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Successes, Challenges, and Future Directions for an Urban Full Service Community Schools Initiative

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Abstract

After receiving a multiyear federal grant, an urban school district and community agency that focused on family literacy implemented a comprehensive school reform initiative called Providence Full Service Community Schools (PFSCS). A host of community partners collaborated to develop the PFSCS model with the broad goal of strategically connecting teachers, families, afterschool programming, and community services, as a method for improving the well-being of students in participating schools and their families. This article compares findings from a baseline and 4-year follow-up study of the PFSCS, documenting changes in stakeholder perceptions about the project. In the follow-up study, respondents noted increased family engagement and improved climate in PFSCS schools, along with more school–community partnerships. Findings also suggested stakeholder perceptions had changed regarding the extent to which the PFSCS was expected to improve academic achievement. Specifically, although some stakeholders were disappointed that a direct link between the PFSCS and improved test scores had not been

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found, findings also indicated that overall, the community continued to value the work and desired to see the program expand.

Keywords
full service community schools, urban education, school improvement, educational reform

Educators, researchers, family advocates, and policymakers have argued that some urban schools are so underresourced that, without sustained support from community social service agencies and the authentic involvement of families, these schools will be unable to create the necessary conditions to overcome the negative effects poverty can have on academic achievement (Dryfoos, 2000; Harris & Wilkes, 2013; Tagle, 2005). Researchers have documented that schools in economically and otherwise disadvantaged circumstances often have less access to quality academic programming that includes comprehensive social and family supports (e.g., Anderson, 2016; Evans, 2004). Thus, calls for more and better partnerships between schools and communities to support disadvantaged neighborhoods have continued to grow (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2006a; Adelman & Taylor, 2006b; Anderson, 2011; Conwill, 2003; National Center for Mental Health in Schools [NCMHS] in the Department of Psychology at UCLA, 2016). Moreover, although opportunities for supplementary educational supports (e.g., tutoring) and family assistance (e.g., caregiver literacy programs) have increased, comprehensive school–community partnerships continue to lag behind need (Center for Mental Health in Schools [CMHS], 2008). Such challenges have fueled the reemergence and evolution of the "community schools" model as an approach to better coordinate schools with local community resources and social service agencies (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003).

The community schools concept was first popularized in the early 20th century when John Dewey described schools as miniature communities where real-life experiences could be provided to allow students to learn the skills needed to become successful adults (Dryfoos, 2002). In that same era, Jane Addams and the Settlement House movement encouraged more and better connections between communities with their public schools (Houser, 2014). Decades later, the 1983 release of the highly influential report, *A Nation at Risk*, which criticized America's public school system, reignited support for school–community services integration. One outgrowth attributed to this report's influence was a proliferation of school-based health centers (SBHCs). However, because this particular model was unable to respond

to the need for broad services coordination and, additionally, was difficult to sustain financially (Dryfoos, 1998), often such projects ended when grant funding finished or core administrators who started the program retired or moved on. The focus on health was also often viewed as being too limited in scope to be responsive to wider school concerns. Dryfoos (1994, 1995, 2005) argued for combining SBHCs with other school reform efforts to create "Full Service Community Schools" (FSCS). In these models, the school provides a central "hub" in the community that develops a variety of community-based partnerships, designed to meet the specific contextual needs of a school, its children, and families. Furthermore, FSCS approaches are intended to provide developmentally appropriate supports and transitions from early childhood to adulthood. As Dryfoos (2002) noted, "almost anything can be provided in a school as long as it meets the needs of the school/community and as long as resources can be identified" (p. 397). The core concept of these models is to coordinate and integrate fragmented and often inaccessible programs into "one-stop shops" that, in turn, help schools to better support young people and their families (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002).

One well-known example of these efforts is the Quitman Street Community School, located in a disadvantaged neighborhood of Newark, New Jersey. Dryfoos (2003) described Quitman as an exemplary model that illustrates many of the major features of FSCS approaches. Adopting the Children's Aid Society prototype, Quitman is open from 7:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., offering before- and afterschool programming that is coordinated with the school curricula, as well as adult sports and education opportunities. The school includes a health clinic for students and community members, with a full-time nurse practitioner, social worker, and part-time pediatricians, dentists, and other service providers. Many parents are involved in the school, offering support or resolving school- or community-related issues, as well as volunteering in classrooms, the cafeteria, and so on. Volunteers also support the school in many other ways, such as when a group of volunteers replaced aging playground equipment. Community members can attend classes, such as computer skills development and General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation, which are provided at the school by various community agencies (Dryfoos, 2003).

With long-term support from the Charles S. Mott Foundation (http://www.mott.org/), the original community schools concept evolved into the more recent FSCS model (Dryfoos, 2002). These approaches are now associated with a variety of terms and models, such as "cross-sectoral alliances" (Wohlstetter, Malloy, Hentschke, & Smith, 2004), "strategic alliances" (Gajda, 2004), and "Full Purpose Partnerships" (Anderson, Houser, & Howland, 2010). More recently, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE;

2014) described FSCS as approaches that encourage the "coordination of academic, social, and health services through partnerships among (1) public elementary and secondary schools; (2) the schools' local educational agencies (LEAs); and (3) community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other public or private entities." This definition coincided with the establishment of a grant program by the USDOE to support FSCS implementation and replication. Through its Fund for the Improvement of Education, 10 communities across the United States were awarded 5-year grants in 2008 to develop or enhance local FSCS models. The FSCS initiative described in this article was one of these original 10 sites.

It is not surprising that FSCSs have gained the attention of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers, particularly in urban areas (e.g., Chen, Anderson, & Watkins, 2016). FSCS provides a model for coordinating and integrating various community services, including parent education, child welfare, health and mental health, case management, prevention programming, and afterschool care that support school-wide change processes (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000; Anderson, 2016; Dryfoos, 2002). On the contrary, even with growing federal support and increased local interests, substantive challenges confront the proper evaluation of FSCS models (Houser, 2014; Knapp, 1995), including resistance of schools toward outsiders (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005); difficulties of effective communication both with and among FSCS stakeholders (e.g., Epstein, 2011); substantive limitations of the best evaluation methods, such as the expenses associated with using random assignment (Dryfoos, 2002; Voyles, 2012); and the potential misuse of student-level outcome data to evaluate system-level projects (Hernandez & Hodges, 2003). Ultimately, generalizability of research and evaluation on FSCS models will be limited due to the methods used as well as the numerous and complex interactions among school personnel, service providers, and families created by model implementation (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015; Houser, 2014; Knapp, 1995).

Theoretical Framework

The child psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggested that children grow and thrive within an environment that extends from home to school to neighborhood to community and beyond (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to ecological systems theory,

> Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or restructure that environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27)

Development is promoted through continual and dynamic interactions between children and their surroundings. To illustrate, Bronfenbrenner (1994) used "a set of nested Russian dolls" (p. 39) as a guiding metaphor. The nested orientation of these dolls was intended to exemplify a series of theoretically relational structures, called the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Briefly summarized, the microsystem refers to interpersonal relationships with those significant others whom children see every day (e.g., family, school personal, peer group). The next level, mesosystem, denotes cross-relationships among the people in the microsystem. For example, Bronfenbrenner (1994) described the relationships among school and family as "a system of microsystems" (p. 40). In his theory, the exosystem includes the next level of relationships, such as parents' employers, a family's health care workers, and school district administrators. The macrosystem acknowledges the cultural and economic conditions of a society. Finally, Bronfenbrenner (1979) reasoned that all these relationships change and evolve over time, a level which he called the chronosystem.

In ecological systems theory, children's growth can be supported or hindered by these multilayered relationships. As such, FSCS approaches to coordinating and integrating community services into schools provide a kind of facilitation of ecological systems theory. Adding to systems theory, Chen and colleagues (2016) described how FSCS models build and enhance both families' and schools' *social capital*, the idea that networks and relationships have value that can be used to promote student well-being (McNeal, 1999). This theory further stipulates that social capital can be enhanced by better connecting and integrating fragmented community supports and social services, which in turn can be used to increase the strength of parents' social networks (Bourdieu, 1985; Rouxel, Heilmann, Aida, Tsakos, & Watt, 2015). As a result, the community within which a school operates and its families reside is expected to develop shared common values and resources. These resources, both tangible and intangible, are made more accessible to those who need them. Ultimately, this theory predicts that children in environments with higher amounts of social capital are more likely to develop to their fullest potential because schools function more effectively, parents and caregivers are empowered, and communities are more cohesive and harmonious. Effective schools and communities are better able to assume all the responsibilities of successful child development. In sum, in the FSCS model, ecological systems theory can be used to recognize the hierarchy and interconnectedness of relationships that affect child development and school functioning, while social capital is used to exploit and capitalize on these relationships at home, in school, and in the community. These efforts

reinforce the assumption that it does take a village to raise children (Anderson, 2016).

Research Questions

The purpose of the study described in this article was to evaluate a system-level FSCS project called the Providence Full Service Community Schools (PFSCS) initiative. PFSCS was one of the first federally funded FSCS in the United States. We first describe the setting and then examine the extent to which community perceptions of the PFSCS model changed over the course of 4 years during the implementation of the federal grant. Specifically, findings are compared from a baseline study conducted in 2009 and a follow-up study in 2013. Both studies used semistructured interviews to examine the perceptions of key stakeholders in Providence's children's service systems about the PFSCS initiative, including successes and challenges over time and how the community and the model changed from 2009 to 2013. Three primary research questions drove this study:

Research Question 1: How did key stakeholders perceive the successes of the PFSCS initiative?
Research Question 2: How did these stakeholders perceive the challenges of the PFSCS initiative?
Research Question 3: What implications can be drawn from stakeholders' perceptions about the successes and challenges for the 4-year project?

Although preconceived hypotheses did not drive the design, the 2013 study was developed to build upon the 2009 baseline study.

Method

Data for the 2009 study were gathered, analyzed, and reported as part of an evaluation plan that was conceived and implemented shortly after receipt of the federal grant. Data for the 2013 study similarly were collected, analyzed, and disseminated as part of the project's ongoing evaluation. The 4-year time lapse between these two studies allowed the researchers to explore changes over time. The following sections describe the setting, samples, data collection, and analytic procedures for both studies. Design differences between two studies are highlighted. Both studies were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Indiana University.

Setting

Providence, Rhode Island, first implemented its FSCS initiative during the 2008/2009 school year. Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island (http://www.diiri.org/), which had submitted the proposal to the USDOE in partnership with the Providence Public Schools (http://www.providence-schools.org), was responsible for the management and coordination of the PFSCS initiative. PFSCS targeted several elementary schools in a small geographic region of the city: Robert L. Bailey (started fall 2008), Charles N. Fortes (started fall 2009), Alfred Lima (fall 2009-spring 2010; started again fall 2012), the Sgt. Cornel Young and Charlotte Woods Elementary School at B. Jae Clanton Complex (started fall 2010), Lillian Feinstein Elementary School at Sackett Street (started fall 2011), Pleasant View (started fall 2012), and Mary E. Fogarty (started fall 2012). While there were variations in structure across schools, in general, the PFSCS initiative provided comprehensive services overseen by a site director who directed and coordinated activities at the school level, including family literacy programming, out-of-school time, wraparound case management, health outreach, and family engagement.

Evaluation activities for the PFSCS initiative were developed and monitored by a local Evaluation Advisory Board (EAB) that was formed by the external evaluator shortly after the grant was awarded in 2008. Membership on the EAB included evaluators from the external evaluation team at Indiana University, leaders from Dorcas International Institute and the school district, representatives from partner organizations (e.g., health, mental health, family literacy, child welfare, participating schools), representatives from family and youth advocacy organizations, and parents and caregivers. The original EAB included a number of evaluators from various family- and youth-focused projects and social service systems in Providence. This was intended to better connect the new project's evaluation activities with those already occurring in Providence. The primary goal of the EAB was to ensure that evaluation activities were both informed by and contributed to day-to-day and long-term functioning of the PFSCS initiative. Collected data were compiled, analyzed, and then shared with the EAB, which had input into finalizing and disseminating evaluation findings.

The EAB functioned until the end of the grant; however, its membership constantly changed, especially during the second half the grant period. Moreover, based on the interest of the PFSCS leadership, there were times when the EAB was given more attention than other times. The federal grant required only a select set of Government Performance and Results Act of

1993 (GPRA) data be reported to the granting agency. This gave the EAB considerable autonomy to create and implement a local evaluation based on the interests of its membership. The EAB also helped develop the theory of change and logic model for the PFSCS initiative.

Study Samples

In both the baseline (2009) and follow-up (2013) studies, purposeful sampling, based on criteria that were created by the EAB and approved by PFSCS governance, was used to recruit participants. As a nonprobability sampling technique, purposeful sampling involves the intentional choice of participants who can provide information that is associated with specific research questions by virtue of their experiences (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). For both studies, 2009 and 2013, the most important criterion for being nominated and invited to participate in an interview was possessing an understanding of the children's social services systems in Providence relative to the implementation of the PFSCS initiative. Moreover, understanding the children's social services systems also meant that these participants either worked directly in such agencies and had meaningful contact with them, or were in some other way connected with the PFSCS.

After the list was approved by the EAB, an invitation letter describing the study was sent to potential interviewees. In addition, snowball sampling (Bernard, 2006; Sadler, Lee, Seung-Hwan, & Fullerton, 2010; Suri, 2011) was employed to ensure that participants represented the diversity of experiences associated with PFSCS; each interviewee was asked to nominate additional stakeholders who should be interviewed. This comprehensive selection process ensured the inclusion of voices of families and from various agencies and systems involved in children's social services in Providence. Ultimately, for the 2009 baseline study, there was an 89% response rate (18 out of 20 nominees for the first round of interviews and six out of seven nominees for the second round). In the 2013 follow-up study, 80% (16 out of 20) of nominees were interviewed. Each participant was involved in no more than one interview per study. Some participants were interviewed for both the baseline and follow-up study. To maintain confidentiality, neither the identities nor specific roles of participants in either study are described further.

Data Collection

For comfort and convenience, participants were asked where they wanted to be interviewed. Typical interviews were conducted in the participant's office or another mutually convenient location, such as a coffee shop.

Some interviews were conducted over the phone. The interview protocol was relatively simple. In brief, the 2009 baseline study used semistructured questions to allow respondents to describe the benefits, goals, vision, and challenges of PFSCS, as well as how this initiative differed from other local education improvement efforts. In the 2013 follow-up study, respondents also were asked about the successes and challenges PFSCS had experienced since its implementation, and to describe contextual factors that had affected the operation and outcomes of the initiative. Interviews for both studies lasted between 30 and 60 min and were audio recorded and transcribed. An outside transcriber was used for reliable quality and efficient turnaround. The interviewer then checked the transcription with the audio recording. Transcripts were cleaned for coding by eliminating proper names and other identifying information, without changing meaning. The content of the transcripts was not otherwise altered. Audio recordings were securely stored and destroyed in accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board at Indiana University.

Data Analyses

For both studies, interview transcriptions were first examined broadly for common topics and ideas. For the 2009 study, a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used extensively to help the evaluators develop an emergent understanding of stakeholder perceptions about PFSCS through systematic exploration of the data. In both the baseline and the 2013 studies, analytic induction and constant comparison methods also were used (Krathwohl, 1998). Specifically, categories were identified, described, and then broken down into themes and, in some cases, subthemes. These categories and themes were then linked to other concepts to develop a theory or explanation (Creswell, 2014). The theory, which continued to be developed as the PFSCS initiative evolved over time, was compared with new data from the field. This process was participatory and iterative, and continued until discrepancies among the findings were resolved and no additional new information was forthcoming (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

Findings are reported separately and sequentially by study: 2009, followed by 2013. In the following sections, themes that emerged from the analyses of each study are presented and, when appropriate, subthemes also are described.

Baseline Study (2009)

In the baseline study, which included 18 stakeholder interviews and several follow-up interviews, four main themes emerged from the data: (a) factors that lead to the creation of the PFSCS initiative, (b) PFSCS mission, (c) anticipated challenges and possible solutions to implementation, and (d) vision for PFSCS. Each theme, along with subthemes, is described below.

Factors leading to the creation of the initiative. First, with regard to the timing of the implementation of the PFSCS initiative, stakeholders pointed out that funding is always the most critical factor in a project such as this. Stakeholders were well aware of the essential role of funders and how the seed money could help the initiative to establish and sustain itself. Respondents were pleased that the grant had been awarded but some were worried about possible disconnections between the organization that submitted the grant, Dorcas Place, and the school district where the project was being implemented. The second core aspect of this theme that emerged from the data was that both the individuals and affiliated organizations of the PFSCS were not satisfied with the current educational system in Providence. The desire to bring about positive changes and address, as one respondent described it, "the immense needs of students and families with the help of FSCS model" was a key subtheme. The third aspect was the perceived need for support from leadership for the PFSCS from multiple levels, including the mayor's office, school district superintendent, general public, and education commissioner. Fourth, respondents clearly noted that prior to the creation of PFSCS, a history of educational improvement endeavors already existed in Providence and the PFSCS initiative was built on an established foundation that included many previously established partnerships. Respondents noted that prior collaborations in Providence, directly and indirectly, contributed to the establishment of the PFSCS initiative and they were hopeful that these prior relationships would form a solid foundation for growing this project.

This history and context was viewed to have created an open attitude toward educational reform in Providence and a supportive atmosphere in which the PFSCS initiative was established. In general, stakeholders believed that multiple benefits would emerge from implementing the FSCS model, including (a) additional collaborations among the various players interested in educational reform efforts in Providence, (b) comprehensive systems of care for children and their families that would lead to improved health and mental health, (c) better access to other needed social services and supports for families, and (d) as a result of these factors, increased student educational success.

Mission of the PFSCS initiative. The second primary theme that emerged from this study focused on the importance of articulating and implementing a mission for the PFSCS. First, respondents suggested that the services and supports provided by PFSCS needed to align with those already existing in participating schools. Specifically, the mission of the model needed to emphasize integration and coordination so that overlap and turf issues among partners could be avoided or resolved. Second, and similarly, interviewees also clearly noted that the mission of the PFSCS initiative should be to help schools become the "hub" of the community where students, parents, and other community members could find and access needed resources. Respondents again clearly noted that such resources should be provided through well-designed comprehensive systems of service delivery (e.g., systems of care). Third, respondents argued that the mission of PFSCS needed to include improved and sustained family engagement in all project schools. They also noted that to the extent this was effectively achieved, student success could be expected to increase. Finally, interviewees argued that as PFSCS was a relatively new educational initiative, leaders needed to inform the general public and other potential partners about its role in the community. In other words, part of the mission of the PFSCS initiative should be to continue outreach not only to new partners but also to the wider community, to educate potential partners as well as the public about what it does and why it is important.

Anticipated challenges and recommended solutions. Stakeholders also were asked to envision possible challenges to the implementation of the PFSCS model and how such challenges might be avoided or resolved. The primary response was that the initiative was very ambitious, would not be easy to implement fully, and would be even harder to sustain. In fact, a clear recommendation to emerge from the data was that the community needed to focus on the long-term sustainability of PFSCS from the very beginning of the project. Interviewees recalled numerous reform-minded efforts that had come and gone in Providence, especially projects that were initially funded by external grants. Such transient work creates not only burnout when it is imposed on people from the outside but also skepticism because these cyclical patterns of "come and go" are so consistent. Second, respondents repeatedly noted the importance of clear, ongoing two-way communication at and across multiple project levels, including parent–teacher; school-non-school staff; project leader–public; and so on. As one respondent stated, although "the establishment of communication requires considerable persistence, maintenance of established relationships over time requires even more." The

PFSCS initiative was tasked with devising methods to strengthen and improve communication.

The third concern focused on the need to fully describe or "institutionalize" partnerships and important roles, especially at the leadership levels. For example, respondents noted that the *terms of partnerships*—the expectations and responsibilities of different partnering organizations and their employees' roles—needed to be outlined through memoranda of understanding. In addition to the importance of clearly defined partnerships, another perceived solution that turned out to be somewhat prophetic was how important it is to "prepare well in advance for the negative impact" of the frequent turnover of personnel in social services including education. Fourth, and repeatedly, respondents described the local economic challenges facing children and families, social services, and P-12 education. It was noted that education and social services are notoriously underfunded and the addition of the 2009 economic crisis made things much worse. Similarly, the challenges created by urban poverty, especially for youth and their families, also were expressed repeatedly. Respondents acknowledged that although these challenges were outside the control of PFSCS, the challenges of poverty directly highlighted the importance that PFSCS staff knows how to connect families with relevant resources. Fifth, interviewees described some of the political challenges that face Rhode Island, challenges that are often exacerbated by the small size of the state. As one stakeholder stated, "Rhode Island is a highly political state. For our small size, politics is everything here."

Another major challenge identified by interviewees was the extent to which participating schools were fully open to the initiative. Although schools and their staff were not viewed as necessarily being opposed to implementing a FSCS model, interviewees worried that the typical school staff member may feel a bit "jaded" by negative experiences related to multiple previous school reform efforts. Concerns about the amount of collaboration that would be required were also noted, as well as the sheer amount of communication needed for the FSCS model to be successful. Authentic partnerships are not easy to achieve, and trust needs to be constantly considered, as highlighted in this quote:

> Well, I assume there will be some friction around roles, and again, those are delicate situations that need to be addressed right away and smoothed out as things come up, and it could be as simple as we're bringing in health services so the school nurse feels threatened. [It] could mean we're referring families to family services for counseling and it threatens the social worker. [It] could be that we're doing a reading ramp-up summer program and it threatens the classroom teacher. So I think, obviously if everybody is on board and understands that the goal here is to help the kid with all these multiple measures,

> people, if they get it, they can let go of that stuff; but most people don't get it, and what they get is feeling threatened. So I think those things need to be addressed very quickly before it gathers a momentum of its own . . .

The need to anticipate and prepare in advance for these kinds of challenges was voiced repeatedly by respondents. One respondent stated that the PFSCS leadership must understand that, as the initiative evolves, more and more challenges will arise. Thus, it is essential to keep everybody "on the same page." Not surprisingly, the inevitability of disputes between and among schools, community-based organizations (CBOs), families, and other partners was a recurrent subtheme of "anticipated challenges." Transparency was a common solution expressed by the interviewees, which they also pointed out, can best be achieved "through opened and sustained lines of communication among and between all partners and at all levels of the project."

Future vision of PFSCS. In the last theme from the baseline study, stakeholders envisioned that the PFSCS initiative would help to improve youth development, family engagement, and student success in Providence. It is important to note that definitions of student success not only focused on academic performance but also included physical and mental health, school attendance, classroom behavior, and attitudes toward learning. PFSCS was also expected to improve family engagement which was viewed as being essential to adequate and appropriate communication among home, school, and community. Improving school climate was an expected long-term vision of this initiative. Respondents voiced hope for sustainability and replication of the FSCS model and that steady funding would be obtained. Interviewees likewise envisioned that the model would be expanded, both in terms of serving more students within project schools and replication with new schools. Respondents appeared to recognize that implementation processes for the PFSCS initiative would be both iterative and developmental. In other words, there would be setbacks and milestones that each school community would undergo during its development. In terms of a future vision, a basic premise emerged that the PFSCS should provide a platform for schools, families, and CBOs to collaborate transparently and authentically. Although this last finding was not as robust as the previously described themes, it was clear that respondents expected the PFSCS "platform" would lead to improved school and family functioning and other important systemic outcomes, if it could be implemented properly.

Follow-Up Study (2013)

A follow-up to the 2009 study was conducted toward the end of the grant period. The purpose of the follow-up study was to build from the initial study to understand how key stakeholders viewed the successes and challenges of the PFSCS model after 4 years of implementation. Analyses indicated that the interview data could be broadly categorized as follows: (a) perceived strong versus weak outcomes; (b) strengths; (c) contextual factors, including readiness for success; (d) recommendations for implementation, strengthening partnerships, strategic alignment, leadership, schools, CBOs, and evaluation; and (e) vision for the future. These five categories were then collapsed into three overarching themes for the follow-up study, which are described below: (a) challenges with the PFSCS initiative, (b) successes of the PFSCS initiative, and (c) lessons learned after 4 years, along with suggestions for future directions for the initiative.

Challenges with the PFSCS initiative. As the PFSCS evolved, stakeholders were keenly aware of the hurdles it had encountered, as well as its successes. Specifically, findings indicated that interviewees viewed the PFSCS initiative as starting quickly and powerfully, but slowing over time. Some of the slowing was due to changes in leadership, staff turnover, and newer community and school reform efforts that replaced or interfered with the focus on PFSCS. Some of the perceptions of slowing down also had to do with an underestimation of how comprehensive the PFSCS should be and a lack of readiness to accomplish this level of implementation. However, perceived lack of readiness and underestimation of need were both clearly attributed to repeated leadership changes in PFSCS and elsewhere, and with the adoption of similar but possibly competing initiatives in Providence. For example, in 2010, the Providence Children's Initiative introduced a model called the "Harlem Children's Zone" to build community supports for student success. Interviewees noted that these were laudable efforts but they also created confusion not just for parents and school personnel but also among the general public. Social service professionals in different agencies "were not always clear about the different initiatives and which ones were occurring in which schools or neighborhoods." Challenges are further described in the last section of the findings called "Lessons Learned." This elaborated discussion is deliberate to underscore the extent to which respondents in the follow-up study wanted to ensure that results from this study provided some directions for the future of the PFSCS as well as for others who might undertake similar journeys.

Successes of the PFSCS initiative. On the contrary, respondents were quite pleased with the success that the PFSCS model brought about. First, PFSCS helped to promote a culture change within the community; second, PFSCS improved parent involvement; third, PFSCS helped to improve student and family literacy; and last but not least, the PFSCS helped to improve the community's awareness of the importance of early childhood education and out-of-school time. These areas of success are further described next.

Culture change and parent involvement. Most stakeholders noted that PFSCS helped to promote a culture change in the schools, among partners, and in the district that reflected the broader FSCS approach. This kind of culture change was one of the desired vision goals outlined by stakeholders in the baseline study, and it is one of the notable successes of PFSCS identified in the follow-up study. Specifically, interviewees noted, PFSCS had increasingly become more embedded in the district with several schools adopting PFSCS as a turnaround strategy. Moreover, the school district created a full-time position titled Director of Strategic Partnerships which was viewed, at least in part, as a response to collaboration in the PFSCS model. Some respondents felt that this is the kind of work that may prove "transformative" as the district moves forward. Moreover, the rationale for the district including *multi-tiered systems of support* in its long-term strategic plan was partially attributable to having the PFSCS model. Thus, as a stakeholder noted, "PFSCS has helped to impact the Providence Public School District in ways that extend how it thinks about partnering and student supports."

Parent engagement was found to be one of the stronger positive outcomes of the PFSCS initiative, as illustrated in this respondent's comment, "I think increasing parent involvement, bringing parents in, having very purposeful activities and supports [is one of the strongest outcomes to date]." However, this finding needs to be considered with some caution, as several interviewees questioned the quality of current family engagement, suggesting that the PFSCS needs to ensure that family engagement is authentic and sustained over time. In the words of one stakeholder,

> [B]ecause a family goes to an event three times in a year [at] their child's school . . . to me doesn't say a lot . . . I'm just saying if it's done in a way where you're growing parent leadership skills; so possibly supporting the creation of a PTO . . . for me, parent engagement is having parents that are involved in the activities of the school and can advocate . . .

Student achievement and family literacy. Some stakeholders noted that

PFSCS may have helped to improve reading scores. At one of the project schools, there was an intentional investment in reading interventions and respondents speculated that reading scores had improved for least for some of the students who were involved. A respondent put it this way:

> In regard to students' academic performance, the third grade reading scores are perceived to have improved or been maintained for students involved in [reading intervention]. However, the point of contention is the ability to move beyond literacy to overall academic improvement for students not engaged in an intentional academically focused intervention.

Although causal connections between PFSCS and improved academics could not be established from these findings, it was clear that respondents viewed the implementation of the model as a very important step for participating schools, the district, and the community, in the pursuit of improved academic achievement. Interviewees strongly believed that test scores as well as grades would eventually improve, specifically, because of PFSCS. Finally, several stakeholders noted that family literacy programming "really developed and is a key success for PFSCS." One participant said, " . . . adult education has met benchmarks every year . . . "

Focus on early childhood. A few stakeholders mentioned the success of including an early childhood component in the PFSCS framework. By integrating child care, children's health interventions and protections, and parent education within a wraparound framework, young children and their families were receiving higher quality services and supports. Respondents acknowledged that although early childhood programming has been a constant struggle for PFSCS, momentum has been gained and partners more clearly agree that early childhood opportunities will enable PFSCS to expand its menu of services, strengthen family-school rapport, and improve transitions into early elementary.

Out of school time. Some stakeholders noted that out of school time has been a key success for PFSCS. For several years, summer programming allowed schools and CBOs to partner to prevent summer learning loss. One result has been that the summer learning program offered through PFSCS became more systematic, served more students, and garnered more funding. These efforts also allowed the district to consider the types of summer programming that might be used to support students year-round. One interviewee stated, "It was always kind of a hodge-podge . . . Full Service Community School sites really helped [the district] rethink that [summer learning loss]. Additionally, the summer program through PFSCS has helped [to] address

summer learning loss." Another participant noted that this impact was even broader, with potential state-level implications:

> Full Service summer learning program really helped inform [state education department] to raise that to the next level to create a state wide summer learning strategy and then got funding from Hasbro and the general assembly . . . So they created a legislative task force from the [state's] general assembly on summer learning . . . Full Service, directly and indirectly, has helped influence state, state policy, state resources, and raised consciousness and awareness of an issue that probably a smaller pool of people knew about, you know, learning loss. And so, I think that's been extraordinary.

Miscellaneous improvements. Although less fully articulated than the previously described successes, a host of other positive outcomes associated with the PFSCS emerged from the findings of the 2013 follow-up study. These included *practice-level collaboration* (e.g., teachers, parents, and afterschool personnel working more closely), *understanding and using data at multiple levels* (e.g., student, school, community), *school-wide changes* (e.g., increased focus on connecting with families and better connecting afterschool activities with school curricular goals), and the *provision of comprehensive family supports* (e.g., providing case management to families, connecting caregivers to family literacy programs, helping family members access needed social services such as mental health counseling). Overall, many respondents felt that the PFSCS initiative had numerous positive influences on participating schools and their communities, as well as on the entire school district.

Lessons learned. We end the presentation of the follow-up study results by describing a set of findings that may be referred to as important take-aways or "things we can learn from five years of the PFSCS that might be instructive to others in similar situations." First, although many respondents indicated a more collaborative culture was emerging among the PFSCS schools and partners, interviewees nonetheless also pointed out that the obstacles to effective collaboration, which were clearly identified as potential challenges in the baseline study, remained pervasive and problematic. Respondents unmistakably described the tremendous difficulty of building efficient, comprehensive systems of care across different schools, each with its own unique culture, strengths, and needs, in such a short timeframe. Such work was further impeded every time key leaders retired, were promoted, or moved to a new position. Territorial issues and silos were reduced in the PFSCS model, but still remained "fairly entrenched," even after 5 years. Several interviewees suggested that the community had been either too optimistic or had failed to plan for the substantial changes in leadership that are inevitable over time,

including the loss of project champions, changes in political administrations and associated appointees, and the consequential entrance of new leaders with different and sometimes opposing visions:

> It is hard to function effectively and consistently if the key players keep changing and if there is no driving vision that receives full commitment. High turnover at all levels means that there is no trickle-down or trickle-up effects from a solid base of employees who are dedicated and committed to this way of working with a shared vision of desired outcomes. The vision keeps having to be rediscovered or reinvented. In the world of grant funding, schools and CBOs need to be able to adjust programming and visions to keep up with the funding streams.

Respondents pointed out more pragmatic needs for PFSCS as it moves forward. For example, some folks noted that the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of many of the important key players (e.g., school-based site directors) in all aspects of the model need to be fully articulated and agreed to by all partners. Lack of role clarification left some stakeholders confused or just misinformed, inhibiting the overall mission of the PFSCS model. Not surprisingly, staff turnover only added to confusion about role and responsibility.

A challenge facing PFSCS in 2013, which had not been mentioned in the baseline study, was limited collective experience working with academic data. Respondents stated that help was needed for data interpretation at multiple levels, as well as the need for using data to create and monitor short-term and long-term change. Even though the testing requirements imposed by the federal *No Child Left Behind* law were in full effect during the study period, it was clear that the gathering, cleaning, and analyses of these data, as well as how to address sharing and confidentially issues related to the practical uses of these data at the local level, were not well understood. To illustrate the complexities of making use of testing data in the PFSCS model, one participant said,

> And so when you track the kids that are in Full Service and/or in reading intervention, the data still goes like this [upward trend]; but what happens is the school sees [downward trend]. And if it went down a tick, which it did in 2011-12, well, it was a problem with Full Service; and I just don't think that's fair. So to me, the challenge or the weakness, is how, collectively, we're looking at the information and how we're looking at the data.

Indeed, findings from this study suggested that help with data analyses and interpretation was widely needed at multiple levels. Not surprisingly, one of

the primary recommendations emerging from PFSCS evaluation is to expect to need technical assistance for using data to inform practice.

The last quote also serves as an important reminder that the PFSCS was not originally conceptualized as a model specifically designed to improve school-wide academic improvement. Although respondents assumed it would lead to improved achievement, the primary purpose of PFSCS was viewed as a vehicle for providing services and supports to schools and families. Regardless of original perceptions, findings from the follow-up study suggested that improved academic achievement emerged, arguably, as one of the most important expectations for the PFSCS. In fact, the lack of clearly identifiable improvements in academic achievement in PFSCS schools was widely noted as a disappointment; even though, as some interviewees also pointed out, the problems facing some of these schools and their communities are highly intractable. Given the "entrenched, enduring poverty in a community like the one served by PFSCS," some respondents argued that it is important to develop a shared working theory about when a new comprehensive program like this one should be expected to broadly improve academics.

Discussion

Overall, the initial goals identified in the 2009 baseline study can be described as having been partially achieved. As a whole, stakeholders had expressed big expectations for the PFSCS initiative in 2009. Findings suggest that respondents envisioned that the PFSCS would help increase student success and family engagement, and improve the climate of participating schools. In the follow-up study 4 years later, it was apparent that while some expectations had been met, a perception emerged that the project fell short of intended goals. Interviewees noted that some of the anticipated outcomes associated with the initiative had not been clearly achieved or remained in formative stages. For example, stakeholders felt that family engagement had increased in PFSCS schools and to a lesser extent, school climates had improved; but they also questioned whether reading scores had improved as a result of model implementation. Specifically, when compared with the baseline study, stakeholders in the follow-up study had less confidence in the ultimate goal of increased test scores. However, this finding needs to be interpreted with some caution given that improved academics in the PFSCS was not a core project goal identified in the baseline study. Instead, the perception in the baseline study, that academics would improve, might be better categorized as "hopeful"; as noted by this interviewee, "academics should be expected to improve." In fact, in the early logic model developed for the PFSCS

initiative, improved academic success was listed not as a project outcome but as an impact that was expected to emerge over time. Some respondents found it problematic that achievement took on such precedence when it had not been included initially as an expected outcome of the PFSCS. Moreover, it was beyond the scope of our study to examine in sufficient detail why perspectives about the level of importance that stakeholders were placing on test scores changed from baseline to follow-up. On the contrary, as findings from the follow-up study indicated, the lack of preplanning to study academic achievement created problems for the community as the project progressed, not only with data collection and analyses but also with the perception, held by at least some stakeholders, that the model had not fully succeeded.

At the community level, some of the changes that occurred between 2009 and 2013 in the PFSCS initiative were evident in the findings from this study. As the grant period came to an end, there were clear attempts to engage a broader array of stakeholders (e.g., City Council; School Board) in the PFSCS model that had not been occurring in 2009 (e.g., Green & Gooden, 2014). Also by 2013, there was a wide perception that the school district was far more interested in how school–community partnerships could benefit schools. In fact, the district created and hired a Director of Strategic Partnerships, ostensibly just for this reason. Thus, by working collaboratively with a wide range of community-based stakeholders, such as families and business leaders, school leaders broadened their understanding about the political and socioeconomic forces shaping their local contexts and gained an asset-based understanding of the communities in which their schools are situated (Horsford, 2010; Khalifa, 2012). To some extent, this evolution reflected what Ishimaru (2014) reported in her ethnographic case study of one Oregon school district's collaboration with a CBO: "traditional partnerships tend to emphasize individualistic goals and interventions to remedy perceived deficiencies in students, families, or communities, whereas collaborations emphasize systemic goals and coordinated change within a culture of shared responsibility" (p. 208).

At the school level, there were many conversations occurring in 2013 that were not occurring in 2009. For example, discussions about connecting afterschool programs and other aspects of the PFSCS model to academic achievement were wide-spread. However, some concern about too much focus on academics was expressed and respondents noted that the community needs to remember that FSCS approaches should focus not just on improving academic achievement but also in creating and providing opportunities for recreational activity to support the overall well-being of students and families (Deich, 2001). Afterschool programs can and should include community service, arts, sports, and educational enrichment activities like chess and science

clubs, as well as programs more focused on academics such as Project Learn, from the Boys & Girls Clubs of America (Quinn, 2005). In addition, conversations about when and how school and community partners could and should be collaboratively discussing individual students and families were quite prevalent in our studies. This topic, which often emerges with the growth of interagency collaboration, not only includes the legal and ethical need for confidentiality but also touches on turf and territory, distinct agency-level mission and purpose, funding (who pays for what), and the evolving role of families from passive recipients to drivers of services provision (e.g., Anderson, 2011). As Corrigan (2000) stated, "Collaborative ventures require sharing of resources, and information is one of the most important resources needed to run a service organization" (pp. 186-187). Although a necessity, client information confidentiality can pose a barrier to effective collaboration (Gardner, 1992). Greenberg and Levy (1992) suggested applying a "need-to-know" standard and a rigorous information delivery system to facilitate the exchange of confidential information. In sum, the PFSCS initiative was associated with some positive effects at multiple levels of the ecological system where the child develops, including family, school, and community.

Limitations

Obviously, inferences drawn from these studies should be made cautiously and take into consideration several limitations. First, purposeful sampling was used in both studies, creating the possibility that not all stakeholder perspectives were adequately captured or represented. Still, in both studies, respondents were invited to participate because they were nominated by their peers in the community as being able to reflect on the PFSCS model from a variety of perspectives. Diverse perspectives were actively sought. Moreover, the respondent lists for both studies were checked and rechecked with the EAB prior to as well as during data collection. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that it is possible with this type of design that a different group of respondents might have led to an alternate set of findings. Similarly, although multiple sources of data were used for these studies, results were mostly based on stakeholder perspectives. Thus, even though, for example, respondents may have reported that the PFSCS model led to improved family engagement, we were not always able to corroborate such perceptions with more objective sources of information. Second, because this research was conducted in a set of elementary schools in one school system in a single metropolitan area on the eastern seaboard, generalizations to other communities, school districts, or schools are potentially ambiguous. Participating schools, teachers, parents, or students were not randomly assigned, and thus,

there were unknown differences among participants (e.g., demographics). In spite of these limitations, we suggest that the findings from this work might assist school and community leaders and others in better understanding their own local efforts to develop FSCS models (Stake, 1995).

Concluding Thoughts

Overall, this project highlights a path that often occurs in educational reform efforts. First, community leaders recognize a need, find a grant or other external funding to address that need, and implement a significant intervention. Second, because the process understandably garners the attention of other community leaders (e.g., politicians; new advocacy groups), new stakeholders get involved in the work. Third, as turnover and change occurs and new political administrations take power, competing ideas and interventions are introduced, and original leaders retire, move on, or just burn out. Finally, priorities change and funding runs out (Anderson, 2016). In the case of PFSCS, even with considerable focus on sustainability from the outset, this predictable path was in many ways followed. Thus, we conclude with three concrete lessons drawn from this work that might be instructive to others involved in similar ventures.

1. Turnover, which needs to be anticipated at all levels of the initiative, from CEOs of partnering agencies to project leadership to school personnel, can have substantial, continued, and often negative impact on development.

The importance of creating some level of cohesion and continuity in leadership cannot be overstated (Adelman & Taylor, 1997). Deich (2001) noted that honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, and consistency are essential to effective leadership; perhaps nowhere is this more important than in a project as comprehensive as the PFSCS initiative.

2. Agreed upon and clearly written out and delineated expectations are needed for all aspects of these kinds of projects, including specified job descriptions for all personnel, partners, and components (Dryfoos, 2002).

Clarity around the PFSCS model was seen as necessary not only for building trust and institutionalizing relationships and vision, but findings also indicated that operationalized collaboration would have reduced the negative

impact associated with constant staff and leadership turnover. According to one participant,

> Key lessons are things like being very careful about clear lines and delineations, in terms of expectations of partners and what, you know, what each of us expects from the other. There's been a lot of transition, and we were learning on-the-ground communication.

We are reminded of an observation recently made by Stefanski, Valli, and Jacobson (2016), in a recent examination of the FSCS literature, who aptly put it this way: "Key to partnership building is clarifying power-sharing boundaries and responsibilities as well as recognizing that more comprehensive forms of partnership require a radical transformation of traditional school structures and norms" (p. 135).

3. As Blank and colleagues (2003) suggested more than a decade ago, starting with and constantly establishing buy-in with a broad and ever growing group of stakeholders is not only critical but also an unending part of development and sustainment of large-scale school and community reform efforts.

One stakeholder put these challenges this way:

> I think one of the lessons learned was you cannot come in to any school and claim ownership and plant your flag. You have to come in and allow people to invite you in. You can have—you can physically be here, but you have to let people come to you and say, "we're ready—we need you for this piece, and we need you for this piece, and we can see the value add of you being here." . . . you really need to build relationships first . . . [I]t may just be about somebody heard me [as a teacher] and if they're willing to work with me, well then, boy oh boy, am I willing to work with them.

After 4 years of implementation in Providence, tough issues remained. Even though stakeholders argued that improving interagency collaboration was vital for the development of the community and its schools, fully and authentically engaging families and maintaining relationships among multiple and ever-changing players proved to be an ongoing struggle for the PFSCS. Still, almost without exception and despite concerns, interviewees in our research studies stressed the importance of the work and desired to see the program expand. We end with a reminder that the unease inherent in these findings should not be considered unusual, particularly given the challenges of evaluating and understanding complex social interventions. This kind of

work is not easily measured or replicated across sites. Uncertain ideas about PFSCS outcomes can be partially attributed to the challenges of studying multilayered, multifaceted service systems, and constantly changing political demands. Indeed, consensus about the effectiveness of complex, comprehensive models, such as PFSCS, will likely only emerge as evidence from many site-specific studies accumulates and is systematically examined. Thus, we end by calling for more and better studies of these highly contextualized, but potentially powerful approaches to interagency collaboration.

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