

Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports

(2021)

Abstract

This report underscores that the prevailing view of community schools is *just a beginning* for their ongoing development and contribution to improving schools. We stress that defining the initiative as a “community-based effort to coordinate and integrate ... services” raises some concerns and limits their evolution. We illustrate this by highlighting that the movement to link community services to schools inadvertently has worked against efforts to catalyze a much needed transformation in how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

With respect to community school’s moving forward, we focus on system building that includes an emphasis on transforming student/learning supports and that is pursued by school-home-community collaboratives. The process is described as requiring an expanded framework for school improvement policy that coalesces school and community resources into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of interventions by weaving together overlapping institutional missions and resources.

Key challenges for those committed to developing comprehensive and equitable community schools are discussed as including (1) outreach to a wide range of community resources, (2) adopting shared governance and functions, (3) establishing an effective and sustainable collaborative infrastructure, and (4) connecting “families” of community schools to address common concerns and achieve economies of scale.

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Evolving Community Schools and Transforming Student/Learning Supports

*The real difficulty in changing the course of any enterprise
lies not in developing new ideas but in escaping old ones.*

John Maynard Keynes

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, community schools increasingly are seen as a valued approach to addressing barriers to learning and teaching and promoting healthy development.¹ The Brookings Institution’s Task Force on Next Generation Community Schools has even recommended “the transformation of U.S. schools into community schools, centering initial efforts on the 4 percent of school districts that educate approximately 40 percent of the country’s children, include urban and rural communities across the nation, and have the greatest concentration of unmet student needs.”²

The increasing endorsement of the community school movement has resulted in more schools adopting the term. However, in practice, “community schools” vary considerably in what they do and don’t do. For some, the term is adopted mainly to indicate a school’s commitment to finding better ways to involve families and link with other community stakeholders. Others adopt the term *Full-Service Community Schools* to indicate implementation on campus of family centers, volunteer and mentor programs, school-based health centers, a variety of co-located health and human services, and efforts to extend the school day for learning and recreation. A few others are pursuing *comprehensive collaborations* focused on weaving together a wide range of school and community resources (including the human and social capital in a neighborhood) and transforming how schools enhance equity of opportunity for children and families and improve schools and neighborhoods.³

How are Community Schools Defined in Public Policy?

As defined in a 2021 guidance from the U.S. Department of Education:

A full-service community school is a public elementary or secondary school that uses established partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to provide well-rounded educational opportunities and meet the social, emotional, physical, and mental health, and academic needs of students.

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the ARP Act, a full-service community school is defined as a public elementary or secondary school that:

- (a) Participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships; and
- (b) Provides access to such services in school to students, families, and the community, such as access during the school year (including before-and after-school hours and weekends), as well as during the summer.

<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/07/21-0138-ARP-Community-Schools-OMB-and-OS-Approved-071421-1.pdf>

In an earlier statement, the Coalition for Community Schools emphasized that community schools help promote a climate at school that is safe, supportive and respectful and that connects students to a broader learning community.⁴ In general, the literature on community schools offers a broader vision than the one incorporated in federal legislation.

The following presentation highlights that the prevailing view of community schools is *just a beginning* for their development and contribution to improving schools. We stress that defining the initiative as a “community-based effort to coordinate and integrate ... services” raises some concerns and limits their evolution. We illustrate this by highlighting that the movement to link community services to schools inadvertently has worked against efforts to catalyze a much needed transformation in how schools address barriers to learning and teaching.

Community Schools: An Evolving Concept

The history of the community school movement reflects a continuous evolution in conceptualization. Supporters have called for a variety of ambitious goals. Prominent among these are improving school climate and establishing a psychological sense of community; changing school culture; addressing diversity needs; promoting well-being, resilience, and protective factors; promoting whole child development; increasing student and family empowerment and collaborative governance; pursuing culturally responsive pedagogy; addressing barriers to learning and teaching; ensuring social justice and equity of opportunity. The hope is to contribute to efforts to deal with such interrelated societal concerns as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment.

Schools and a wide range of home and other community resources clearly share goals related to reducing adverse childhood experiences, pursuing the education, development, and socialization of the young, and promoting the general well-being of society. Given that the goals are complex and interrelated, there is widespread agreement that schools, homes, and communities should find better ways to work together.

Community schools only *emerge* from the relentless collaboration over a period of years of community, school, and family stakeholders. And the sites that increasingly are being developed reflect the public policy definition included in legislation.

Community schools can be and can do much more. As this report stresses, a good step forward includes working with school staff in ways that catalyze the transformation of student and learning supports. Such a step can mutually benefit schools, families, and communities and evolve a new generation of *Comprehensive Community Schools*.

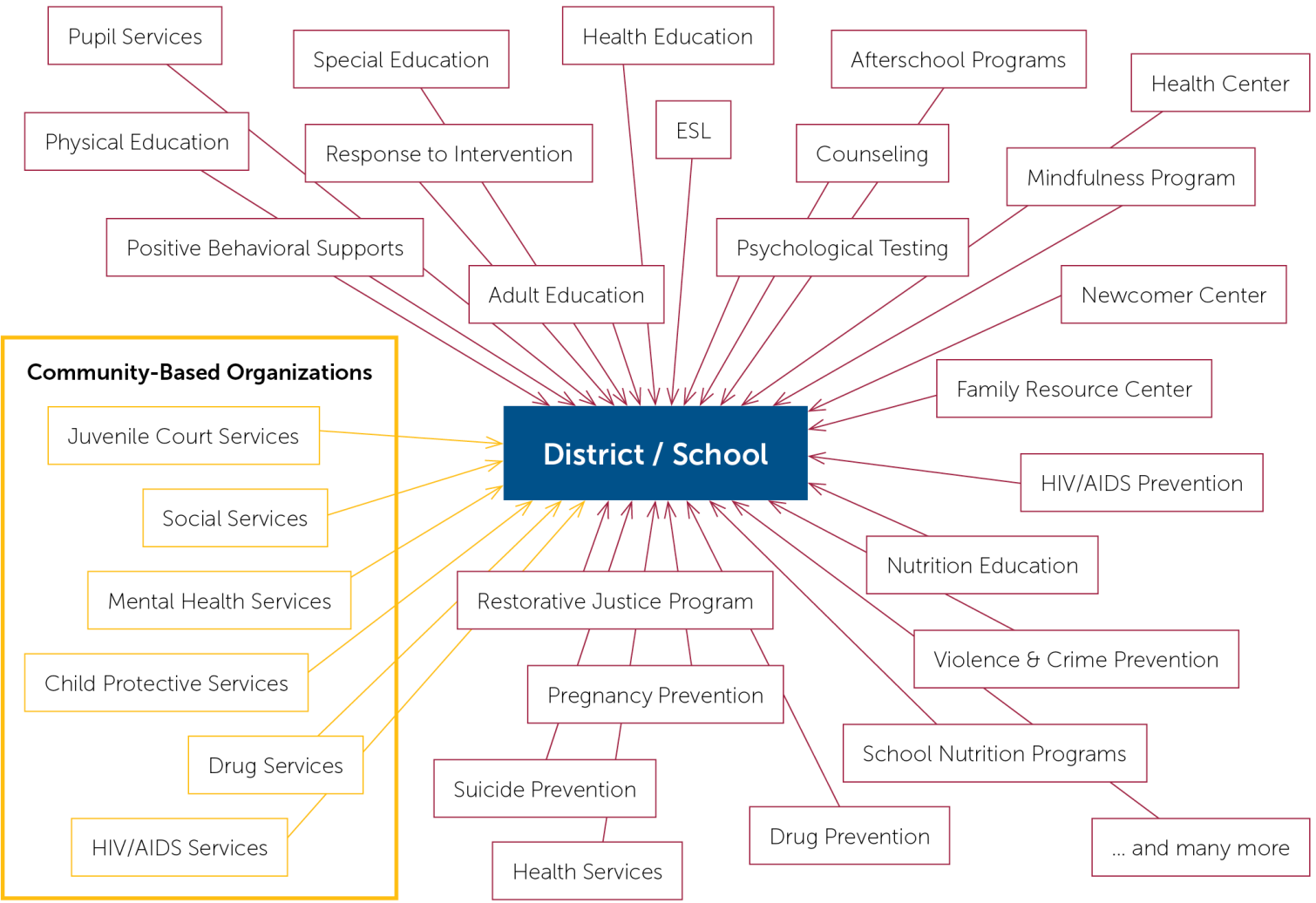
Community Schools and Student/Learning Supports

With respect to the need to transform student/learning supports, the following state of affairs is widely acknowledged:

- Many schools are unable to address the number of students who are not doing well.
- Adding a few more professionals will not meet the long-term needs.
- Existing student/learning supports are organized in too fragmented a way (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

A Fragmented Approach to Addressing Barriers to Learning



As community schools evolve, one question that arises is:
Are they helping or hindering the transformation of student/learning supports into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and promoting well-being.

Our Center's analyses have identified that

- fragmentation is an indication of the marginalization of student and learning supports in school improvement policy
- fragmentation often is exacerbated when community resources are brought on a school site
- ending the fragmentation and significantly improving how schools provide student/learning supports involves much more than focusing on coordination and integration of services
- ending the marginalization, involves coalescing school and community interventions for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and expanding MTSS frameworks into a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports.⁵

Given the above considerations, the following strategies have been proposed to reframe student/learning supports in transformative ways:

- (1) coalesce all school efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students into a unified component and integrating the component as a primary and essential facet of school improvement policy (see Exhibit 2)
- (2) move beyond a limited MTSS framework to build the continuum of interventions into a consolidated set of subsystems weaving together school and community resources (see Exhibit 3)
- (3) organize the supports needed each day at schools into a delimited set of domains crossing the continuum to establish a framework for developing a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of student/learning supports over several years (see Exhibit 4)

The new framework is designed to prevent many of the problems experienced by students and schools, thereby reducing the numbers of and costs incurred by unnecessary referrals for specialized assistance and special education.⁶

Schools are using the framework illustrated in Exhibit 4 to do resource mapping to help identify existing resources and how to (re)deploy them. Below are cited two mapping tools designed to identify existing resources in a way that organizes planning to improve a school's system of student/learning supports and also clarifies critical system gaps.

(1) *Mapping & Analyzing Learning Supports*

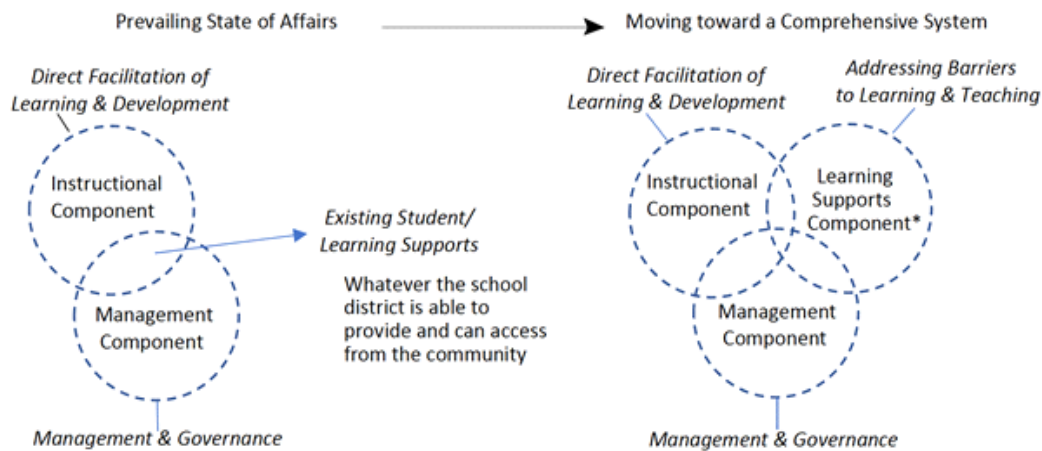
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/summit2002/tool%20mapping%20current%20status.pdf>

(2) *An Aid for Initial Listing of Current Resources Used at a School for Addressing Barriers to Learning and Teaching*

<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/listingresources.pdf>

Exhibit 2

Expanding the Framework for School Improvement Policy and Practice*



*Notes:

Expanding school improvement policy into a three component framework provides a path to ending the marginalization and improving outcomes. Establishing learning supports as a fundamental and primary policy commitment can help focus schools on the need to (a) unify all student/learning supports, (b) develop the component over time into a comprehensive and equitable system, and (c) expand the framework for school accountability.

The transformation of student/learning supports also requires rethinking the roles and functions of student/learning support staff.⁷

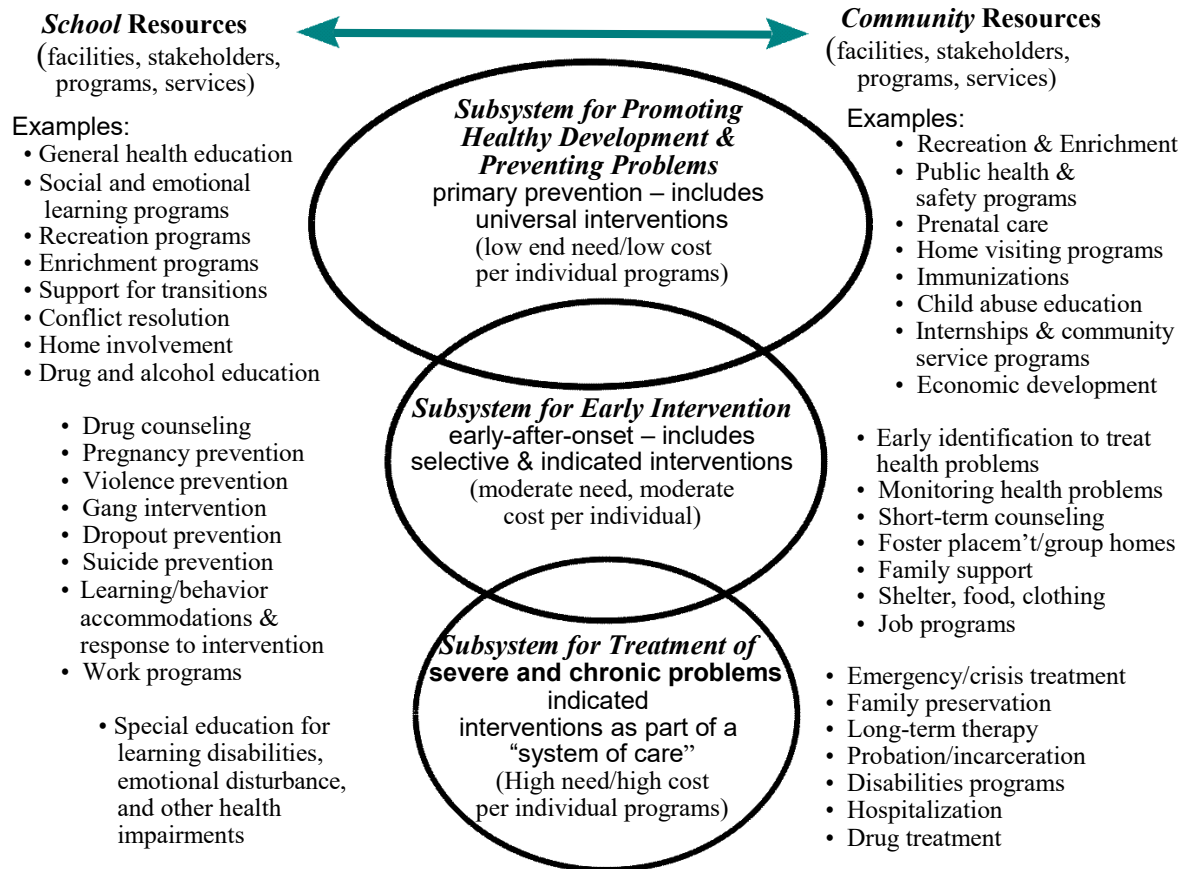
The learning supports component overlaps the instructional component by bringing learning supports into the classroom. In doing so, it stresses a psychological approach to personalization and a sequential and hierarchical approach to special assistance.

The transformation of student/learning supports requires a dedicated infrastructure for daily operation of the component for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. Such an infrastructure calls for administrative and team leadership in addition to workgroups that are responsible and accountable for the successful development and daily operation of a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports. Examples of assigned functions include: aggregating data across students and from teachers to analyze school needs; mapping school and community resources; analyzing resources; identifying the most pressing program development needs at the school; coordinating and integrating school resources and connecting with community resources; establishing priorities for strengthening programs and developing new ones; planning and facilitating ways to fill intervention gaps; recommending how resources should be deployed and redeployed; developing strategies for enhancing resources; and social marketing.

For a detailed discussion, see H. Adelman & L. Taylor . (2019). *Improving school improvement*. Los Angeles: Center for MH & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5288v1c1>

Exhibit 3

Framing a School-Community Intervention *Continuum* of Interconnected *Subsystems*



Adapted from H. Adelman, & L. Taylor, (2018), *Addressing barriers to learning: in the classroom and schoolwide*. Los Angeles: Center for MH & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/55w7b8x8>

Note: The multitier student support (MTSS) model as emphasized in federal legislation and as widely portrayed in school improvement plans usually is illustrated simply in terms of levels rather than as a system of intervention. The simplicity of the tiered presentation is appealing, and the framework does help underscore differences in levels of intervention. However, this is not a strong way to depict the intervention continuum, and it is an insufficient framework for organizing student/learning supports. Specific concerns are that (1) the framework mainly stresses levels of intensity, (2) does not address the problem of systematically connecting interventions that fall into and across each level, and (3) does not address the need to connect school and community interventions. As a result, adopting MTSS as a major facet of school improvement is just a beginning in advancing efforts to address barriers to learning and teaching and reengage disconnected students..

Exhibit 4

Intervention Framework for a Third Component of School Improvement*

		Integrated Intervention <i>Continuum</i> (levels)		
		<i>Subsystem for Promoting Healthy Development & Preventing Problems</i>	<i>Subsystem for Early Intervention</i>	<i>Subsystem for Treatment (“System of Care”)</i>
Categories of Classroom and School-wide Student/Learning Support Domains	<i>Classroom-based learning supports</i>	(e.g., personalized instruction)	(e.g., special assistance in the classroom provided as soon as a problem arises)	(e.g., referral for <i>specialist</i> assistance)
	<i>Supports for transitions</i>	(e.g., welcoming newcomers & providing social/academic supports)	(e.g., when problems arise , using them as teachable moments to enhance social-emotional development and learning)	(e.g., personalized supports for students returning to school from incarceration)
	<i>Home involvement & engagement</i>	(e.g., outreach to attract and facilitate participation of hard-to-reach families)	(e.g., engaging families in problem-solving)	(e.g., support services to assist family in addressing basic survival needs)
	<i>Community involvement & collaborative engagement</i>	(e.g., outreach to recruit volunteers)	(e.g., developing community links and connections to fill critical intervention gaps)	(e.g., outreach to reengage disconnected students and families)
	<i>Crisis response/prevention</i>	(e.g., promoting positive relationships)	(e.g., immediate response with physical and psychological first-aid)	(e.g., referral for follow-up counseling)
	<i>Student & family special assistance</i>	(e.g., enhancing coping & problem solving capability)	(e.g., providing consultation, triage, and referrals)	(e.g., ongoing management of care related to specialized services)
		Accommodations for differences & disabilities		Specialized assistance & other intensified interventions (e.g., Special Education & School-Based

*The above matrix provides a guide for organizing and evaluating a system of student and learning supports and is a tool for mapping existing interventions, clarifying which are evidence-based, identifying critical intervention gaps, and analyzing resource use with a view to redeploying resources to strengthen the system. As the examples illustrate, the framework can guide efforts to embed supports for compensatory and special education, English learners, psychosocial and mental health problems, use of specialized instructional support personnel, adoption of evidence-based interventions, integration of funding sources, and braiding in of community resources. The specific examples inserted in the matrix are just illustrative of those schools already may have in place. For a fuller array of examples of student/learning supports that can be applied in classrooms and schoolwide, see the set of surveys available at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/surveys/set1.pdf>

**Concerns to Address
as Community
Schools Evolve**

In linking, co-locating, and integrating community services at schools, the efforts have tended to (a) increase fragmentation, (b) reify the trend at schools to react to problems rather than prevent them, (c) concentrate efforts on a relatively few students in a district rather than meeting the needs of the many, (d) generate conflict among school and community providers, (e) reduce the total amount of resources for intervention, and (e) further marginalize student/learning supports.⁸

*Increased
fragmentation*

For example, when community agencies co-locate personnel at schools, such personnel often operate independently of existing school programs and services. Too little attention is paid to developing effective mechanisms for coordinating complementary activity or integrating parallel efforts. Consequently, a youngster identified as at risk for bullying, dropout, and substance abuse may be involved in three programs operating independently of each other.

*Reactive
and limited*

Also, schools tend to be reactive in responding to problems and to focus on discrete and often serious problems. Many community agencies who participate at community schools do the same. This results in providing needed specialized services for a relatively small number of individuals but limits attention to developing interventions to minimize and prevent problems.

*Conflict among
community and school
professionals*

For many reasons, there is rising tension between school district employed support staff and their counterparts in community based organizations. When "outside" professionals are brought in, school specialists often view it as discounting their skills and threatening their jobs. The "outsiders" often feel unappreciated and may be rather naive about the culture of schools. Conflicts arise over "turf," use of space, confidentiality, and liability.

School staff lay-offs

When school policy makers come to believe that community services brought to a school can meet the need, they are tempted to cut-back on school staff. Over many years, district student support professionals have feared that contracts with community agencies will result in a reduction-in-force of student/learning support staff.

*Further marginalization
of student/learning
supports*

On a more basic school improvement policy level, the piecemeal approach to school-community collaboration contributes to the continuing failure of policymakers at all levels to accept the need to fundamentally transform the work of school and community professionals who are in positions to facilitate development and learning and address barriers to learning and teaching. The reality is that prevailing approaches to school-community collaboration often marginalize efforts to effectively coalesce and then develop a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of interventions.

To address the above concerns, policies and guides for developing comprehensive community schools must pay greater attention to countering negative effects arising from the work.

Making It Happen

Efforts to connect school, home, and community resources can benefit from embracing a wide spectrum of stakeholders

Besides schools that designate themselves as community schools, many others across the country bring together stakeholders for many purposes, including co-location of services. The range of community entities is not limited to agencies and organizations. It encompasses all human and social capital in a neighborhood (see Exhibit 5). As a result, the nature and scope of stakeholder relationships varies considerably. At community schools, such relationships frequently are referred to as partnerships; however, too often this is a premature characterization. Some don't even constitute a meaningful collaboration.

Bringing together stakeholders is not the same as establishing an effective collaborative. For many sites calling themselves community schools, developing and sustaining an effective collaborative remains an elusive and ongoing challenge.

While it is relatively simple to make informal connections to accomplish specific tasks (e.g., linking and coordinating with a few service agencies or after-school program providers), it is much more difficult to establish and institutionalize a major long-term collaborative partnership focused on system building. (Advocates for school, community, and family connections have cautioned that some so-called collaboratives amount to little more than groups sitting around engaging in "collabo-babble.")

In negotiating agreements to work together, decision makers frequently are asked simply to sign a memorandum of understanding, rather than involving potential collaborators in processes that lead to a comprehensive, informed commitment. Relatedly, some collaboratives rely heavily on positive personal relationships which are vulnerable to the mobility that is common in collaborative groups. The aim in establishing a stable and sustainable collaboration is to develop *working relationships* that transcend changes in personnel. And, when newcomers join, well-crafted procedures must be in place to bring them up to speed.

It's relatively easy to convene a "collaborative" . . . it's developing and maintaining an effective infrastructure that's hard to do.

Effective working relationships require clear role-related responsibilities and an institutionalized infrastructure, including mechanisms for performing tasks, solving problems, and mediating conflict. Also needed are sufficient resources and time for participants to learn and carry out the collaboratives functions effectively.

Our analyses suggest that any vision for developing a *Comprehensive Community School* involves establishing and maintaining a collaborative of stakeholders dedicated to building a comprehensive, multifaceted, cohesive system of interventions that can strengthen youngsters, families, schools, and their communities and significantly reduce problems. Building such a system, of course, requires well-designed systemic changes. To be effective in pursuing such changes in a sustainable way, the collaborative must be institutionalized (e.g., through formalized policy, contract-like agreements, and accountability) and implemented with strategies that address the complexity of schools and community organizations.⁹

Indeed, the hallmark of a school-community collaborative is a formalized agreement among participants to establish an approach for accomplishing goals in a better manner than any of the participants could do alone. A community school is a prime example.

Exhibit 5

A Range of Community Resources that Could Be Part of a Collaborative

County Agencies and Bodies

(e.g., Depts. of Health, Mental Health, Children & Family Services, Public Social Services, Probation, Sheriff, Office of Education, Fire, Service Planning Area Councils, Recreation & Parks, Library, courts, housing)

Municipal Agencies and Bodies

(e.g., parks & recreation, library, police, fire, courts, civic event units)

Physical and Mental Health & Psychosocial Concerns Facilities and Groups

(e.g., hospitals, clinics, guidance centers, Planned Parenthood, Aid to Victims, MADD, "Friends of" groups; family crisis and support centers, helplines, hotlines, shelters, mediation and dispute resolution centers)

Mutual Support/Self-Help Groups

(e.g., for almost every problem and many other activities)

Child Care/Preschool Centers

Post Secondary Education Institutions/Students

(e.g., community colleges, state universities, public and private colleges and universities, vocational colleges; specific schools within these such as Schools of Law, Education, Nursing, Dentistry)

Service Agencies

(e.g., PTA/PTSA, United Way, clothing and food pantry, Visiting Nurses Association, Cancer Society, Catholic Charities, Red Cross, Salvation Army, volunteer agencies, legal aid society)

Service Clubs and Philanthropic Organizations

(e.g., Lions Club, Rotary Club, Optimists, Assistance League, men's and women's clubs, League of Women Voters, veteran's groups, foundations)

Youth Agencies and Groups

(e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, Y's, scouts, 4-H, Woodcraft Rangers)

Sports/Health/Fitness/Outdoor Groups

(e.g., sports teams, athletic leagues, local gyms, conservation associations, Audubon Society)

Community Based Organizations

(e.g., neighborhood and homeowners' associations, Neighborhood Watch, block clubs, housing project associations, economic development groups, civic associations)

Faith Community Institutions

(e.g., congregations and subgroups, clergy associations, Interfaith Hunger Coalition)

Legal Assistance Groups

(e.g., Public Counsel, schools of law)

Ethnic Associations

(e.g., Committee for Armenian Students in Public Schools, Korean Youth Center, United Cambodian Community, African-American, Latino, Asian-Pacific, Native American Organizations)

Special Interest Associations and Clubs

(e.g., Future Scientists and Engineers of America, pet owner and other animal-oriented groups)

Artists and Cultural Institutions

(e.g., museums, art galleries, zoo, theater groups, motion picture studios, TV and radio stations, writers' organizations, instrumental/choral, drawing/painting, technology-based arts, literary clubs, collector's groups)

Businesses/Corporations/Unions

(e.g., neighborhood business associations, chambers of commerce, local shops, restaurants, banks, AAA, Teamsters, school employee unions)

Media

(e.g., newspapers, TV & radio, local access cable)

Family members, local residents, senior citizens groups

Key challenges for those committed to developing comprehensive and equitable community schools include institutionalization of (1) outreach to a wide range of community resources, (2) movement toward shared governance and functions, (3) establishing effective and sustainable collaborative infrastructures, and (4) connecting “families” of community schools to address common concerns and achieve economies of scale.

Outreach

For districts developing community schools, outreach is a continuous process. The process requires effective mechanisms to link and connect with the community entities highlighted in Exhibit 5.

A key facet is a social marketing campaign to *inform and invite participation* of all community stakeholders. Such a campaign highlights the district’s plans for working with the community to develop a cohesive and comprehensive system to address concerns shared by local schools and neighborhoods.

Social marketing is followed by personalized contacts with community leaders and organized entities to mobilize participation, support, and commitment. As the collaborative work develops, special outreach to disenfranchised groups increases. The aim is to mobilize all the human and social capital represented by family members and other home caretakers of the young.

Shared Governance and Functions

Authentic community engagement necessarily entails delegating and sharing responsibility
Ohio Collaborative Commission

A community school that can substantially evolve in sustainable ways requires shared governance (power, authority, decision-making, accountability). This is essential for pursuing the functions related to the shared vision and goals (e.g., it enables weaving together school and community resources and making systemic changes). It is important to ensure that all stakeholders are represented (e.g., school and community policy makers, staff, unions, organized family advocacy groups). While most participants have a primary affiliation elsewhere, working in a school-community collaborative requires committing appropriate time and resources to pursuing the shared vision and common goals.

In developing and evolving a community school, governance must be designed to ensure (a) the vision and mission are effectively pursued, (b) power is equalized so that decision-making appropriately reflects all stakeholder groups and so that all are equally accountable, and (c) all participants share in the workload – pursuing clear roles and functions. Achieving these objectives is a process of both systemic change and ongoing organizational capacity building.

Equalizing power among stakeholders involves well-designed contractual agreements, considerable capacity building, and safeguards to minimize abuse of all three forms of power. Agreements must spell out how prevailing governance and operational infrastructure will be transformed to enable weaving together overlapping institutional missions and resources and using the resources in planned and mutually beneficial ways.

Shared governance requires empowerment of all stakeholder groups and use of processes that equalize power and ensure equity and fairness in decision making. Empowerment is a multifaceted concept. In discussing power, theoreticians distinguish “power over” from “power to” and “power from.” *Power over* involves explicit or implicit dominance over others and events; *power to* is seen as increased opportunities to act; *power from* implies ability to resist the power of others.¹⁰

Major Examples of a Collaborative's Functions Related to a Community School

- Facilitating communication, cooperation, coordination, integration
- Operationalizing the vision of stakeholders into desired functions and tasks
- Enhancing support for and developing a policy commitment to ensure necessary resources are dispensed for accomplishing desired functions
- Advocacy, analysis, priority setting, governance, planning, implementation, and evaluation related to desired functions
- Aggregating data from school and neighborhood to analyze system needs
- Mapping, analyzing, managing, redeploying, and weaving available resources together to enable
- Making recommendations about priorities for use of resources
- Establishing leadership and institutional and operational mechanisms (e.g., infrastructure) for guiding and managing accomplishment of desired functions
- Defining and incorporating new roles and functions into job descriptions
- Building capacity for planning, implementing and evaluating desired functions, including ongoing stakeholder development for continuous learning and renewal and for bringing new arrivals up to speed
- Defining standards, expanding accountability indicators, and ensuring appropriate outcome evaluation
- Social marketing
- Raising funds and pursuing grants

Establishing a Sustainable Collaborative Infrastructure

Pursuing the many functions of a school-community collaborative requires a well-conceived and effective operational infrastructure that is sanctioned and endorsed by governing bodies. Many efforts to collaborate have floundered because too little attention was paid to this reality.¹¹

Key elements of a collaborative's operational infrastructure are mechanisms to steer the work, provide oversight and leadership, plan and implement ongoing capacity building and support, and accomplish specific functions. Exhibit 6 provides a graphic illustration of a prototype for a collaborative's operational infrastructure.

Special note should be taken of the *steering group* and the *staff work group* since these often are given short shrift in establishing collaboratives.

A steering group should consist of high level district and community leaders who are fully committed to ensuring the success of the collaboration – not just initially but over time. Such a group provides status and viability to the collaborative's goals and processes; it drives, supports, and nurtures the work and uses political clout to deal with barriers and solve problems interfering with progress. The steering group ensures development of an operational infrastructure that consists of effective leaders and staff and ad hoc and standing work groups.

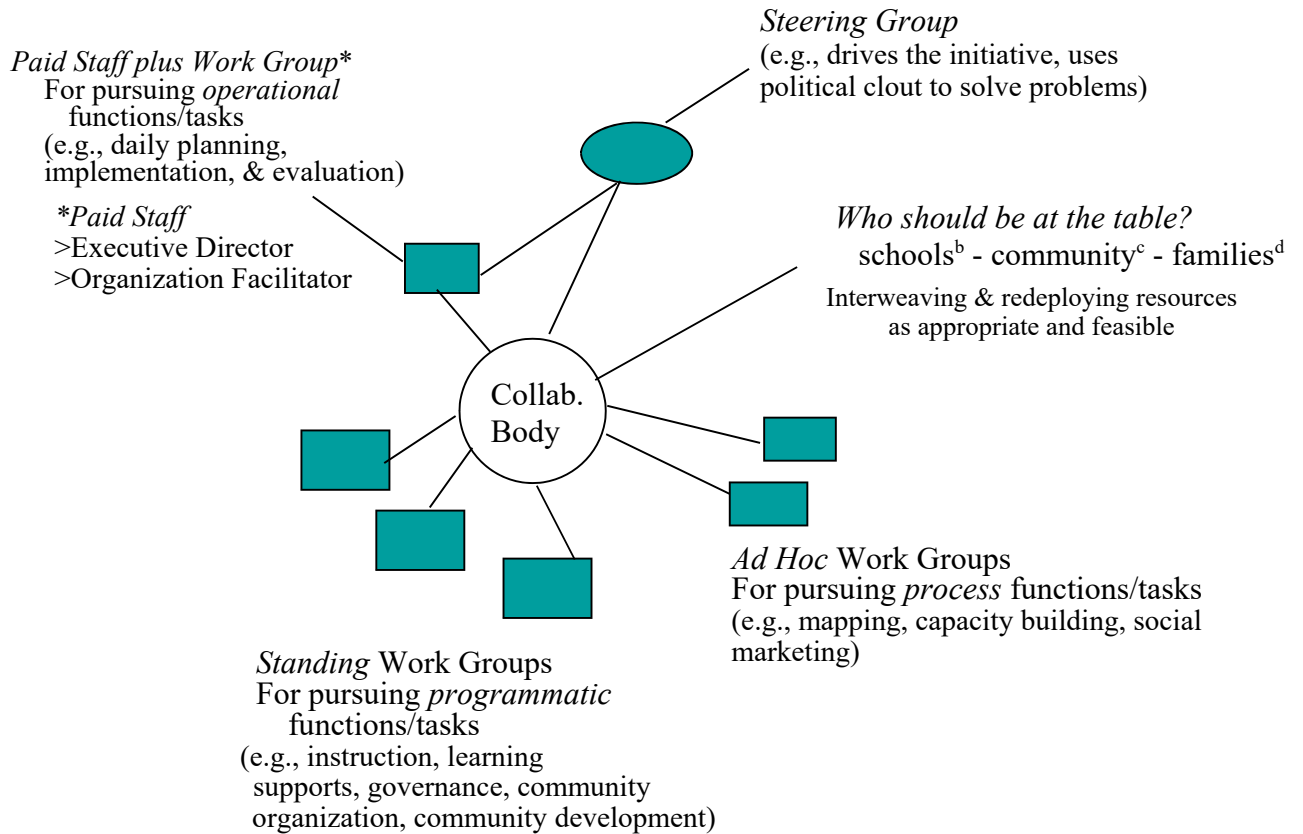
Because collaboratives bring together participants who have a range of other commitments, at least one full time staff member is needed to provide day-by-day coordination, monitoring of progress and reporting to the steering group, and addressing problems when they arise. Another staff member is needed to facilitate the complex system changes and address the related reactions that arise during establishment of a community school.

Properly constituted with school, home, and community representatives, a school-community collaborative can develop an infrastructure of leadership, work groups, and staffing to pursue functions related to a community school (or a "family" of such schools). To be effective, there must be (1) adequate resources (time, space, materials, equipment) to support the infrastructure; (2) capacity building (e.g., training and support) to ensure participants have the competence to perform their roles and functions; (3) authority to act; and (4) ways to address personnel turnover quickly so new staff are brought up to speed. Because work groups usually are the mechanism of choice, particular attention must be paid to enhancing the capabilities and enhancing motivation of all stakeholders as they work together.

We recognize that non of this is easy. A high degree of commitment and relentlessness of effort is required in coping with the myriad political and bureaucratic difficulties involved in making major institutional changes and accomplishing the functions involved, especially when financial resources are sparse.

Exhibit 6

Prototype of a School-Community Collaborative Operational Infrastructure^a



^aConnecting the resources of schools, families, and a wide range of community entities through a formal collaborative facilitates all facets of school improvement. Effectiveness, efficiencies, and economies of scale can be achieved by connecting a “family” (or complex) of schools (e.g., a high school and its feeder schools, schools in the same neighborhood). In a small community, the feeder pattern often is the school district.

^b*Schools.* This encompasses all institutionalized entities that are responsible for formal education (e.g., pre-K, elementary, secondary, higher education). The aim is to draw on the resources of these institutions.

^c*Community entities.* These encompass the many resources (public and private money, facilities, human and social capital) that can be brought to the table (e.g., health and social service agencies, businesses and unions, recreation, cultural, and youth development groups, libraries, juvenile justice and law enforcement, faith-based community institutions, service clubs, media). As the collaborative develops, additional steps must be taken to outreach to disenfranchised groups.

^d*Families.* All families in the community should be represented, not just representatives of organized family advocacy groups. The aim is to mobilize all the human and social capital represented by family members and other home caretakers of the young.

Evolving into a Family of Community Schools

Currently most community schools focus on connecting home and community resources at one school. Because community resources in many neighborhoods are sparse, a school-by-school approach often leads to inequities (e.g., the first school to contact an agency might tie up all that a given agency can bring to local schools).

Schools in the same geographic (catchment) area have a number of shared concerns. Some programs and personnel are (or can be) shared by several neighboring schools, thus minimizing redundancy and reducing costs. Furthermore, the same family often has children attending all levels of schooling at the same time. When such a family has several children in need of special attention, it is neither cost-effective nor a sound approach for each school to work with the family separately.

As community schools evolve, the opportunity is to make collaborative connections encompassing a cluster or “family” of schools. In particular, many natural connections exist in catchment areas serving a high school and its feeder schools.

Some school districts and agencies already pull together several geographically-related clusters to combine and integrate personnel and programs. In a small community, a cluster often is the school district. Several collaboratives may coalesce to increase efficiency and effectiveness and achieve economies of scale. Finally, “systemwide” (e.g., district, city, county) mechanisms can be designed to provide support for what each locality is trying to develop.¹²

With this in mind, a high school feeder pattern or a cluster of schools in the same neighborhood might create a school-community collaborative to develop a “family” of community schools. The collaborative would (a) develop mechanisms that connect the family of schools and (b) play a role in outreaching and connecting community resources equitably to schools across a district.

Working together, a family of community schools can identify and meet common needs, help coordinate and integrate school and community resources, minimize redundancy, deploy resources equitably, achieve economies of scale, and work to evolve into a comprehensive approach.¹³ Such a family of community schools will be especially attractive to community agencies that often don’t have the time or personnel to link with individual schools.

Addressing Barriers to School-Community Collaboration

Not only must community schools be continuously nurtured, facilitated, and supported, special attention must be given to overcoming institutional and personal barriers. A fundamental institutional barrier to effective school-community collaboration is the degree to which efforts to establish such connections are *marginalized* in policy and practice. The extent to which this is the case is seen when existing policy, accountability, leadership, budget, space, time schedules, and capacity-building agendas do not support efforts to use collaborative arrangements effectively and efficiently to accomplish desired results. This may simply be a matter of benign neglect. More often, it stems from a lack of understanding, commitment, and/or capability related to establishing and maintaining a potent infrastructure for working together and sharing resources. Occasionally, lack of support takes the ugly form of forces at work trying to actively undermine collaboration.

Examples of institutional barriers include:

- Policies that mandate collaboration but do not enable the process (e.g., a failure to reconcile differences among participants with respect to the outcomes for which they are accountable; inadequate provision for braiding funds across agencies and categorical programs)
- Policies for collaboration that do not provide adequate resources and time for leadership and stakeholder training and for overcoming barriers to collaboration
- Leadership that does not establish an effective infrastructure, especially mechanisms for steering and accomplishing work/tasks on a regular, ongoing basis
- Differences in the conditions and incentives associated with participation such as the fact that meetings usually are set during the work day which means community agency and school personnel are paid participants, while family members are expected to volunteer their time.

At the personal level, barriers mostly stem from practical deterrents, negative attitudes, and deficiencies of knowledge and skill. These vary for different stakeholders but often include problems related to work schedules, transportation, child care, communication skills, differences in organizational culture, accommodations for language and cultural differences, and so forth.

Concluding Comments

Community Schools and other efforts to develop school-home-community collaborations show significant promise for addressing barriers to learning and teaching and promoting well-being. At the same time, it is well to remember there is great variability among what are called Community Schools. In particular, it is essential to differentiate those that are mainly interested in enhancing connections with community agencies from those committed to a vision for developing a comprehensive community school.

Those that focus primarily on linking community services to schools can exacerbate tendencies to downplay the role of existing school and other community and home resources. They also may contribute to perpetuation of approaches that overemphasize individually prescribed services, further fragment intervention, and underutilize the human and social capital indigenous to every neighborhood. All this is incompatible with transforming public education in ways that address the whole child, strengthen families and neighborhoods, and close the opportunity and achievement gaps.

The success of a school-home-community collaborative in general and community schools in particular is first and foremost in the hands of policy makers. The policy aim should be development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive system of interventions that promotes well-being and addressing barriers to learning and teaching. This will require ending the marginalization and the ad hoc and piecemeal policy making that have characterized efforts to build such a system.

Developing the desired system of interventions requires braiding together many public and private resources. In schools, this means enhancing cost-effectiveness by rethinking intervention and restructuring to combine parallel efforts supported by general funds, compensatory and special education entitlement, grants, and specially funded projects. In communities, the need is for better ways of mobilizing the human and social capital of families and the expertise and resources of agencies and other stakeholders and connecting these resources to each other and to schools.

To these ends, a high priority policy commitment is required to (a) develop and sustain collaboratives, (b) support the strategic weaving together of school and community resources in order to develop comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approaches, and (c) catalyze and support system transformation generate renewal. Such a policy commitment includes revisiting current policies to reduce redundancy and redeploy allocated school and community resources that currently are being used in inefficient and ineffective ways. It also calls for eliciting a high degree of commitment and relentlessness of effort from the many stakeholders interested in developing and evolving community schools

The post pandemic period cries out for better ways to strengthen youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods. While the need is greater than available resources, the opportunity to transform how schools promote well-being and address barriers to learning and teaching is here.

Coda

Attaining more than cosmetic changes in complex organizations such as schools requires understanding how major systemic changes are accomplished and how to deal with the inevitable challenges that arise. In a recent report, we outlined what we have learned in pursuing multifaceted and complex changes in school systems. And we offer specific examples from our work to illustrate lessons learned in pursuing substantive and sustainable systemic changes. See

Implementation Science and Complex School Changes
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/implemreport.pdf>

Notes

- ¹ See *Using American Rescue Plan Funding to Support Full-Service Community Schools*
<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/07/21-0138-ARP-Community-Schools-OMB-and-OS-Approved-071421-1.pdf>
- ² Task Force on Next Generation Community Schools (2021). Addressing education inequality with a next generation of community schools: A blueprint for mayors, states, and the federal government. Washington, DC: Center for Universal Education at Brookings.
<https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Next-generation-community-schools-task-force-report-FINAL.pdf>
- ³ The various points made about the community school movement throughout this report come from the resources cited in the reference list.
- ⁴ Blank, Berg, & Melaville, 2006.
- ⁵ See Adelman & Taylor, 2020a; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2014.
- ⁶ For in depth discussions about moving forward to transform student and learning supports, see the resources the Center has developed to guide planning, including the following three free books:
> *Addressing Barriers to Learning: In the Classroom and Schoolwide*
> *Improving School Improvement*
> *Embedding Mental Health as Schools Change*
All three of these resources can be accessed at no cost at
http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html
- ⁷ See *New Directions for School Counselors, Psychologists, & Social Workers*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/report/framingnewdir.pdf>
- ⁸ Adelman & Taylor, 1997, 2006a, b, 2010, 2018; Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2014; Freeland, Horn, & Butler, 2015; Keith, 1999
- ⁹ Adelman & Taylor, 2003, 2007
- ¹⁰ See Hollander, E.P., & Offermann, L.R. (1990). Power and leadership in organizations: Relationships in transition. *American Psychologist*, 45, 179-189.
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- ¹¹ Goessling, Selvaraj, Fritz, & Pep, 2020; Holme, Castro, Germain, Haynes, Sikes, & Barnes, 2020
- ¹² Adelman & Taylor, 2019
- ¹³ For more on weaving together resources, see *Funding Stream Integration to Promote Development and Sustainability of a Comprehensive System of Learning Supports*
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/fundingstream.pdf> ; *Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success*
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Final_Finance_ExecSum.pdf

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Also see the Center's online clearinghouse Quick Find topic: *Collaboration - School, Community, Interagency* at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qa/p1201_01.htm

