© Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, Volume 24, Number 2, p. 69, (2020)
 ISSN 1534-6104, eISSN 2164-8212

Building on Strengths to Address Challenges: An Asset-Based Approach to Planning and Implementing a Community Partnership School

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Abstract

This article explores the planning and implementation process for a community partnership school for a historically low-performing elementary school using an asset-based community development approach. We offer insights into the community needs assessment process that enabled four key community partners to identify needs and projects for the school and surrounding community. The community partnership school draws its strength from four local organizations assimilating their expertise and resources on focal areas for community engagement. Beyond organizational resources, the partners also developed local networks and resources that could be useful for the community. Building on the asset-based community development model, insights and challenges are presented for others seeking to employ a similar approach to mobilize assets for student success and community engagement.

Keywords: community partnership school, asset-based community development, community-based organizations

This article presents a retrospective account of the planning and early phases of implementation for a community partnership model in a historically low-performing school serving a high-needs urban neighborhood. The four partners working in the Florida Panhandle region are Escambia County School District (via C. A. Weis Elementary School), Children's Home Society (CHS), University of West Florida (UWF), and Community Health Northwest Florida (CHNF, formerly known as Escambia County Clinic). Considerable attention is given to the specific process of identifying and cultivating resident resources (or assets) as a primary foundation for the work, as this has been a central focus of efforts to date and an element of the work that distinguishes it from deficit model approaches that are more commonly deployed in efforts to benefit high-needs communities (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006). Results obtained from this work directly informed the prioritization of effort and resources in the early implementation phase, as well as longer range planning for growth and sustainability. Drawing on findings from our reflective analysis of the planning and implementation processes as well as the insights of varied stakeholders, we extrapolate lessons that inform the (ongoing) work and should inform similar work in other settings.

Following a review of literature about the community partnership schools and asset mapping or capacity mapping, the background of the project is discussed to provide an overview of the project site and demographic information. The authors then present the process of asset-based community needs assessment and the projects that have emerged from the process. This article offers insights from the initial stages of the project, where it was imperative for the four key partners to recognize the community needs and shared goals. Therefore,

this article could assist future university–community partners to participate in long-term projects within their communities and provide a foundation grounded in research for school and community need activities. Finally, this article highlights the role of the university to actively engage in the local community with long-term partnerships.

Review of the Literature

Community Schools

The origins of community schools can be traced back to Dewey's speech "The School as a Social Centre" and his association with Jane Addams, founder of the Hull House (Longo, 2007). The basic tenets of democratic and civic education have evolved into community schools that support students, their families, and the local community. Contemporary community schools have taken inspiration from institutions like the Hull House, the Highlander Folk School, and the Neighborhood Learning Community, among others.

Community schools are a mutual partnership between schools and local community stakeholders. The integrated approach of community development and after-school academic and enrichment support serves the local community and provides essential substance to the students (Longo, 2007; National Center for Community Schools, 2016). According to the National Center for Community Schools (2016), "Community schools maintain a central focus on children, while recognizing that children grow up in families, and that families are integral parts of communities" (para. 2). Blank and Villarreal (2016) explained that the community schools work within public schools as "centers of flourishing communities where everyone belongs and works together to help our young people thrive" (p. 16). Sanders (2016) noted community schools are sites that provide "services for families, lower family stress, and increase family engagement in children's education" (p. 158). Community schools are sites that foster interconnections between community members, school system, and community agencies to offer a broad array of services (Dryfoos, 2005). Community schools integrate health services and enrichment programs for students and their families as an untapped opportunity for raising academic achievement and improving learning. Lubell (2011) illustrated the pioneering approach of the Children's Aid Society in the Developmental Triangle (See Figure 1). Children are at the center of integrated learning opportunities, support services, and instructional programs to support the children, families, and community. In the

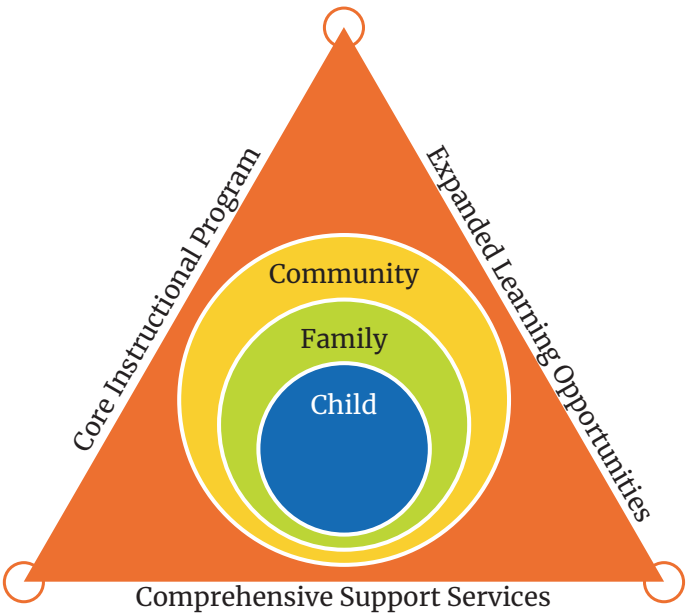

Figure 1. The Developmental Triangle
Note. Adapted from "Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action," by E. Lubell, 2011, p. 3. Copyright 2011 by the Children's Aid Society.

traditional community school approach, integration of services is integral to the structure for providing an array of services.

Community Partnership School

The Community Partnership School represents a specific application of the community school model and was developed and piloted by the Center for Community Schools and Child Welfare Innovation at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in collaboration with Maynard Evans High School in the Orange County School District (in Orlando, Florida). The community partnership school model has been adopted for the community school initiative at C. A. Weis Elementary School. The key attributes of the Community Partnership School are similar to those of the community school model, with their local context offering opportunities for unique implementation processes. The key elements of the model are long-term partnerships and shared decision-making processes between the school, local community organizations, university, and health institution (UCF, 2016, p. 2). Partnerships are critical for sustainability of community schools, as they are "intentional, aligned, and focused on results" (Capers & Shah, 2015, p. 29). The Community Partnership School enshrined the partnership aspect in its title and structure. The main attributes of this model for students, parents, and local communities are the integration of instructional programs, expanded learning opportunities, and support services. The Community Partnership School includes

> (a) holistic services aimed at removing learning barriers; (b) academic success and healthy communities; (c) enrichment activities beyond a school's curriculum; (d) understanding and meeting needs of the local community; and (e) encouraging opportunities for the parents as well as the larger community. (UCF, 2016, p. 2)

Additionally, the partners of the Community Partnership School commit to a shared vision for the school as well as the local community and pooling and providing access to resources.

This model offers prospects for creating a hub where students, parents, teachers, and local community members feel a sense of ownership (Capers & Shah, 2015). This hub (termed "The Hub" within the organizational structures and systems of the Evans Community Partnership School) provides a long-term connection to students to enrich their community while achieving success.

Asset-Based Community Development

Asset mapping or capacity mapping is a participatory approach that is primarily utilized to support community revitalization (Kretzmann, 2010; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). It incorporates the combination of a broad set of strategies and practices as part of a collective process of harnessing the individual and collective skills within a particular community and the ability to strategically deploy those assets to support, sustain, and revitalize that community. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) identified the following three key aspects of asset-based community development:

- Asset based. This concept advocates a positive approach to sustainable development wherein the community building begins with a collective process of identifying the assets within the community.
- Internally focused. The collectivism at the community level acknowledges the need for an outside support; nevertheless, the focus is internally driven. The priority for asset mapping is to identify and leverage the resources from within the community.
- Relationship driven. Community building through asset mapping has strong impetus on "any identifiable set of activities pursued by a community in order to increase the social capacity of its members" (Mattessich et al., 2004, p. 11). This requires a continuous process of building reciprocal relationships among community members. Furthermore, conducting an inventory of the skills required to survive in the given environment can assist in maintaining and strengthening these relationships.

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) and Kretzmann (2010) set forth a five-step process for community engagement utilizing an asset-based approach. Within this process, asset mapping is a participatory method that is used as the initial

step toward community engagement. The researchers (Kretzmann, 2010; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) identified the following five steps in the asset-based approach:

- Asset mapping. This first step is to map the assets within the community and interact with individuals, citizens' associations, business leaders, and local institutions. The underlying idea of this first step is to gain knowledge about the assets through strategies such as transact walk.
- Building internal relationships. This process allows building relationships among local assets for mutually beneficial problem solving within the community. Collaboration between diverse groups of individuals will help to engage people with an insider's perspective in realistic activities.
- Asset mobilization. The process encourages mobilization of the community's assets for economic development. Asset mapping assists with the identification and utilization of local resources for local development.
- Building a vision. Asset mapping can assist in sustainably creating representative groups of local leaders and stakeholders for the purposes of building a community vision and plan. This helps to ensure the rights of the local people and their complete commitment to the proposed activity.
- Establishing external connections. Asset mapping captures the insider's perspective, and it also has the flexibility to engage the outsiders who may have a pertinent cause that aligns with the local community.

Asset-Mapping Activities Beyond School: Bringing Together Community and Schools

The cohesive approach to engage parents and children can stimulate and mobilize social, cultural, and human capital development within the community, with the school acting as a nodal point for every activity. Case studies by Green and Goetting (2010) illustrated seven successful examples from the U.S. and other countries. Building upon the strategy of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), Green and Goetting (2010) focused on professional trainings and technical assistance at the community level with an overall commitment to looking inside the community and seeking professional assistance from within the community to avoid dependency on outside support. Within this type of model, a school can assume status as a nodal agency to facilitate a community-based center/forum (Johnson, Thompson, et al., 2009). This forum can encourage community members, students, professionals, technical experts, academicians, researchers, and others to find and assume their role in a communal effort. The purpose of such community-based activity is to bring together local community leaders as well as professional experts to undertake community building. Community building here is not limited solely to a community project; it includes personal assistance to individuals who need some specific help. Green and Goetting (2010) suggested economic activities such as credit trainings, personal finance management, and taxation workshops. They also presented guidelines—based on prior experiences—to reorganize community assets to promote community engagement. The asset-based community development strategies consider contexts and cultures as common issues, and concerns are addressed. Again, the idea is to understand the limitations and build upon the key characteristics for resilience.

Asset mapping can be an enriching experience provided the participation of stakeholders is a respected effort for everyone involved; thus, cultural sensitivity is essential for the efficacy of this development strategy (Green & Goetting, 2010). Linking human capital with social and cultural capital is crucial at every phase of the proposed activity. Communities, particularly those with marginalized populations and socioeconomic challenges, have sensitive aspects and fragility interwoven within the groups. Isolation can cause disagreement; however, asset mapping can positively impact the communities by bringing them together to create and initiate development from inside (Johnson, Thompson, et al., 2009).

Models of community education, such as the Al Kennedy Alternative School (*https://kennedy.slane.k12.or.us/*), Cincinnati's Oyler Community Learning Center (*https://*

oyler.cps-k12.org/), and the Promise Neighborhoods program (*https://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html*), have created a niche in spaces left behind by large-scale school reform programs such as those initiated as part of No Child Left Behind (Coalition for Community Schools, 2015a, 2015b). The Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCDI; *https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx*) at DePaul University offers a framework for bringing together the community and educational leaders into a holistic learning experience for the students.

Development of C. A. Weis Community Partnership School

Context and Initial Work

The C. A. Weis Community Partnership School, initiated in 2016, has materialized through a long-term partnership (25 years) between the Escambia County School District (via C. A. Weis Elementary School), CHS, UWF, and CHNF. The four core partners bring together a committed superintendent and principal, a health care partner, a university partner, and a community social services partner. Escambia County School District includes 35 elementary schools, nine middle schools, and seven high schools. This project is based at C. A. Weis Elementary School, a Title 1 school within a high-needs community. Escambia County School District provides the project site for the Community Partnership School. CHS has been active in Florida since 1902 with a focus on children and families. CHS is the lead partner and provides high-quality academics, health care, counseling, support, mentoring, and more. UWF was established in fall 1967 and has almost 13,000 students. UWF's partnership contributions are led by the College of Education and Professional Studies, with faculty engaged in research and collaboration. The college also assists in identifying resources across the university that can be mobilized for community school projects. CHNF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit community health center active in the region since 1992. CHNF provides resources for the C. A. Weis Community Partnership School Wellness Cottage, a pediatric clinic embedded in the school, to provide a range of services for the students and community members.

The long-term commitment between these partners includes time, resources, and leadership commitment. CHS competed for and received a planning and implementation grant from University of Central Florida (UCF) that provided funding for 2 years contingent upon establishing the commitment to a long-term partnership. The implementation grant has been crucial in establishing the Community Partnership School and planning for a long-term project that includes establishing processes and affordances for resident voice, promoting stakeholder engagement, and providing services through The Hub (a one-stop service provider housed within the school). Planning became a priority to ensure sustainability of the organizational structures and systems of the Community Partnership School. To facilitate that planning, the four partners participated in a series of meetings and workshops at the initial stage to discuss and formalize the focal areas of the Community Partnership School. These workshops and meetings were structured to promote a broader understanding of the community needs in practice and to identify specific strategies for the Community Partnership School at C. A. Weis Elementary School.

Priority was given to forming committees for community leadership and outreach into the community, data collection, and communication. These committees, with membership from all partners, discussed and formalized the processes for supporting the structure of the Community Partnership School. The data committee took the lead in operationalizing the community needs assessment (CNA) and sharing data with partners to initiate implementation strategy. UWF was the lead partner for the CNA.

Initial work involved forming partnerships with relevant organizations and collaboratively conceptualizing roles and operationalizing responsibilities for the core partners. CHS served as a connector (Morse, 2014) that facilitated dialogue and sharing among the various agencies involved. The multiple-step process was used to better understand challenges and will remain an ongoing and iterative process as we continue to learn and deepen our understanding moving forward, and we will use that deeper understanding to fine-tune the work. The process began with identifying and reviewing available extant data and reports to better understand the social, cultural, and economic contexts of the school and community. We fol-

Table 1. Demographic Data for C. A. Weis Elementary School Students

	%2016–17 n = 511	%2017–18 n = 544	%2018–19 n = 543
African American	79.5	80.5	77.9
Hispanic	4.9	4.0	4.9
Two or more races	5.7	5.7	5.7

Note. Source: Florida Department of Education (2020a, 2020b, 2020c).

lowed that process by surveying C. A. Weis Elementary teachers and conducting interviews and focus groups with parents and community members. This work was undertaken under the auspices of the planning grant, and we did not seek IRB approval for it. On the follow-up community needs assessment, we requested and received IRB approval from UWF. In all cases, we asked people to help us identify and understand (1) people, places, and things that can contribute to the work of promoting positive educational outcomes and community well-being (assets) and (2) the specific barriers faced by the community and the school in reaching those educational and community objectives (challenges). Additionally, core partner members participated in town hall meetings conducted by an outside community entity that addressed the needs of the Brownsville neighborhood in the zip code that overlapped with the C. A. Weis Elementary School zone.

Setting

We started by reviewing extant data and other information from various government sources (e.g., Census Bureau). These data can help with building a preliminary understanding of background and context but are incomplete/insufficient for getting a sense of the community to the extent that is necessary to consider appropriate services and interventions that might address the challenges. Moreover, these data do not allow for identification of assets or provide voice/agency among the members of the community—elements that are essential to effective community-based work, according to key figures in the field (e.g., Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Thus, we made use of these data but also moved well beyond to seek broader and deeper understandings.

Extant Demographic Data.The following data provide a picture of the characteristics of children and families served by C. A. Weis Elementary School. Over the last 6 years, the number of students has slightly decreased, and there has been gradual change in composition of the minority communities (see Table 1). The total number of students was 570 in 2014–2015, decreased to 511 in 2016–2017, and increased to 543 in 2018–2019. The (proportional) Hispanic student population has more than doubled in the past 6 years, from 2.1% in 2013–2014 to 4.9% in 2018–2019. However, the (proportional) African American student population has slightly decreased, from 85.9% in 2013–2014 to 77.9% in 2018–2019. Similarly, the students who identified with two or more races remained consistent at 5.7%.

Extant School Performance Data. In recent years, student achievement scores for English/Language Arts has remained static, whereas mathematics and science have each shown a downward trend (see Table 2).

For the 2018–2019 school year, C. A. Weis Elementary School was among the 300 lowest-performing elementary schools in the state of Florida (Florida Department of Education, 2019). Low student achievement, especially among impoverished and minority students, was a primary motivation for the efforts that led to initiating a community partnership school within the C. A. Weis Elementary School.

Asset Mapping/Needs Assessment

An accurate and comprehensive understanding of needs posed by nonacademic barriers to effective teaching and learning is essential to the success of the proposed community partnership school. We approached the work of identifying needs and barriers through the framework of an asset-based community development model. In short, we wanted to identify the assets that are present in the community, as well as the challenges faced by members of the community (including C. A. Weis Elementary students and their families), in

Table 2. Summary of Weis Elementary Proficiency Levels on State Assessments

	2013–14[a]	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19
ELA		11%	11%	14%	18%	31%
Mathematics	25%	22%	16%	26%	27%	42%
Science	37%	26%	13%	21%	43%	32%

Note. Source: Florida Department of Education (2020a, 2020b, 2020c).
[a] During the 2010–2011 school year, Florida began the transition from the FCAT to the FCAT 2.0 and Florida End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments (Florida Department of Education, 2020a).

order to (1) activate and marshal the assets we currently have to address the challenges that are present and (2) seek out and enlist additional assets and resources to address the challenges for which we currently lack corresponding assets. Beginning with assets is an essential feature of the model, as it grounds the planning in the possible, and it initiates the processes of community engagement and fosters empowerment of community members (Beaulieu, 2002).

As conceptualized in this model, community assets generally fall into four categories: (1) individuals, (2) institutions, (3) programs, and (4) physical structures/settings. Assets are existing people, places, or things that—if properly activated and cultivated—offer benefits to both the community and the asset itself (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). The challenges that we wanted to identify and inventory are barriers to community well-being, student learning, and student growth (e.g., lack of access to appropriate medical or dental care, something that can cause students to miss school and thus negatively impact academic progress).

Our data collection approach was systematic and thorough. We began by accessing and reviewing extant demographic data from publicly available sources. To deepen and enhance our understandings, we then developed protocols to use in asking varied stakeholder groups to help us in identifying and understanding the assets and challenges in the community served by C. A. Weis Elementary. We checked those results for accuracy utilizing standard credibility techniques (e.g., member checking, negative case analysis) and then analyzed the results to identify consistencies and patterns that pointed toward areas of shared understanding and/or concern. Both the interview/focus group protocol and the online questionnaire were organized around the same set of nine questions. Utilizing individual interviews, focus group discussions, and an online questionnaire, we solicited information from three primary stakeholder groups: (1) parents, (2) community members, and (3) teachers. Specifically, parents and community members participated in one of several interview/focus group sessions (conducted at C. A. Weis Elementary School, Oakwood Terrace, and the Boys and Girls Club), and teachers completed an online questionnaire.

Results from the interviews, discussions, and questionnaire indicated that the community has multiple and varied assets with the potential to contribute to the community and to the school, but they may be underutilized or ineffectively utilized because of lack of coordination, lack of resources, and lack of communication within and among community stakeholders. Assets that were identified through the data collection process included institutions, community groups, faith-based organizations, individuals, and organizations. Specific individuals named as assets included parents and caregivers of C. A. Weis Elementary students and the teachers at C. A. Weis Elementary (several were mentioned by name).

We also asked participants for suggestions about things that could contribute to C. A. Weis Elementary School and the community. Responses to this question included the following: (1) extended school day opportunities for students (academic and athletic/recreational), (2) educational opportunities for C. A. Weis Elementary School parents, (3) parenting classes, (4) closer relationship between the community and the police, (5) greater involvement of community members in problem solving (and greater responsibility for solving problems), (6) financial education for parents/other adults, and (7) access to health services. In light of what was learned through this initial assessment, the planning and imple-

mentation team pursued issues surrounding health, extended learning opportunities for students, and parent and community engagement.

Health. Health issues emerged as one of the major barriers to student achievement and academic success. Health issues included medical, dental, vision, behavioral/mental health, nutrition, and wellness. Health project activities were initiated with students, then parents, and later extended to the community through the Wellness Cottage in a much more expanded capacity than the traditional nurse's office found typically in schools. Parents are encouraged to enroll children and young adults (i.e., 18 years of age or less) with the Wellness Cottage. The cottage is staffed with a physician, and enrolled children have access to medical care even if they do not attend C. A. Weis Elementary School. The students at the school are required to submit a physical medical report and immunization card before they attend the classes. Previously, this process was an issue for the parents, since students could not attend the school. The Wellness Cottage provides ready access to services to ensure that students do not miss school on account of health reports. In 2016–2017, there have been 1,300 pediatric visits recorded, which indicates a high need for the accessible service. Further, a health services coordinator is working to link students and parents with the Wellness Cottage. The coordinator shares the updates and information about the health services with the parents and bridges the gap between many providers, such as CHNF. Additionally, the coordinator receives information from teachers about students' health issues. Recently, C. A. Weis Elementary School recognized that the health coordinator, along with the Wellness Cottage, have assisted in attendance success.

Extended Learning Opportunities for Students. As the convener, CHS attempted to reach out to existing community providers of after-school services to provide partnership-based after-school and summer programming on site at the school; however, these resources were not willing to realign their current efforts to focus on school-based interventions at the C. A. Weis Elementary School and instead continued to provide the same services in the neighborhood. In the absence of an existing provider, CHS secured funding and began on-site extended learning opportunities for up to an additional 90 children in August 2016. By engaging certified teachers, including some existing C. A. Weis teachers, the program provided additional learning opportunities and focused on incorporating project-based learning strategies that are not part of the core methodology of the daytime school standard curriculum.

Additionally, the program provides enrichment activities through volunteers and other organizations, including a local drug and alcohol prevention program providing groups focused on self-esteem and resilience building; volunteer teachers providing groups for children on manners and social skills development; a university intern teaching nutrition and health classes; Spanish classes provided by an existing program specializing in foreign language/culture; community volunteers to provide dance and drama classes; a group of military aviation personnel focusing on STEM skill enhancement and career discussions; school-based gardening provided by the area agriculture extension office from the University of Florida; and program team member support is provided to address potential gaps in technology, music, art, and sports. Additionally, the after-school program provides a snack immediately after school dismissal and a hot meal at the end of the program each day. These activities occur after the school day in the early evening, during the summer, and occasionally on the weekends. The programming is anticipated to continue to expand over time as assets are identified.

Parent and Community Engagement. The CNA is an integral strategic component of the program. The data collection and analysis from this assessment is an ongoing process. Parental engagement is encouraged through participation in school activities, family coaching, literacy/adult education, job preparation, financial literacy/education, employability training/support, crime prevention activities, community support, and community engagement. Parents indicated interest in enhancing their skills and using resources offered by the Community Partnership School. This strategy is still evolving to focus on parents who have shared interest in many activities; however, many are not able to attend classes and events because they have limited time available, because they work two or three jobs.

Initial Focus of Efforts and Plans for Ongoing Work

As described throughout, initial efforts focused on understanding the community in terms of strengths and needs, identifying and cultivating assets, and building a sustainable structure for engagement and governance/decision making. Specific activities that supported those efforts and upon which ongoing efforts will build are highlighted in the subsequent text.

Planning First. The initiation of the Community Partnership School at C. A. Weis Elementary involved several phases of planning. The planning stage involved learning from successful models of community schools and identifying key structural elements that were critical for success and sustainability. The partners created committees involving members from all four organizations. A Cabinet was formed with key executives from all four organizations. The Cabinet is responsible for all organizational decisions, and cabinet members delegate roles and responsibilities at different levels of their respective organizations for efficacious commitment to the community partnership school. The four partners also held regular meetings in groups, committees, and at the executive and operative levels. Attentive to the conceptual models guiding the work, the four partners ensured openness by engaging the community in a dialogue where key groups were a part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation process in a way that made the most sense. At the same time, efforts were made to develop the structure and processes in order to have effective implementation (e.g., standing committees, a process for creating ad hoc committees). Further, the focus of partners was on the need to facilitate and support engagement among people within groups that shared commonalities and were logically connected (i.e., community and faith-based groups, providers, parents, teachers, and others) in a structured way. Thus, the governance structure evolved to function as an implementation leadership team. Planning between the core partners was the priority in all the processes for implementation of the community school.

Learning Through Field Trips. To support the planning and implementation process, the core partners also recognized the value of exploring existing models for community schools. A workshop was arranged to understand the model and implementation structure of Evans Community Partnership High School, and, further, the partners visited a community school in New York City. In all these workshops and meetings, all core partners had representation and engagement.

Supporting Clear Communication. The core partners have a long-term commitment for the community school that extends beyond their respective organizational commitments. The core partners perceived the need to have clear communication centered on the idea that expectations must be met at all levels. The four partners structured a communications committee to work together collaboratively for the success of community school and children. This communication channel also was considered effective for writing grants and formalizing memorandum of understanding (MoU) processes, collecting and sharing data, and seeking funding opportunities.

Fully Realizing Needs Assessment. Asset mapping was conducted prior to needs assessment with the logic that the identified assets can assist at the implementation phase. The university partners took the lead in designing and conducting the asset mapping and CNA. Using an asset-based approach, the university aimed at identifying and cultivating resident resources. As noted by a participant in the minutes of an early planning meeting, "It doesn't do the community any good to identify problems that we don't have assets to address" (Johnson, 2015). During the next phase, the focus was on the needs assessment, and focus groups were conducted to gain a broader and deeper understanding of community needs. The CNA was designed to identify and develop programs to address the needs of this community. Teachers from the local school were involved in the process of the CNA, and their experience became valuable for learning about the parents and the community. The CNA was conducted during 2015 to 2016. Events at the school (e.g., Back to School Bash) were used to interact with parents for interviews and focus group discussions.

Applying a Vetting Process. Since its inception, the community school attracted support from local businesses and organizations. Local profit and nonprofit organizations were interested in assisting the school as well as the community school through local resources and events. The support of external organizations was considered beneficial; however, at the same time, the core partners

recognized that there should be a vetting process for other organizations seeking to become involved. A protocol was established for any outside providers to determine alignment with the mission/vision of the C. A. Weis Community Partnership School and the expected efficacy of the proposed applicants/events. Prospective organizations complete an application, which is submitted to the community school director. The applications are then reviewed by a subcommittee for alignment with the mission of the Community Partnership School and expected efficacy; if approved by the subcommittee, the Cabinet votes to approve or reject each applicant. For example, an afterschool dance program taught by a volunteer professional choreographer was approved by the Cabinet because it provided an extended learning opportunity for students.

Involving Local Organizations. In response to what we learned from the CNA, we began by maximizing and supporting existing partners with the school, such as ECARE, a local pre-K mentoring program for 4-year-old children who are involved in Head Start/VPK at C. A. Weis Elementary School. Head Start is provided by the Community Action Program Committee. The Committee added an Early Head Start unit at C. A. Weis Elementary School in 2016. As another example, well-organized members of the Jerusalem Project, an alliance of Greater Little Rock and First Baptist churches, adopted C. A. Weis as their ministry focus to provide and manage a weekend backpack food program for children identified as needing this level of support. In 2017–2018, almost 164 students received the backpacks. These members purposefully volunteer to become screened/trained school district mentors assigned as focused tutors for children needing specialized attention for improvement. They coordinate an annual Back to School Bash that includes a resource/service fair and the engagement of Baptist HealthCare as a key sponsor for volunteers and logistical resources such as food and drink. We intentionally pursued and engaged local church leaders and faith-based organizations because of their powerful impact on the social development of the community and neighborhood.

Instituting a Summer Feeding Program. In 2016, the school district applied for C. A. Weis Elementary School to be a USDA Summer Feeding Site to address the hunger issues faced by children in the school. Several teachers and staff members volunteered to provide extended learning classes for students in the summer hours between breakfast and lunch. The school district cafeteria prepared the meals and the CHS Community Partnership School personnel monitored participants and provided logistical support. Another food resource is offered through extended learning services included in a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant. This USDA program provides breakfast and lunch for the children engaged in that effort. In 2017, the summer feeding program was widely publicized and extended to include children from the local community not involved in the extended learning program.

Expanding After-School Activities. The scope and size of the initial implementation of our after-school program was greater than originally conceptualized due to the receipt of a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant. Although resources were available, challenges occurred in implementing a large program with a very short start-up time and funding restrictions. As previously mentioned, these resources have provided us with the opportunity to leverage additional involvement of provider partners and volunteers, resulting in a more robust community experience. The weaving together of provider partner and volunteer skill sets and resources provides the ability to tailor the program to the children, families, and community. Additional expansion in areas of the expressive arts, character development/social skills, career exploration, and sports/physical exercise will be a focus for future program enhancement. The average daily attendance increased in the past 2 years. Improved behavior is reflected in fewer discipline referrals, down from 773 in 2015-16 to 112 in 2018-19, and out-of-school suspensions, reduced from 425 in 2015-16 to 42 in 2018-19. These numbers illustrate the positive impact of the various community- and children-centric projects initiated by the Community Partnership School.

Facing Persistent Challenges. The implementation process for the community school has been a learning process for all of the four partners. At the initial stages, the learning from other models brought forward the understanding that every community has specific needs, and the community school will be a channel to support the local community in every possible manner. At the same time, it is also recognized that there will be challenges in implementation. At this time, we

would like to share an instance that gives insight into challenges that may persist even after continuous efforts to resolve them as the community school partnership school evolves. The Community Leadership Council was envisaged for active community participation. This particular council was structured to involve local stakeholders for community engagement. Prominent leaders of the community were approached (e.g., local church leaders, pastors, firemen, a disk jockey). These external stakeholders were expected to take a leadership role in the local community while being part of the community school. Further, the council's engagement with the community school was to ensure that community people are well represented and no specific group is alienated. However, this council remains in the formation process, and community partners make continued efforts to identify promising local leaders and encourage their participation. Local leaders have shown interest and support; however, the council is still being formed, as potential leaders have withdrawn from participating. Such challenges need to be acknowledged in studies to explore issues in community engagement for practitioners.

Ensuring Availability of Transportation. Asset mapping brought forward transportation as one of the challenges students, parents, and community members face daily. The information from the asset mapping was further substantiated by the GIS mapping undertaken by the University of West Florida's Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences with the assistance of C. A. Weis Elementary School. The map is based upon student same address counts and provides a visual map of the access to public transportation and sidewalks for safe walking zones. The map illustrates families living in urban zones with no direct sidewalk access to school and limited public transportation. Many of the families do not have personal cars or have nonworking cars in need of repair; thus, parent and student mobility is limited. Transportation is an ongoing factor limiting student participation in after-school activities. The school bus was made available for one of the marginalized housing projects of the county. However, many students living in dispersed zip codes still face the challenge of enrichment activity involvement. The assistant principal obtained a commercial driver's license (CDL) to ensure that students had a backup plan for utilizing the school bus for after-school activities. Other volunteers from the after-school program are also sought to undertake the CDL test to have an alternative plan for transportation. The community school partners discussed the matter in Cabinet meetings and sought assistance from the superintendent of the county schools to identify resources. Grants are under process for establishing safe sidewalks. Further, transportation assistance from local faith groups is being sought for community events.

Measuring the Impact of the Project. After the initial asset-mapping process, the university is currently assisting with a second CNA. The university and other partners are also working on a centralized process of data collection and sharing on a long-term basis.

Reflections and Recommendations

We learned from our preliminary work that the community served by C. A. Weis Elementary School has considerable assets with the potential to contribute to the community and to the school. These assets are far greater and have far more potential than were immediately apparent to the community school team. Additionally, these assets are far greater and far more than would be expected given the perception of the community within the general population. We also learned that many of those assets may not be fulfilling their potential because of a lack of coordination, lack of resources, and lack of communication among them. In short, these assets remain unrealized because of the lack of a coherent plan with systems and structures to allow for connecting the dots both internally (i.e., among community assets) and externally (i.e., between assets and external stakeholders). Assets that were identified through the data collection process included institutions, community groups, faith-based organizations, individuals (i.e., group representatives of formal groups and unaffiliated individuals), and formal and informal organizations.

We also learned that building trust with community members is essential to any kind of meaningful engagement. The aphorism "people must know what you care about before they care what you know about" is apt here. Trust cannot exist in situations where the unique expertise of parents is ignored (Capers & Shah, 2015). Moreover, low-resource communities,

such as this one, often experience long histories of short-term altruism driven by external funding for projects and services with abruptly ending relationships at the conclusion of the funding period (Johnson, Shope, et al., 2009; Johnson, Thompson, et al., 2009). The approach taken by the community schools' team here was explicitly attentive to that history and the negative feelings it has engendered and took steps to redress it by requiring a long-term commitment among the key partners that was not dependent upon a funding stream. Funding is necessary for much of the work, of course, but it can undermine that work if other essential factors are not in place and/or when funding drives the work rather than a shared vision developed collaboratively (Capers & Shah, 2015). The necessity of the long-term commitment of the partner agencies rather than reliance on individuals has been reinforced during the implementation year at C. A. Weis Elementary School as personnel departures occurred within two of the community partnership agencies. Had this effort been driven by interested individuals instead of agency commitment, it is likely that much of the work done to date might have been abandoned rather than delayed as has happened.

Drawing on these and related lessons learned during the planning and implementation phase, we offer two broad recommendations for those seeking to undertake this kind of work.

First, use an assets-based model to create synergy with existing partners—starting with assets and maintaining a focus on assets throughout the process so that relationships within the school and surrounding community are recognized, sustained, and strengthened. The substantive involvement of community assets changes the structure of the process from something that is enacted upon a community by well-intentioned outsiders into a collaborative structure where ideas and solutions are generated with and by community members and then filtered to external stakeholders with relevant expertise to complement and supplement resident resources. The asset-based model broadens the traditional notions of who is an educator and who is a leader to promote and support a system where community assets are publicly and explicitly recognized, where everyone has something to contribute, and where everyone has a role and responsibilities. The grassroots egalitarian approach taken here unpacks and reverses traditional power dynamics to place community members at the center and to position (or reposition) external organizations as supports or affordances (Gibson, 1950) for work that is initiated through dialogue between and among the community and its partners. Finally, adopting an assets-based approach sends the message that there is inherent value in the community—that it is not an object of charity but a potential partner for doing meaningful work together.

Second, assimilate side-by-side rather than sidelining or pushing out. Recognizing that the community members and families served by C. A. Weis Elementary School have a unique perspective of the school is a primary component in overcoming mistrust. Involving the Community Leadership Council is paramount in fostering relationships and overcoming mistrust. Those parents and community members who expressed interest in being a part of this advisory group faced individual challenges in having the necessary time to devote to this effort. As a result, this important avenue for input into the Community Partnership School has been lacking to date. To be true to the model, give voice, and capitalize on the value of all partners, the community partnership needs to focus on recruiting and retaining Community Leadership Council members. This perspective differs from those of the partnership agencies and includes narratives based upon past intervention experiences. In this community partnership, the Cabinet repeatedly reminded one another to listen and learn from the community rather than to assume we knew the needs and solutions. This process prevented the community partnership agencies from imposing solutions or alienating any segments of the community and allowed us to engage more fully with all stakeholder groups.

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