



BUILDING BLOCKS

An Examination of the Collaborative Approach Community Schools Are Using To Bolster Early Childhood Development

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Because Every Child Deserves Every Chance

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About the Coalition for Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education K–16, youth development, community planning and development, family support, health and human services, government, and philanthropy as well as national, state, and local community school networks. Our mission is to advance opportunities for the success of children, families and communities by promoting the development of more, and more effective, community schools. The Coalition for Community Schools believes that strong communities require strong schools and strong schools require strong communities. We envision a future in which schools are centers of thriving communities where everyone belongs, works together, and succeeds. The Coalition is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC.

About the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, DC, that works to build the capacity of people, organizations, and systems—in education and related fields—to cross boundaries and work together to attain better results for children and youth. IEL envisions a society that uses its resources effectively to achieve better futures for all children and youth.

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Preface

Abundant research and analysis in two key arenas has brought early childhood education to the forefront of school reform conversations. First, a deeper understanding of brain development in young children forces us to be more intentional about the quality and quantity of early learning opportunities, particularly for vulnerable children. Second, dramatic differences in acquired vocabulary and other cognitive skills between low-income children and their more affluent peers begin as early as 9 months of age by some estimates. As these children get older, closing the achievement gap becomes more of an uphill battle. Despite this “inequality at the starting gate” there is growing evidence that we can close the gap by linking high quality early childhood education to a successful transition into elementary school. This 0-8 alignment of services, supports and instructional strategies helps to ensure success.

At a time when expanding early childhood education opportunities has emerged as a national priority, the Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership is delighted to share what we uncovered during case-study analysis of four local efforts to align early learning programs with K-12 education in their respective systemic community schools initiatives. *Building Blocks: An Examination of the Collaborative Approach Community Schools Are Using to Bolster-Early Childhood Development* provides a critical window into implementation efforts on the ground in Cincinnati, Ohio; Evansville, Indiana; Multnomah County, Oregon; and Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Community schools have an advantage as they become more intentional about facilitating smooth and effective linkages for children and families who are most vulnerable during the transition between early childhood and the early grades. With a highly collaborative culture and, particularly in the more mature initiatives, stable governance structures and cross-sector partnership mechanisms, community schools can easily build bridges with early childhood partners. By fostering learning and healthy development of the “whole child” and paying attention to children’s developmental needs, community schools establish the necessary conditions for children to succeed and thrive.

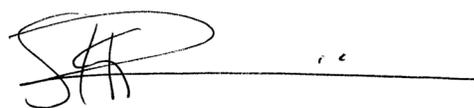
Building Blocks demonstrates that community schools are among the leaders in defining best practices for supporting and strengthening linkages with early childhood, making a difference in the lives of young children. They have developed systems and strategies to align the resources of schools and communities in support of our most vulnerable children. As these 0-8 alignment strategies grow, it is our hope and the hope of our friends and colleagues in local communities that all children, from birth through college and career, will get the support they need to thrive. We thank the leaders, partners and practitioners in each of the highlighted communities for allowing us to learn with them for the benefit of all.



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Report Summary

Increasingly, school systems and communities are adopting the community schools approach as a core education reform strategy. In these places, new bridges are being built with the early childhood education system.

With rising interest in early childhood issues within the community schools field, along with growing national attention to 0–8 strategies and reading by third grade, the Coalition for Community schools sought to learn more about how community schools are working to make connections with the early childhood field.

In spring 2011, a Coalition team conducted site visits to four communities (Cincinnati, OH; Evansville, IN; Multnomah County, OR; and Tulsa, OK) that have been implementing the community school strategy for at least six years and have strong or emerging relationships with the early childhood community. Multnomah County and Tulsa were both already participating in an Institute for Educational Leadership-sponsored project, funded by the Kellogg Foundation, to increase linkages between early childhood programs and the school system through community schools. Cincinnati and Evansville have both been creating their own strategies to bridge the two systems.

Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with over 100 key stakeholders across the four sites, including superintendents, community leaders, principals, parents, initiative leaders, funders, community partners, and others. Interviews were augmented by observations of approximately 15 meetings, site visits to over 10 community schools and early childhood facilities, and an analysis of pertinent documents. In addition, the Coalition administered a survey to 17 experienced community school initiatives to capture the broader scope of engagement with early childhood issues across the field.

This report summary provides an overview of community schools, demonstrates the need to invest and link to early childhood programs, describes the case study sites, and offers cross-site lessons.

What Is a Community School?

A community school is a place and a set of partnerships connecting school, family, and community. A community school is distinguished by an integrated focus on academics, youth development, family support, health and social services, and community development. Its curriculum emphasizes real-world learning through community problem-solving and service. By extending the school day and week, it reaches families and community residents. The community school is uniquely equipped to develop its students into educated citizens ready and able to give back to their communities.

A Collaborative Approach: Community Schools

Leaders in a growing number of communities throughout the United States are addressing the challenge of preparing young people for college, career, and citizenship through the community schools strategy. The schools use an approach that brings the assets of the community and the school together in a coherent, joint effort to help students succeed.

Community schools address both the academic and out-of-school factors that influence student achievement, attendance, health, and other important outcomes through partnerships among schools, community-based organizations, higher education institutions, local government, faith-based institutions, and neighborhood groups. Many begin by focusing on the needs of young children and then support students through to college and career.

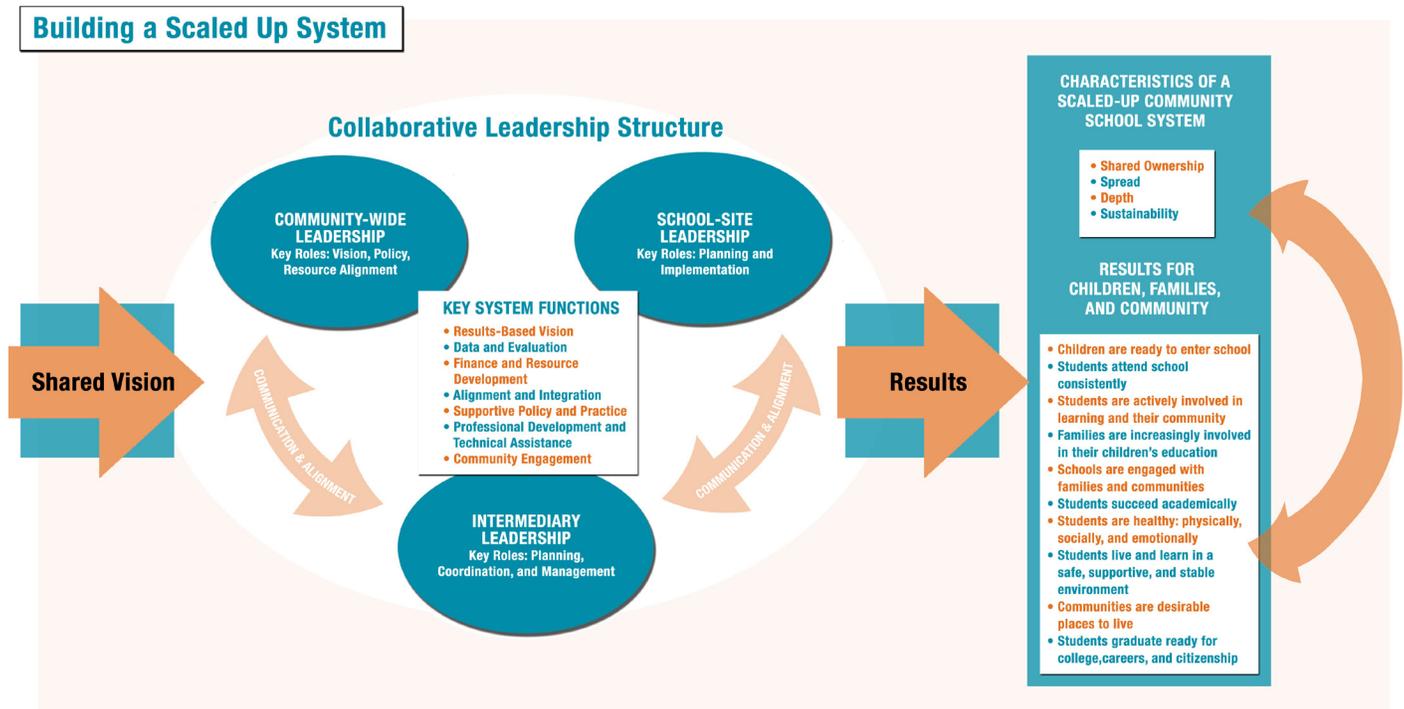
As bridging entities, *community schools are uniquely well-positioned and organized to support and strengthen linkages with early childhood opportunities.*

Community Schools Built On Theory of Action

Community schools are built on a well-defined theory of action. A system of community schools (Figure 1) starts with a shared vision to achieve a set of results. The results vary from community to community but most often include: children ready to enter school, students successful in school, families increasingly involved in their children's education, and more. A successfully scaled-up system of community schools also operates with its own set of results organized around shared ownership among stakeholders, spread and depth of the work from the earliest years through college and career, and sustainability that maintains and strengthens the community school initiative. Both sets of results are mutually reinforcing and lead to more and more effective community schools.

A collaborative leadership structure helps translate vision into action and results. It typically includes a community-wide leadership group that is responsible for setting the vision, creating supporting policy, and developing and aligning resources. The leader-

Figure 1: Community School System Theory of Action



ship group often includes the school district, unions, higher education institutions, non-profit organizations, community members, public agencies, philanthropies, and businesses. At the school site, a leadership team made up of educators, community partners, families and residents, and other local stakeholders work to implement the strategy at the neighborhood level. The school-site leadership team is responsible for planning and implementing strategies within the school. A resource coordinator at the school works with school partners to support learning, aligning the work of partners with the mission of the school and helping bridge the transition into school for young children.

Essential to all systems of community schools is an intermediary entity that plans, coordinates, and manages the initiative. Working to connect the community-wide and school-site leadership groups, the intermediary must be a trusted, legitimate, and credible entity with the capacity to support the initiative. The intermediary entities work across seven functions (see text box “Community School Functions”) to move the initiative forward.

Systems of community schools have the potential to align the work of early childhood organizations and school districts. They provide an opportunity for leaders of both arenas to work together to problem-solve, identify resources, increase access and quality, strengthen transitions, and, most important, improve outcomes for children.

Community Schools Increasingly Focused on Early Childhood

Increasingly, the community schools field is focusing on early childhood. Our survey of the 17 most developed community school initiatives indicate that 88 percent engage in early childhood work. All of these initiatives can point to early childhood opportunities in at least some community school buildings. In some cases, communities are focusing on early childhood issues only in selected schools while, in others, they are focusing on early childhood strategies across multiple schools. For example, 60 percent of the communities engaged in early childhood are focusing on 0–8 alignment; 54 percent have made reading by third grade a priority; 47 percent are emphasizing early chronic absence; and 27 percent are strengthening transitions to elementary school.

Community School Functions

- ▶ **A Results-Based Vision** to fuel the initiative and motivate scale-up efforts.
- ▶ **Data and Evaluation** to track key indicators of student progress and collect data on community assets to support the school’s mission.
- ▶ **Finance and Resource Development** to ensure that existing school and community resources are identified, coordinated, and used to leverage new dollars, fund continuous improvements, and sustain expansion.
- ▶ **Alignment and Integration** to ensure that the school and its community partners are lined up and heading in the same direction at the community and school-site levels.
- ▶ **Supportive Policy** to ensure that the policies of school districts’ and partner agencies’ support community schools and that community leadership responds to school-site needs.
- ▶ **Professional Development and Technical Assistance** to instill a community school culture within everyone working with students and in the larger community by transmitting values and attitudes, assumptions, and expectations consistent with a community school’s vision.
- ▶ **Broad Community Engagement** to create the political will to fund and sustain scale-up by developing a broad-based commitment to community schools and ensuring that youth, families, and residents are fully heard.

Even though early childhood is a growing component of community schools work, respondents indicated that it still represents less than 25 percent of their total work, although two communities indicated it was more than 25 percent of their work.

Consistent with the findings from the case studies, 70 percent of community school initiatives have representation from the early childhood community on their collaborative leadership structures. An early childhood coalition or collaborative exists in 82 percent of the communities. Community school staff members sit on the early childhood collaborative in 76 percent of these communities; in the three communities where community school staff members do not already sit on the early childhood collaborative, two communities have indicated that they plan for more involvement in the future. In addition, 79 percent of communities indicated that the district with which they work most closely¹ has already developed an early childhood plan, demonstrating the importance that school districts now attach to early childhood issues.

The Imperative and Challenge of Linking School and Early Childhood Systems

Without question, a continuum of academic and non-academic support throughout a child's life gives the child the best opportunity for success. Strategies to link early childhood and the K–12 system are built on the increasing recognition that “[t]he advantages gained from effective early interventions are best sustained when they are followed by continued high quality learning experiences,”² as Professor James Heckman has argued.

Regrettably, such recognition comes at the same time that more children are living below the poverty line. Nearly 21 percent of children across the country live below the poverty line, and estimates show that 42 percent of children come from low-income families.³ The recession and the rising poverty that has come with it have had a tremendous impact on schools and children in urban centers, rural communities, and, increasingly, in suburban communities that are ill-equipped to respond to new social service needs.

In a reform environment that demands schools to focus on instruction and teacher quality, schools must also address non-school factors associated with poverty. Out-of-school factors such as low birth-weight; inadequate medical, dental, and vision care; food insecurity; environmental pollutants; family relations and family stress; and neighborhood characteristics all influence school success.⁴

Young children are particularly at risk. The data on chronic early absence suggest that, in some locations, approximately 10 percent of all students are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade.⁵ Moreover, 83 percent of low-income students are not reading adequately by the end of third grade.⁶

Increasing poverty and deteriorating state budgets are undercutting children's early childhood opportunities. The National Women's Law Center reports that “families were worse off in 37 states than they were in 2010 under one or more child care assistance policies” such as income eligibility, waiting lists, copayments, and reimbursement rates for child care assistance.⁷ The report adds that, overall, it is harder for families to provide their children with the early learning experiences they need.

At the same time, despite recent growth in state prekindergarten programs, only 4 percent of 3-year-olds and 27 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in state-sponsored preschool programs. Forty states fund preschool, but, for the first time since the National Institute for Early Education Research began compiling data, total state spending and cost per pupil has decreased.⁸ The nation's oldest early childhood program, Head Start, serves approximately two-fifths of eligible 3- and 4-year-olds.⁹

1 Some community school initiatives, such as Multnomah County and Tulsa, work with several districts which is why the question asked them to focus on the district they work with most closely.

2 Heckman, James J., 2008. “Schools, Skills, and Synapses,” IZA Discussion Papers 3515, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA).

3 See <http://www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html>.

4 Berliner, D.C. (2009). *Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. Retrieved from <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/poverty-and-potential>.

5 Chang, H.N., & Romero, M. (2008). *Present, Engaged, and Accounted For: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades*. National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. New York.

6 *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters*: Annie E. Casey Foundation.

7 Karen Schulman, Helen Blank. (2011). *State Child Care Assistance Policies 2011: Reduced Support For Families In Challenging Times*. National Women's Law Center. Washington, DC.

8 Barnett, W. Steven, Epstein, Dale J., Carolan, Megan E., Fitzgerald, Jen, Ackerman, Debra J., and Friedman, Allison H. (2010). *The state of preschool 2010: State preschool yearbook executive summary*. New Jersey: The National Institute for Early Education Research.

9 National Women's Law Center calculations, January 2012

Linking school efforts with a disparate set of early childhood providers poses a major challenge. The early childhood system is in fact a mix of supports for children and their families (i.e., Head Start, prekindergarten, child care centers, family child care providers, and family friend and neighbor care as well as an array of health, social, and family services and parenting, home visiting, and family support programs). This patchwork makes it difficult to build bridges at the community and school-site level.

Nevertheless, school districts and local, state, and federal governments are increasingly emphasizing the importance of high-quality early childhood opportunities as a way to prepare students for elementary school and to improve outcomes throughout students' lives. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recently awarded nine state grants for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge that focuses on improving access to high-quality early learning opportunities for low-income children. The collaboration has also created the first Office of Early Learning, housed in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. The new Office of Early Learning will be responsible for the Challenge grants and other aspects of early learning across ED and will work with the DHHS, which is responsible for the major federal early childhood programs, and with other departments.

Even with increased attention to early childhood education and development, schools and districts seeking to create a more seamless 0–8 approach to learning face several questions. How do schools work with and help support their early childhood communities? What roles do schools play directly in providing early childhood services? How do schools and early childhood providers collaborate for successful transitions into kindergarten? How do the school and early childhood systems interact with other systems such as health care? How are decisions about expanding access and improving quality made at the local and state levels? How do early childhood providers and schools maximize community resources? How do they collect and share reliable data? What supports are available to families throughout a child's education experience?

Community Schools: A Bridge to Early Childhood

Community schools that are linked to early childhood learning opportunities offer great promise to create a system of educational and other supports for young children that prepare them for a successful transition into school. The lessons from Cincinnati, Evansville, Multnomah County, and Tulsa will inform efforts to build more effective 0–8 systems of learning and support for students, to ensure reading by third grade, and to help students and their families succeed.

CINCINNATI, OH: Cincinnati Community Learning Centers

Cincinnati's Community Learning Centers (CLC) Initiative started in 2001 when the Board of Education adopted a vision for district-wide redevelopment of all schools as centers of their communities. A \$1 billion Facilities Master Plan approved by the voters in 2002 promised that each school would become a community learning center. CLCs act as hubs for community services, providing access for students, families, and the community to health, safety, and social services as well as to recreational, educational, and cultural opportunities. All 55 district schools are on some stage of the community school continuum, and 31 have resource coordinators. The agencies that provide services at CLCs are organized into what are known as "partnership networks." The networks are made up of agencies with similar missions in a variety of categories, e.g., health, mental health, college access, after school, mentoring, tutoring, and early childhood. Each partnership network has a dedicated network leader who facilitates collaboration, builds capacity, and provides ongoing support for implementation at the site level. These leaders meet together as a Cross-Boundary Leadership Team.

- ▶ **Focus on Early Childhood:** Cincinnati's CLCs are increasingly including early childhood into their strategy. Most prominently, many new CLCs are creating early childhood spaces in the school building and working to support early childhood providers with the same types of supports delivered in the CLC from kindergarten through 12th grade. The Early Childhood Partnership Network is increasingly involved in these efforts.

EVANSVILLE, IN:

Evansville Community Schools

The Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC), a school district in southwest Indiana, has taken the lessons from one community school to scale across the district. Community schools are now a central component of the district's strategy, and each of the district's 38 schools is on some stage of the community school continuum. EVSC's mission is to establish school sites as places of community to support successful youth and family development and to provide equity and excellence for all students. A School-Community Council, including the school system and 70 community partners, is a central forum for setting the vision and aligning resources for the community school strategy. Within the district, an Associate Superintendent for Family, School, and Community Partnership, supported by a Director of Full-Service Community Schools, coordinates the work of the "big table" and its teams. Together, they keep the school district connected to the community's needs and resources, braid together funding streams, and coordinate the work of partners. Each school's site council is made up of parents, school staff, and representatives from community agencies and meets monthly to discuss needs specific to each school.

- ▶ **Focus on Early Childhood:** Evansville has made early childhood and family, school, and community partnerships key focus areas of the district's strategic plan. EVSC's Director of Early Childhood helps align supports for young children. EVSC is also co-locating education providers in the Culver Family Learning Center, a repurposed building that supports early childhood learning opportunities in conjunction with the community school strategy.

MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OR:

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods Community Schools

A unique partnership of city, county, state government, and six local school districts started the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Community Schools initiative in eight schools in 1999. Responding to community demand and based on the initiative's results, the partnership has now opened over 60 community schools across the six districts. With Multnomah County acting as managing partner, SUN Community Schools bring together schools, community leaders, agency professionals, families, and residents to plan the best ways to support youth through education, family involvement, the provision of services, and the use of community buildings. The SUN Coordinating Council is the governance body for the system. It includes representatives from SUN partner organizations, such as the Director of the Multnomah County Department of County Human Services, high-level school district administrators, the Director of the City of Portland Children's Levy, the Director of Portland Parks and Recreation, community partners, and others.

A full-time SUN Manager at each school, funded by the partners, is responsible for coordinating the work of the school and community partners through a school-site operating team and site advisory structure. SUN Managers are employed by community-based organizations with long-standing credibility with the school.

- ▶ **Focus on Early Childhood:** Multnomah County has focused on early childhood for many years. Its Parent Child Development Services (PCDS) program relies on the Parents-as-Teachers model, home visits, and school-based playgroups. SUN schools also participate in IEL's Early Childhood-Community Schools Linkages Project, piloting a strategy to link early childhood learning and schools in four pilot schools. Through the Linkages Project, SUN supports school readiness and success by promoting coordinated transition to school, engaged families, regular attendance in the early grades, and community engagement in the science of early learning. In addition, SUN participates in a County-wide Early Childhood Council, a volunteer committee representing programs and agencies that serve 0–8 children. SUN provides the council a way to work with schools that are already designed to support students and their families.

TULSA, OK:

Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative

The Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI) was established through the Tulsa Metropolitan Human Services Commission (MHSC) in 2007 and is administered by the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa (CSC). TACSI provides leadership and influence to engage local communities in creating and sustaining community schools. TACSI is guided by a community steering committee comprising representatives of the initiative's two school districts, funders, CSC staff, local government, and higher education institutions. The TACSI Resource Center at CSC staffs a Management Team with leaders from the two school districts (Union and Tulsa) and other stakeholders. The structure ensures focused, accountable leadership within the community and key institutions for implementing and grounding TACSI in developing evidence-based conditions for learning.

TACSI schools focus on seven core components: early care and learning, health/health education, mental health/social services, youth development/out-of-school time, family/community engagement, neighborhood development, and life-long learning.

- ▶ **Focus on Early Childhood:** Oklahoma has a strong history of support for early childhood demonstrated by its funding of a state-wide preschool program for 4-year-olds. The CSC houses the Child Care Resource Center (CCRC), which helps parents find programs that meet their needs and is the only project in the state that helps early care and learning programs gain accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). TACSI also participates in IEL's Early Childhood-Community Schools Linkages Project and pilots a strategy to link early childhood learning and schools within four pilot schools. A Linkages Leadership Team is made up of representatives from CSC, Educare and the Community Action Project, both school districts, practitioners, coordinators, and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

FINDINGS

Overall, the case studies in this report show that community schools offer a vehicle for supporting development of a 0–8 early childhood system. With their relationships across sectors and their emphasis on using a place-based strategy, community schools are working with early childhood providers, including school districts, to strengthen ties to schools, enrich transitions, and improve outcomes for young children.

1. Community school systems engage in a wide-variety of activities to strengthen connections to school.

Community schools are:

- **Implementing transition programs that support children and families as they move into elementary school.** Tulsa has created transition teams comprised of early childhood and school staff to share information about students so that needed supports are not lost with a change in school. Multnomah County has created summer transition programs in partnership with participating school districts so that children have early exposure to the elementary school setting.
- **Aligning curriculum and pedagogy through joint professional development for early childhood and school staff as well as for opportunities for collaboration.** Tulsa's transition teams are sharing pedagogical practices among staff so that kindergarten teachers can ease the transition into school by creating recognizable practices.
- **Engaging parents through programs that bring parents of young children into the school building, offering them and their families services and supports, and conducting home visits.** Multnomah's Parent Child Development Services programs use the Parents-as-Teachers model as well as home visit and school-based playgroups for family caretakers and early-childhood providers. One school invited Burmese immigrant parents to hold parenting classes in the building, providing a connection to the school for parents and their young children.
- **Creating a continuum of services by offering supports for young children and their families that they are accustomed to in early childhood programs, especially Head Start.** In Tulsa, preschool teachers who share information with

community school K–12 teachers learn about the supports available in the community school and can help guide parents by using family supports included as part of Head Start to the correct resources.

- **Extending expanded learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day to young children who are not traditionally served by after school providers.** All the study communities are working to increase expanded learning opportunities, especially after school, for young children. In Tulsa, the community school intermediary created a list of such opportunities that are age-appropriate for their community school resource coordinators.

2. Community school systems provide a platform for strengthening the connection between the early childhood and school communities. Well-implemented community school strategies, activities, and structures garner credibility for the schools and create opportunities for partnerships with the early childhood community, local governments, and other partners.

Each study community has a collaborative leadership structure, including representatives from school districts, that addresses pressing community challenges and opportunities, including early childhood work. Existing relationships between school systems and community partners in Multnomah County and Tulsa enabled the communities to engage in the Early Childhood Community Schools Linkages Project. These partners incorporated the project's goals to improve transitions into elementary schools as part of their initiative's vision for child success from birth through college and career. In Cincinnati, schools are creating space for young children in elementary schools and are supporting children and families through the resources of other community partners.

3. Each of the communities has a city- or county-wide early childhood collaborative that is connected to the community school collaborative leadership structure. Partnering

with the early childhood collaborative enables community schools to align strategies and focuses on providing supports for young children.

Each community school initiative has cross-pollinated staff and missions with their local early childhood collaborative. In each site, the community school intermediary sits on the local early childhood collaborative. For example, in Multnomah County, a representative from SUN sits on the Early Childhood Council; in Evansville, the school district is part of the city-wide Early Childhood Development Coalition. In some sites, representatives from the early childhood community also sit on one of the community school initiative's collaborative bodies.

4. Intermediaries represent an important resource for bringing together early childhood and school partners at the community level.

In Multnomah County and Tulsa, the intermediaries have staff capacity to bring together stakeholders from the school and early childhood communities to work together and align strategies. They host a Linkages Team that includes key stakeholders from the early childhood and school communities, key partners, and support staff. In Evansville, the district uses its capacity for this purpose.

5. Community school coordinators represent an important resource for bringing early childhood and school partners together at the school-site levels.

At the school-site, coordinators work with early childhood providers and community partners to support school linkages. They create a successful transition and maintain a continuity of support for children and their families. For example, the resource coordinator at Cincinnati's Oyler CLC organized meetings of the school, a new early childhood provider, parents, and community partners that support young children in order to discuss implementation of a new early learning center in the school. In Evansville, coordinators support summer transition programs.

6. Participation in the community school system provides early childhood providers access to a larger set of resources.

In Tulsa, early childhood providers may use school-based health clinics. In Cincinnati and Tulsa, parents of young children participate in adult education classes at the school site. In Cincinnati, the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team enables school and early childhood providers to select from a range of services provided by community organizations in the areas of health, mental health, arts, youth development, and more.

7. In some community school settings, co-location of school and early childhood providers means that the school and providers share resources work together toward a common vision and align strategies.

Community schools in Evansville are co-locating several early childhood providers in the Culver Family Learning Center where providers share resources such as a family play space and a parent education center. In Cincinnati, the director of the early childhood center at Riverview, a prekindergarten–12 school, meets almost daily with the school's Resource Coordinator and participates in the school's Parent Teacher Association and on its Local School Decision Making Committee.

8. Data help focus community schools and early childhood providers on specific challenges, such as early chronic absenteeism, and lead to shared solutions when discussed in a collaborative setting with several stakeholders and several resources.

In Multnomah County, SUN shared data on the absence of early childhood education in several school districts with over 100 stakeholders, thereby encouraging the districts to create new strategies to address this alarming result. In Tulsa, school and early childhood educators share data about specific children to ease transitions into elementary school.

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

When districts are deeply engaged but not necessarily in charge of the collaborative, they have the opportunity for all providers to work together to provide high-quality early learning opportunities and supports for young children. In Cincinnati, schools may select from a set of early childhood providers that participate in the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team. In Evansville, several early childhood providers, including the district, share space and resources at the Culver Family Learning Center.

The report's case studies illustrate how community schools are serving as the vehicle for strengthening the connection between early childhood opportunities and school systems. They include stories from the field and describe the collaborative leadership structures that help facilitate and sustain the work. Each case ends with its own set of lessons, many of which are raised in the cross-site lessons described above. The cases show that community schools that work with the early childhood community are moving in the right direction. Working in partnership, with the deep engagement of schools, the study communities are providing a continuum of support that will help students be successful from birth through college and career. ■

The communities studied in this report have expanded their early childhood work since our site visits (read the epilogue to learn more). The Coalition for Community Schools has also started a new early childhood project in partnership with the Family and Works Institute. This project is training family engagement staff partnering with community school initiatives on Ellen Galinsky's Mind in the Making and the Seven Essential Skills framework. There are also new reports on the Early Childhood/Community School Linkages pilot project. You can learn more about all these resources at www.communityschools.org/earlychildhood.

CASE STUDIES

Selected Results from Cincinnati CLCs

- ▶ Since adopting the CLC strategy, Cincinnati is the first urban district in Ohio to receive an “effective” rating and is the highest-performing urban district in Ohio.
- ▶ CLCs are demonstrating improvement. In 2007–08, only 30.8 percent of CLCs had a rating of continuous improvement or higher; in 2010–11, 73.1 percent of CLCs achieved that distinction.
- ▶ High school graduation rates climbed from 51 percent in 2000 to 83 percent in 2009.
- ▶ The achievement gap between African American students and white students narrowed from 14.5 percent in 2003 to 4.3 percent in 2009.



www.communityschools.org

Cincinnati, Ohio Community Learning Centers

Cincinnati’s community learning centers¹⁰ are revitalizing the city’s neighborhoods, bringing families back into public schools and instilling a new sense of hope in neighborhoods where students often gave up on their education. Many share the vision of an education system that serves children from the early years through their transition to post-secondary learning and careers.

Planning New Opportunities for Young Children

On a rainy afternoon in the library of the Oyler Community Learning Center’s (CLC) temporary location, early learning program providers and school partners from across Cincinnati gather to brainstorm about ways to attract families to the school’s new center for infants and toddlers.

One participant talks about getting information on newborns from local hospitals while another says that community partners are available to provide transportation to parents who need to apply for a child-care voucher. Someone recommends contacting a local organization that helps pregnant mothers, and a parent says that most parents in the neighborhood are too young to raise children and that they get help only when they enroll their children at Oyler.

Jami Harris, the school’s Resource Coordinator, provides the group with statistics on family educational levels in the neighborhood and average scores on the state’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in Literacy.

“Ultimately, what are the things we need to do to make sure the enrollment is there?” asks Darlene Kamine, executive director of Cincinnati’s Community Learning Center Institute and a passionate former juvenile court magistrate who has played a central role in the growth of the city’s full-service community school movement.

Oyler CLC is a K–12 school in the low-income, urban Appalachian neighborhood of Lower Price Hill; it is one of 31 schools across Cincinnati with a resource coordinator who organizes the work of community partners in the schools to support student success.

“The community learning center is what is going to impact the community. And it starts with my nine children going to kindergarten.”

—Linda Doyle

Director of the Early Childhood Center at Riverview Community Learning Center

¹⁰ Cincinnati chooses to call its community schools Community Learning Centers because in Ohio charter schools are called community schools

Oyler Community Learning Center

Oyler, a K–12 CLC, has graduated more neighborhood students from high school in the past 3 years than in the collective 85 previous years. Since 2006–07, the school has improved its Ohio Performance Index every year, up 21.7 points. All of this could not be possible without Oyler's many partners:

- The Community Learning Center Institute
- Adopt a Class
- Jobs for Cincinnati Graduates
- Cincy After-School
- YMCA of Greater Cincinnati
- Kemba Credit Union
- Northlich
- Christ Church Cathedral
- National Marketshare Group
- Freestore Food Bank
- KMK
- E.W. Scripps
- Price Hill/Western Hills Kiwanis
- Paycor
- Consolidated Metal Products
- Police Federal Credit Union
- Cincinnati Postal Employees Credit Union, Inc.

Oyler became a K–12 school after an intensive community engagement process, sponsored by the school district, focused on designing new schools in each CLC. Oyler parents expressed a strong desire for a K–12 school because their children were dropping out of school when they went on to the city's comprehensive high schools. Oyler already offers preschool classes and is an example of how CLCs that include early childhood education programs are bringing new life to diverse neighborhoods where many parents had lost faith in their local schools.

The vision for Oyler is the same as that at Riverview East Academy, a toddler-to-12th-grade CLC on the south side of Cincinnati, but it is a vision that is still in the process of being realized.

An eye-catching blue and yellow building with porthole-looking windows, the Riverview East structure was inspired by the design of a riverboat. Built on stilts, the school is intended as a refuge for resi-

dents when the Ohio River floods the neighborhood. The building is organized into three sections, one of which houses early childhood classrooms operated by Cincinnati Early Learning Centers—one of the city's highest-rated providers.

Like Oyler, the Riverview CLC brings early education “slots” to a historically low-income Appalachian community in which many students dropped out of school after eighth grade rather than leave the neighborhood to attend high school. In addition, as a CLC, the school offers a variety of other opportunities and supports, including after-school programs, tutoring, and mental health counseling.

But as nine preschoolers cluster around their teacher on the floor in one classroom, another classroom is empty because too few families have registered for Riverview's preschool program. “I am here now, but where are they?” asks Linda Doyle, director of the early childhood center at Riverview.

Doyle says that the lack of enrollment is attributable to the fact that, to qualify for a voucher, parents must be either employed or in school full-time. But some parents are able to find only part-time jobs in today's weak economy, and others need additional support and motivation. Often, children from other school catchment areas end up filling the available slots. That is why the early childhood and school partners who are meeting at Oyler are intent on filling the new classrooms with eligible families from the neighborhood. They are strategizing on how to identify parents with young children as early as when mothers are pregnant.

Doyle, however, is still encouraged that nine of her preschoolers will stay at Riverview for kindergarten—a step toward reaching the vision of providing a well-rounded, supportive learning experience from early childhood through high school.

She already meets regularly with kindergarten teacher Barbara James to discuss transition issues for certain children and to give the preschoolers a glimpse of their future classroom. The school's social worker helps Doyle connect her families to additional resources. Parents are invited to parent workshops at the CLC. Doyle meets almost daily with the CLC Resource Coordinator and participates in the school's Parent Teacher Association and its Local School Decision Making Committee. Riverview's early childhood center is an integral part of the CLC.

Riverview and Oylar are examples of a growing trend in Cincinnati: deeper connections between schools and their co-located early childhood programs, with shared resources and community support. “The CLC is what is going to impact the community,” Doyle says. “And it starts with my nine children going to kindergarten.”

Schools Rebuilt by the Community

In 1997, the Ohio Supreme Court declared the state’s reliance on property taxes to fund education unconstitutional, a decision that forced many districts, including Cincinnati, to begin replacing and renovating decaying old school buildings. Around the same time, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) board member Jack Gilligan—also a former governor—was becoming interested in the concept of schools as the center of the community. He visited the Children’s Aid Society in New York, which is often a national model of community school work, and then convened school and community leaders to discuss the concept.

Initially, voters rejected a bond issue to begin work on the 10-year Facilities Master Plan. A second attempt to pass the \$1 billion measure, however, specified that every school was to be rebuilt as a community learning center. The measure passed. “The master plan and community engagement—they are wedded to each other,” says Eve Bolton, president of the CPS Board of Education.

Allowing parents and community members to create schools that meet their needs has been part of what Kamine calls a “re-culturing” of the school district and an effort to rebuild trust in among all families in the school district, including those sending their children to suburban or private schools. “One of our goals was just to keep the city from becoming an empty shell,” says Kamine, who was hired by CPS as a consultant to undertake the work of involving community members in creating a vision for their neighborhood schools.

Bolton also sees early learning opportunities as a critical aspect of rebuilding the district. “Where we have those early childhood centers, people stay with CPS,” she says.

The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers (CFT), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, is another active partner in pushing for the CLCs

What Is a Community Learning Center?

Community Learning Centers rest on the five following foundational elements:

- ▶ A commitment to comprehensive, sustained community engagement to ensure the development of partnerships responsive to the school—the community’s shared vision for the school as the center of the neighborhood.
- ▶ Site-based governance charged with establishing the unique vision for each community learning center, steering the selection of community partners, and evaluating the performance of those partners.
- ▶ Partnership networks comprised of providers in each area of need to provide district-wide capacity and equitable access to high-quality services, e.g., Growing Well (physical health), MindPeace (mental health), Adopt A Class Foundation (business mentors), College Access, Leave No Child Inside (Nature and Environmental), and Alliance for Leadership and Interconnection (green built environments and curriculum).
- ▶ Cross-Boundary Leadership that knits together the partnership network leaders as a collaborative team to coordinate and integrate interdisciplinary resources.
- ▶ On-Site Resource Coordinators who provide the critical infrastructure at the site level to develop, integrate, and manage the community partnerships. The Resource Coordinator (RC) is responsible for coordinating and managing partnerships that support students and families in alignment with the district’s overall CLC strategy. The RC is a key leader in the community engagement process and serves on and works with each site’s Local School Decision-Making Committee (LSDMC).

Adapted from <http://clcinstitute.org/about>.

and more resource coordinators. “It’s a support to the teachers,” Julie Sellers, CFT president, says about being in a CLC school with comprehensive supports. “I’ve worked with it and without it and I never want to work in a school without a [resource] coordinator.”

Sellers tells a story to illustrate the impact of CLCs. A young girl lost members of her family in a fire and was understandably having difficulty in school, forgetting her homework and being generally disengaged. When a community partner began offering ballroom and line-dancing classes for fourth and fifth graders at her school, the student participated. “The transformation of that child was so unbelievable,” Sellers says. “She saw success in ballroom dancing, and then she started having success in academics.” Sellers adds that fourth and fifth grades were targeted when the coordinator communicated with the teachers about which students were struggling. “We knew dancing was a need,” she says.

Cincinnati already stood as an example of collaboration between the teachers’ union and the school district. Now that relationship also encompasses the community, Bolton says. “All of a sudden there is another party at the table,” she says. “That is how we are going to become the number one urban district.”

Re-Engaging All Families

The birth of CLCs is not limited to low-income neighborhoods but is also a phenomenon in middle-class areas where parents may have the resources to send their children to private schools or move to the suburbs.

Montessori in Pleasant Ridge

The transformation of Pleasant Ridge Elementary School into Pleasant Ridge Montessori is another example of how a new model of early childhood education is drawing a diverse mix of middle-class families back into Cincinnati Public Schools. The neighborhood of “Pleasant Ridge was always very diverse, but [parents] wouldn’t send their kids to the school,” says Maureen Simon, a lead preschool teacher at the school and one of the founding parents of the Montessori program there. “To watch this grow has been incredible. It’s been life-changing for my family.”

The preschool is tuition-based, with a sliding scale for low-income families. Head Start pays tuition for 11 students.

Before Pleasant Ridge’s transformation in 2006, the school’s enrollment had fallen to 330. Now, it is close to 500, with a more socioeconomically balanced enrollment. The percentage of students on free or reduced-price lunch has fallen from 99 to under 70 percent. Some worried that low-income, minority children would be displaced from the school or that white parents would send their children to the preschool and then depart for private schools after kindergarten. But Simon and others say that the school’s growing racial diversity is evident through third grade, which is the current grade of the school’s first class of Montessori preschoolers. “Montessori brings in the preschoolers; the CLC keeps them here,” says Angie Okuda, the school’s CLC resource coordinator.

As a CLC, Pleasant Ridge works with a variety of partners that provide additional social services and learning opportunities, including a mental health therapist, the Blessings in a Backpack weekend meal program, and refurbished computers donated to families. It has also become a professional development site for Xavier University students majoring in Montessori education.

Hyde Park

After closing a school in the Hyde Park neighborhood several years ago because of nearly non-existent enrollment, the district is planning to re-open the school in response to parent advocacy. Parents gathered signatures from roughly 500 families not currently enrolled in CPS schools who said that they want to enroll their children in a CPS neighborhood community learning center. While these families also wanted a preschool to be part of the school, they dropped that request after realizing that the preschool would compete with many church-based preschools in the area. Still, Kamine says, “They did this all on their own.”

CLC Organization and Funding

Cincinnati Community Learning Centers are organized in a unique way that finances resource coordinators at more and more schools and ensures essential opportunities and the delivery of services at each school. The CPS CLC Coordinators, the Cincinnati Community Learning Centers Institute, the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team, and the policy and leadership of the Cincinnati Public Schools are the glue that holds the CLCs together.

Currently, CLC Resource Coordinators are funded by four major organizations in the city—the Cincinnati Public Schools, the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, Haile/U.S. Bank Foundation, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and the Community Learning Centers Institute (CLCI), which raises funds from private donors. The funding streams and various lead agencies give each CLC “a different color,” Kamine says. Resource Coordinators are hired by and reflect lead agencies that include the YMCA, Project GRAD, and mental health partners such as Central Clinic. CLCI also serves as a lead agency in some schools. In the 2011–12 school year, 31 schools have Resource Coordinators.

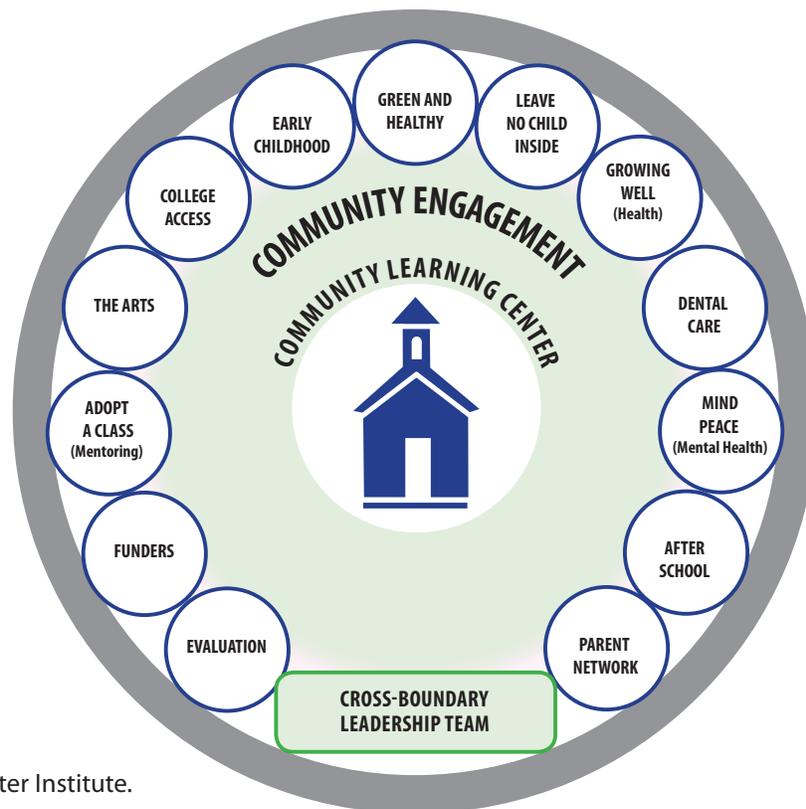
The agencies that provide services at CLCs are organized into what are known as “partnership networks” made up of agencies with similar missions in a variety of categories, e.g., health, mental health, college access, after-school programming, mentoring, tutoring, and early childhood education. The early childhood group is led by the Success by 6 collaborative, which advocates for high-quality early childhood programs and is supported by the United Way of the Greater Cincinnati.

When organizing services for their schools, Resource Coordinators “essentially go shopping” among the networks for programs that meet their needs, Kamine says. In effect, the CLCs operate by redirecting community resources into partnerships with schools.

Each network also has a leader who is a member of the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team (Figure 2), an organizational approach unique to Cincinnati that “takes on issues that are important to all of us” and sets priorities for the CLCs, says Susan Shelton, director of Mindpeace, the mental health partnership network. Mindpeace is one of the networks in Cincinnati that predates the CLC structure, but its work has been enhanced by its new relationship with the schools. “CLCs were a tipping point for the work that we were doing,” Shelton says. “Saying ‘We are the professionals and we know what you need’—that doesn’t drive change.”

As an essential part of their efforts to support community schools, the superintendent of schools, the president of the Board of Education, and the union president share leadership responsibility for making decisions about what happens in the district and the CLCs, which are subject to the policies of the Board

Figure 2: Cincinnati Community Learning Centers Cross-Boundary Leadership Team



SOURCE:
Graphic adapted by
and with permission from
Community Learning Center Institute.

of Education. CLCs are not a separate program but rather are fundamental to how the district and its schools operate. However, all decisions about the partnerships, including the selection of agencies and partner accountability, fall under the purview of the site-based governing boards—called Local School Decision-Making Committees—at each CLC.

Learning to Be a Resource Coordinator

Angie Okuda, a former private tutor with an effusive personality, was one of Cincinnati’s first nine Resource Coordinators. On her first day at work, she said that she expected someone to tell her what to do—but it didn’t happen. Instead, she found herself helping out on lunch duty and cleaning science kits. It was by building relationships with secretaries and science teachers, however, that she began to gather information on students’ needs. Now, she serves as a bridge between classroom teachers and the school’s mental health and after-school providers.

Resource Coordinators work with each school’s Local School Decision-Making Committee (LSDMC), an entity that has existed at each school since the 1970s to set goals, approve the school budget, and even recommend candidates for principal. The LSDMCs help create what is called a *OnePlan*—a school improvement plan that includes a look at the comprehensive needs of students and how the school and community will meet those needs. The committees’ role extends to approving agreements with partner agencies to provide services and programs to meet student needs as part of the CLC. While the extent to which coordinators interact with LSDMCs varies from school to school, their relationships with the principals are consistently strong, Kamine says.

The Difference a Coordinator Makes

Partners in Cincinnati say that they see a clear difference between working with schools with and without Resource Coordinators. Bill Burwinkel, a business owner and founder of the Adopt-a-Class mentoring program, says that schools can be “challenging” environments that do not always provide a “good reception” to members of the business community who want to donate their time to helping students. But “a really good resource coordinator,” he says, “understands their responsibility to those partners.”

Given that the schools adopted by Cincinnati businesses and other organizations offer prekindergarten classes, the mentoring program is another way that CLCs focus on young learners. “The value of taking corporate America and putting them [sic] in the schools accomplishes what we wouldn’t be able to do otherwise,” says Marilyn Crompton, director of Growing Well Cincinnati, the primary health care network of providers.

Patricia Gleason, president and CEO of Cincinnati Early Learning Centers, says that she also notices a difference between her program’s relationship with Riverview East and that at another school without a Resource Coordinator where she also operates early childhood classes. She attributes the difference to the partnership culture at Riverview. Doyle, the early childhood director at Riverview, talks about how the staff there “would do anything” for the children in her program—even rescheduling a school-wide fire drill to avoid interrupting naptime. But, at the school without a Resource Coordinator, Gleason says, “We wouldn’t think of calling up the principal and saying ‘We have a family who doesn’t have clothes.’ It’s different.”

The Growing Role of CPS

CPS has been taking on a larger role in setting goals for CLCs and working with the Resource Coordinators. In 2010, the CPS School Board passed Policy 7500, which states that “each school should also be a community learning center” and that each CLC should be the “neighborhood’s center of activity.” “I would wear that phrase on a t-shirt,” Kamine says, noting how well the policy communicates the vision and responsibilities associated with operating a CLC. “[The district] has embraced it. They are walking the walk” (see text box on Board Policy 7500, page 19).

While both the board and central office support CLCs, they recognize that the initiative can be neither a top-down effort nor a function solely of the school system. They see the strength of the CLCs in the genuine partnership with the community, thereby ensuring more sustainable funding and support and helping withstand the ups and downs of tax levies and changes in staffing at the central office. At the same time, CPS is providing increased support. “They are definitely here to say,” CPS Superintendent Mary Ronan says about CLCs. “We are definitely seeing success.”

Cincinnati School Board Policy 7500 COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

The Board of Education believes that each school should also be a community learning center in which a variety of partners shall offer academic programs, enrichment activities, and support to students, families, and community members before and after school as well as during the evenings and on weekends throughout the calendar year. Each school's Community Learning Center shall hereinafter be referred to as CLC. The Board envisions each CLC as the neighborhood's center of activity.

The Board further believes that in order to serve more fully the needs of students and to support the improvement of their academic and intellectual development, each District public school must engage its community if these worthy purposes are to be realized.

As the learning center in the community, each school and its partners must demonstrate strong collaboration, set high expectations for all students, embrace diversity, and share the accountability for results.

Each CLC should have a Resource Coordinator, who develops and coordinates services and programs that serve the students, their families, and the community. The Resource Coordinator shall be appointed in accordance with the Superintendent's administrative guidelines and shall work collaboratively with the principal and the LSDMC to provide the services and programs that meet the needs and priorities identified by the school's leadership.

Annually, as part of the OnePlan process, each school shall assess the needs of its student population. As a result of that process, each school's OnePlan shall describe the partnerships deemed necessary to enhance opportunities for student success and community and parental involvement. The LSDMC, ILT, parents, and the school community shall participate in the development of this comprehensive plan.

It shall be the responsibility of the Resource Coordinator to develop written agreements with the agencies and organizations that shall provide the services and programs. The agreements shall include a provision clarifying that the partnering agency or organization shall be responsible for reimbursing the District for actual costs for the services rendered by District custodial or operations employees that occur outside the employee's regular scheduled work hours, if applicable, in accordance with Board Policy 7510, Use of Facilities. These charges shall not apply to the District's capital partners that maintain exclusive control over and responsibility for the facilities in which their programs and services are provided.

In addition, the agreement shall include a provision that requires the agency/organization to provide evidence that each employee and/or volunteer has submitted to a criminal history records check in accordance with Board Policy 3121 and Policy 4121.

Once developed, the agreements shall then be submitted to the LSDMC through the principal for approval. Each agreement shall provide for an annual evaluation of the programs and/or services provided under said agreement. The agreement shall include a provision whereby the LSDMC retains the right to cancel said agreement for cause, either at the conclusion of the agreement or with sixty (60) days written notice served upon the agency.

The Superintendent shall be responsible for preparing administrative guidelines necessary to implement this policy.

*Available from <https://community.cps-k12.org/sites/boardpolicies>

In 2009, the district hired Julie Doppler as its CLC Coordinator. CPS wrote a job description and training manual for the coordinators, and Doppler meets with them twice a month to "maximize their impact," she says.

While she oversees federal grants that help fund community learning centers, Doppler also provides some professional development to the Resource Coordinators, in addition to the training they receive from their own agencies—a need that, according to Okuda at Pleasant Ridge Montessori, has increased. "We now know we are getting too big for ourselves," Okuda says. "We need the training to match the socioeconomic issues we are facing."

Mayerson Academy, a professional development center that serves CPS, is currently preparing a more formal training program for Resource Coordinators. The coordinators also attend conferences in order to share knowledge and learn from those in similar positions around the country.

Doppler was also instrumental in recruiting tutors as part of the Be the Change campaign, an effort to enlist 2,000 volunteers who could help children in the grades tested on the state assessment. The initiative, however, has left many with the impression that CPS is more interested in what CLCs can do to raise student achievement than in anything else. It is a perception that is not entirely wrong, Ronan says. "If your Resource Coordinator isn't helping you raise achievement, it's nice, but it's not helping you meet your target," Ronan says.

Bolton adds that the district's involvement in the campaign was also necessary to ensure the selection of high-quality tutors. "A lot of people make a lot of money off our kids. Everyone wants to tutor," she says, but adds that CLCs "keep alive the idea that you're teaching the whole child."

Balancing the district's priorities with "a broader view" of what children need to be healthy and successful is also a role for the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team, says Mindpeace's Shelton. "When it's just tutoring, tutoring, tutoring, we can say, 'Time out,'" she says.

Using Data: The Learning Partner Dashboard

Another major project for CPS and its community partners is the design of the Learning Partner Dashboard—a database that will link to the district's overall student data system and be aligned with each school's four goal areas: academics, parent involvement, community engagement, and wellness.

Initiated by CPS and its community partners, the Dashboard is to be updated nightly with academic, behavior, and absenteeism data while partners will enter information on the students they serve and how often—providing a picture of whether CLC services have a positive effect on achievement. The system is intended to highlight students in need of assistance—a need that Okuda at Pleasant Ridge recognized shortly after she became a Resource Coordinator.

"I was the only one who knew which kids were in what programs," she says. "The teachers needed to know, but they didn't know that I knew."

Previously, tutoring services and other programs operated on a first-come, first-served basis. The Learning Partner Dashboard is intended to make sure that students who most need help are receiving it.

For now, the Learning Partner Dashboard collects only academic data, but Doppler says that plans call for adding health and wellness data, particularly for children with asthma or for rates of obesity. "We started with academics because that's what we know best," she says. At this point, the Dashboard does not include information on preschoolers or children's early learning experiences before school entry, but Doppler reported interest in adding Ohio Kindergarten Readiness Assessment scores to the system.

The Strive Partnership in Cincinnati, with support from Proctor & Gamble and volunteer executives from Microsoft, is helping to implement the Dashboard. Strive is a four-year-old initiative dedicated to spurring improvement in educational outcomes from birth through the transition into a career. Strive is also helping to lead the Be the Change campaign, and one of Strive's priorities is "linking community supports to student achievement," which could be another way of describing community learning centers. "CLCs are a major priority because of the impact it [sic] has," says new STRIVE executive director Greg Landsman. He calls CLCs "the bridge" between what happens in school and out of school.

The United Way of Greater Cincinnati, which funds some CLC sites, is also interested in what the data can show about the effectiveness of schools as centers for social, health, recreation, and other support services. "What we liked about CLCs was that it was taking something to scale," says Patricia Waldsmith, director of community impact at the United Way. "They are a perfect incubator for seeing how partnerships work." She added, however, that "better clarity" is needed in determining whether "the right kids are getting the right services at the right time."

Summer Learning Supported by the Community

One of the most successful examples of partnership between CPS and the many providers involved in CLCs has been the 5th Quarter—a month of learning and enrichment activities for children in 16 of the city's elementary schools. The morning hours of the program, held for a third year in 2011, focus on academics while the afternoon is filled with activities such as art, music and dance, visits from Cincinnati Zoo animals and their keepers, and hands-on science experiments. While the program initially focused on children entering the "testing grades" of three through eight, most schools with Resource Coordinators or 21st Century Community Learning Center funds have added learning and enrichment activities for children in the primary grades as well.

The 5th Quarter is part of CPS's elementary initiative—an effort to improve academic achievement in 16 low-performing elementary schools. So far, test scores in these "turnaround schools" are heading in the desired direction. According to CPS, "Seven

of the schools have jumped one or two categories in the Ohio report card ranking system, and six of the schools have met all of their federal accountability targets for Adequate Yearly Progress.” While it is not possible to determine precisely to what extent the additional social services and enrichment programs provided through the CLCs have contributed to the gains, Kamine is convinced that “it would not work if you didn’t have the community engaged.”

Community Support in Action: Addressing Health Needs

Members of the community have been vocal about including health services as part of community learning centers’ offerings—services made available with the help of Cincinnati’s health care community. CPS and the city had been funding school nurses, but, when the city voted in 2011 to eliminate its portion of the funding, advocates protested, prompting city officials to restore some of the city’s contribution. The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, part of the Growing Well health collaborative, stepped in to provide additional funds and to spearhead a planning and fundraising effort for school health. Even so, the number of schools with registered nurses has dropped from 39 to 26. Unlicensed school health assistants will be assigned to the other schools.

Nonetheless, full-service health centers operate in eight schools, with two more added in fall 2011. The district has also received \$500,000 from the Health Resources Services Administration for equipment and construction—part of the federal *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*. The funds will help support a new eye center at Oyler CLC.

Schools serving preschoolers have sometimes evidenced confusion over whether the health centers can serve the younger children, Dr. Crumpton says. “These invisible lines had been drawn,” she says, but adds that the health care partners are now beginning to take some responsibility for the younger children.

“From Cradle to Career”

Strive deserves credit, some say, for focusing attention on the early years as the beginning of learning.

“Strive has been instrumental in building a better picture of how education should be organized—from cradle to career,” says Stephanie Byrd, director of the

United Way of Greater Cincinnati’s Success by Six initiative, which is also the early childhood partnership network for the CLCs. She added that not everyone has recognized “that the early years are part of the education system.”

For a long time, even the United Way failed to recognize the importance of early childhood education despite the fact that early childhood development was one of its top priorities. Waldsmith points to efforts in K–12 education that were not integrated with early childhood development efforts. Other than examples such as Oyler and Riverview, many Resource Coordinators likely still do not see the need for integrated efforts, she says. Early learning “has not been on the radar for CLCs,” she says. “Those Resource Coordinators are not focused on kindergarten readiness.”

Yet, several CPS schools offer early childhood classes, primarily Head Start. Unlike many neighboring districts, CPS also pays for full-day kindergarten out of its general fund. But Head Start students often do not remain in the same school for kindergarten, discouraging “much engagement by families in a school and community that they are not going to be a part of,” Kamine says. Improving collaboration between Head Start—which operates under its own strict performance standards—and the public schools is a goal of the federal Office of Head Start. CPS is certainly not alone as a district where the federal program and local schools are disconnected. Waldsmith says CLCs could be the means of drawing the two together. “CLCs could play a role in helping early grade teachers understand the early years,” she says.

Deborah Bradshaw, CPS director of early childhood education, says that building those relationships often “depends on who is in the role” of Resource Coordinator or even principal. “There are some who have a broader vision,” she says. “There is room to start bridging that a little more.” Those bridges are growing as CLCs increasingly strengthen the connection with early childhood. As Riverview, Pleasant Ridge, and now Oyler demonstrate, when early learning opportunities are provided within the CLC, Resource Coordinators and community partners can build bridges and supports for students of all ages.

As with most school districts, CPS is limited by state funding in what it can offer parents with young children. Ohio has long paid for public preschool and began funding an Early Learning Initiative (ELI)

in 2005 with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grant. But spending on ELI was drastically cut in fiscal year 2010, leaving families to look for slots in other programs that often had other income or work eligibility requirements. In fiscal 2011, the program received no increases. “We pretty much got decimated,” Bradshaw says.

While it will not open new classrooms, the Winning Beginning fund-raising campaign of the United Way of Greater Cincinnati will at least focus on improving school readiness and preschool quality in the metropolitan area. Part of the effort, which aims to raise \$30 million over five years, aims to develop a system for measuring children’s progress from preschool into kindergarten.

Reaching the Same Goal

In the meantime, Oyler CLC is continuing its efforts to ensure that young children in the neighborhood have a high-quality early learning experience.

Since the earlier meeting, Harris, the Resource Coordinator, has invited local family child-care providers and early childhood staff from the Santa Maria Community Services agency to be part of what is happening at the school. They are working to identify and fill gaps in services for families. For example, Santa Maria can provide home visits and parent education classes while the health center at Oyler can provide immunizations, health screenings, and other medical services, Harris says. “We never want to step on anyone else’s toes or duplicate services,” Harris says. “This is what is great about CLCs. It’s a collaboration with others who are all trying to reach the same goal.”

Cincinnati Lessons

LESSON 1: Collaborative leadership structures at the school and community levels are poised to address new challenges and opportunities. Specifically, Cincinnati CLCs are well-positioned for developing strategies to support linkages between early childhood programs and the CPS. At the school-site, community partners were instrumental in the decision to bring an early childhood center to Oyler and helped provide services and connections to the early childhood community. The Cross-Boundary Leadership Team is organized to bring together leaders of collaboratives focused on major programs (e.g., after-school, mental health, tutoring) in order to assist CLCs with selecting appropriate providers.

LESSON 2: Deep connections between early childhood programs and schools require consistent and intentional effort. The connections are most readily developed when early childhood facilities are co-located in schools. It is far more challenging to build bridges between schools and community-based early childhood programs.

LESSON 3: Resource Coordinators must focus on building connections with early childhood programs. While Resource Coordinators have largely targeted students in elementary and high schools, they must now expand their focus to early childhood programs. Resource Coordinators are an essential element of the community learning center approach. Funding for coordinators should be protected and not linked to economic cycles.

LESSON 4: Distributed power through shared ownership at the community level sustains the CLC initiative and ensures that no one partner dominates outcomes or strategies. Cincinnati’s CLCs are jointly owned by the school district, the Board of Education, community partners, and funders. They all play a role in CLCs’ success and help make community and collaboration a part of CPS’s culture, rather than a separate set of programs.

LESSON 5: Data collected from stakeholders and shared via, for example, the Learning Partnership Dashboard help identify the need for supports for students and families and guide the selection of partners that best provide supports and achieve desired results.

LESSON 6: Community engagement that uncovers what a community wants for its schools and what resources are available has the power to transform neighborhoods and a city. Community engagement has led to the creation of several early learning opportunities housed in CLC buildings. ■



CASE STUDIES

Evansville, Indiana: Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation

Selected Results from EVSC Community Schools

- ▶ By applying the community schools strategy throughout the school district, EVSC has achieved several outcomes:
 - Met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2010 and 2011
 - In 2009–10, 79.1 percent of graduates pursued college, a rate higher than the state average
 - In 2009–10, expulsions dropped from 235 (2007–08) to 9; suspensions dropped from 5,287 (2007–08) to 5,000*
- ▶ A focus on early childhood development contributed to a 27.3 percent increase in the number of students meeting early literacy benchmarks. In fall 2011, 49.4 percent of kindergarten students met Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) benchmark instructional recommendations upon entry into school compared to 38.8 percent in fall 2006.†
- ▶ Students from the Culver Family Learning Center and Daniel Wertz Head Start (a Head Start/EVSC partnership) have higher DIBELS scores entering kindergarten than students of similar backgrounds who did not attend early childhood programs.‡
- ▶ In 2011, 1,633 students who participated regularly (30 or more days) in after-school and summer programs across 13 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) sites had higher grade point averages and fewer daily absences, compared to students who did not attend the programs at all. Teacher surveys suggest that behavioral improvements were observed for the majority of both elementary and middle school students attending the programs for 30 or more days; these include satisfactory homework completion, behavior, participation, and academic performance.‡

Community schools in Evansville, Indiana, are extending the impact of community partners' and agencies' work in enriching the lives of students and their families. Additional resources are helping refine the responsibilities of community school coordinators, including their role in facilitating services for young children and their parents. Community schools are a part of the district's culture, and early childhood education is central to the district's strategic plan.

Providing Academic Support in the Early Years

The boy with close-cropped hair and a purple polo shirt finally gets a chance to hold the microphone and describe to his classmates what happens next in "The Cow that Went Oink." "Now the horse is coming to the pigs," he says enthusiastically, using clues from the illustrations and speaking in a big voice even though his mouth is right on the microphone.

The discussion is a typical pre-literacy and classroom orientation activity in the summer transition program for incoming kindergartners at Lincoln School, a community school in Evansville. It is also part of the school's effort to ensure that children are well prepared for the early grades and evidence of the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation's (EVSC) dedication to improving early childhood as part of its district-wide community school initiative. "We have an awesome group of Ks." brags Lincoln School's Principal Kim Johnson.

Lincoln School is part of the Early Childhood Development Coalition, a citywide initiative launched by the United Way of Southwestern Indiana in 2006 that includes not only school district representatives but also several partners from the early childhood community.

"We're totally committed to early childhood, family, school, community partnerships . . . quite frankly, we can't solve or resolve [school] issues in isolation. It takes a community effort."

—David Smith

Superintendent, Evansville
Vanderburgh School
Corporation

* Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) State of the Schools, 2012 (<http://www.evschools.com>)

† Diehl Evaluation and Consulting Services (2011a). Preliminary Evaluation of the EVSC Early Childhood Program. Contact: Cathlin.Gray@evsc.k12.in.us

Diehl Evaluation and Consulting Services (2011b). Preliminary Evaluation of the EVSC Early Childhood Program. Contact: Cathlin.Gray@evsc.k12.in.us

The coalition's goal is to improve the quality of early childhood settings in Evansville and create stronger connections between the schools and the children who will attend them—whether or not the children have attended preschool. Evansville community schools are important partners in the coalition.

To Jonathan Rucker, Lincoln's community school coordinator, the nine-day transition program is also a chance to plug children and families into all the services available at Lincoln even sooner than the first day of school—programs such as monthly “coffee chats” for parents on child development and education topics, a senior citizen volunteer tutoring program in reading, access to a social worker, on-site screening for lead poisoning, and summer swimming lessons offered by the Evansville Parks and Recreation Department.

“The more support you can put in place at an early age, the less you have to worry about the kid later on,” says Rucker, who cultivates relationships with community partners, such as the high school junior he brought in to run a three-day summer sports camp for children in grades one through three.

Lincoln is also one of EVSC's new K–8 (in one case, prekindergarten–8) schools, a recent configuration change that has been challenging in some respects but is expected to provide further ongoing support for students as they progress toward high school. “Eighth graders still knowing their kindergarten teachers—there's a lot of power in that,” says Jacqueline Kuhn, principal of Cedar Hall Community School, one of the former elementary schools that merged with a middle school. It is also where EVSC's work with community partners began.

History and Growth of Evansville's Community Schools

While all 35 EVSC schools are considered community schools, some, such as Cedar Hall, have been able to develop full partnerships with community agencies. Cedar Hall has an ingrained culture of collaboration that defines the way the school interacts with local agencies and businesses in this southern Indiana city.

Cedar Hall began to evolve into a community school in the 1990s when the United Way's efforts to create a one-stop shop for human services merged with Cedar Hall's successful after-school programs, remembers United Way Executive Director Carol Braden-Clarke. The participation of the local neighborhood association also lifted the initiative to a level beyond the school. “It didn't have a name. We didn't really know precisely what we were doing,” says Cathlin S. Gray, former Cedar Hall principal and now EVSC's associate superintendent for family, school, and community partnerships. But Gray's research into the full-service school work of Joy Dryfoos, one of the founders of the Coalition for Community Schools, and the creation of a formal school council at Cedar Hall, which includes community partners, gave the initiative a structure and direction that would expand across the district.

Meanwhile, Southwestern Healthcare, Inc., which coordinates mental health services in Evansville, discovered that it achieved greater success with children facing emotional and behavior problems by addressing children's needs in a school setting instead of pulling them out of school for therapy sessions—appointments that often meant children would miss an entire day of school. “There's a realization that no one can do this alone,” says John Browning, president of Southwestern. “We can't be effective if behavior isn't reinforced at home and at school.” Browning also made case workers available to help teachers at Cedar Hall learn strategies for assisting students in the classroom.

Other partners, such as St. Mary's Hospital, the Boys and Girls Club, and Lampion, a family and child service agency, began seeing the same benefits by working closely with the schools.

When the 23,000-student EVSC received its first 21st CCLC grant in 2000, the community school strategy began to spread to more schools, with extended learning opportunities and social services delivered by community organizations. EVSC's

EVSC Strategic Plan Focus Areas

- ▶ Professional development
- ▶ Early childhood education
- ▶ Innovative school models
- ▶ State-of-the-art technology
- ▶ Family, school, and community partnerships

partner agencies gathered for the first time in 2000 in what is known as the “big table”—every-other-month gatherings that allow partners to present their work and discover new ways to collaborate. In 2001, the School-Community Council (SCC), often still fondly referred to as the “big table,” was formally created to oversee the expanding initiative.

When former Superintendent Vince Bertram—who served from 2007 through 2011—arrived in Evansville, he engaged the community in a process to identify strategic focus areas for the school district. Together, the school district and community identified family, school, and community partnerships as one of five core focus areas in the district’s strategic plan (see text box “EVSC Strategic Plan Focus Areas”). Formalizing partnerships as a key district strategy was the primary goal of the SCC’s Steering Committee, made up of community partners and people working with Gray, whom Bartram tapped as associate superintendent for family, school, and community partnerships.

Today, Superintendent David Smith is committed to sustaining and intensifying the district’s efforts to enhance the operation of community schools and provide early childhood opportunities. When Smith was asked just one day after he was hired whether he would change strategies, he responded, “The change is going to be we’re *not* going to change. We’re totally

committed to early childhood, family, school, community partnerships...quite frankly, we can’t solve or resolve [school] issues in isolation. It takes a community effort.”

Once the new strategic plan was written, the SCC Steering Committee was recast as the Leadership Advisory Committee, a 16-member group of selected partners, staff from the district’s academic team, and representatives from the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships. The committee is now setting new goals and will focus primarily on advising schools and “big table” members on programs that better meet student needs.

Additional grants followed the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, including a Safe Schools Healthy Students grant in 2004, allowing for growth of community school components to all schools. The Welborn Baptist Foundation, another early partner, provides a coordinated school health program and places wellness coordinators in 24 schools, further reinforcing the school as a place that meets both academic and non-academic needs. Other funding sources, such as Title I and the Carol M. White Physical Education Program grant and additional local, state, and philanthropic funds, help support the community school structure, services, and philosophy (see text box “EVSC Community School Funding Sources”).

Grabbing a piece of paper off her desk, Gray offers an example as she talks about the district’s recent receipt of a \$75,000 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant. Because the grant application was aligned with Evansville’s efforts to eliminate homelessness, the district is disbursing the funds to a variety of partners to focus on tutoring homeless youth. In addition, Aurora, a non-profit agency, will provide school staff with professional development to help them recognize homeless youth; the Lampion Center counseling agency will provide case management services; and Youth First, another nonprofit, will deliver tutoring to youth in homeless shelters. Finally, 4C of Southern Indiana, Inc., the local child care resource and referral agency, is helping to create “play spaces”—areas with books, toys, games, and art supplies—in the city’s transitional housing and emergency shelters.

Carrie Hillyard, EVSC’s assistant director of Title I, works with principals to find as much flexibility as possible in the various grants received by the district in order to align funding that supports the district’s

EVSC Community School Funding Sources

- Title I
- Title I School Improvement Grants
- 1003 G—School Improvement
- Special Education
- Title II—Professional Development
- Title III—English Language Learner
- Title IV—Safe and Drug Free
- Even Start and Head Start
- Centers for Disease Control
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Carol M. White Physical Education Grant
- Grant to Reduce Alcohol Abuse
- Safe School/Healthy Students
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant
- Full-Service Community Schools Grant

strategies while meeting grant requirements. “It’s a good thing I took creative writing in school,” she says. “There is a lot of creative writing that goes into getting schools what they need.”

As community schools expand in Evansville, the efforts to work with partners to improve access to preschool programs and link them to schools are likewise expanding. As noted earlier, early childhood education is one of the district’s core focus areas and figures prominently in the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships.

Moving into the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships

In 2009, the division headed by Gray moved into a former branch of the Old National Bank, which leases the building to the district for \$1 a year. Now separate from the district’s central office, the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships is designed to be a welcoming place for families, as evidenced by its inviting play area for young children. One of the district’s partners—Hospitality and Outreach for Latin Americans (HOLA)—is housed in the center, increasing the district’s ability to reach out to Evansville’s growing Hispanic community and enhancing the nonprofit’s efforts to serve more children through its after-school programs. “It’s easier to promote our programs,” says Executive Director Monica Landaeta.

Even though the center’s office is separate from the district’s central office, Gray meets weekly with senior district officials and routinely steers them toward addressing issues in collaboration with members of the “big table.” “I’m now working with partners almost as much as Cathy,” says David Dimmet, EVSC’s chief academic officer.¹¹ Dimmet recently became a Big Brother so he could set a good example. He has noticed that making decisions at the district level, without giving schools and partners a chance to weigh in is ill-advised amid a climate of collaboration. “That would have been tolerated before,” he says, referring to a recent situation in which district leaders deliberated over how to continue funding instructional coaches once federal stimulus funds dried up. “Now if we don’t get input, we get resistance.”

¹¹ David Dimmet left EVSC in summer 2011 just after he was interviewed for this study.

Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships Services

- ▶ After-school and summer enrichment program
- ▶ Early childhood education
- ▶ Extended daycare center program
- ▶ Family support services
- ▶ Health, wellness, and coordinated school health
- ▶ School-community council (community schools)
- ▶ Southwest Indiana College Access Network (SICAN)
- ▶ Student support services (e.g., mentoring, counseling, school-linked services)

Learning To Do Community Schools Better

In 2010, the district received a Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which formalizes and supports much of what Evansville’s schools have been doing with other funding streams. The grant focuses on five schools and the development of policies, procedures, and job descriptions for each school’s community outreach coordinator, says the director of the FSCS program for EVSC, Patricia Weinzapfel, a former local television news reporter who brings communication and leadership skills to her job. “Every school is a community school,” she says, but there is variation in implementation across the schools. “This allows us to do it better and grow the work in a more intentional way.” The grant also provides funds for professional development and for each school’s site council. A sixth school will have the same resources and a coordinator, though under a 1003(g) School Improvement Grant using a “turn-around model”—one of four options available to low-achieving schools under No Child Left Behind.

The six schools represent a variety of grade configurations from the early childhood years through high school, which, Weinzapfel says, will serve as “a model for all levels.” (See text box “Making the New Cedar Hall Even Better” for an example of growth at the school level).

Meeting around the Big Table

Today, the School Community Council counts more than 70 members, and partners joke about the need for a bigger table. The SCC also includes several committees, or teams, made up of both EVSC staff and community representatives who focus on specific areas such as health and wellness, communications, and evaluation.

Janet Raisor, executive director of case management, community outreach, and rehabilitation services at St. Mary's Hospital—which makes case workers available to EVSC, offers exercise programs, and sends a mobile dental van to schools—says she clearly sees the difference community schools make for Evansville families. The rich mix of services and extensive involvement of partners does not exist in neighboring counties or districts. “People are jealous of what we have here,” she says, describing surrounding counties as “about 10 years behind.”

Partners talk as much about how their organizations benefit from participation at the big table as they do their own work in the schools. For example, when Jo Gilreath, interim director of Mental Health America in Evansville, was re-examining the non-profit's core mission, she was reassured that another partner would provide the services she could no longer provide. “I was able to let go of some things with cutbacks because I knew what else was going on,” she says.

The big table has also changed some partners' thinking about applying for grants. Amy Walker, executive director of the Public Education Foundation in Evansville, said she used to think that agencies were all competing for the same slice of the pie. But now, she says, she has learned that one partner's success can often have positive ripple effects. “Being on the big table gives me access to resource knowledge that I wouldn't know otherwise,” she says.

Other members say that they have learned that some funders look for organizations that are already working together to address a problem. Anita Hays, secretary for the SCC, describes an event four years ago, called Healthier Evansville, that brought together staff from the city's two hospitals—St. Mary's and Deaconess. Instead of wearing t-shirts promoting their respective organizations, they wore Healthier Evansville t-shirts. “They are very competitive,” she says. “But that disappears at the big table.” The real sharing of information and resources often takes place

after the official meetings, Hays says. “While I'm cleaning up, I love to hear the clicking that's going on,” she says.

In a recent meeting, for example, Helen Peck, coordinator of the University of Evansville's 21st Century Scholars Program, which funds college tuition for Indiana students, sat at the end of the table with Melissa Davis, programs and partnerships manager for the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library. When Peck learned that the library had mobile laptop carts available for computer classes, she began asking how she could work with Davis to make those available to high school students in the Scholars program.

David Schutte, EVSC coordinator of community outreach, plays an important role in building cohesion among partners. He started out implementing 21st Century Community Learning Center programs for the district but now takes on any task related to working with community partners, functioning as something of a site coordinator for the district. Wearing a polo shirt instead of suit to work so he can relate to a wide variety of community members, Schutte tries to attend every site council meeting at every school in order to update partners on what is happening district-wide. He also makes certain that all participants feel appreciated for the work they do. “It's about being sure we value both sides,” he says. “People are people. Feelings get hurt.”

Many Coordinators

EVSC faces a considerable challenge as it continues to implement its district-wide community school initiative. For example, that several coordinators work with various community partners could potentially give rise to confusion over roles and responsibilities. In particular, the FSCS grant and School Improvement Grant brought an additional staff person to six schools to form community partnerships, improve services for children, and strengthen relationships with parents. Those six individuals joined schools whose 21st Century coordinators often led site council meetings and developed partnerships. Lincoln School, for example, now accounts for four coordinator positions—21st Century, Title I, FSCS, and the Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP). In many other schools two or three coordinators are on staff. In addition, high schools have student support advisors. While the Culver Family Learning Center does not

Making the New Cedar Hall Even Better

Many of the lessons EVSC has learned about running community schools are the result of Cedar Hall's experience. Nonetheless, the Cedar Hall staff is still intent on engaging new partners and strengthening relationships with existing partners.

For example, Cedar Hall's prekindergarten program is funded under Title I—a decision that, Principal Jacqueline Kuhn says, has resulted in higher scores for her students on the DIBELS early literacy assessment as compared to schools with comparable levels of poverty. Another Title I prekindergarten program was set to open at Evans Elementary in fall 2011.

"Our K kids come in about 18 months behind so pre-K is one of our greatest interventions," Kuhn says, but adds that she would like to partner with Head Start to strengthen the early childhood program, diversify funding streams, and serve more children.

Kuhn and others convinced the local neighborhood association, which had always been part of Cedar Hall, to begin meeting in the school's "family-community outreach office." "Getting them into the building consistently has been huge," she says.

Built on the site of its former structure, Cedar Hall is now a colorful, new, environmentally friendly building with a rooftop garden and a façade that looks like a series of rowhouses.

On a recent summer morning, students had just finished the academic portion of their summer school program and were waiting in the small gymnasium for buses that would transport them to another school where the city's Department of Parks and Recreation runs afternoon activities.

Business majors from the University of Southern Indiana are designing business plans for the school's clothing closet, which helps families in need of school uniforms and other items.

Kuhn emphasizes that partnerships have to run in both directions. "We don't always come with our hand out," she says, adding that she regularly goes to the neighborhood association meetings and provides volunteers for community events.

The EVSC's plans to create K–8 schools never included Cedar Hall. In fact, the school was scheduled to be closed—until Bertram got an earful from parents and local residents who did not want to lose their school. "They were sizzling," Kuhn describes the crowd. "I had never seen him so shaken."

When Cedar Hall ultimately merged with one of the district's middle schools in 2010, prekindergarten parents expressed typical concerns about their children riding on buses with eighth graders, and the eighth graders were not too eager to return to an elementary school now that they were the "big shots," Kuhn says. But she notes that her oldest students have interacted positively with the school's youngest pupils. Students in the eighth grade "cadet teaching" elective class, for example, read with students in prekindergarten through first grade—even learning best practices from a Title I reading specialist.

have all these positions, Jonathan Walker, the center's family community outreach coordinator, still must determine how his job differs from that of Head Start's two parent advocates.

Receipt of the FSCS grant therefore added to the potential for confusion over roles and responsibilities. Weinzapfel and many others, however, say that the new position has allowed the existing coordinators to return to focusing on what they were originally intended to do; that is, the 21st Century coordinators oversee after-school programming, and the PEP coordinators work to improve physical education programs. Tequia Barrett, program director for the 21st Century grant, says that more than one coordinator at several schools has been beneficial. "I have yet to be in a school where you have the capacity to meet all the needs," she says.

Barbie Sandifer, who had already been volunteering as a leader in Cedar Hall's PTA, was hired as the school's family and community outreach coordinator after the principal noticed her strong connections in both the school and community. Sandifer, who was also recruited for her natural people skills, says she views her role as social worker and troubleshooter. She routinely stays after school or attends youth baseball games so she can meet parents, many of whom do not have telephones or e-mail accounts.

Julie Mullen, community outreach coordinator at McGary Middle School, said she has relied on Ashley Blondin, her 21st Century site coordinator, to introduce her to partners while going door to door to local businesses

to build new relationships. Each day, she called 10 homes of incoming sixth graders to try to establish rapport with new families and let them know that she is willing and able to line them up with services, such as the dental van, parent education, even bus tokens—a process sometimes met with skepticism. “So many of these families have been offered things and it hasn’t been followed through,” she says. As the new member of the team, she said she feels responsibility for taking some of the burden off the others. “People come to me for everything,” she says. “I’m up at two in the morning researching grants for somebody because I don’t want to say no.”

Donna Newman, director of children’s services for the Community Action Program of Evansville (CAPE), the Head Start grantee, added that it is also important “not to confuse parents” with the variety of coordinator positions. She added, however, that she thinks the roles and responsibilities are getting worked out and that “it will be a good thing for the families and the community.”

An Early Learning Leader

Early childhood education is another one of EVSC’s five core focus areas, although the district has been a leader in focusing on the early years for a long time. Roughly 20 years ago, Evansville began offering full-day kindergarten, using its own funds to supplement what the state spends for half-day kindergarten.

Indiana is one of 10 states provides no public funding for preschool. In the absence of such funding, Evansville has offered preschool education through partnerships with Head Start or under Title I. In addition, kindergartners are eligible to participate in after-school programs covered by the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant—something not usually offered at the elementary level. In other states and communities, kindergartners are sometimes considered too young—and too tired by 3:00 p.m.—to benefit from after-school programs. Moreover, schools often struggle to identify the appropriate staff needed to engage and supervise both older and younger students.

In Evansville, the district runs buses at 4:00 p.m. to take the kindergartners home while older students stay later, according to Schutte. Parents in Evansville also have the option of using the fee-based extended-daycare program that operates in all elementary schools. Community partners support after-school

activities for young children; for example, Home Depot staff gave students a birdhouse building lesson, and the Boy Scouts taught boys how to tie a necktie. “We don’t try to be classroom teachers, but we still want them to learn,” says Leia Darden, who oversees the after-school program.

Creating a New Model for Early Childhood

In 2010, EVSC created a new model for serving young children from birth to age 5—the Culver Family Learning Center. The center brought Head Start classrooms, the Even Start family literacy program, some developmental preschool classes and early childhood special education classrooms under a single roof in one of the district’s most at-risk neighborhoods. With only one year behind them, the staff is still envisioning ways to make the most of the facility, a former elementary school.

“This room has been sitting, waiting for some energy and some money,” Emma Couture, project director for the center, said in spring 2011 as she walked through the school’s former library. Leather couches sat in front of bookcases stacked with papers and brochures. Boxes sat on top of tables, but Couture envisioned the room as a venue for parent meetings and casual gatherings. Now, through a partnership with 4C, the former library will see the energy Couture envisioned. 4C is moving its parenting classes into the Culver center, along with its highly regarded resource library, which includes toys, curriculum materials, and books. The space will now be called the “family room,” says Erin Ramsey, EVSC’s new director of early childhood, adding that the center ideally will serve as a hub not only for families but also for preschool and childcare providers in the area. “I think there has been a shift in our city,” Ramsey says, adding that the telephones “ring off the hook” with calls from parents looking for preschool slots. “People want their young children to go to school. That wasn’t always the case.”

Touring through the building, Gray learned that EVSC was using some of the classrooms for storing science kits and other materials. “We can get rid of that. I don’t want this to be a catch-all,” she tells Couture. “We need more room for kids.” Since then, the science kits have been removed and replaced by 4C’s parenting education programs. In the spirit of collaboration, 4C leases the space from EVSC for just \$1.

Considered a community school, just like the rest of the district's schools, Culver has a site council, a community outreach coordinator under the FSCS grant, and partners involved in delivering services to the children and families. For example, the play space for families facing possible homelessness will be located at Culver.

CAPE (the Head Start grantee) provides wrap-around services at Culver while the district hires the lead teachers. The arrangement allows CAPE to provide health and family advocacy services for non-Head Start–eligible children who also attend classes—something otherwise unavailable to those children, explains Newman, CAPE's director of children's services. "I think the comprehensiveness of a community school is very good," Newman says. "The services that are combined between Head Start and the [local education agency] are worth the partnership."

In partnership with St. Mary's Hospital, Culver is in the process of designing its developmental preschool classes for children from low-literacy households. Given that Culver is located in Evansville's arts district, leaders also want to establish connections with the arts community.

Another initiative involving St. Mary's will blend funding sources to serve preschoolers diagnosed on the autism spectrum in a full-inclusion class and follow the children closely so both the medical and education professionals can learn about effective interventions. "The message is that the medical community and the education community need to come together and figure this out," Ramsey says. "We can't work in isolation when kids are young."

Walker, the outreach coordinator, has spent much of his time overseeing the work of establishing a new "hoop house"—a garden enclosed in a structure that Walker describes as a "Quonset hut." Parents who participate in adult education classes at Culver tend the crops—tomatoes, strawberries, and celery—during their breaks. "Gardens are one of those pieces that can make parents feel very engaged," Walker says.

Building Relationships with Other Providers

In addition to forming bonds with families, Gray would like to see Culver staff members move away from identifying teachers based on their program affiliation.

"We need to use collaborative language and collaborative terminology," she says. "We're not there yet."

While Newman noted the benefits of the partnership with CAPE for classes at both Culver and Daniel Wertz Elementary School, both she and Gray noted some challenges with the relationship. "The philosophies don't always merge between Head Start and schools," Gray says. Competition for children and teachers is also an issue when school districts begin offering prekindergarten classes, and Evansville has been no different.

Given that EVSC teachers earn more than Head Start teachers, Gray says that Head Start was naturally worried that it would lose teachers. At the same time, private providers in the community were concerned that EVSC would serve families that otherwise would seek their services, even though families served by the district cannot afford privately provided services. "We're talking about kids who don't have access," Gray says. Many of the worries about competition have faded. Instead, for the most part, Melissa Schmidt of the United Way says that the "profile of early childhood education has been raised in the community."

EVSC's early childhood department is housed in the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships rather than in Academic Affairs for the express purpose of keeping the focus on comprehensive services—not just on education. "We don't want [early childhood] to look like K," Gray says. In Evansville, however, the district is organized to break down administrative divisions in order to maximize opportunities for students. Gray works with the Office of Academic Affairs to strengthen early childhood education in addition to ensuring the delivery of comprehensive services. A spirit of collaboration pervades the district and its community partners.

EVSC's early childhood efforts, specifically under Bertram, have drawn the attention of outside observers. An editorial in the local *Courier Press* talked about the former superintendent's contributions.

"We would presume as well that children attending one of the school corporation's new preschool centers will benefit almost immediately, especially considering that some may otherwise have had no formal learning experiences prior to attending kindergarten," the editorial stated. "Experts in brain development say these are critically important years for children to learn, hence the new emphasis on early childhood education."

The Early Childhood Development Coalition's Work To Improve Early Learning

Early childhood learning is a growing priority not just for the district but also for other partners around the big table, including Mayor Jonathan Weinzapfel and the United Way. With a grant from the Indiana Association of United Ways and the Lilly Endowment, the city formed the Early Childhood Development Coalition. Now including over 60 partners, the coalition is working with the Mayor's Education Roundtable to organize an early childhood education summit to spur interest in early learning programs among leaders outside the education field, Schmidt says.

The city also piloted the state's Paths to Quality child care rating and improvement system, funded by the Welborn Baptist Foundation; the system provides incentives to programs for reaching higher standards.

The coalition has done more than just talk about the importance of learning in the early years. It is implementing early learning activities by, for example, organizing literacy nights for families with young children and publishing a series of children's books featuring the character Napoleon Peacock. Roughly 4,200 families participate in Napoleon's book club; in exchange, they receive books and additional parent education materials. Coalition members also created a Kindergarten Readiness Checklist to be filled out by formal childcare or preschool providers and given to kindergarten teachers when children enroll in school.

While the process of getting preschool and kindergarten teachers to agree on the skills that children should demonstrate upon school entry was described by Gray as "pulling teeth" and by Couture as "blood, sweat and tears," Schmidt said that kindergarten teachers now collect checklists from roughly 30 percent of EVSC's entering kindergartners, with plans to reach more children. A scaled-down version of the checklist in a colorful brochure format offers parents a way to share some information about their child during the kindergarten transition process.

The issue of transitioning children into kindergarten is another area where Head Start providers and coalition leaders find little common ground. Newman says that CAPE agreed to use the coalition's checklist even though Head Start had already developed its own checklist. She thinks that EVSC kindergarten teachers do not have much trust in the assessment tools used

in Head Start. "I don't think that we are where we need to be on the usage of the [assessment] information and starting children out at the skill level where they need to be," Newman says, adding that more opportunities are needed for early childhood teachers and kindergarten teachers to work together. "I still think [transition] is not taken very seriously," she adds. "There needs to be more meetings, more collaboration between early childhood and kindergarten."

A Priority for All Partners

Other community partners are talking about the importance of providing services and support for young children. The Welborn Baptist Foundation, which funds the Napoleon books, runs Little HEROES, a wellness and exercise program for childcare centers that is an early childhood version of its initiative for school-age children. The Children's Museum of Evansville worked with the city's early childhood community to plan a special school transition event called "Kindergarten. . .Here I Come!" The exhibit was designed to give children a chance to sit on a real school bus, meet crossing guards, put their belongings in a "cubby," and hear a story.

The Southwest Indiana College Access Consortium (SICAN), which obviously focuses on readiness for post-secondary education, is recasting its model to reach younger children. SICAN had been placing a student advisor in every high school and middle school in the district to help create a "college-going culture," says Jacque Barnette, SICAN coordinator. The model is now shifting, assigning advisors to an entire feeder pattern—from kindergarten through 12th grade. While they will continue to provide one-on-one advising in high schools, the advisors will plan more programs at the elementary and middle school levels. "We recognize the need for early intervention," Barnette says, especially when children have parents that didn't attend college. [Our advisors] are going to walk into a school and sell college—K to eight."

Gathering and Understanding Data

One of Weinzapfel's goals for FSCS grantee schools—and eventually for all EVSC schools—is to help principals, coordinators, site council members, and others develop an accurate picture of which programs are in place at which schools and what partners can provide what services. To that end, she unrolls a long spread

sheet on a conference room table. The spread sheet, which features color-coded areas for certain services, including early childhood programs, has helped Weinzapfel track what is happening at grantee schools.

Laura Lockyear, a high school data coach who works in EVSC's research and evaluation department, is developing an online program that will permit schools to choose from a menu of community providers as they develop their school improvement plans. Schools would then mail their requests for programs to the district office because Weinzapfel doesn't want "30 schools calling one partner." Ultimately, Lockyear says, the system could specify how many children received services from a particular provider and whether there was any impact on their academic performance. Lockyear's project is related to a larger effort within the district to build a new data warehouse—a project that includes community partners.

At the beginning of the three-year warehouse-building process, an "indicator summit" brought together partners to specify the information they need—such as teen pregnancy rates, body mass index measurements, and parents' education level—in order to apply for grants and improve services. (See text box "Selected Results from EVSC Community Schools"). While the partners do not have access to the warehouse, they can request data and collect information for input into the warehouse, such as attendance in summer school or after-school programs. Now deputy superintendent of academics and accountability, Susan McDowell Riley earlier served as director of psychological services for the district and was a member of the big table. Riley says that the third year of the "build" will include more information pertaining to community schools and partnerships, such as survey data, children's early learning experiences, or whether children are served by SICAN.

District leaders also work with schools to help teachers and administrators better understand the data they already have. One result of "performance management" sessions has been the recognition that students need more support during transitions between schools, including at the point of kindergarten entry. Officials plan to hold a performance management session on early childhood classrooms. The session will provide Gray with another opportunity to reinforce the role of community agencies in responding to children's needs in support of achieving each child's learning goals. "Cathy always asks ques-

tions about 'how are you working with your partners?'" Riley says. "[Principals] know they are going to be questioned about it."

Facing Early Childhood Challenges

EVSC is facing some shifts in its funding for early childhood programs. For 13 years, the district has been recipient of the Even Start family literacy grants. The program, serving 50 to 60 children a year, was originally housed at Cedar Hall but moved to the Culver Center when it opened in 2010. Even Start provided not only early childhood classrooms but also adult education and GED and English-as-a-second language programs. In early 2011, however, Congress eliminated funding for Even Start, which has faced longstanding doubts about its effectiveness.

During summer 2011, Gray and Couture were deliberating over how to continue providing services for Even Start families. The 3- to 5-year-olds, Gray said, would likely be absorbed by the other Head Start and prekindergarten programs, but there was some uncertainty over how to "piece together" funding to continue the infant and toddler classes. Ultimately, the district is continuing the Even Start model with funding from the FSCS grant. Couture will focus on building stronger partnerships between the various programs at Culver.

EVSC would like to serve young children's health needs through school-based health centers in its community schools and has initiated efforts to scale up health services as resources become available.

Both Lincoln and Cedar Hall, for example, were built with space for a clinic, complete with examination rooms and a reception desk that can be accessed by a separate outside entrance for visiting patients.

"It's designed to grow," Johnson at Lincoln says, standing in the dark, empty clinic space that serves as the school nurse's office during the school year. "We could serve families—not just kids—if the funding gets worked out."

Under a recent grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, funding is assured at three sites in Evansville for the next five years. The \$1.2 million grant was awarded to the University of Southern Indiana's College of Nursing and Health Professions to operate school-community health centers at the K–8 Glenwood Leadership Academy,

Culver Family Learning Center, and Juan Diego Hispanic Center, which provides education and social services to Evansville's Hispanic community. Along with the school district, other partners involved in the grant are St. Mary's Medical Center, Southwest Behavioral Health Care, and the county health department. The center at Glenwood was expected to open in January 2012, with the two other sites opening the following year. The centers' staff will include a clinic manager, nurse practitioner, and medical assistant, with hours of operation increasing over time. "We're hopeful that if we are able to do this good and do this right, we can eventually branch out," says Diana Butler, EVSC's director of health services.

Raisor of St. Mary's Hospital says that creating sustainable school-based health services is "more complicated than just building a clinic," particularly in urban areas where low-income families often use the hospital emergency room as their regular doctor's office and where other clinics already exist. "I think we will get there, and it will probably be a better model," she adds. "We need the stakeholders to develop it."

Reaching Parents

With all the strong partnerships in Evansville, many in the district say more work needs to be done to improve relationships with some of the most important stakeholders—parents. Several coordinators and others talked about the desire to see parents become more active on school site councils and at school and community events. This is another area where the district could learn from Head Start, Newman says. "It takes awhile to learn that culture, to become passionate about that," she says. "We have a history of it and they don't."

A new family engagement initiative recently launched by the district is focusing on improved ways to connect with parents. Staff members from each school—a total of 112—were identified to work on reaching out to parents and trained in issues such as cultural sensitivity and effective practices. Staff were then expected to choose parents to serve as liaisons for the initiative. "We are asking, wanting, needing parental input," says Kate Scates, a school social worker leading the effort who also works at the district level on an alcohol abuse prevention program and other social-emotional learning issues. She says that the Culver Family Learning Center—and early childhood

classes in general—can help provide other schools with examples of how to form bonds with parents.

"If you can get families engaged, or if they can establish a relationship with just one person in that school," she says, "they are more likely to be involved." Strengthening bonds with parents is just one of the ways that Evansville is improving school, family, and community connections. The school district and community are organized through the community schools initiative to take on these and new opportunities as part of their mission to improve outcomes for children.

Lessons

LESSON 1: Purposefully integrating community schools and early childhood concerns into the district's leadership structure and strategic plan creates greater ownership among staff in local schools and across the district. It also makes the child, community partnerships, and early childhood transitions a seamless part of how the district conducts business.

LESSON 2: Community schools help community partners reach their unique goals. Putting competition aside can lead to widespread success.

LESSON 3: Building trust between public schools and Head Start or other community-based early childhood programs can take time. If it is clear that the goal is to serve children not currently receiving any preschool services, then the walls will begin to fall as a wide range of providers shares strategies and resources.

LESSON 4: Development of a data system that can answer the questions posed by both schools and community partners takes time and must ensure that all parties involved in the community schools initiative will be able to target their services and resources effectively and respond to funder expectations.

LESSON 5: Working together, the community school leadership structure and the local Early Childhood Development Coalition help move forward a system of care and learning for young children in and outside the school system.

LESSON 6: When the district sees the community schools initiative and early childhood opportunities as part of its core mission, it is able to blend the several public and private funding streams to achieve its goals. ■

CASE STUDIES

Selected Results from SUN

- ▶ Data show that students who regularly participated in Multnomah County SUN Community School activities showed strong gains in academics, attendance, and behavioral improvement. For example, in 2008–09, 75 percent of students increased their state benchmark scores in reading and 77 percent in mathematics; the average daily school attendance was 95 percent, and 74 percent of students had a more positive attitude toward school.
- ▶ Results suggest that SUN students with high rates of participation in after-school activities significantly outperform comparison students in school attendance and credits earned toward graduation.
- ▶ For more, visit <http://web.multco.us/sun/results>



www.communityschools.org

Multnomah County, Oregon: Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Community Schools

In a culturally rich region of the country such as Multnomah County, Oregon, SUN Community Schools have quickly earned the support of a variety of civic and political leaders and have crafted an effective strategy for removing obstacles to children’s educational success. Already working with young children and their families as part of the SUN Service System, SUN Community Schools recently started addressing school transitions in the early years. This is providing SUN another way to prepare children for school and to connect with families in order to make them aware of what community schools can offer.

Reaching a New Population

When Child Care Resource and Referral of Multnomah County began offering CPR and child safety classes to local childcare providers, it noticed a significant turnout among Burmese immigrants. Because of the language barrier, however, participants benefited little from the training. In response, Brooke Chilton Timmons from lead agency Metropolitan Family Service and supervisor of six community schools that are part of the Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) Service System, arranged for a class not only offered in Burmese but also held at Parklane Elementary School, a SUN Community School site closer to the neighborhoods where many Burmese residents live. “This is a population that the schools have been trying to reach,” Timmons says. “Many of the Burmese families are not well connected with the school buildings and so we welcome any chance to provide an opportunity for them to be involved.” The experience shows how SUN Community Schools are working to address the needs of Multnomah County’s young children and to reach families in culturally responsive ways.

“SUN is the most powerful united effort between principals and others to align extended services and improve student outcomes. . . . This is critical now with the limited resources we have.”

—Carole Smith

Superintendent, Portland
Public Schools

The SUN Service System: Overcoming Battles

Founded in 1998, SUN is a thriving system of community schools and supportive services in six school districts across Multnomah County, including the Portland Public Schools. The county, with financial support from the city of Portland, serves as the “managing partner” or intermediary in a cross-community, cross-jurisdictional partnership.

In fall 2011, the network of community schools grew from 60 to 64—a testament, leaders say, to the widespread and stable political support that SUN has

Becoming “Really Good Neighbors”

SUN Community Schools enjoys a solid position in the community as evidenced by the dedicated partners that the system has attracted. An example is the Imago Dei Community Church located just east of downtown Portland. With an active membership of young professionals and families, the church participated in a “Love Portland Schools” day of service, in which volunteers cleaned the schools, made repairs, and collected winter coats for students at Alder Elementary, a high-poverty SUN Community School in the Reynolds School District.

Ken Weigel, the church’s pastor of ministry development and home communities, wanted to find a way to allow parishioners to extend their involvement beyond a single day, but without going to the school’s SUN site manager with offers to help. Noting that all schools have a flagpole, Weigel came up with a system in which school representatives and families would pin notes to the flagpole, describing their needs. Volunteers would then select the need they thought they could best meet and contact someone about it.

Imago Dei members now work in seven schools. A second project, which began one Easter, is called Change for a Dollar. On Sunday mornings, with a turnout of roughly 2,000, worshippers drop a dollar into a bucket to support community needs, including SUN schools. The weekly donations generate between \$800 and \$1,500.

Despite turnover in the site manager position at Alder—where the church’s involvement is strongest—Weigel has maintained his commitment. “We’re just trying to figure out how to love seven schools,” he says. “God called us to be really good neighbors.”

garnered among members of the Multnomah County Commission, city leaders, and superintendents. At a June 2011 meeting of SUN’s 17-member Coordinating Council, participants discussed ways to thank the commissioners for their continued support—perhaps through public comments at a commission meeting or through a public relations effort.

However, county leaders have not always demonstrated unwavering dedication to the SUN model. In 2006, when the county faced a budget crisis, a few commissioners questioned whether the county’s investment in SUN schools was prudent. The commissioners’ assertion enraged community members and provoked over 500 people to demonstrate outside the county offices. “We had people [lined up] here around the building because they couldn’t get into the budget meeting.” The room was packed, recalls Gloria Wiggins, division manager for Catholic Charities, El Programa Hispano, and a representative of the Coalition of Communities of Color, an advocacy organization heavily involved in making sure the SUN Service System provides services tailored to Multnomah’s diverse ethnic groups.

Now, SUN is “politically bulletproof,” says Bill Scott, a business leader and co-chair of the Coordinating Council. “The popularity with the county has been tested.” Lorenzo Poe, a Coordinating Council member and a Portland Public Schools official who was involved in the early development of community schools, notes that politicians do not run for office without voicing their support for SUN. With the battle for public support won, SUN focuses on building a replicable community schools model that involves several community agencies and addresses the needs of the area’s diverse population.

Early Development of Community Schools

Portland and Multnomah leaders became interested in community schools in the late 1990s as a way to respond to a variety of challenges, including higher academic expectations, school budget cuts, and the region’s growing racial and ethnic diversity.

Many elements of what later would become the SUN Service System already existed, such as an emerging after-school programming initiative led by City Commissioner Jim Francesconi, Multnomah County’s funding of an array of social services targeted to youth, a county community-building initiative,

health clinics and other providers delivering services in the schools, and the Parks and Recreation Department operating what it called “community schools.” But these initiatives were not coordinated.

Community leaders began researching existing models of coordination, including the Children’s Aid Society, which in the late 1990s operated several community schools in New York City. Drawing on city and county general funds, they decided to develop a full-service community school model in eight schools. A youth advisory board came up with the name Schools Uniting Neighborhoods–SUN Community Schools.

Development of a formal School-Age Policy Framework followed in 2003, which “solidified some things, such as having services held in schools,” says Diana Hall, SUN program supervisor. The policy created a system for the delivery of social and support services that lead to educational success and self-sufficiency for children, families, and community members. The SUN Service System built on SUN Community Schools and identified community schools as its cornerstone strategy.

The SUN Service System also recognized that it was also important to work with the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) and other culturally specific social service organizations in order to respond to the county’s rapidly changing demographic composition, including an influx of Asian immigrants. Today, the county’s Hispanic community is seeing the most growth, but Lee Po Cha, family services director for IRCO, says that SUN creates a bridge between schools and families. “We’ve realized the strength of the model is the whole idea of partnership,” he says. “You can’t expect one SUN site coordinator do to a miracle.”

A Diverse Mix of Partners

Oversight and management of SUN is provided by the Coordinating Council, made up of members who represent the county, the city of Portland, participating school districts, the state of Oregon, funders, and business and community agencies. The intermediary, the SUN Service System in the Department of County Human Services, supports the council (see Figure 3).

The involvement of a diverse set of partners on the council recast the impression, Scott says, of SUN as merely a county initiative. “It shifted the feeling

of SUN to being much more of a sense of joint ownership,” adds Joanne Fuller, the other co-chair of the council and Multnomah County’s chief operating officer. She says that the council “creates a lot of people with investment in what is happening.”

In addition, eight nonprofits and one government agency operate as lead agencies for SUN sites, including Portland Parks and Recreation, Metropolitan Family Service, Catholic Charities, Self Enhancement, Inc., and IRCO. SUN intentionally invited culturally specific organizations already working in schools to become lead agencies. SUN’s goal was to deepen the organizations’ connection to community schools and to build on the needs and assets of each school community. Lead agencies and partners support students and families through, for example, after-school programming, parenting classes, transition programs, life skills development, and more.

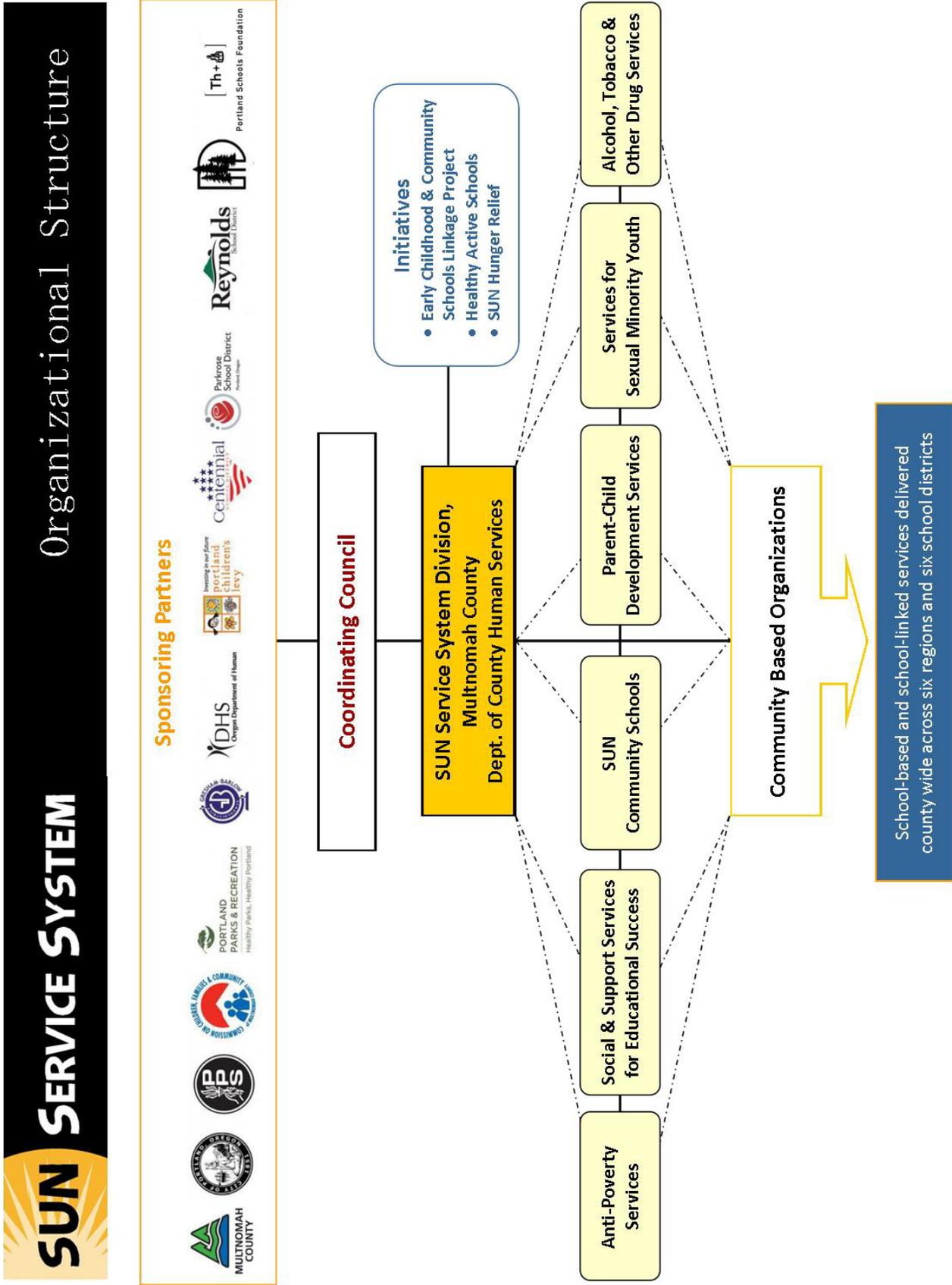
At each lead agency, a supervisor oversees a handful of SUN Community School sites. The supervisors are responsible for training and supporting site managers, handling budgets for individual SUN Community Schools, conducting surveys of families, and monitoring participation and program performance through a database called ServicePoint.

The variety of agencies involved means SUN sites can have a unique feel, depending on the competencies of the agency running the sites and the needs of a particular community. Through collaboration, however, SUN Community Schools are able to meet

Selected Members of the Early Childhood Council of Multnomah County

- Multnomah County Library
- Multnomah County Health Department
- Children’s Institute
- Multnomah County Department of County Human Services, SUN Service System
- Multnomah Education Service District
- Child Care Resource & Referral of Multnomah County
- Commission on Children, Families and Community
- Portland Public Schools

Figure 3: The SUN Coordinating Council: A Diverse Mix of Partners



needs they would not otherwise be able to address. For example, Portland Parks and Recreation ran a community schools program that predated the SUN Service System; not surprisingly, the program primarily provided recreation activities. “Prior to SUN, we didn’t have the social service piece. We didn’t have the connections,” says Mary Richardson, a supervisor with Parks and Recreation. “By partnering together, there is a lot of information coming together that we wouldn’t have on our own.”

Multiple School Districts

Hall says the SUN system is enhanced by its reach. It serves six of the county’s eight school districts, allowing district administrators and site managers to learn from each other’s successes and missteps.

Karen Gray, superintendent of the 3,600-student Parkrose School District in northeast Portland, served as superintendent of a district on the Oregon coast before assuming her current post four years ago. Parkrose currently has two SUN schools—Parkrose High School, supervised by Portland Parks and Recreation, and Shaver Elementary, supervised by Metropolitan Family Service. When Gray arrived, she did not even know what SUN stood for, but she now knows she would never want to work in a district without community schools. “I want all my schools to be SUN schools,” she says. “It connects the community to the school and the school to the community.”

Linking the Early Years with Schools

The connection between SUN and Multnomah County’s child care, Head Start, and preschool providers is growing stronger under the Linkages Project, a three-year initiative of the Coalition for Community Schools that is funded by a \$225,000 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Linkages is an effort to connect early childhood education work with strong community schools initiatives for three purposes: to enhance the quality of early childhood learning opportunities, to facilitate transitions between early childhood and school, and to ensure that services for children and families will continue as children progress through the grades. Multnomah County is one of three Linkages sites; the others are Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

For two reasons, Multnomah County was a logical participant in Linkages. First, it has developed a strong community schools structure, and, second, many lead agencies were already providing services for young children or families with young children under the SUN Service System. Various social service agencies in the county have long offered the Parent Child Development Services (PCDS) program, which uses the Parents as Teachers model and includes both a home-visiting component and playgroups to teach parents about key child development milestones while providing children under age 5 with a social environment in which to interact. Many of the groups have shifted from meeting in community locations to meeting in SUN schools, giving parents—many of them low-income—a reason to get acquainted with the school their child may eventually attend and to take advantage of additional opportunities to help their children learn. “It is not an afterthought,” says Julie Houston, director of early childhood and family services for Impact Northwest, a social service agency and one of SUN’s lead agencies. She adds that even parents with infants are asked, “What school will your child go to?”

Linkages has also made Portland one of three sites in the country chosen for a professional development grant connected to “Mind in the Making,” a book and videos that focus on how children learn essential “life skills.” Ellen Galinsky at the Families and Work Institute developed the materials, which offer another opportunity to bridge gaps between early childhood educators and primary grade teachers, says May Cha, who leads SUN’s early childhood work.

Working Harder To Reach Immigrant Families

Culturally specific Parent Child Development Services groups also reach out to families in their own languages. Alder Elementary School in the Reynolds School District, for example, hosts a playgroup of West African parents. Mothers work on their conversational English in order to grow more comfortable communicating with their children’s teachers. A group of Latino families also meets at the school.

Many immigrant families’ view of early childhood development or school readiness differs from that of American parents, says Lee Po Cha at IRCO. For example, given that reading to children is not a

common tradition among many groups, home visits are especially valuable, Lee Po Cha notes. “The PCDS model works perfect for this population because we go to them,” he says, adding that school-based playgroups help “remove some of those barriers” between families and schools.

Superintendents of the SUN districts also recognize the important role played by SUN programs in connecting parents to schools. “Our SUN Community Schools are making a critical difference not only in the lives of students but also parents,” Don Grotting, superintendent of the David Douglas School District said recently during a SUN study visit leadership panel held for visitors from Albuquerque.

By reaching out to different cultural groups, SUN leaders have also realized that they need to exercise care about the terms they use. “Kindergarten round-up,” referring to practices to get prospective students and their families acquainted and registered with their new elementary school, “...that doesn’t make any sense to them,” Chilton Timmons told the Coordinating Council. SUN is attentive to the language it uses with different groups.

The Linkages Project has also fostered increased collaboration among members of the county’s Early Childhood Council, a volunteer committee representing programs and agencies that serve 0–8 children (see text box on page 37). “The Early Childhood Council has been meeting for many years. The Linkages table created a new place for early childhood and school-age professionals to work together,” says Peggy Samolinski, SUN program manager, who has been serving on the council since well before the advent of Linkages.

Now, council members such as Renea Arnold, early childhood services supervisor for the Multnomah County Library, is thinking about ways to use SUN schools to make books available to more young children and to provide a parenting class on reading to children. And Elana Emlen, who works with the Multnomah Education Service District, said that using SUN sites to make parents aware of a new 0–8 wellness initiative called Project LAUNCH “makes a lot of sense.”

SUN’s Support of Early Learning

Building on the success of the Parent Child Development Services program, SUN coordinators are now devoting even greater attention to early childhood

issues as a consequence of Linkages. SUN currently has two official Linkages sites—Parklane Elementary School in the Centennial School District and Woodmere Elementary School in the Portland Public Schools—but Linkages is producing impacts across the county. Each Linkages school has established a kindergarten transition team that includes principals, site managers, parents, kindergarten teachers, and representatives of the early childhood community. Each team is responsible for strengthening the transition into elementary school for all young children.

Linkages has placed special emphasis on providing children without preschool experience with a taste of school during the summer before their kindergarten year. Using a transition strategy started by Portland Public Schools with Title I funds and expanded through Linkages, both Parklane and Woodmere offer summer transition programs that introduce children and their parents to the school environment, promote social and emotional skill building, and foster enthusiasm among children and parents for the “big school.”

The success of the summer transition programs has motivated officials across the school districts in Multnomah County to spread the model to several other schools. Portland Public Schools decided to introduce transition programs into three other elementary schools in summer 2011. In the Centennial District, leaders decided to expand the program beyond Parklane to all four of its community schools.

SUN staff estimate that only 64 percent of children eligible for Head Start have placements in Head Start. It is difficult to determine whether the other 36 percent or those not eligible for Head Start participate in formal early childhood experiences. Organizers of the transition programs are using Head Start waiting lists to find children most in need of a summer transition program. They also advertise the programs through the non-profit Child Care Resource & Referral of Multnomah County, the Parent Child Development Services groups, and early childhood special education programs, said Cha, who leads the Linkages Project for SUN.

Even though Alder Elementary in the Reynolds District is not a Linkages site, the school’s kindergarten teachers saw the need to institute a summer program for incoming kindergartners. After lobbying school and district administrators, they launched a program in summer 2011 and taught the summer

classes, which are funded with Title I funds and emphasize social skills and parent engagement. “We want to really create that bond so when they come back all the faces aren’t brand new,” says Vice-Principal Denise McBride, adding that she can “almost guarantee” the children attending will not have had any experiences with out-of-home care. “They have a lack of interaction with adults who are not [in their] family.” Principal Paz Ramos wishes his school provided even more early learning opportunities. “Our goal is to have a pre-K,” he says, but he does not know how it would be funded. “We have to figure out how can we collaborate with our partners.”

Plans for Another Early Childhood Demonstration

A seamless path between early childhood education and the early grades is the vision of a demonstration project at Earl Boyles Elementary, a SUN Community School in the David Douglas School District. Still in the early stages of planning, the school-based early learning program is an initiative of the Children’s Institute, a well-known statewide advocacy organization, and could be “a good practical place to show what SUN would be like for children 0 to 5,” says Molly Day, the institute’s early learning initiative director. As a SUN Community School, Boyles was a logical choice for the demonstration, but Day stated at a recent meeting of the Early Childhood Council that efforts to create such a program without the support of a community school might not succeed.

While she is encouraged by initiatives such as the Earl Boyles demonstration and SUN’s Linkages, Samolinski says that she is careful about the creation of 0–8 strategies that do not lend themselves to replication elsewhere. “For some of our school communities, it’s already a strong focus,” Samolinski says. “But we’re trying to build it into the conversation for all.”

The potential of the Linkages Project also lies not just in opening community schools to younger children but also in reaching out to community-based Head Start and childcare programs, says Cha. She asks, “How do we start engaging early childhood providers to see community schools as a resource and vice versa?”

Barriers to Collaboration

Members of the Early Childhood Council acknowledge that they would like to see more interaction with Head Start, which is the only publicly funded preschool program available in the county. However, collaboration with the federal program has been a struggle because the four Head Start grantees do not participate on the Early Childhood Council or in other community-wide discussions about early childhood. In the Parkrose School District, Head Start classes meet in district buildings no longer used as schools, and the parents of a Head Start preschooler typically do not visit Shaver Elementary, the local SUN Community School, to facilitate transition. “We try to have meetings with Head Start teachers and our kindergarten teachers at the end of the school year, but it’s hard,” says Cindy Bartman, Shaver’s principal.

Head Start, however, has long stood as a model of parent involvement and leadership. In fact, Kim Dunn, a former Head Start parent and member of the Early Childhood Council admitted that, when her child started kindergarten, she missed the support and opportunities offered by Head Start. “We both felt out of place,” she says. In fact, some national experts suggest that Title I schools could improve their efforts to engage parents by following the example set by Head Start through its informal “listen and learn” sessions in which parents, community members, and school staff meet to discuss strengths and ways to improve partnerships. Strengthening relationships with families across the 0–8 age span, specifically for children entering Title I schools, is the goal of the new National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement, funded by the Office of Head Start.

Another barrier to strengthening the ties between families with young children and SUN community schools is that after-school programs—frequently a family’s first experience with a community school—often are not open to kindergarten children, and sometimes not even to first graders. While SUN is certainly not the only community schools initiative that does not make programs available to young children, the absence of early childhood offerings can create the perception that community schools serve only older students or offer only after-school classes. May Cha has worked to increase awareness about early childhood issues and programs among SUN site managers and surveyed them to determine their understanding of the need for services for young children, particu-

larly kindergartners. The survey showed that kindergartners were almost always welcome at family events and could receive the same social services as older children. At the same time, an inventory of extended-day programming showed that, even the schools that opened after-school classes to kindergartners, often did so only once or twice a week or had to cut back because of a lack of staff.

Clearly, with limited financial resources, community schools are often unable to fund adults in the numbers needed to provide appropriate supervision for younger children. In addition, some providers say that extended-day programs make the school day too long for 5-year-olds while others note the challenges involved in providing activities that meet the needs of students across a K–5 or K–8 age range. Supporting expanded learning opportunities for young children is a complex problem that SUN and its partners are addressing as they increasingly focus on early childhood learning. “We have to make strategic decisions about serving younger kids,” says Frances Hall, a SUN site supervisor with Neighborhood House, a social service agency. “We don’t have the space to run two programs [for younger students and older students].”

Focusing on Early Chronic Absenteeism

Even with those obstacles, however, SUN has brought light to an issue that is unifying both the early childhood community and school districts across Multnomah County. Under the Linkages Project, schools, early childhood providers, and parents are starting to recognize the harmful effects of absenteeism in the early grades and how it can undermine children’s ability to read by third grade. Research on early chronic absenteeism was first released in 2008 by Hedy N. Chang, a researcher and writer, and Mariajose Romero, now an associate professor at LaGuardia Community College in New York. The study, “Present, Engaged and Accounted For,” presented national data showing that more than 11 percent of kindergartners and close to 9 percent of first graders are chronically absent—missing 10 percent or more of the school year. In schools serving poor children, the percentages are probably higher, the report said.

Since the report’s release, the Coalition for Community Schools has been educating those involved in local community schools about absenteeism—an issue that is important for parents to understand before

their young children start school but that also matters deeply to K–12 educators. Absenteeism is also a major concern of the Linkages Project.

In Multnomah County in November 2010, SUN invited representatives of the six SUN districts were invited to attend a workshop on early chronic absenteeism. Participants learned that one in four county students was chronically absent in grades K–3. In kindergarten, the rate was even higher, with one in three children missing at least 10 percent of the academic year. Over 100 people attended the workshop, with a similar turnout at a second gathering in March 2010.

The workshop has inspired all six SUN districts to increase their focus on addressing early chronic absence in a number of ways. Districts now regularly share data with central office staff, principals, teachers, and families; they have revised their attendance tracking systems to reflect chronic absence measures; they are addressing the transition to kindergarten as a way to reduce chronic absence; they have created attendance teams and attendance clubs; they check in on chronically absent student by, for example, calling students’ homes and picking up chronically absent students; and they communicate with parents, often through home visits, about the importance of attendance.

The SUN Community Schools initiative is providing additional support to combat absenteeism. It has printed colorful brochures on early chronic absenteeism for placement in main school offices, in childcare centers, and in other places frequented by parents with young children. Site managers note that they provide families with information on absenteeism through various venues such as through the Parent Child Development Services groups or during the summer transition classes for new kindergartners. “We can do early prevention on absenteeism,” says Moe Yonamine, the SUN site manager at Alder.

Using Data for Planning and Evaluation

SUN has leveraged early chronic absence data to raise the importance of early childhood across the county. All six SUN school districts now focus on early chronic absenteeism as a key indicator of progress, and use school district–level absenteeism data in SUN’s annual evaluation efforts. Absenteeism is one of the topics termed a “critical issue area.” Absenteeism

data are fed back to individual schools in spreadsheet reports that show participation levels in various programs and how those compare to academic or other goals of the school.

SUN uses several tools and mechanisms to gather data to evaluate success and drive program development and initiative planning. At the site level, data on client demographics and participation, as well as data on program characteristics, are entered into ServicePoint, a database used by SUN to capture data and outcomes across several programs and initiatives, including community schools.

SUN surveys teachers to determine their impact on interim academic indicators and youth assets. SUN then compiles and analyzes the survey results and provides the results to lead agencies and individual schools. The results permit each school to see what teachers have to say about areas such as homework completion, student behavior, attitudes toward learning, and attendance.

SUN also surveys students about their experiences in after-school programs, asking whether there is someone who can help them with homework and whether they feel that there is an adult who cares about them.

Recently, the county's internal evaluator used data from ServicePoint and school districts to develop a better understanding of whether participation in SUN services leads to higher academic achievement. The study compared outcomes for high school students participating in SUN community school services during the 2008–09 year with those for a group of students in the same schools who did not participate in SUN. The results showed that students in SUN programs had higher attendance rates and earned more credits toward graduation but did not score higher on standardized tests. (For more results see text box “Selected Results from SUN.”)

Staff recognize that ServicePoint is limited for use in community schools evaluations. The database is not only cumbersome for site management purposes, but it also does not “talk” to school district, county health department, or mental health databases. At the same time, SUN leaders would eventually like to have the capacity to conduct a longitudinal study of K–12 children in order to explore the long-term impact of attending a community school.

Maintaining Continuity into the Primary Grades

For now, schools such as Alder and other elementary schools provide some examples of how community schools can build on work that begins in the early years to communicate with parents about their children's regular attendance at school.

Prior to 2011, Alder had already been offering summer school for children entering the first through fifth grades. Children in the primary grades participated in enrichment programs while children in the higher grades received more academically focused work to improve their performance in the fall. In summer 2011, however, Alder changed the arrangement such that younger students received the more concentrated academic help. “We have a lot of little kids who aren't where we need them to be,” says McBride.

In addition, after-school classes at Alder include culturally specific activity groups in which students enjoy snacks, draw, or work on their homework. One class serves K–4 students and their Karen-speaking mothers, many of whom came from refugee camps. Karen speakers are an isolated ethnic group within the Burmese culture. A case-worker from the Asian Family Center, part of IRCO, conducts weekly home visits with the families and communicates with the children's teachers about their school work. Another after-school group serves Pacific Islanders.

Alder is also the site of one of six SUN emergency food pantries supported by the Oregon Food Bank, which serves families year round, including through the summer. The shelves in a conference room adjacent to the front office hold the overflow of canned goods while the SUN office stocks two refrigerators with meat and fresh produce, something families often do not receive in an emergency food box.

Alder is Oregon's first “Dreamer” school selected by the I Have a Dream Foundation. The foundation will provide students with support and resources to help them meet or exceed expectations on benchmark tests in the hope that 80 percent will earn a post-secondary degree or certificate funded by the foundation. Many of the goals of the Dreamer model overlap with the goals of community schools, including collaboration with education and non-education partners and “attending to the birth-through-college-completion continuum.” When deciding from among a pool of

finalists on which school to adopt, the foundation considered only SUN schools, Samolinski says.

Taking Advantage of Opportunities

Its highly regarded position in the county is helping SUN connect with initiatives aimed at helping students succeed from their earliest years through their transition to adulthood. Such initiatives include a new Cradle-to-Career partnership, Portland Mayor Sam Adams's strategic plan, and Governor John Kitzhaber's plans to reorganize early childhood funding.

Cradle-to-Career Partnership

SUN leaders are working to connect with the new Cradle-to-Career (C2C) Partnership. Launched in 2010, C2C is a broad coalition of government, education, business, and community leaders throughout Multnomah County that plans to monitor key indicators of student success, issue reports to the public, and hold programs accountable for results. C2C was the culmination of two earlier initiatives with similar goals—the Leader's Roundtable and the Education Cabinet, formed by the Portland mayor's office and the county chair to address high school completion. It is also a local adaptation of the Strive Partnership, a broad effort active in Cincinnati to involve community leaders in helping children succeed at all stages.

The C2C initiative, housed in a new organization called All Hands Raised (formerly the Portland Schools Foundation), intends to create “collaboratives” to work on “strategic priorities,” such as making sure that students are prepared for kindergarten or improving high school graduation rates. Dan Ryan, director of All Hands Raised, describes C2C as a “structured approach to cross-collaboration.” “It's about breaking down the silos,” he says. “It's in that isolation that we've built some really bad habits.”

SUN leaders, many of whom also sit on the C2C Council, see community schools and the SUN Service System as a core strategy for C2C—not just one of many youth-oriented programs or a collaborative of after-school program providers. For them, community schools are the vehicle or strategy for delivering services from the prenatal period through students' transitions after high school and beyond.

“How do we hone our message so we get SUN nested into C2C?” Scott asked at the SUN

Coordinating Council meeting. SUN has recently applied to serve as a “collaborative” (a structure that C2C hopes to create to address certain priorities) to address two of C2C's three priorities: eliminating disparities among children and ensuring youth success, and linking community and family supports to children and youth success.

All Hands Raised and SUN have successfully cooperated to deliver a summer program ensuring a successful transition from eighth to ninth grade. In fact, with SUN schools already offering summer programs, All Hands Raised went to SUN with the 9th Grade Counts initiative, which provides opportunities for students to earn credit before starting high school. “We went deep with 9th Grade Counts,” says Nate Waas-Shull, director of community engagement for All Hands Raised. “We couldn't do it without SUN. It was a crucial vehicle to push through this bold initiative.”

Ryan notes, however, that partners questioned whether students would attend SUN sites during the summer. Although several SUN partners offer summer programs, Ryan noted that SUN is sometimes viewed as a “closed system” by providers or agencies that do not have a contract with SUN. Nonetheless, the lines of communication between C2C and SUN are open—a step toward answering leaders' questions about how the two initiatives align. Key members of the SUN Service System Coordinating Council, including superintendents, are on the C2C Steering Committee and the broader C2C Council, and Waas-Shull is a member of the SUN Coordinating Council. Diana Hall adds that C2C's role of holding the community accountable is important. “They are a promise of a new table where the leaders won't just admire the data, but do something about it,” she says.

The Mayor's Portland Plan

The SUN Service System expects to play a critical role in advancing the Portland Plan, Mayor Adams's strategic planning process for the next 25 years. The plan, for example, sets forth education goals, such as “strengthening schools as community centers.” According to the plan, by 2035, “school facilities [will] serve students, families and neighbors as gathering places for community events, learning opportunities and recreation,” and “neighborhood schools [will] offer appropriate wrap-around community services, before- and after-school programs, parental engagement, and lifelong learning opportunities for all

community members.” The draft plan also proposes the concept of “20-minute neighborhoods” in which residents will be able to reach non-work amenities and services, including schools, within a 20-minute walk. “[The Mayor] sees that there needs to be a continuum of supports,” said Kali Thorne Ladd, the mayor’s education strategies director, a member of the SUN Coordinating Council, and a former SUN site manager. “He sees SUN as the vehicle for schools to be open to the community.”

The Governor’s Plans for Early Childhood

A proposed reorganization of Oregon’s funding for early childhood programs is another factor that could affect how programs for young children are delivered as part of the SUN Service System. Governor Kitzhaber’s plans for early childhood programming call for pooling the various funding sources that currently support disadvantaged young children and distributing those funds on a per-child basis to meet eligible children’s health, social, and educational needs. SUN leaders want to make sure they are in tandem with the governor’s plans, however they develop.

Another proposal involves identifying children by their school attendance zones. SUN co-chair Joanne Fuller, who served on the state’s Early Learning Design Team, sees the link between children and their neighborhood as an important step in realizing the potential of community schools. In fact, such a linkage is reflected in the SUN Service System’s rental assistance for low-income families, the purpose of which is to help stabilize families so that children can reap the benefits of remaining in the same school, Fuller stressed. “If you’ve got a school that is really thinking about the whole family, they create seamlessness for when [the children] do enter school,” Fuller says. “They are showing families what SUN Community Schools can offer.”

Every School a SUN Community School

An Every School a SUN Community School initiative launched near the end of 2010 as an effort to make the proven SUN model available to more children across the county. “The way to create consistency is if all schools are SUN schools,” as long as reaching children in poverty is still the standard for deciding how the system grows, Fuller says. The Every School initiative is involving the business community in directly funding

community schools—an annual cost of about \$95,000 per school that covers the site manager, supervision from an agency, some programming, and supplies.

One obstacle, Diana Hall says, is that Portland is “foundation poor.” The philanthropic community is not a significant source for expanding the SUN system. Another barrier is that, even if the system expands to include additional sites, county funding and the pool of social services for needy families will not necessarily grow commensurately. “We would be spreading the same amount of social service resources over more schools,” Samolinski says.

In addition, the availability of supplemental funding for SUN Community Schools is not spread equally across the county. In 2002, Portland voters approved the Portland Children’s Levy and then, in 2008, approved it for an additional five years. The levy funds eight SUN Community Schools and early childhood services, including Parent Child Development Services groups and mental health services. But the levy cannot fund SUN schools outside the Portland city limits, even as poverty rates rise beyond the boundary into the eastern part of the county.

Still, district leaders say that SUN schools can do more for families than if they were not community schools. “SUN is the most powerful united effort between principals and others to align extended services and improve student outcomes,” Portland Public Schools Superintendent Carole Smith said at the meeting of the Albuquerque visitors. “This is critical now with the limited resources we have.”

Lessons

LESSON 1: Well-implemented community school structures, strategies, and activities garner *credibility* for schools and create opportunities for partnerships with the early childhood community, governments, and other agencies and organizations. Community schools provide a platform for launching additional initiatives and strategies as demonstrated by the Linkages Project, Children’s Institute Early Learning Initiative, I Have a Dream Foundation’s work, and the Cradle-to-Career Partnership. These initiatives purposefully selected SUN community schools and associated nodes of activity. Their best chances of success depend on a respected strategy that uses partners as resources.

LESSON 2: When schools and the early childhood community build bridges and collaborate, they are able to address challenges and identify solutions. For example, focusing on an issue that is relevant to both early childhood educators and elementary schools—such as early chronic absenteeism—provides a vehicle for increasing communication between and among sectors, potentially leading to significant progress.

LESSON 3: Building robust partnerships with community organizations, especially culturally specific social service organizations, can allow community schools to reach families with services that providers could not otherwise deliver. Likewise, partner organizations make their services available to families at a convenient location—the community school.

LESSON 4: A community-wide collaborative leadership group that includes school district leaders, community partners, government officials, and the early childhood community can help set a strong

vision for the community and sustain new strategies, such as for early childhood programming, into its broader goals for children and families.

LESSON 5: Keeping the lines of communication open between community school leaders and those involved in what could be considered “competing” initiatives can avert turf wars and keep everyone focused on the goal of helping children and families succeed.

LESSON 6: A summer transition program for children entering a community school and their families helps children and parents acclimate to the school environment. It promotes social and emotional skill building, fosters enthusiasm among children and parents as children prepare to enter “big school,” and connects to resources available at the community school. More than just co-locating a transition program within a school building, the programs are integral to and supported by school and community partners. ■



CASE STUDIES

TACSI Gets Results

- ▶ Researchers comparing 18 TACSI schools to 18 non-TACSI schools found that students in TACSI schools that had deeply embedded the community school model scored significantly higher than comparable students in non-TACSI schools.
- ▶ The difference was 19 points in reading achievement and 32 points in mathematics achievement.
- ▶ Further, unlike the comparison schools, the 18 TACSI schools had higher ratings in instructional leadership, effective supervisory practices, culture of faculty trust, instructional agency, student trust of teachers, school identification among students, parent trust in school, and school outreach.
- ▶ Results suggest that SUN students with high rates of participation in after-school activities significantly outperform comparison students in school attendance and credits earned toward graduation.



www.communityschools.org

Tulsa, Oklahoma: Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI)

Those inside and outside the education system increasingly view schools that are part of the Tulsa Area Community School Initiative (TACSI) as a vehicle for solving problems and connecting children and families with the opportunities and resources they need to thrive. This view is exemplified by what education leaders in Tulsa call the “natural fit” between community schools and early learning programs. In Oklahoma—a state known for providing access to early childhood education—TACSI’s experience shows how preschool programs and strong community schools can connect to create a continuum of support and learning throughout the early years.

Early Learning and Elementary Schools Often Start “Miles Away”

Only a chain-link fence separates the McClure Early Childhood Education Center, which is run by the Community Action Project, and McClure Elementary School, part of the Tulsa Public School District. The fence is primarily for safety purposes, though until recently, the two schools might as well have been located at opposite ends of the city, if communication between the teachers is any indicator. “We were right next door, but we were miles away,” says Stephanie Turpin, a McClure Head Start teacher at the Early Childhood Education Center.

But that was before formation of a transition planning team made up of representatives of both the preschool and the elementary school under the Linkages Project, a three-year \$225,000 grant to the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI), which leads community school efforts in the Tulsa and Union Public School Districts, both of which serve the city of Tulsa. Funded by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Linkages is an effort of the Coalition for Community Schools to connect early childhood education work with strong community school initiatives for three purposes: to enhance the quality of early childhood learning opportunities, to facilitate transitions

“It seems to me that the younger you involve children, the more you’re going to get the parents of those children involved in school. When they see supportive schools, they feel more comfortable.”

—Wayne Bland

Board of Directors,
Community Service Council

TACSI Community Schools Levels of Development

- ▶ **Inquiring:** Acquiring knowledge of the critical elements of community school DNA
- ▶ **Emerging:** Expanding shared leadership, collaborations, and partnerships through engagement and capacity building
- ▶ **Mentoring:** Aligning the community school vision with programs, services, and opportunities around shared results through integrated school/community partnerships
- ▶ **Sustaining:** Embracing the philosophy of community schools throughout the school and the broader community

Adapted from *Four Levels of Community School Development* (TACSI)

between early childhood and school, and to ensure that services for children and families continue as children progress through the grades. Tulsa is one of three sites; the others are Multnomah County, Oregon, and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Now, a transition planning team made up of teachers from both McClure Elementary and its neighboring early childhood center meets monthly, providing Head Start teachers with a unique opportunity to inform the kindergarten teachers about the children who will advance into their classrooms and to discuss classroom practices that can make that transition smoother. For example, Meagan Cornelius, a kindergarten teacher at McClure Elementary, has added “centers” to her kindergarten classroom—activity areas that preschoolers typically cycle through during the day; at the same time, Head Start’s Turpin has started to give rising kindergartners longer spans of time in centers to strengthen their ability to persist with a task or project. The Head Start teachers also designate what they call a “safe place” in their classrooms so that students may step aside if they have a disagreement with a classmate or find themselves in other emotional situations. “They choose to go there. It’s not time out,” Turpin says. “It’s self-regulation.”

For their part, the McClure kindergarten teachers are carving out a safe place in their classrooms so that Head Start students will see something recognizable when they enter their kindergarten classrooms. In addition, the preschoolers enjoy frequent opportunities to visit the kindergarten classes.

Before creation of the transition planning team, the McClure Head Start teacher and McClure kindergarten teachers held ideas that were probably typical of most in their positions across the country. “The majority of kindergarten teachers are told that Head Start teachers never tell students ‘no,’” Cornelius says. And, according to Turpin, “Our perception was that kindergarten teachers are mean.”

The transition teams—at McClure and three other sites with both elementary schools and early learning centers—include family support specialists and other partners who ensure that any social services received by a child or family in preschool will continue once the child enters public school. “That’s what is different about a transition committee at a community school and a regular school,” says Janet McKenzie, one of two transition specialists working on the Linkages Project.¹²

In fall 2011, seven Tulsa Public elementary schools, most of which are community schools, will share a site with early childhood education centers, creating more opportunities for joint planning.

TACSI Builds a Sustainable Structure

The opportunity to connect schools and early childhood programs in Tulsa is the product of a strong community-wide, collaborative leadership structure that supports community schools. More specifically, TACSI grew out of a 2005 campaign of the Tulsa Community Foundation, called Step Up Tulsa!, that involved over 300 regular participants who identified priorities and “trendbenders” that would improve the quality of life for Tulsa residents. In the area of education, leaders voiced concern that the impact of early childhood programs receded once children entered school.

Jan Creveling, now program director for community schools at the Community Service Council (CSC), was hired to find a strategy that would have the greatest impact on at-risk children and families.

¹² Since the site visit to Tulsa, McKenzie has stopped serving as a transition specialist and now works in one of the schools.

After reviewing various models, Creveling identified the community schools approach as the direction CSC would take, with the expectation that early childhood education would always be a major focus of the initiative. Creveling's early research included participation at the Coalition for Community Schools' national conferences, where she asked leaders of other community school initiatives around the country about what they had learned and what they would do differently.

In 2007, the Tulsa Metropolitan Human Services Commission officially established TACSI. The commission is a partnership of school systems, local government, and public and private agencies that coordinates funding, planning, and policy decisions regarding human services in Tulsa County. CSC provides staff support to the commission, administers TACSI, and houses its resource center.

TACSI leaders have given careful thought to what makes a community school in Tulsa. They refer to "community school DNA"—those elements that are necessary for the TACSI community school model to function and achieve results. The elements include a coordinator and a school site team.¹³ In addition, each community school is expected to address core components of student success, one of which is early childhood (0–8). Others include health/health education, youth development/out-of-school time, mental health/social services, family and community engagement, neighborhood development, and life-long learning (see Figure 4).

TACSI considers its schools to be at any given point on a continuum of community school development. In the first stage—Inquiring—a school team attends TACSI's "Community Schools 101" training. Schools at the second stage—Emerging—receive \$5,000 to begin creating their school-site teams, which bring partners into the school to address the needs and interests of students and families. The third stage—Mentoring—involves the hiring of a coordinator to provide day-to-day management of programs, services, and opportunities. The Mentoring stage also requires the community school to offer guidance to schools that are beginning the process of becoming community schools. The highest level of implementation—Sustaining—requires the participation of all relevant stakeholders: educators, families, students,

and community and neighborhood partners; all stakeholders have diffused the community school strategy throughout their organizational arrangements and instructional practices.

A community steering committee responsible for oversight, joint planning, and policy development guides TACSI and brings together partners such as CSC staff and representatives of school districts, funders, government, and institutions of higher education. A management team operationalizes the community school strategy, reviews activities and practices, and sets the initiative's direction. The management team is composed of key decision makers from the school districts, Oklahoma University–Tulsa, and CSC and is intentionally small to ensure that the initiative moves forward at a meaningful pace. The management team keeps the steering committee and other partners current on its plans. In Tulsa, consensus and transparency are the overarching characteristics that make the system work. Figure 5 depicts TACSI's organizational arrangements.

Affirmation of TACSI's model comes from community partners across the city. The Foundation for Tulsa Schools recently narrowed its fundraising efforts to only a few specific priorities—one of which is community schools. Other funders say that they are convinced that community schools—especially those focused on early childhood learning—are a good investment. "We are very much impressed by what we see," says Wayne Bland, a member of the board of directors of the Temple Foundation, named for two public school employees in Tulsa. The foundation currently funds the coordinator position at Mark Twain Elementary School. "It seems to me that the younger you involve children, the more you're going to get the parents of those children involved in school," Bland added. "When they see supportive schools, they feel more comfortable."

TACSI's structure and the support from the schools and community enable TACSI to address community needs such as access to food, mentoring, health and mental health services, expanded learning opportunities such as summer programming, and, as this report illustrates, a strong continuum of support for children and their families as children move into elementary school.

¹³ Union Public Schools calls its coordinators Community Parent Liaisons.

Figure 4: The TASC Community School DNA

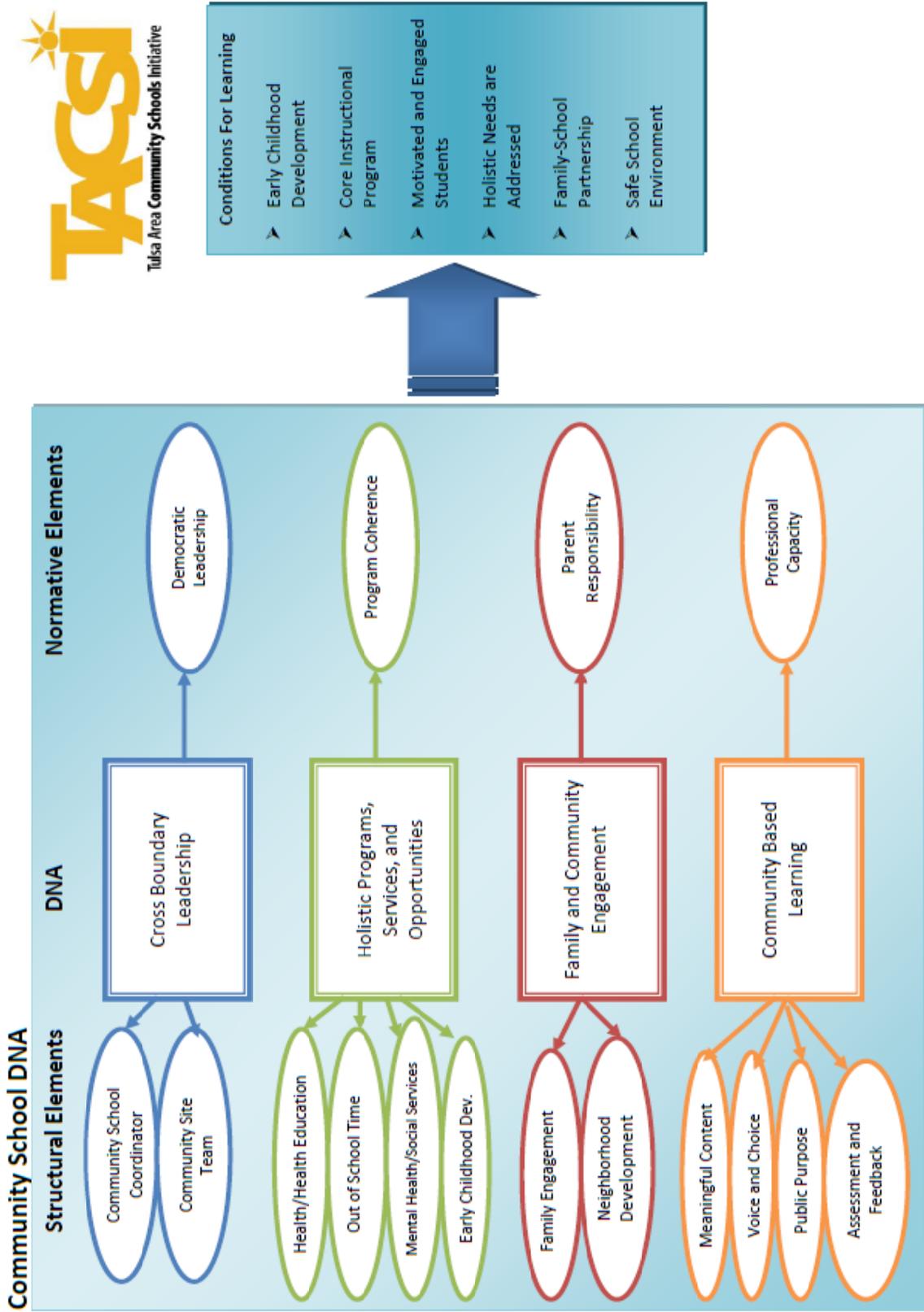
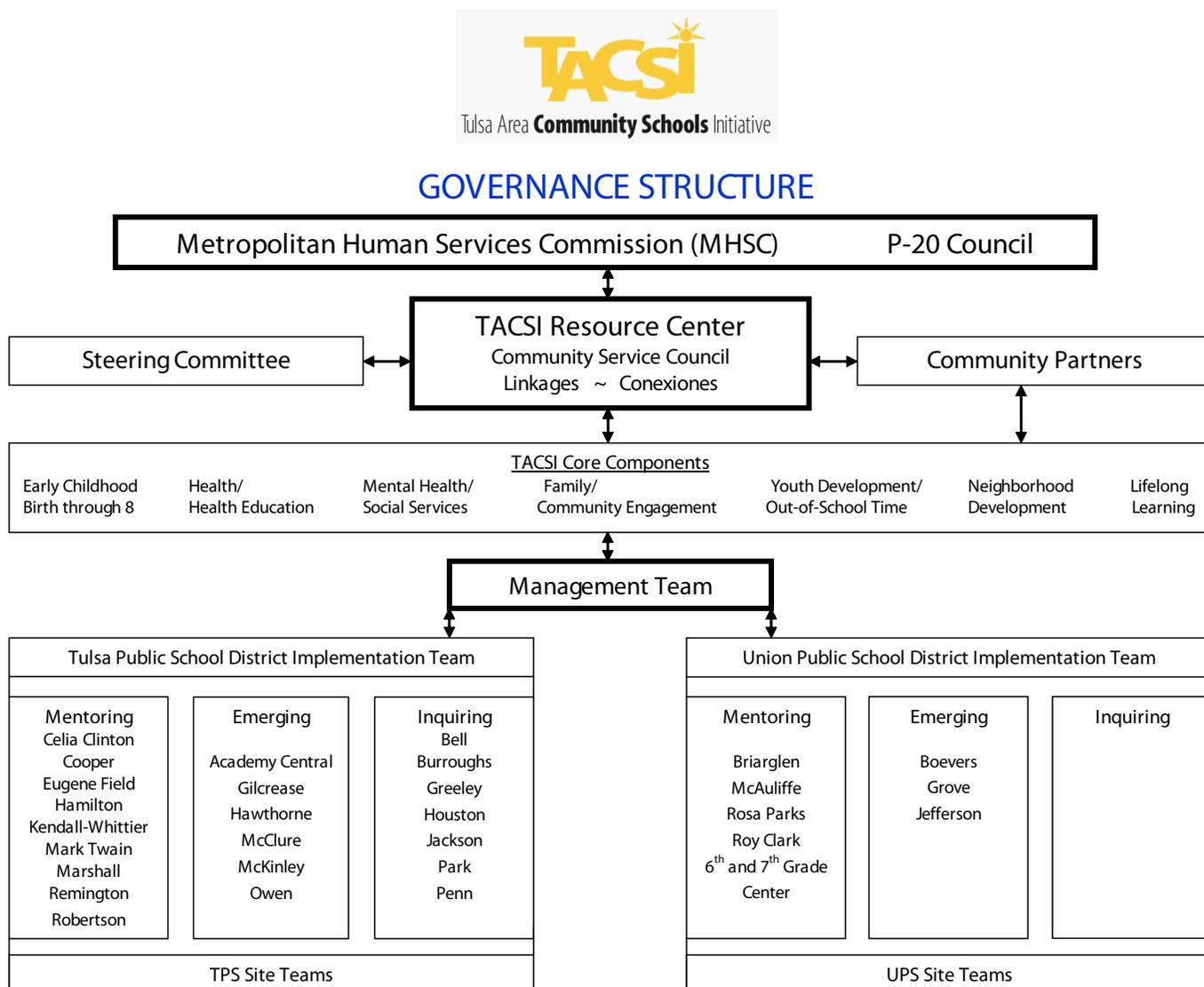


Figure 5: The TACSI Governance Structure



Why Linkages in Tulsa?

To many outside observers, Tulsa—or Oklahoma in general—probably does not seem like a state that needs advice in the area of early childhood education. Enacting a universal pre-kindergarten law in 1998 and requiring all districts to offer full-day kindergarten by the 2011–12 school year, the state has long been considered an early childhood leader. According to the annual State Preschool Yearbook published by the National Institute for Early Education Research, Oklahoma’s prekindergarten program meets 9 out of 10 indicators of quality.

Not only does Oklahoma make prekindergarten universally available, but Head Start programs, like those at McClure Early Childhood Education Center, are operated by the Community Action Project (CAP), a highly regarded 40-year-old social service agency. Tulsa is also the site of two—soon to be three—Educare centers, model programs supported by the George Kaiser Family Foundation that provide comprehensive care and education services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Nonetheless, even though young children had access to early childhood education in Tulsa, the programs were not always well connected to the schools that children would later attend, as the McClure example shows.

TACSI Programs Help Parents and Children During Critical Transitions

Melissa Villeagas, a mother of four, has experienced the benefits of TACSI's increased attention to children's transitions. She has two children at Kendall-Whittier Elementary in TPS, a prekindergarten–5 school, and two children at the Educare Early Childhood Education Center next door.

When one of her sons, now 7, was diagnosed with autism, the staff at Educare and the elementary school made sure that he had several opportunities to visit what would be his prekindergarten classroom and teacher. Easing each transition has continued as the student moves to each higher grade.

Through the school's partnerships with local agencies and program providers, Villeagas's children have also participated in Boy Scouts, a "Good News" Christian club, ballet lessons, a fine arts festival, and "make and take" cooking classes. "They want to do everything," Villeagas says about her children. "There is nothing compared to what they have here."

The school's clinic is Villeagas's children's primary health care facility, and she is participating in a nurse training program through EduCareers, a workforce development initiative for Educare parents through the Tulsa Children's Project.

Superintendents See "A Natural Fit"

Leaders in Tulsa say that attending to children's education, health, and social needs before they enter kindergarten should be part of the reach of a community school. "It's a natural fit," says Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) Superintendent Keith Ballard, who has made the growth of community schools one of his top priorities. "You have to meet the needs of kids or you won't have sustainable academic achievement."

TACSI also operates seven community schools in the neighboring Union Public Schools (UPS) district. According to Union Superintendent Cathy Burden, the district's other 19 schools are "all engaged in the process of becoming community schools." She echoes Ballard's beliefs about the logical connections between early childhood development programs and public schools. "It's all consistent with our philosophy of

trying to be there for parents, and be there for children," Burden says. These superintendents recognize and understand the importance of connecting young children and their families to elementary schools.

Teachers at the Kendall-Whittier community school make home visits to families of incoming students and organize summer playgroups to help children and parents get to know each other. "They are sensitive to fostering those friendships," says John Cruncleton, the father of two Kendall-Whittier children. He added that the home visit was especially helpful to his daughter Lottie, who had struggled with shyness. "They were interested in making contact with us."

Districts' Increasing Support of Community Schools

Community schools are also playing a role in TPS's efforts to respond to the district's declining enrollment. As part of the process of closing 13 schools and redrawing attendance boundaries—which can cause turmoil for any school community—Ballard said that the district would create additional community schools as one of the "trade-ups" to make the closures more palatable.

For Ballard, making community schools an integral component of the district also means dedicating more funding to their operation. "We should start assuming some responsibility for ourselves," he says, adding that TACSI will remain "our compass and research partner." TACSI has been funding community school coordinators, but Ballard wants the district to begin paying the coordinators' salaries. While TPS's willingness to cover these costs was a welcome prospect, the proposal raised questions for both the existing coordinators and TACSI leaders.

Kristen Granstaff, coordinator at Eugene Field Elementary, wondered whether she would have to assume additional responsibilities if she became a district employee. Amy Putnam, coordinator at Marshall Elementary, added that funding by an intermediary organization such as TACSI "gives us leverage." She also said, however, that if the district becomes more active in running community schools, then she and others should be "proactive" about ensuring that their positions do not become something other than what TACSI envisions.

After discussions between TACSI leaders and TPS, the school board ultimately decided to keep the existing and new coordinators under TACSI's authority. The school district added six coordinators funded by Title I, four of whom were expected to be on board by the 2011–12 school year. TACSI Program Director Creveling said that she needed some “assurances” from the district that the position of community school coordinator would not change because of its Title I support. She said that she wants officials to understand that the coordinators do more than just serve as parent liaisons—that they also network with community providers and agencies and serve on school administrative teams to make sure services and programs are well matched to the needs of students, families, and community members.

In view of the ongoing cuts in education spending, TACSI has been concerned about the stability of the district's funding for the positions. If the funds for those new coordinators are ever threatened, Creveling says, “We'll be ready at any time to step back in.” In UPS, Burden had already made the decision to pay coordinators' salaries out of Title I funds. “It sustains the entire model for our district,” she said. “I feel good about that.”

Finding Someone to “Energize Change”

TPS took another major step when it created the new position of director of community schools. And Creveling couldn't be more pleased with the person tapped for the job—Dr. Diane Hensley, former principal at Mark Twain Elementary, one of Tulsa's strongest community schools and an example of how a community schools initiative can change a school and its teachers. At Mark Twain, Hensley said that she encountered an unmotivated staff but was determined to lead them in changing the school's vision to benefit children. Interest grew in running a year-round calendar and starting home visits—a practice that Hensley brought from the time she spent at Whittier. “People started coming and saying, ‘What is different?’ It's a vision of respect and dignity for all people,” explains Hensley.

She also wanted to work with early childhood partners and invited the Native American Coalition of Tulsa, which ran Head Start classrooms about 10 miles away, to be part of the school. Hensley secured the agreement of the director of the Head Start classrooms to open a classroom at Mark Twain. At the

outset, the Head Start children and their families were largely separate from the rest of the school, following their own schedule and eating lunch in their classrooms. “We wanted them to come into the cafeteria and be part of the community,” which eventually happened, Hensley says. Now, the coalition operates two full-day Head Start classrooms of 3-year-olds and wants to add a third classroom. The early learning classrooms are increasingly integrated with the elementary school while maintaining their own identities and management.

Hensley describes herself as “not a program person.” She did not immediately seek Mark Twain's participation in TACSI until members of her staff kept returning from meetings and reporting enthusiastically about what they were hearing. “I've always liked being on the outside, pushing the parameters of the district,” she said, but added, “I would love to believe that energizing change can come from within schools.” In looking ahead to assuming the role of community schools director for TPS, Hensley is confident that the Mark Twain teachers have developed a strong sense of ownership of the wrap-around services provided at the school. “Most everything in the district is principal-driven,” she says. “But community schools can't be.”

As community schools director for TPS, Hensley will initially supervise four new Title I-funded coordinators along with their principals and TACSI. She works closely with TACSI to maintain unity and fidelity to the TACSI model and at this point reports to the associate superintendent for elementary schools.

Linkages Became “The Connector”

Even before the advent of Linkages, Tulsa had initiated efforts—many of which were housed at CSC—to improve the quality of early childhood programming. The efforts included JumpStart, a community engagement campaign focused on the importance of high-quality early learning experiences, as well as the Child Care Resource Center (CCRC), which helps parents identify programs that meet their needs. CCRC is the only project in Oklahoma that assists early care and learning programs in gaining accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

“This was good fertile ground,” says Paige Whalen, who coordinates the Quality Enhancement Initiative at the CCRC and serves on the Linkages

Selected TACSI Partners

- Tulsa Public Schools
- Union Public Schools
- Broad faith-based partnerships
- CampFire USA Green Country
- Child Care Resource Center
- Community Service Council
- Family and Children's Services
- Global Gardens
- Metropolitan Human Services Commission
- Northeastern State University-BA
- OU Physicians Tulsa Community Health Clinics
- OU Urban Design
- Tulsa City-County Health Department
- Tulsa City-County Library
- Tulsa Community College
- Tulsa Technology Center
- Tulsa University
- Tulsa City Parks & Recreation Department
- Tulsa Children's Behavioral Health
- Tulsa HUB Bicycle Education/Safety
- YMCA

Leadership Team, which is made up of representatives from CSC, Educare and the Community Action Project, both school districts, practitioners, coordinators, and the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. But it took Linkages, leaders say, to bring some of these people working on the various initiatives out of their "silos." "Linkages is the connector," Whalen says. "We have more intentional practices happening."

Creveling adds that, when community school coordinators fill out their time sheets, they have to reflect how much time they spend on each of TACSI's seven "core components." Before Linkages, "Very few were putting any time in early childhood," she says. Now, community school coordinators are increasing their efforts to build relationships between their schools and early learning providers. Harriet Patterson, parent-community liaison at Roy Clark Elementary School in UPS, says that she promotes the Early Head Start program when she meets with

parents of students with younger siblings. Granstaff, at Eugene Field Elementary in TPS, said that she has increased her contact with staff at the adjacent Eugene Field Early Childhood Education Center. Coordinators at the four Linkages sites participate in joint planning and professional development with their counterparts at the early childhood centers next door.

Nonetheless, the coordinators encounter barriers to involving young students in out-of-school-time programs. "There is a perception among teaching staff that little kids can't do extended day," Patterson says. "But they don't vaporize and vanish when school is over." Sometimes the resistance comes from providers that lack experience in working with younger children. She describes one provider, a Kung Fu instructor, who is the "most gentle, peaceful guy, but is shaken by first graders."

Some families face obstacles when a younger child is enrolled in an early childhood center and an older student is enrolled at the elementary school next door. In some instances, the preschoolers are not eligible to attend the elementary school's after-school programs because of childcare licensing regulations. In other instances, transportation is provided for the older child but not for the Head Start child. To extend learning opportunities, TACSI's committee on out-of-school time and youth development is working to create more opportunities for younger students during the summer 2011 pilot program.

Smooth Transitions for Young Learners into Rosa Parks Elementary

A seamless pathway from the early years through the early grades is the hallmark of both Rosa Parks Early Childhood Center and Rosa Parks Elementary School. The two schools sit next to each other on a large lot across the street from a horse pasture where newborn foals may be seen alongside their mothers in the spring. Kenna, the therapy dog, is one of the first to greet visitors to the center, which serves 0–3 children through both home- and center-based programs. "She makes everyone feel comfy," says Lynn McClure, the principal.

Through collaboration with CAP, UPS administers the Early Head Start (EHS) and preschool programs for 3-year-olds at Rosa Parks Early Childhood Center. The home-based EHS program features six parent educators who conduct home visits

and bring parents in for “socializations.” The center-based 3-year-old classrooms follow the Reggio Emilia model of early childhood instruction, which focuses on creating a relaxing and visually appealing environment in which children explore and create work with a variety of materials.

In one of the low-lit classrooms, a hand-made mobile hangs from the ceiling, and children’s identity panels—which change throughout the year as children are able to draw more details about themselves—are posted on the wall. “The things we are seeing our kids doing are unbelievable,” says Kara Lowry, one of the preschool teachers. On this particular day, a class of rising prekindergarten students had just returned from a visit to the elementary school, where they participated in a scavenger hunt and checked off on their clipboard what they had discovered, such as a block area and a P.E. class. “We read books,” announced one girl.

In addition to working with a partnering agency for family support and crisis intervention, McClure says the center reaps the benefits of the partnerships established with Rosa Parks Community School next door. For example, in the Global Gardens community garden between the two schools, children learn how to plant and “go mucking about,” she says, with Kenna resting calmly at her feet. Anyone from the community can visit the school’s clinic, which was built as part of the school and is operated by University of Oklahoma Physicians.

Karen Vance, principal of Rosa Parks Elementary School, makes sure that preschoolers’ first impressions of her school are positive. “I want them to feel comfortable in a big school,” she says. “I send my teachers over there to observe so they can be better prepared.” But the elementary school is also organized to continue providing a nurturing environment—not just during the prekindergarten year. Vance’s teachers loop through two grade levels in order to “have a longer relationship with their students and their parents,” she says. The school also stopped requiring parents to drop their children off at the front door in the morning—a routine that troubled parents of young children. Now, all parents may accompany their children to the classroom—if the children want them to do so. “Sometimes that is the only time that a parent has to talk to the teacher,” Vance says. “We try to remove little barriers.” Kim Roark, a third-grade teacher at Rosa Parks, says the community school helps meet students’ needs that would otherwise get

in the way of their learning. “We could not do all the things we do without the resources,” she says. “We feed them breakfast. We have snacks for them. We don’t have to run all over town trying to find things like clothing assistance.”

The early childhood center serves families from across the Union district, although not every 4-year-old in the neighborhood will just cross the large lot to attend elementary school. Many children enter kindergarten straight from home or childcare arrangements. For that reason, as part of Linkages, TACSI is involving community-based childcare centers. Stacey Mwongozi, the other transition specialist, is working with the childcare licensing agency to plan training programs for center- and home-based providers on how to prepare children for the transition into school and what it means for a child to attend a community school. Licensing staff will also receive information to share with providers on expectations for children when they enter kindergarten. In addition, community schools will receive maps depicting the variety of early learning providers within their school boundaries.

Following Up with Forms

When children move from Educare into Kendall-Whittier or any other elementary school, parents receive a questionnaire designed to provide their child’s new teacher with information about the student. As part of Linkages, Educare teachers are now making a more concerted effort to ensure that the forms reach and undergo review by the receiving teachers—something that has not always happened, according to McKenzie. The lack of attention to those forms at the elementary level has been a frustration for Steven Dow, executive director of CAP, which operates 14 early childhood centers in the Tulsa area. He recalls that teachers carefully filled out forms on exiting children only to have the papers sit for months in a TPS office. The transition process, he says, has not been “as systematic as I want it to be.”

CAP, however, is actively involved in Linkages and recently helped organize a two-day joint professional development workshop for Union Public Schools’ prekindergarten teachers and CAP preschool teachers at Rosa Parks Early Childhood Education Center. “The pre-K teachers [from the elementary school] will come in our building and get their eyes on their children,” says Lynn McClure, principal of Rosa Parks Early

Childhood Education Center. The teachers will also review data and discuss various children in order to be better informed about making classroom assignments.

Linkages is also enlightening those in the public schools about sound early childhood practices and a comprehensive approach to education, says Andrew McKenzie, who leads TPS's Early Childhood Services. "That expertise and guidance is coming from those outside partners, because that is what they do," he says. "Community schools give us a much broader focus of child development."

Continuous Improvement

TACSI is designed for continuous improvement and for creating and capitalizing on new opportunities, such as early childhood linkages. Its community-wide leaders set new directions for the initiative, and community partners are there to assist. Two examples are continuous improvement through professional development and a new summer learning experience.

Professional Development to Strengthen the Initiative

TACSI is structured to respond to the needs identified by the community. To that end, TACSI pays close attention to the first impression many schools make on families, particularly parents who bring in young children to register for school. With the growth of community schools across both districts, TACSI wants to make sure that school secretaries, receptionists, and other support staff are aware of what is available for families and do not merely refer them elsewhere.

In fact, Cruncleton, the dad at Kendall-Whittier, remarked that the office staff often seemed "overwhelmed" and sometimes did not inform parents early enough about activities or deadlines. "People in the office should know what I do. They are the ones touring people around the school," says Joseph Bojang, parent-community liaison at Briarglen Elementary School in UPS. "People in the office usually don't get a chance to have professional development." In response, the staff has been learning some practices from a corporation that is recognized for its friendly customer service—Chick-fil-A.

Granstaff describes herself as a "buffer" between community partners and families, which often have different expectations of each other. For example,

when events are held at her school, the organizers often ask Granstaff to get parents to RSVP to ensure sufficient food or supplies. The families served by her school, however, typically do not follow such protocol and just show up. She sees her job as someone who makes "a good experience happen for people from two different cultures."

Partners Create Opportunities Together

During summer 2011, TACSI offered a summer learning opportunity for the first time. Forty partners, including the American Red Cross, American Theatre Company, Boy Scouts, Camp Fire USA, Northeastern State University, the Tulsa City-County Library, Tulsa Health Department, local individuals with expertise and an interest in working with children, and many others, participated in the effort, which was held at five schools and involved about 400 children. Many of the partners were new to TACSI and were motivated by the opportunity to work with children during the summer. Students in kindergarten through fifth grade were eligible.

Partners say that community schools—especially those with coordinators—enhance their ability to offer services to children and families. "When you have a coordinator, you're better able to build relationships," says Bobbie Henderson, executive director of Camp Fire Tulsa. "They have an appreciation of what out-of-school time can contribute to learning."

On a recent gathering at Tulsa's Junior Achievement building, TACSI's many program partners gathered to hear details about the summer initiative. TACSI counts over 60 formal and informal partners as part of the initiative (see text box on page 54).

"I get energized any time I come to these meetings," says Pam Rask, deputy associate director of the Tulsa Health Department, whose nurse case managers work with schools on issues such as obesity prevention and oral health. In addition, a health department social worker focuses on bullying prevention and conflict resolution. "Standing alone, we can't address all the problems of these kids, but through the community schools we can."

The Future of TACSI

Interest in TACSI's model is growing—there are now 31 schools across both TPS and UPS. Representatives from two additional school districts—Sand Springs and Broken Arrow—will soon begin attending TACSI “academies,” and TACSI staff are supporting initial work in Oklahoma City. But these discussions come as Creveling and Genie Shannon, TACSI's school liaison, are preparing to put TACSI in someone else's hands. “We've said from the beginning that we need a younger director,” Creveling told members of TACSI's management team at a spring meeting.

CSC will conduct a national search for Creveling's replacement, and the expectation is that someone new will be hired by the winter. The new director will then hire a new school liaison. Creveling and Shannon expect to stay until summer 2011 to support the new team. Given that the community partners and schools take ownership for the initiative, the new team will have lots of help.

Focusing on Impact

TACSI has built evaluation and accountability into its sustainability plan. External evaluators have studied how community schools are organized and their effectiveness across several measures. The results indicate that TACSI is on the right track.

TACSI itself has concluded that it is making a difference as previously demonstrated (see text box on page 47). It continues to work with an external researcher to evaluate process and impact and incorporates lessons from the evaluations into its strategy and training. In addition, TACSI is now creating site-based data teams that will use data at the school level to improve community school practice. In the future, TACSI plans to look at the impact of community schools on individual students in the early years.

The “Bottom Line”

There are no signs of doubt about the value of community schools among the first-grade teachers and curriculum specialists gathered in a classroom at Roy Clark Elementary School. Huddled near an interactive whiteboard displaying test scores for individual students, the staff know exactly how services provided by partners have influenced learning and where the gaps remain.

Monthly meetings of the student assistance team regularly focus on how the school's 30-plus partners can support students—perhaps the health department needs to address a head lice problem that is keeping children from attending school or perhaps a particular student would benefit from the after-school Kung Fu class. The team presents student data to partners.

“[Teachers] are communicating with the after-school providers so they know what skills kids need,” says Principal Theresa Kiger, adding that community partners that do not contribute to student growth are sometimes not invited back. “You don't get to be a partner by just giving coupons to kids.”

It is that ongoing integration between the attention to academics and supportive services that led Roy Clark Elementary to be one of three schools in the country to be named a 2011 National Community School by the Coalition for Community Schools. Results include a decline in absenteeism to nearly zero, an increase in reading and mathematics scores, and 100 percent participation in parent-teacher conferences. “At the end of the year, we're looking at the efficiency of the [partner] provider,” Kiger says. “Our bottom line is academic data.”

Lessons

LESSON 1: With its leadership structure, TACSI is able to address pressing community challenges and opportunities. When community leaders, who already enjoyed strong community school partnerships, focused on connecting early childhood programs with elementary schools, they were able to mobilize early childhood providers and schools districts, set a direction, and facilitate increased partnership, data sharing, and learning across the two levels.

LESSON 2: TACSI's story shows that, even when high-quality early childhood programs are located next door to elementary schools, the teachers at the sites still need someone to create structured opportunities to help them step out of their “silos” and share knowledge and practices in order to support children's transitions. Intermediary entities are central to building these bridges. TACSI's position as an intermediary enables it to convene and support early childhood staff in the district and across providers. Its connection to the Child Care Resource Center provides access to a wide variety of early childcare providers and to the school systems.

LESSON 3: Partnerships between early childhood programs and the school system can create a continuum of supports, ensuring that children and families who are used to services through Head Start or state-funded prekindergarten programs continue to receive assistance when children enter elementary school.

LESSON 4: Superintendent leadership is pivotal to the development of community schools and to building bridges between community schools and early childhood opportunities. Superintendents in Tulsa support community schools and are incorporating them into their strategies to improve learning and strengthen the education continuum starting at birth. They are institutionalizing aspects of the community schools structure by hiring a community schools director for the school district and financing community schools coordinators with Title I funds. They and their staff also serve on TACSI's collaborative leadership structures, and the early childhood leaders participate in the community-wide early childhood initiative organized by TACSI.

LESSON 5: As community school efforts grow, everyone in the school must understand the community schools strategy and the role of the coordinator and is mindful of how families with young children are received when they first visit a school. TACSI deliberately guides schools through the stages of development and provides funding and a coordinator only when schools have proven their understanding of the community schools strategy and focus areas (TACSI community schools DNA) at the Inquiring stage.

LESSON 6: TACSI community schools are organized to work with all early childhood providers and create successful transitions, whether children's formal early childhood experiences take place in an elementary school, in an early childhood center, or at home. ■



Building Blocks Report Epilogue

This report illustrates the important role early childhood education opportunities play in creating the conditions for learning in community schools. Since the case studies were written, there have been a number of exciting developments as community schools continue to deepen their work to support children ages 0–8.

An evaluation of the Early Childhood/Community School Linkages pilot project, featured in the Multnomah County and Tulsa case studies, has concluded. The Linkages project evaluation (conducted by the John W. Gardner Center for Youth at Stanford University) confirmed that, as systemic community school initiatives become more intentional about facilitating smooth and effective linkages for children and families during the transition between early childhood and the early grades, they have impact. The report which can be found here (www.communityschools.org/earlychildhood), illuminates promising outcomes at three levels: systemic, school setting and child/family.

In addition, there have been some important developments in the places covered in this report:

MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON: The Linkages project and related early childhood efforts described in this report have led to a new strategic initiative called Kindergarten Counts. This community wide campaign began in spring 2012 and brings together early childhood and school partners to promote successful kindergarten transitions in SUN Community Schools for children and their families. Activities include early kindergarten registrations, summer opportunities (a 2–3 week free summer learning program that emphasizes social and emotional school readiness skills), and an emphasis on strong kindergarten attendance. Twelve SUN Community Schools are using the Early Kindergarten Transition program. The programs offer classroom experiences for children new to school and parent group meetings for caretakers to learn about the school, meet other parents and staff, and learn strategies for supporting their children. The program is intended to support children with little or no preschool experience and those who participated in Head Start.

TULSA, OKLAHOMA: The Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative has created a Linkages Transitions Toolkit as part of their participation in the Linkages Project. They are piloting the toolkit at one of their experienced community schools and are training 14 other community schools on the strategies for engaging and supporting children ages 0-8. Tulsa continues to explore ways to extend key elements of their community school strategy, such as out of school time, to young children. They have recently started an afterschool program for preschoolers through eight year olds that teaches self-regulation through yoga. The program is currently being implemented in seven community schools and early childhood centers.

CINCINNATI, OHIO: Two important developments have occurred recently in Cincinnati. First, Oyster school, Cincinnati Early Learning Centers (a community partner) and a private family foundation worked together to create the Schiff Early Learning Center within Oyster Community Learning Center. The new school building opened in Fall 2012 and deliberately included a space for a co-located early childhood center that can accommodate 42 children, some as young as six weeks old. Second, Cincinnati's CLC leadership created a new Early Childhood Network, comprised of the city's early childhood providers, to join the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team. Private family foundations are paying for a network director who is working neighborhood by neighborhood on a new community engagement process to enhance early childhood opportunities. The Oyster "hub" serves young children and their families whether they are enrolled in the school or not. For example, whereas in the past, mothers with young children may have been hesitant to allow home visiting programs into their homes, they can now conduct the visit in a location at the CLC. Another CLC hub piloted a summer kindergarten readiness program that was developed by teachers and served children in the community.

EVANSVILLE, INDIANA: Evansville's leaders have continued to make early childhood a key strategy for improving outcomes for children. The Culver Family Learning Center now supports eight early childhood classrooms and there are six other such classrooms in other elementary schools. Each of these all-day programs have a waiting list. Culver has become a center of early childhood education in other ways as well. The 4C of Southern Indiana Child Care Resource and Referral Agency has recently moved its staff into the building. The Evansville community is also rising up to support early childhood education. In April 2012, community partners hosted an Early Childhood Education Summit where business, community, and school leaders heard from early childhood experts and the business community created an early childhood business roundtable that will explore ways that private dollars can support early childhood initiatives.

Finally, efforts to expand the Coalition's early childhood work continue through the "Mind in the Making" Community Schools Project, in partnership with the Family and Works Institute. Launched in June 2011, the project is designed to use Ellen Galinsky's *Mind in the Making and the Seven Essential Skills* as a focal point for building bridges between early childhood systems and community schools. It also is intended to promote educational innovation in community schools, serving as a model for educators and families throughout the country. Participating communities identify members of key constituencies to serve as *Mind in the Making* "Learning Facilitators." Using a training of trainers capacity building model, learning facilitators in Multnomah County and Tulsa are receiving training and support to work with parents, families and educators. Learning facilitators in Hartford, Evansville, and, Providence, will receive training and support in 2013.

You can read more about the important work community schools are doing on early childhood at www.communityschools.org/earlychildhood. ■

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