provides support in five areas: information and communication; professional development; community capacity building; accountability and results, and financial management. In this role, TACSI can support not only the community schools in TPS and UPS, but also support the movement elsewhere in the state. For example,

TACSI has been working with Edgemere Elementary School in the Oklahoma City Public Schools.

Changes have also occurred in the two districts. In UPS, the number of schools with community school coordinators is growing, and in 2013, the UPS school board adopted a policy, which now envisions all schools as being part of a community school district. The policy states:

> *The Board of Education believes that each school should embrace the community schools philosophy in which a variety of partners shall offer academic supports, enrichment activities, and assistance to students, families, and community members.*
>
> *The community schools philosophy emphasizes real-world learning through community problem-solving and service. The Board further believes that in order to serve more fully the needs of students and to support the improvement of their academic and intellectual development, each school must engage its community if these worthy purposes are to be realized.*
>
> *As a community school, each school and its partners must demonstrate strong collaboration, set high expectations for all students, embrace diversity, and share the accountability for results.*

UPS, Creveling says, would be an example of "how you scale up." Administrators are trained in the community school philosophy and can't even be hired as principals until they have worked in a community school for two years.

TPS is also going through a transition. After extending his leadership for another year, Superintendent Keith Ballard will retire in June 2015, and a search will begin for his replacement. Cross & Joftus, an educational consulting organization, is also doing an assessment to gather information about the community school work in the district.

While coordinators have been added in recent years, Creveling says turnover among principals has been standing in the way of creating those strong relationships with families and community partners that TACSI believes is so necessary for community schools to be successful.

CREATING A BIRTH-TO-EIGHT STRATEGY

Another development at CSC is the adoption of a birth-to-eight approach that includes the work on transition into kindergarten, the Power of Families, and technical assistance to child care centers and homes to improve quality and pursue accreditation.

The Sprouts Child Development Initiative is also a significant piece of the strategy. The Sprouts interactive website has information on early literacy development and links to resources. It also features the widely used Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3), a developmental screening tool that takes a snapshot of a child's growth in communication, gross motor development, fine motor skills, problem-solving ability and personal-social skills.

While parents can conduct the screening themselves, the tool is also being shared and promoted throughout the community—with healthcare providers, child-care centers, faith-based institutions, community school coordinators and partners, and now the promotoras as well. This demonstrates how the various early-childhood initiatives at TACSI are interrelated and support each other. Whalen noted that the goal with Sprouts is to make the ASQ-3 a routine experience for all children—not just if a parent or provider suspects there might be a concern about development.

"This is a best practice for any program," she says. "It's such a simple thing, and it helps create a relationship with a family through that child."

LOS ANGELES EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

Connecting young children to the elementary schools they will attend and improving school readiness opportunities has been part of the Los Angeles Education Partnership's (LAEP) approach since it began its work roughly 30 years ago in schools in the San Fernando Valley.

"We recognized very early that we needed to be involved with families and we needed to be involved with families from birth," says Ellen Pais, the president and CEO of LAEP. While developing teacher leadership has been a strong element of LAEP's model of working with schools, Pais adds that healthy child development and early learning opportunities support that approach. "Teachers need to understand better who is coming to school," she says.

> **"We recognized very early that we needed to be involved with families and we needed to be involved with families from birth." —ELLEN PAIS,**
> **President & CEO, Los Angeles Education Partnership**

About 10 years ago, LAEP ran a six-week summer transition program for incoming kindergarteners at Miramonte Elementary School, one of three elementary schools in South Los Angeles that are part of LAEP's network of community, or "partner" schools.

The school recruited children who had enrolled in school for that fall but had not attended preschool.

Funding to support those early transition programs, however, has not been as constant as LAEP's commitment. Shifting funding streams have limited the work LAEP has been able to do around school readiness—a reality that most nonprofit organizations working on early learning face. First 5 Los Angeles, a public agency created by voters and funded with taxes on tobacco, provided grant funds for the transition program at Miramonte, but has since redirected its investments away from actual services and more toward policy and quality improvements.

"It's been very hard to sustain a school readiness program," Pais says. LAEP, however, is now seeking funding to restart such transition activities—not just at Miramonte, but also at the other two South L.A. elementary schools—Parmalee Avenue and 75th Street.

"We would love to make a robust community school at the early-childhood and primary level that intersect with each other and reflect really what school readiness is about," Pais says.

PARTNER SCHOOLS

Those three elementary schools feed into middle schools and a high school that are also part of LAEP's network of 18 sites, some of which are high schools with multiple academies. As partner schools, they focus on six core elements—high-quality instruction, teacher leadership and collaboration, college and career

readiness, parents as partners, youth empowerment and educational equity. Most of them also have community school coordinators that work to develop partnerships that bring critical health and other wraparound services to students and families.

LAEP's early work in community schools in the San Fernando Valley was supported by foundation funding. Then the organization received its first Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The grant provided funding for work at four campuses and allowed LAEP to expand its work into the Northeast San Fernando Valley. A second FSCS grant was awarded in 2015 and focuses on five schools in South Los Angeles—the three elementary schools as well as Bethune Middle and Edison Middle.

Even though LAEP's network has only three elementary schools, there is a strong push to create services for children and families across entire feeder patterns of schools that would begin when children are born and follow them through graduation. In those communities where LAEP is only working in middle and high schools, there are hopes of moving down into the elementary and early-childhood level. The demand, however, has to come from parents and the schools.

"If you let it grow out of these stakeholder groups, it will be more successful," says Gustavo Morales, the South Los Angeles project director for LAEP's Transform Schools work.

CREATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SCHOOL

That's the way services for families with young children spread from Miramonte to Parmalee, Pais explains.

Parents with children at Parmalee began attending some of the programs available at Miramonte, such as workshops and a support group for parents of children with special needs. They began to ask for similar services at their school.

"Everything is really fostered by the desires of the parents," Pais says. "They have a voice in several ways."

LAEP is also an Early Head Start grantee, operating programs for infants, toddlers and their parents at both Parmalee and Miramonte. These services include home visitation programs, on-site early learning classrooms, support groups and workshops. The Early Head Start programs also have a parent council, which allows them to have input into the types of workshops available to them.

"You want [families] to have that relationship with the school," says Elvia De La Torre, LAEP's senior director for early childhood.

Sometimes preschool families don't have access to all of the programs and services available at at elementary school, such as after-school programs. There might not be enough staff members or there might be limits on eligibility. But LAEP is working to make sure parents of young children know what is available at school and in the community and that they are able to participate. Workshops, for example, might attract parents of preschoolers as well as parents up of the upper elementary grades.

"We are not focused on limiting who can participate," Pais says. "We want those bridges between families who don't yet have kids in school and parents who do have kids in school so we can build that community."

At Parmalee, workshops have been offered on Planned Parenthood, social-emotional development for adults and guided reading with children. Other topics include English as a second language, first aid and CPR, preventative health and nutrition, computers and technology, and parenting and family support. A baseline evaluation of the new FSCS grant, conducted by Public Works in Pasadena, Calif., showed that over 2,500 parents attended workshops at the five schools during the 2014-15 school year.

THE NEED FOR PRE-K PREP

The growing focus on young children is also being supported with data from the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a measure of young children's development in the areas of:

- physical health
- emotional maturity
- social competence
- language and cognitive skills
- communications and general knowledge

The instrument was developed by researchers at the Offord Center for Child Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. In partnership with Offord, the Center for Healthier Children, Families and Communities at the University of California, Los Angeles, is implementing a U.S. version of EDI as part of its Transforming Early Childhood Community Systems initiative across Los Angeles County.

"It's a way to frame policy conversations that are not judgmental," Pais says, adding that the results help families, teachers and principals better understand what children need to be successful in school.

EDI is being implemented in South Los Angeles to guide the community schools' work with young children. Elizabeth Kane, the principal at Parmalee, says the data show a "need for pre-K prep." That's why she's excited about the opportunity to create the transition program, what she's calling a "kindergarten boot camp," in the summer of 2016. As the original program at Miramonte did, the new program would target families whose children have not attended pre-K.

PACOIMA CHARTER'S EXAMPLE

EDI, however, was also used several years ago in one of LAEP's original partner schools—Pacoima Charter—and helped guide the school's development of a comprehensive early-childhood initiative.

"The statistics were very real to us. Most of the kids came from our school," says Principal Sylvia Fajardo, who credits Pais with opening her eyes to the importance of providing strong early learning programs and reaching out to families with young children. "I didn't really understand early childhood. I only cared about testing and third through fifth grade."

Now Pacoima Charter, which is part of the Youth Policy Institute's Promise Neighborhood initiative (YPI), funded by the Department of Education, has a thriving state-funded preschool program that is a model for other schools that are part of the grant.

The two morning and two afternoon classrooms use the Curiosity Corner curriculum from Success for All (SFA), providing continuity for students when they move into kindergarten, which uses SFA's KinderCorner program. Because Pacoima Charter is a large school, with roughly 1,500 children, each grade has a coordinator to oversee the learning at that level. One coordinator is responsible for both preschool and kindergarten, which also helps to smooth the transition for young children and facilitate communication between the teachers.

As she was making what she calls her "conversion," Fajardo visited the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City, which includes Baby College, a program that educates expectant and new parents about health, nutrition, safety, language and other aspects of child development. She wanted to bring something similar to Pacoima, so the school started Baby University and became part of First 5 L.A.'s Best Start initiative. Best Start focuses on improving skills of both parents and caregivers and providing "leadership training to help them achieve their goals and ensure that children enter kindergarten ready to succeed in school and in life."

Best Start provided free kits for new parents, which include videos and other materials about young children's development. But Fajardo didn't want to just

hand them out. "We know our parents, and we know our community, and we know they're going to put it in a closet," she says. So the kit is used as part of Baby University, a series of three two-hour sessions which parents must complete before they can enroll their children in preschool.

The school also received a Race to the Top grant from the Department of Education to provide professional development in STEM subjects and make some improvements in areas suggested by First 5 LA, such as the use of assessments and improving outdoor facilities.

> "Common Core is challenging for everyone. How is that shift changing the way parents perceive their children being successful?" — ELIZABETH KANE, PRINCIPAL, PARMALEE AVENUE ELEMENTARY

YPI provides a summer transition program at the school, but it currently only reaches about 50 of the incoming kindergartens who have already attended preschool. Fajardo, however, wants to reach many more young children in the community who have not had an early-childhood classroom experience.

That's why Pacoima Charter, in partnership with LAEP, also offers a school readiness program that runs from November through June for those who were not able to get into a preschool class. Children, even if they aren't planning on attending Pacoima Charter, attend the program twice a week to learn about school routines and become comfortable in a school setting. When they first start, Fajardo says she can hear them crying outside her office window. "By week two or three, they're great."

Pacoima Charter's families have access to programs and professionals who can address children's non-instructional needs as well. Two social workers, with the support of 11 interns from California State University, Long Beach and California State University Northridge, provide both individual and group counseling programs. Instead of having a school nurse, Fajardo used the school's flexibility as a charter to hire a pediatrician who provides parent workshops and works with a school social worker to address any issues among students that might keep them from coming to school. As a result, daily attendance has increased.

LAEP also helped Pacoima Charter create a structure for working with partner organizations. Every other month, local providers and representatives from other schools meet at Pacoima to talk about services they provide, how to support each other and not duplicate each other's efforts.

FOSTERING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

The community school structure at Pacoima Charter provides inspiration to the other elementary schools now working with LAEP. As children from move into the elementary schools, the partner schools want to make sure parents understand the expectations for students and the strategies teachers are using in the classroom—especially since classrooms are probably not the way they remember.

"It's really about transparency," Kane says. "Common Core is challenging for everyone. How is that shift changing the way parents perceive their children being successful?"

Workshops are available to parents on reading strategies and other instructional programs at the school. "The same things we train our teachers on, we feel we need to train our parents on," Kane says.

LAEP's schools are also opening "instructional rounds"—traditionally conducted with teachers—to parents so they can see the teachers' practices in action. Parents going on the rounds participate in two one-hour training sessions to learn more about the school's data and prepare for the classroom visits. The

training also prepares the parents to focus more on the instruction in the classroom instead of how students are behaving, Kane says. The rounds are part of the emphasis on articulation—ensuring that what children are learning and doing in pre-K prepares them for the early grades and then middle school and high school.

Creating awareness among parents about college and career readiness is also part of that articulation process—and goes beyond just hanging college banners on classroom walls. A college and career center at Miramonte Elementary in South L.A. opened in 2015 as a way to get parents and students talking early about courses they'll need in high school and being aware of financial aid resources. "We're kind of experimenting with it," Morales says.

> "When teachers self-select [serving on the Community Engagement Committee], those are the teachers that push schools forward" —
> ELIZABETH KANE,
> PRINCIPAL, PARMALEE AVENUE ELEMENTARY

The Public Works report also showed that some schools have "robust volunteerism," and that parents are assisting in the classroom as well as helping with drop-off and pick-up, working on school beautification projects and helping to supervise during lunch and recess.

BUILDING A STRUCTURE

At schools that have been in LAEP's network for many years, the governance and partnership structure is well established. For example, at Social Justice Humanitas High School in San Fernando, a governing council helps to ensure that the work of community partners is aligned with and in support of the school's core curriculum. But at other partner schools that are still relatively new to community school work, the structure and the ways that partners interact with the school are still emerging.

LAEP encourages each school to have a staff council, a student council, a parent council and a resource council made up of partners working with the school. But in some of the feeder pattern areas, partner organizations are still getting to know each other.

Most of Parmalee's community partners, for example, are still providing their services in the community, not at the school site.

But Arturo Magana, Parmalee's coordinator, saw the effectiveness of the community school model the first week of school in 2015 when a family's home burned down. Because of the connections he had developed over the years coordinating an afterschool program, the family was immediately referred to providers who could help provide food, clothing and temporary housing instead of bouncing from agency to agency on their own.

Community members and partners also showed their support of the school at a recent career day, when doctors and other professionals visited classrooms to talk about their work and answer questions from students. Magana says that partners want to develop ongoing relationships with the families and serve in a proactive way. "When we develop these partnerships and we embed them in the feeder pattern, what happens is accountability," he says.

Providing additional social-emotional support to children while at school is also a priority at Parmalee. Kane is using the school's budget to cover a pupil services administrator and a psychiatric social worker two days a week. They provide group counseling as well as work with students individually. The goal, Magana says, is for the same personnel to work at all of the schools in the feeder pattern to create continuity for children and parents.

Teachers at Parmalee are buying in to their school's growth as a community school. When it was time for the staff to select committee assignments for the year,

several chose the Community Engagement Committee, which is focused on developing partnerships. The teachers on that committee were also the ones who recommended that parents begin participating in the instructional rounds.

"When teachers self-select something like that, those are the teachers that push schools forward," Kane says.

Magana is also working with some emerging parent leaders who will eventually become part of the committee and work with teachers.

At Miramonte, a strong partnership is beginning between the school and UMMA Community Clinic in Los Angeles. The school has dedicated a bungalow to serve as a health center where Andres Valdovinos, a health program coordinator with UMMA, provides health education programs, helps families get health insurance and refers children to either the clinic's flagship office in South L.A. or its wellness center at Fremont High School.

Valdovinos, who used to run tobacco prevention programs at schools in Orange County, south of L.A., says he already notices a significant difference between his experiences with that program and his work with the LAEP partner schools.

"It was hard for me to kick off that [tobacco] program because I didn't have support. My only support was the principal," he says. "Now working with these schools, I have a coordinator that I was introduced to right off the bat. The schools are a big help. Even the union is a great help."

Because there is a great need for dental care in the community, LAEP is also working with with the UCLA School of Dentistry to provide screenings, provide fluoride treatments and give parents check-ups as well.

WORKING TOWARD ALIGNMENT

Strong community schools ensure that the services students receive outside of the regular school day support learning in the classroom as well as the overall goals of the school. In fact, one of the outcomes that LAEP wants to see is that partner schools "develop curricular connections between after-school and classroom learning to reinforce Common Core State Standards; view the after-school program as part of the overall standards-based curriculum," according to the Public Works report.

Those curricular connections between regular classrooms and after-school programs are beginning to take place at Parmalee. The school is starting a new after-school tutoring effort that is targeting students who need some additional academic support. Students are being grouped by the specific skills where they need improvement instead of by their grade level. "It's really about their need—not putting kids in little boxes," Kane says.

The effort to create alignment is also extending to children's homes. Because students get three weeks off over the winter holidays, parents are receiving information on how to reinforce and practice those skills with children during the break, Magana says.

As schools continue to develop relationships with community providers, LAEP wants to ensure that alignment is prioritized as part of the partnerships and that after-school providers collaborate with classroom teachers.

At some schools, Morales says, teachers are open to talking with partners about students' non-instructional needs, but less likely to share instructional goals and practices. But in those where teachers are also working in after-school programs, the connections are stronger.

"It's like an organizing campaign," he says. "We're trying to win one teacher at a time."

CONCLUSION

This report updated previous IEL research that revealed five core lessons from the early childhood education and family engagement field: Systemic Collaboration, Distributed Leadership, Shared Resources, Family Support and Relationship Building. While these lessons hold true as guidelines for promoting quality practice and realizing collective goals, the field has progressed since the initial research. The foundations were laid for a two-generation approach to family engagement and early learning, but prioritizing both child and family needs systemically has gained significant traction over the last two years.

Federal policy increasingly recognizes the value in family and community engagement. The U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services released a Joint Policy Statement on Family Engagement in May 2016, followed by a Joint Letter Supporting Family Engagement in Early Learning from the department secretaries. According to the statements, the Departments assert that "strong family engagement is central—not supplemental—to promoting children's healthy intellectual, physical, and social-emotional development." Both agencies aim to guide the development of effective practices through research-based family engagement frameworks: T*he Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships* and *Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework*. These frameworks emphasize alignment with early learning providers in their recommendations.

The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 further enshrines the importance of opportunity conditions for families as well as students in the law. For example, the Every Student Succeeds Act mandates stakeholder engagement in writing local education authority proposals and submitting state accountability plans to the Education Department. State consultations are currently underway and these plans will likely be implemented in the 2017-18 school year. This process represents a significant opportunity for the example community school systems to build on the trust they've established among their engaged families, community partners and federal funders.

The cases discussed above should give some sense of the diverse patterns of practice developing across the country. They highlight successes and challenges districts accrue implementing family and community engagement strategies and embedding early learning in a variety of contexts. IEL focused on four key practice areas from the case study sites: Linkages between Early Learning Programs and K-3 Community Schools, Transitions from Early Childhood Settings to Kindergarten and First Grade, Improvements in Primary Education across Community Schools, and Family Engagement in the Early Years and Ongoing Opportunities. These patterns are not exhaustive, but do provide a lens for thinking through alignment across the birth-to-eight continuum and beyond. The cases above describe how community schools are working to ensure ongoing, systemic family and community engagement.

There are a number of comprehensive efforts across to country to improve alignment from birth through the early grades and to improve systemic family and community engagement. While our case studies focused on efforts within the context of systemic

community school initiatives, a number of schools and districts have recognized that they must work together with other community partners, advocates, and public/private agencies to support the development of the whole child. This is particularly true in vulnerable communities where children, youth and families face significant challenges and opportunity gaps.

A range of national collaboratives like the Schott Foundation's Opportunity to Learn Campaign, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the Journey for Justice Alliance and the Alliance to Reclaim our Schools are all – in their own ways – fighting for comprehensive approaches to teaching and learning, improved engagement of parents and families, and quality, affordable education from cradle to career. The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE), founded in September 2014, is the first membership association focused solely on advancing family, school, and community engagement. The emergence of these critical national efforts and the work of countless others are an acknowledgement that schools can't do it alone. There is a cumulative benefit from deeper partnerships between families, schools, and communities and the integration of supports that target both academic and non-academic barriers to learning.

The efforts demonstrated by the cases presented in this report align with increased federal support for robust early learning programs, meaningful community partnerships and investment in family capacity. To ensure the full impact of these opportunities within the current federal policy landscape, the recent push for engagement should be sustained beyond policy-planning processes through implementation. This report does not provide a roadmap, but identifies previous actions and building momentum for family engagement. It documents the approaches nine community school systems have pursued for effective early childhood education and family-school partnerships leading to student achievement and school improvement.

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Family & Community Engagement NETWORK

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LT2 Leaders for Today & Tomorrow

Leaders for Today and Tomorrow (LT2) is a growing network of non-profits, school districts and schools of education committed to retooling pre- and in-service leadership learning and evaluation. LT2 supports the catalytic role of principals, assistant principals and district leaders as community stewards serving schools in highly challenged environments across the U.S.
http://www.iel.org/lt2

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

Funded the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth assists state and local workforce development systems to better serve all youth, including youth with disabilities and other disconnected youth. **http://www.ncwd-youth.info**

Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program

RAMP is a high-tech, career-focused mentoring program for youth involved with or at risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system, including those with disabilities. The RAMP model uses a combination of group, peer, and individualized mentoring to promote the successful transition of all youth.

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The VR Y-TAC is a U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration-funded project that is charged with providing State VR agencies and related rehabilitation and youth service professionals with technical assistance to help more effectively serve students and youth with disabilities, including disconnected youth who need to re-engage with education and/or work such as those involved in the juvenile justice system, the foster care system, and other traditionally underserved and/or isolated youth populations. **http://www.iel.org/vryouth-tac**

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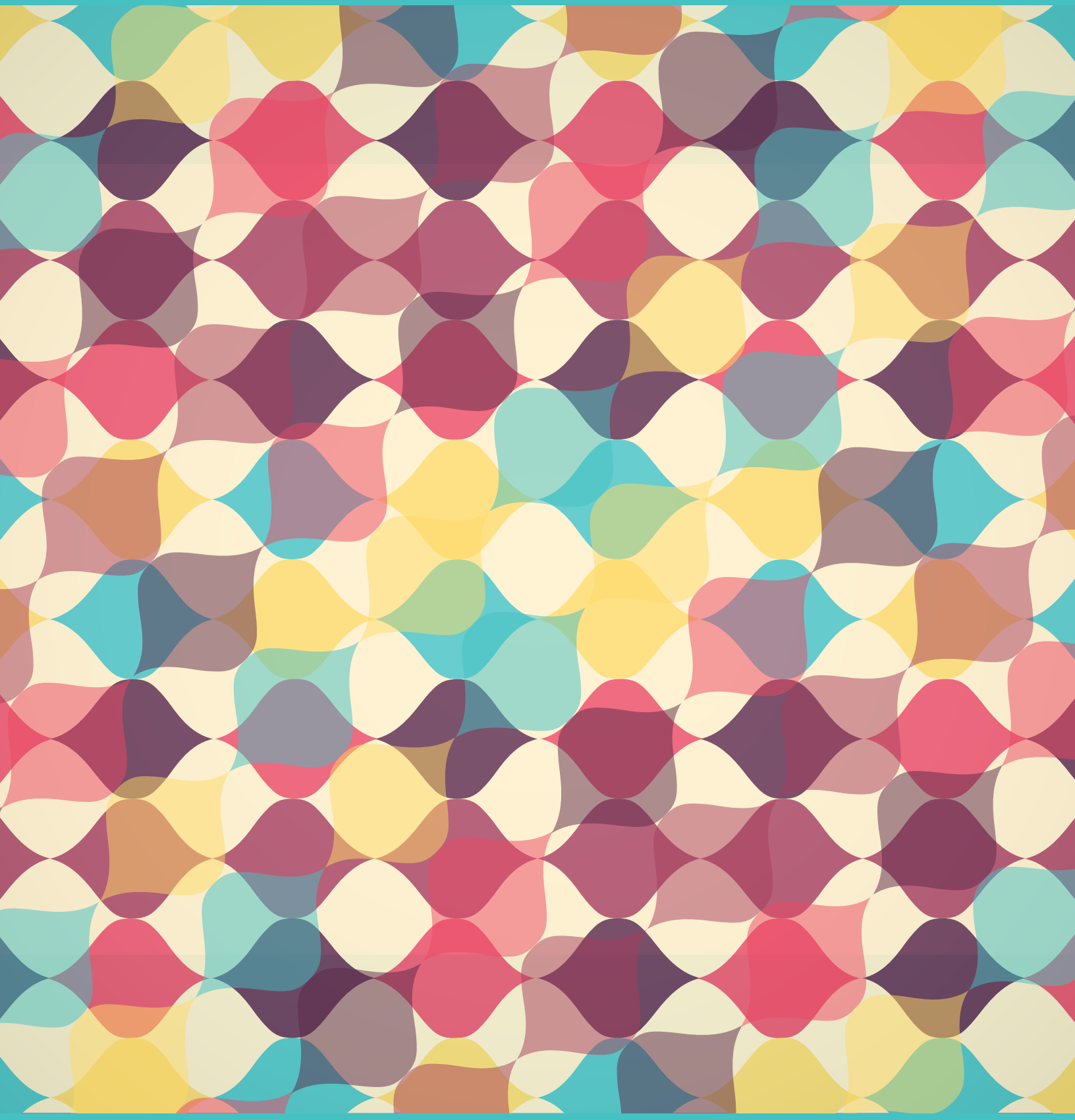

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