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Pathways to School/Community/Family Partnerships Results: Measures of Success and Student Learning

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Over the past decade, a wide variety of school/community/family partnerships have been organized to improve educational and social outcomes for children and families by connecting collaborative services with school reform efforts. However, the partnerships have come under increasing pressure from a number of fronts. For example, even such well-intentioned efforts as class-size reduction have put a strain on partnerships' efforts by reducing the availability of school facilities.

One of the most serious problems confronting collaboratives is the general lack of evidence about the effects of school/community/family partnerships. Specifically, there is no widely known or accepted data that documents the impacts of these partnerships on student learning outcomes. Some evidence has been published showing impact on student behaviors, such as school attendance, violence, and dropout rates. But data showing an

impact on student learning outcomes, such as student achievement on standardized tests, by and large, has yet to be developed.

Context

The urgency of placing a sharp focus on this complex but essential task of documenting outcomes of school/community/family partnerships is emanating from a variety of forces shaping current school reform initiatives:

- Advocates of standards-based education reform and accountability recognize that students learn both in and outside of school and that communities have a responsibility for students' academic success and to ensure all students are ready to learn.
- Emergent brain research findings are creating even more clarity about the effect of early childhood development on later school and life successes.
- The sporadic, but nationally chilling episodes of violence in

schools have brought home the understanding that students' "connectedness" inside and outside of school walls is everyone's concern.

- The federal devolution of reforms in the welfare and workforces development systems have served to heighten the awareness of local partnership participants of their critical role in fostering economic self-sufficiency for poor families.

These forces are among the most important reasons why more school and community leaders and parents are pushing harder for the development of partnerships. But a major question still remains about what difference they make. Neither the participants in these partnerships nor the policy-makers who often compel them to take on these important social issues can answer this basic question.

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Local Partnerships: Creating Coherent Pathways to Success

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Since 1992, California's Healthy Start state-wide program has provided over 600 grantee sites with money to create collaborative, school–community partnerships (S–CPs) to improve academics, health, family and social functioning in disadvantaged, low-performing schools. The most recent evaluation of Healthy Start student achievement reveals a 25% increase in reading scores and a 50% increase in math scores for students in the lowest quartile of student performance; other evaluations reveal significant improvements in quality of life and well-being of students and their families. These findings make a strong argument for embracing the learning support model as an essential component of public education. Furthermore, the problems faced by Healthy Start and the lessons learned in creating its many successful partnerships are broadly applicable to other school–community initiatives.

The Critical Building Blocks for Creating S–CPs

Experience in organizing and sustaining Healthy Start sites has led to Healthy Start's development of a schema of critical building blocks, an ordered sequence of steps necessary for developing successful sites.

1. COLLABORATION

Effective and lasting partnerships begin with a common belief that collaboratives can accomplish far more together in improving the lives of children, youth, families, and communities

than could the partners working independently. Partners must believe that learning support efforts like Healthy Start should be an essential component of public education, must embrace shared leadership, must be willing to commit resources, and must promote simultaneous reform at the school and at the home sites of the partner agencies.

2. COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

The required second step in the organization of S–CPs is a community assessment. This assessment captures insights of the community from many perspectives—schools, businesses, parents, communities of faith, youth and youth groups, disadvantaged people, and those with means—and identifies the community's sense of its strengths, the challenges it faces, and what it envisions for itself. An assessment might not lead the collaborative where it initially had assumed it would go, but a successful collaborative makes adjustments and thereby establishes community trust, an essential ingredient for sustaining the partnership.

3. SELECTING GOALS

The partners must next select the goals determined to be most important to the community. Healthy Start sites have found that goals chosen by outsiders without community input lead to support strategies that are considered awkward, ineffective, or even offensive by the community.

4. CHOOSING AND IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

After the assessment and selection of appropriate results, implementation strategies must be chosen which reflect the goals and the collaborative model. The biggest challenges are (a) deciding which partnerships will best achieve the desired results: social service agencies, grassroots community centers, recreation programs, education enrichment programs, emergency intervention programs, employment development, parent education, tutoring, counseling, or health; (b) deciding which strategies are best implemented on-campus or off-campus; (c) training staff for the integrated approach; and (d) scheduling, supervising, and managing the various components of the collaboration. Developing a customized, school-compatible case management or care management system that addresses the strategies is the responsibility of the whole collaborative. The partners will also have to collectively agree upon who holds the decision-making responsibility and allow those people to focus on what is best for the children and families, not just the system.

5. INTEGRATING AND TRACKING THE WORK

Integrating and tracking the work present substantial challenges to Healthy Start. Because multiple sites are often involved, scheduling, staff development, training, supervision, monitoring, and collecting data are complex tasks,

complicated by the need to integrate different professional cultures. Also, the home or partner agency might be subject to other pressing concerns that may compromise its contribution to the partnership. Furthermore, deciding who, how, and when to track data that accurately captures the progress of all is not simple. For some sites, finding the time or resources to analyze data that would enable them to leverage local support—and sustainability—are substantial barriers.

6. MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT THE WORK

So that adjustments may be made, Healthy Start sites annually evaluate their partnerships according to the entire cycle of building blocks outlined here. Collaborative partners must continually be making decisions about the answers to a few key questions:

- Is this what we came together to do?
- Is this what the school–community wants?
- Is our plan working and how do we know?
- What strategic changes must be made for it to work better?
- How can we tie this good work to sustainable funding?

Defining Pathways

One of the most serious challenges to a Healthy Start program occurs when its assessment reveals community priorities different from those agencies are willing to fund. A partnership may then feel the need to “tweak” its program to remain eligible for funding, but, as a result, the site loses the focus on its original, meaningful goals, leading to a fragmented or even ineffective program. Consequently, Healthy Start now requires grantees to include

community input in all aspects of their planning, implementation, and governance. Program evaluations must reflect one category, student outcomes; the site determines what other outcomes it will evaluate.

Partnerships and the Educational Standards Movement

Healthy Start—a program of the California Department of Education—has connected its work to the educational standards movement by requiring its sites annually to submit data on student academic progress. We have strong evidence that Healthy Start works in low-performing schools, but not all of the highest level decision makers are considering learning support as a remedy for such schools. California’s narrow focus on test scores and class size reduction—however laudable these proposed remedies may appear to be—ignore all of the non-cognitive factors that contribute to academic success: They do not address the underlying personal, family, and community barriers to academic achievement. Some underperforming Healthy Start schools have even de-emphasized their alliance in order to focus on “teaching to the test” or have evicted Healthy Start sites to make way for more classrooms.

State Policy and Financing Healthy Start Partnerships

The notion still prevails among legislators that a successful site will sustain itself after the initial grant period ends. Consequently, no sustained state-level funding for Healthy Start sites extends past the 3–5 year operational grant cycle, and sites must consider the

sustainability from the inception of the project as they compete with growing numbers of sites for shrinking public and private funds. Partial sustainability has been attempted by gaining reimbursements through California’s school-based Medicaid plan (Medi-Cal), but the fear of Medicaid fraud at state and federal levels keeps promising reimbursement strategies from being effectively implemented.

Other promising state funding available to Healthy Start comes in the well-funded After School Learning and Safe Neighborhoods Partnership grants, but these grants are not designed necessarily to fund the systemic reform envisioned in S–CPs like Healthy Start. Despite the fact that Healthy Start regularly offers informal after-school programs, no automatic linkage exists between the two grant programs at the local level; in some cases the two programs operate out of different offices at the same site.

Beyond these technical assistance challenges posed to S–CPs, many of our Healthy Start sites are also challenged by competition with other programs focused on youth development, family support, asset development, community education, or community organizing. Because Healthy Start sites can embrace all of these, sharing core principles with each, advocates for these approaches could advantageously view Healthy Start as an ally rather than as a competitor, but the sustainability of short-term grant funding is a constant pressure that sometimes forces programs to focus on concept survival rather

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Seizing New Opportunities at the Intersection of Schools and Communities

What Do We Know? What Can We Learn? What Should We Question?

Lisbeth B. Schorr, Harvard University

The landscape at the intersection of schools and communities has been dramatically transformed by four powerful new trends: (a) escalating pressures for improved school achievement, (b) demands for evidence of improved outcomes for all social investments, (c) concern for the safety of children at school and during unsupervised non-school hours, and (d) substantially more public and philanthropic resources supporting activities that promise to improve academic outcomes.

In the context of these trends, five lessons emerge from recent experience with community efforts to strengthen and expand support for youngsters, their families and neighborhoods, and their schools.

Accountability, School Achievement, and Social Value

First, we must be willing to be held accountable for results. To obtain the level of public funding warranted for work at the intersection of schools and communities, all participants must respect the public's demand for scorekeeping. It hardly matters whether these demands arise because a cynical public has decided that good intentions are not enough or because an enlightened public wants decision-making to become more rational. Either way, we must be thinking more rigorously about why we do what we do, what ends we hope to accomplish, and how we can document our successes in achieving those ends.

Our willingness to be held accountable for results comes with

an important caveat: It is equally important that those involved in community initiatives commit themselves only to promises they know they can keep rather than trying to tie their accomplishments to school achievement. The initiatives that make contributions to the community certainly do not want to seem to be failing when they are, in fact, succeeding. Leaders of these initiatives should insist on being held accountable for the valued purposes that they *can* accomplish.

In addition, a review of the outcomes identified by funders, policy analysts, practitioners, scholars, and community coalitions as goals for initiatives operating at the boundaries of schools and communities suggests it is time to squelch the notion that all school-based interventions should be judged by their impact on student achievement. Too many other socially valued purposes are, in fact, being pursued—and perhaps achieved. This review also illuminates the importance of interim indicators. The availability of *opportunities* for children to be enrolled in preschool programs or to make connections with health services or caring adults can be documented long before children experience higher rates of school-readiness, good health, or higher hopes for a better future.

Human service agencies and youth development initiatives should be able to be explicit about their contributions, whether they are services that respond to the child who comes to school hungry or sick or abused or in need of

eyeglasses, or are efforts to build social capital or to produce the “relational trust” between schools and families that must precede other reforms in the most alienated communities. But even the finest supports and connections are unlikely to result in improved school achievement unless there are also changes in the classroom.

Improved Teaching

Second, we must take explicit account of the evidence that improved school achievement depends primarily on improved instructional practices. All pathways to improved achievement (especially among student populations that have typically lagged behind) include significant improvements in the classroom, reflecting profound changes in instructional practice.

The removal of nonacademic barriers to student achievement may, especially in the most depleted schools and neighborhoods, be a necessary condition of improved school achievement but is probably never a sufficient condition. Non-educators and the community at large can play a crucial role in removing the nonacademic barriers to student achievement, but their claims will not gain legitimacy by being inflated.

Make Better Use of Schools

Third, efforts to make better use of non-school time, school facilities, and school resources will be supported by the public even if they cannot demonstrate their value in higher student

achievement. It is worth providing opportunities for expanded out-of-school experiences because they enrich children's lives. Keeping children safe, mobilizing needed services, and providing children with opportunities for constructive use of free time are valued by parents and other citizens even if their impact on school achievement cannot, at least in the short-run, be proven. Middle-class children growing up in resource-rich neighborhoods are routinely exposed to opportunities for experiential learning, travel, recreation, the arts, and other experiences that bring pleasure and a sense of mastery. Deliberate and concerted efforts are required if poor children in the inner city are to experience similar opportunities.

Increasing Our Learning Capacity

Fourth, we must strengthen our capacity to learn from current efforts. The knowledge base that undergirds work at the intersection of schools and communities is not very sturdy. The lines connecting interventions and outcomes are still shrouded in mystery.

The mystery is sustained in part because it serves our purposes—at least in the short run. If everything connects to everything else in unspecified and unknown ways, we can get support for our diverse activities simply by promising that whatever we do will help raise test scores. But this victory will be short-lived because we probably won't be able to deliver on our promise. Whether because our contributions will be too marginal or too late in showing up to be detected, because we don't have the right outcome measures, or because the

value of our contributions does not, in fact, lie in higher test scores, we risk failing the very test of effectiveness that we, however inadvertently, agreed to be measured by.

Because of the radical changes in what the public expects of schools today, and because of the many forces that have depleted earlier informal sources of support for school learning, new needs for more formal supports have surfaced over the last two decades. It is tempting to think that revitalized services and supports could substitute for massive efforts now needed to fundamentally reform the core of public education in order to strengthen what teachers actually do in the classroom. Growing evidence suggests they cannot.

But when we look at what we can do at the intersection of schools and communities, the prospects are golden. We have now accumulated considerable experience in using schools as the setting around which to build up the services and supports whose absence can be barriers to children achieving their full potential. It is no longer necessary for every community to "start at square one" to invent its own unique response.

While solutions crafted centrally and imposed from outside are unlikely to work, local communities should not have to act as though there were no generalizable wisdom based on past research and experience. This requires the field to become much clearer about the pathways that lead to the outcomes we seek, and to strengthen our capacity to learn from the rich array of activities now under way. By building on multiple ways of knowing, we will

be able to draw on a far broader spectrum of information about past and current experience than is conventionally considered to constitute credible knowledge. We should focus less on individual projects, programs, and even best practices, and more on building the pathways that link the crucial elements to one another. We should take the grab bag of implicit hypotheses that underlie our current efforts, and organize them into testable propositions to be systematically confirmed, modified, or refuted.

Best Solutions and Priorities

Fifth, we must identify what we need to do together, what we can best do separately, what the trade-offs are, and what our priorities should be. We know that the most important results we are pursuing cannot be achieved by single, narrowly circumscribed interventions. Most desired outcomes require multiple inputs from multiple sources over a sustained period of time. Yet we still fund, provide services, maintain accountability, and conduct evaluations in circumscribed pieces.

So it's tempting to look to collaboration and integration as the answer. Understanding how hard true collaborations are, how time-consuming, how energy draining, should we not ask, when and for what functions they are worth it? Rather than assuming that partnerships are always the answer, we should ask under what circumstances partnerships are the best strategy, and face up to the

(Opportunities, continued on p. 12)

Linking Child Development Knowledge With Partnership Evaluation

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The healthy growth of a child is marked not only by development of the brain and nervous system and other obvious aspects of physical maturation but also by development in the linguistic, cognitive, social and relational, psychological and emotional, and moral and ethical domains. The different theories of child development all agree that there are critical pathways to optimal, positive growth in these domains; and understanding the factors that promote development along these pathways can help educators and partners devise strategies that enhance school achievement.

Focal Points for Partnerships

Based on these development pathways, I see three focal points for partnerships: (a) *relationships*—providing nurturing support so that a child feels secure and develops the skills and internal resources to accept, develop, and maintain relationships; (b) *experience*—providing opportunities for children to have continuity of learning experiences between the school, home, and community; and (c) *exposure*—repeating content in cycles that reinforce learning over extended periods of time.

RELATIONSHIPS

Research concerning attachment underscores the importance of nurturing relationships and their enduring impact on a child's ability to form and sustain both peer and adult relationships, two behaviors central to school success. Children

who are able to form positive relationships with their teachers, peers, and other caring adults are more likely to persist in school and to succeed academically. Conversely, children who do not have these relationships are often disenchanted with schooling—even as early as the fourth grade. Furthermore, studies focusing on drop-out prevention and juvenile delinquency have shown that social isolation, lack of parental involvement, and lack of empathy from teachers and peers are predictors of school failure. Given the effects of positive relationships, partnerships should be designed to promote meaningful interactions with children and to strengthen a child's ability to accept and form such relationships. There are several strategies to promote this development.

Providing modeling for prosocial behavior. The more children see and experience positive relationships, the better able they will be to negotiate, develop, and maintain similar relationships and interactions. Partners must also model positive problem solving so that children will learn how to confront issues and effectively resolve them. In addition, adults need to be available to assist children in processing their problems and to help them reflect on the strategies they use for resolution.

Providing "social security." Children look to parents, teachers, and other adults to determine how to evaluate new social situations. Children need to be exposed to a

wide variety of social situations to cultivate confidence in their own independent ventures, but they need to have available a stable base of adult support to provide guidance and to aid them in processing these new experiences and encounters.

Developing social competence. Family and community partners can help students overcome social isolation and develop social competence for learning. Many programs target students' self-esteem as an important personal development goal, but few link the esteem-building activities with the competencies needed for academic success. Social competence for learning has become particularly important recently as teachers move away from direct instruction models to collaborative and cooperative models of learning. Students need the skills that allow them to engage in group activities and that simultaneously promote academic success. Skills such as consensus building, listening, perspective-taking, and sharing all need to be developed so that children will be prepared to participate in sophisticated group tasks. Family support service partnerships can play an important role in teaching parents how to develop and model these important skills for their children.

EXPERIENCE

Growth in one domain of development does not, of course, happen in isolation from the others. Just as the neural and

synaptic integration occurs in the brain, the developmental domains also integrate—a consequence of both nature and nurture—allowing a child to accomplish particular milestones of development. Children, therefore, need to be presented with integrated and thematic curricula that prepare them for and capitalize on those developmental milestones, curricula which also enable them to perceive relationships among content areas.

To support these efforts, partnerships need to be aware of the curriculum and the thematic units and to connect their work to the curriculum goals. The integrated approach is also applicable to partnerships providing social and health services. Students need to see relationships between their social and behavioral functioning and academic learning.

Establishing continuity in a child's experiences at home, school, and community is another key to sound development. The brain's capacity for recalling information is based on making associations, practice, and experience; and family and community partnerships can provide these critical linkages and reinforcements, enabling the child to understand that learning is continuous, occurring in and outside the classroom.

EXPOSURE

The interactions of the developmental domains and the progress a child makes do not occur in systematic stages; rather, development is flexible, and recent studies on the brain's growth cycles suggest that both behavior and the brain change in patterns

that repeat several times between birth and adulthood. These findings suggest that children have multiple opportunities to learn and relearn skills in cycles that reshape neural networks that were not developed during earlier cycles.

These cycles produce a new capacity for thinking and learning that appears to be grounded in an expanded and reorganized neural network. Full development in thinking and learning at each new level emerges gradually over long periods of time, enabling children to show a cluster of changes over several years. Thus children need to have many opportunities to learn and to reinforce the learning of new skills and content in non-linear and non-sequential ways. Partners can provide opportunities for this reinforcement to take place by providing many activities that correspond to learning objectives and that give students the opportunity to make connections.

Linking Development to School-Community Partnerships

The opportunities to know children, to assist and enhance their development rests largely in the hands of the teachers and parents and other supporting adults. Thus, schools must begin to view themselves as "child development centers" because so much of what a child must master is dependent upon developmental readiness. To attain this view, school/community/family partnerships—which are often more adult-centered than child-centered—must do more to promote child development. Although meeting the needs of parents often improves their child's ability to learn, it is essential also to

help parents develop the skills needed to both advocate for and aid the development of their own children and their children's friends.

A school must have goals and strategies for promoting children's learning and development, but to date, few plans for school reform are guided by our knowledge of child development. A school's reform plan should be developed through an analysis of (a) all the programs, activities, and strategies a school provides during the course of a year; (b) the special characteristics of the students these strategies are intended to address; and (c) the extent to which all of the programs and activities, including those supported by partnerships, target a particular developmental pathway in order to promote students' learning. These child-centered planning analyses will allow schools to determine redundancy or fragmentation in the overall programming for students and enable schools to determine what resources they will need and what partnerships will be able to provide them. Without this articulation, partners will be deemed peripheral or, worse, working at cross-purposes as they compete for students' attention.

Finally, students must understand the school's goals, the developmental milestones they are expected to reach and the ways in which these partners will help them reach those goals. This understanding is important because children need to make connections between supportive resources and activities at the school and their academic

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Promoting Community Partnerships and Active Learning through Federal Policy

Jane Knitzer, Columbia University

Across the country, states and communities are mobilizing to focus attention on young children and families, and many benefits could accrue from an integration of community–school efforts with early childhood initiatives. Ample evidence from research supports such integration. Recent studies demonstrate the importance of early cognitive stimulation and early emotional development, development promoted by a nurturing, reciprocal relationship with a primary caregiver and reinforced by others. But for too many infants and toddlers, this relationship gets off to a poor start, with parents who, because of their own circumstances, place their children in jeopardy. To address this need for better early childhood programs, this paper explores ways to promote the incipient expansion of school–community partnerships (S–CPs) into early childhood learning through maximizing federal policy and employing other new strategies.

The Case for Expanding S–CPs into Early Childhood

Research and comprehensive, high quality early childhood programs, such as the Abecedarian project, suggest that intervening early to strengthen development and parent-child relationships results in long-term positive impact on children, including significantly greater academic achievement, cognitive and language skills, and fewer behavioral problems than evidenced by children in control groups. However, for children in

family childcare or center-based care, poor quality is the norm, with the worst care documented for infants and toddlers. As more welfare-to-work parents take low-paying jobs, greater numbers of young children are spending more time in childcare and early learning environments; currently, about half of young children are in informal, unregulated child care. Poor quality childcare is a corollary of poverty, and, with a stunning 42% of all young children growing up in poverty—roughly half of those in extreme poverty—the implications are ominous and pressing. Research has long documented powerful relationships between poverty and poor academic achievement and other risk factors, but primarily in older children. Now there is evidence that poverty is even more harmful for young children, and the more extreme the poverty, the more harmful. Clearly, waiting until these children hit the schools is waiting too long for developing an integrated community response with a set of outcomes that reflect cooperative ventures by educators, human service personnel, and other community groups and family members.

The federal Educate America Act now mandates school readiness as the top priority; and the objectives of school readiness, as defined by the National Education Goals Panel, include (a) providing universal access to quality preschool programs that prepare children for school; (b) enabling parents to act as a child’s first teachers, with access to

training and support; (c) providing nutrition, exercise, and health care to ensure a child is optimally prepared to learn; and (d) reducing the numbers of low-birthweight babies through enhanced prenatal care. The focus on “school readiness” has directed attention to the development of conceptual frameworks that can capture the complexity denoted by the term, from child factors reflecting social-emotional, cognitive, physical readiness, to family factors, to school factors. Although many people advocate a narrow child focus or even a child-specific focus, there are also strong voices arguing for community-wide indicators that can be used to drive strategic thinking and collaboration.

For all these reasons, S–CPs need to include attention to young children that goes beyond just having a Head Start program on site, or even a family resource center. Current programs throughout the country indicate a solid base on which to build. In 1998, 24 states were funding parent education and family support programs for infants and toddlers; 34 states were funding programs for preschool-aged children. These programs were sometimes home-based and sometimes included parent education, family support, and family literacy initiatives; sometimes they funded communities or schools in designing their own mix of supports for families with young children. In addition, half the states reported funding family support and parent

education strategies for children from birth to 6 years. These programs establish a clear framework for joining the early childhood agenda with early learning goals and with S-CPs.

Currently, only six states have made young children a high policy priority and mounted multiple strategies promoting their well-being. Most efforts focus on family support or on early learning, but, with the exception of some home-visiting and family literacy programs and Head Start, most programs don't attempt to integrate an array of services. This lack of comprehensive services and family support—exactly those supports that supplement a learning focus in the community-school vision—is why S-CPs could be so powerful an asset to the early childhood community. Even as youth development is now a part of the community-schools vision, so child and family development should be, too.

Building and Sustaining S-CPs

The search for sustainable reform has now shifted its approach from “process is all” to “results is all.” Such a mentality gives little thought to what can achieve those results and provides no opportunity for partners to build a shared vision or to think systematically about links between goals, strategies, and outcomes. Because of this result-oriented focus, funds are seldom made available to develop the kind of working relationship among the partners that would sustain the partnerships over time. Furthermore, political and educational rhetoric, and sometimes legislative reality, creates new pressures to de-

emphasize the many pathways to real educational reform and to focus exclusively on achieving simple goals. Concerns about teaching to the test or narrow visions of school readiness (e.g., knowing 10 letters of the alphabet) are real. The challenge for S-CPs is to use outcomes to broaden the vision of how to get to real learning, real family support, and real community collaboration to change the “learning life” of students.

Building and sustaining meaningful cross-agency collaboration with a vision that includes strong family involvement, linking formal and informal supports, and enhancing educational outcomes are not easy tasks. The following dicta seem critical for developing and sustaining S-CPs:

- Strong and sustained leadership is key.
- Building a shared vision for change is labor intensive and requires a mix of clear vision, achievable goals, and opportunistic risk-taking.
- Integrating family, student, and teacher voices is both challenging and essential.
- Engaging broad community support and involvement, including business support, can make a difference in political and fiscal sustainability.
- S-CPs must take on the characteristics of the local culture; they are unique enterprises.

Federal Policies and the Promotion of S-CPs

Federal assistance can help overcome challenges in three key areas: integrating early learning more deeply into the S-CP

movement, expanding the leadership and vision of S-CPs to more communities, and assessing results in a way that holds schools and communities accountable for students' outcomes and also provides information about sustaining and deepening the partnerships.

Goals 2000, Title I schoolwide programs, and other federal actions have promoted greater flexibility than was previously permitted in using federal funds and in consolidating resources. This flexibility is not yet, however, widely used to promote S-CPs specifically or educational reform in general. Furthermore, benefiting from this flexibility, especially across programs, remains enormously complex. One other emerging and not yet fully developed characteristic of recent federal legislation is the use of incentives and performance bonuses to reward states which exceed federally framed goals. These changing perspectives on crafting federal policy offer new possibilities for how the community-schools movement might promote federal policies that can move this complex and crucial agenda forward. Here, in the hope of stimulating debate, are some principles for federal legislation, along with some specific recommendations, particularly related to the early learning challenge:

1. Federal legislation might create incentives to promote systems-level development that include S-CPs. Incentives can help existing

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Outcomes and Accountability in School–Community Partnerships

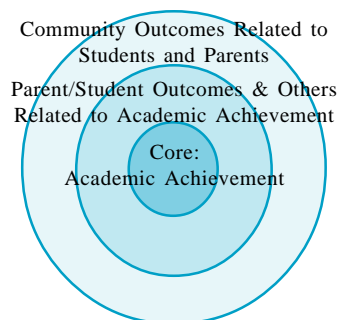
Sid Gardner, California State University, Fullerton

In our most troubled and inadequate schools and communities where many students suffer adverse life situations, no “laser-like focus” on learning can achieve improved academic outcomes by ignoring outcomes which are prerequisites to learning, such as improved health or behavior. School–community partnerships (S–CPs) offer one reform model that seeks to improve non-academic supports to learning. But not all S–CPs are created equally. At its inception, every S–CP must reach a consensus on the relative importance of non-educational outcomes, which may be (a) regarded as essentially marginal, a distraction from, perhaps even a detriment to improving academic achievement; (b) regarded as co-equal to education reforms in achieving better learning outcomes; (c) supported proportionately to the extent that non-educational barriers to learning characterize a given school or district.

When there is consensus that the S–CP’s focus on non-academic outcomes should either be co-equal or proportional to academic outcomes, then the relative importance of classroom performance and interventions aimed at the external causes of classroom achievement gaps must be negotiated. In that discussion, schools are correct to emphasize the academic outcomes, but schools’ partners are also correct to emphasize how their efforts can make a

major contribution to academic performance and other goals in the lives of the students and their parents. An overarching concern must be identifying where overlapping goals can form the “glue” that cements the partnership. For example, schools must recognize that reaching academic goals may be tied to health-related issues. At this point, the partners must establish accountability by further negotiations toward a consensus on what outcomes should determine success and what levels of attainment indicate a project should be replicated—two fundamental, “shared outcomes,” the goals of the project. Partners can then determine what outcomes indicators will be used as fair measures of progress and how data will be collected and reported.

The relationships between the types of outcomes aimed for by most S–CPs may be suggested by three concentric circles.



The innermost circle represents core school-based outcomes: achievement (test scores), attendance, and school completion/graduation rates. The middle circle represents outcomes still achievement

related but no longer restricted to what happens in the classroom: parent involvement, help with homework, reading to elementary school-aged children, and parent engagement with teachers in responding to behavior problems in the classroom. The third circle represents community building and youth development and may include schools’ success in attracting community volunteers, children’s health coverage in the immediate neighborhood, and the effects of early childhood programs that aim at school readiness goals. The outer circles also represent a progressive reduction of accountability for academic achievement. Circumstances—such as strong or strained relations with the community—will dictate the extent to which the outer circles of outcomes can be goals of the partnership; academic achievement may be all the partnership can handle. These circles also suggest the range of options S–PCs may pursue, and because of this range, universal standards should not be specified for S–CPs in the same way we may agree upon, for example, math standards.

Process Outcomes

The partnership’s structure and methods of operating can be specified and used as guides for negotiating locally determined student and family outcomes. Specifically, the following are indicators of the “collaborative capacity” of the partnership:

1. Data-driven policy: the assessment of students' needs outside the classroom as a basis for determining which partners are most needed to build effective learning supports.
2. Roles for parents that go beyond conventional "parent involvement."
3. A commitment by the members of the partnership to redirect their own resources rather than relying solely upon grant funding.
4. Efforts to strengthen collaborative members' information systems in order to measure better the progress toward shared outcomes.
5. An effort to address equity issues in both the content and process of the collaborative's activities.

The fifth of these indicators—equity issues—is inherently controversial, but tracking subgroups may reveal worsening conditions within a total population showing overall success. Seeking to respond to conditions which are not universal is a real test of the partnership's accountability for improved results for the students who need the most help.

Accountability

Accountability issues are driven by (a) the types of agencies and their appropriate goals, (b) the collaborative's capacity to evolve from lower to higher stages of cooperation, and (c) the willingness of partners to negotiate shared outcomes concerning academic achievement as opposed to other goals.

THE PARTNERS

Four different kinds of partners exist, and each has a

different approach to working with and in schools and a particular set of funding sources, and therefore different accountability. Public city, county, and regional agencies, such as child protective services agencies, receive institutionalized, recurring funding. These agencies are accountable to legislatures, resulting in a compliance mentality which emphasizes rules of spending money. Major not-for-profit agencies, such as Boys and Girls Clubs or children's hospitals, rely on United Way, contracts with public agencies, and sometimes fee income. Some of these not-for-profits have developed in-depth outcomes measures. Community-based agencies are more informally funded than the not-for-profits, and they range widely in accountability, from those that have used outcomes to a larger group which still measures success based on the number of clients contacted. Organizations representing parents frequently have no formal budget and typically have no explicit outcomes framework.

EVALUATIONS OF S-CPs

S-CPs need to negotiate agreements to provide data on student performance to external agencies—or vice versa, but problems evaluating S-CPs are manifold. The securing of outcomes data is often crippled by public agencies' information systems, so schools often choose partners according to their capacity to provide and use data—important ingredients of a good partnership. Another important choice related to accountability and evaluation of the S-CPs is selecting among the available outcomes frameworks and the

emerging outcomes software. Some of these frameworks are better than others at orienting new outcomes planners to the broad choices they face; other frameworks are better at providing user-friendly data entry than grappling with what to measure and why.

Current data present a tenuous estimation of cooperatives' impact because of their inexperience in evaluating outcomes and the lack of comparability among the variety of S-CPs. What is most needed is a "tagging" capacity for student files, enabling schools to report to external agencies how their interventions may be affecting academic performance, attendance, and behavior. Without this follow-up and monitoring capacity, neither the school nor the outside agencies will have regular feedback on the impact of their programs.

A final issue in existing evaluations of S-CPs is the extent to which parents and community members are the focal points of the evaluation. We must find better ways of measuring community contributions to the schooling—and the preparation for schooling—which means better assessment instruments and qualitative methods that can verify what changes in behavior are really happening. For example, it is wishful thinking to assume that because adults participate in parenting programs, they are becoming better parents. The curriculum, the instructors, and the parents must be united in a common enterprise in which real changes in parenting can be assessed—and not **(Outcomes, continued on p.12)**

(Outcomes, continued from p. 11)

by perfunctory pre- and post-tests that elicit programmed answers.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE FOUR STAGES OF COLLABORATION

A four-part approach to the stages of collaboration distinguishes between the initial stages of *information exchange* and *joint projects*, and the third and fourth stages of *changing the rules* and *changing the system*. As long as it is working at the level of a project, a coalition can get along without emphasizing accountability. When the collaborative begins to change the rules of service—because of changes in its shared outcomes or as it attempts to scale up the operation—accountability issues

become more important. That is because changing the rules should not be done for convenience but to achieve different or better outcomes than the old rules permit.

When the collaborative is working on changing the rules and moving from the project level of collaborative operations to going to scale, both client and systems outcomes matter. Assessing the relations among the partners may be as important as assessing the impact on students and families. Tracking the efforts made by S-CPs to change the rules, enabling agencies to work together more effectively, can help ensure that “fixing the kids” does not always become the sole focus, with “fixing the institutions” being ignored.

Conclusion

That much-discussed “laser-like focus” on academic achievement may be appropriate if we define academic achievement broadly to mean both the changes within the classroom that enhance learning and those outside the classroom that prepare and sustain the project of learning. If communities opt for cooperative reforms, which currently offer the best hope for reducing the barriers to learning for our most severely disadvantaged students, S-CPs will need to negotiate a series of issues to reach a consensus on general goals, specific outcomes and the measures of accountability that define their progress.



(Local, continued from p. 3)

than on what works best for children.

At workshops, the state does coach local Healthy Start sites on evaluation procedures and on using results to leverage long-term sustainability. Sustainability rates among Healthy Start sites, once as high as 95%, appear to be slipping slightly to around 90% after 8 years. While this sustainability rate is still astoundingly high for a short-term funded grant, one must ask: How long can the rate hold as new sites (over 100 every year) compete for limited outside resources?

These issues in fostering and financing Healthy Start and other S-CPs indicate a need for leadership development for S-CPs’ leaders. Currently, technical assistance funding creates and sustains the planning and implementation of sites, but

does not necessarily train leaders to champion the learning support model. Healthy Start provides local leadership development, but this training is insufficient. Funding commitments to create strong leadership development are clearly dependent on funding commitments to first sustain programs. Why would a legislature or a foundation fund leadership development to champion a concept or approach that is still struggling to gain universal acceptance and sustainable funding?

California’s schools and those of most other states are being pressed to improve test scores, and we know a substantial remedy lies in the implementation of S-CPs like Healthy Start. Nevertheless, policymakers are still reluctant to make similar programs automatically available to all low- or under-performing

schools; they are even reluctant to provide the sustained funding that established programs require. Bootstrapping may be philosophically sound for American capitalism, but it is neither healthy nor fiscally sound for America’s children.



(Opportunities, continued from p. 5)

trade-offs in allocating limited time and attention.

The fundamental conclusion to be drawn is that we need to become more precise about what we are trying to achieve and shrink what Paul Hill calls our “zones of wishful thinking.” The task of reforming and expanding services may indeed be competitive with academic tasks and is probably not best addressed by schools. By

contrast, evidence that schools in depleted neighborhoods are most likely to succeed when they emphasize rigorous academic expectations and convey to students a sense of being known and cared for should stimulate new efforts to find ways of making action on both of those fronts compatible and not competitive. ❧

(Development, continued from p. 7)

learning. In doing so, students play an active role in their own development and learning.

Implications for Evaluation of Partnerships

Partnerships and associated activities must be closely aligned with the school's academic and developmental goals so that the outcomes expectations of all the partners are congruent. The partnership should know which of the developmental pathways it will focus on to achieve those outcomes. This knowledge will enable partners to generate and test hypotheses about the potential impact of the intervention. Although it may be difficult to tease out the effects of a single partnership on outcomes, it should be feasible to look at the interaction effects and to compare the experiences of students exposed to different learning opportunities.

Since we know that development is not a sequential process, non-linear evaluation methods should be designed to assess a students' progress. Few models exist. A viable strategy would be to examine the evidence that exists supporting the child-centered thrust in the school and to develop new measures from this evidence. ❧

(Policy, continued from p. 9)

programs—such as Head Start—and new ones direct their attention to include community-based initiatives for young children and families, and encourage integration with any ongoing school–community efforts. The incentives might consist of implementation and bonus funds for initiatives that show evidence of systems change and improved community indicators and educational outcomes.

2. Legislation should continue to promote flexibility in existing federal education programs and more consistency in the ways flexibility is defined across programs.
3. Federal agencies can promote among themselves easier resource sharing, better strategic planning, and new initiatives.
4. The federal government, both through legislation and agency (especially inter-agency) initiatives, should promote a strong research and development agenda to facilitate more effective learning.

Conclusion

Federal policy alone is not sufficient to change schooling in America to meet the vision and goals set forth by the S–CPs. But it clearly has played a key role in helping to develop the S–CPs of the late 20th century, and it can, and must, continue to play an important role in shaping and implementing the vision of S–CPs for the future. ❧

(Pathways, continued from p. 1)

This key question remains unanswered not because of an unwillingness to grapple with how to determine school partnership outcomes. Most state and local partnerships have conducted evaluations and examined outcomes. The “theory of change” approach, for example, which has been constructed over a number of years by evaluation researchers working in concert with the Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives for Children and Families at The Aspen Institute, is among the most thoughtful and systematic. Further, one of the best efforts at documenting partnership results came from SRI's (formerly the Stanford Research Institute) evaluation of the California Healthy Start program. SRI's first evaluation report was issued in the spring of 1999, and it contains solid evidence about Healthy Start's positive impacts on schools and communities in general, as well as on student achievement outcomes specifically. However, for a myriad of political, philosophical, and policy reasons, forging a common vision about what outcomes matter and how best to measure them remains one of the most vexing stumbling blocks in this field.

A National Invitational Conference

As a result of this perplexing question and other issues confronting partnerships, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), through the aegis of its program, Ensuring Student Success through Collaboration Network, and the

(Pathways, continued on p. 14)

(Pathways, continued from p. 13)

Laboratory for Student Success (LSS), The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education jointly convened a national invitational conference, "Pathways to School/Community/Family Partnership Results," held in Los Angeles, CA, April 12-15, 2000. The conference was designed to accomplish two key goals: (1) fostering a greater understanding of the existing measures of success of school/community/family partnerships; and (2) building a consensus around a few core measures of success and approaches for developing pathways for measuring these agreed upon results. Therefore, LSS and CCSSO proposed the following objectives for the conference:

1. articulation of why "moving beyond collaboration to results is essential";
2. formulation of a definition of pathways to success for school/community/family partnerships;
3. strategic examination of effective approaches for engaging and sustaining family members' involvement in their child(ren)'s school and community activities that are essential to improving student achievement;
4. strategic examination of elementary school-level partnerships with community and family stakeholders that have some existing measures of success in general, and student learning outcome measures in particular;

5. examination of how federal and state resources could be more strategically aligned to promote and sustain school/community/family partnerships; and
6. development of recommendations for creating a more coherent, systematic approach to defining and collecting data on generally accepted core measures of success for school/community/family partnerships, including alignment of public and private sector resources necessary to advance these endeavors.

In an effort to bring clarity to the discussion about school/community/family partnerships, the focus of the possible range of partnerships was limited to elementary school/community/family partnerships. These types of partnerships, which collaborate with community-based health, human service, and recreational organizations, have typically been the focus of investments from the philanthropic and public sectors. Leaders of such partnerships have many lessons to offer about overcoming the barriers to effective partnerships and defining and documenting results; many have solid evidence of outcomes. Conference participants included representatives from seven states participating in CCSSO's Ensuring Student Success Through Collaboration Network, coordinators of multi-agency school/community/family partnerships, policymakers, and scholars from throughout the country.

To serve as a prolegomena to the conference discussions seeking to identify next-step recommendations in coordination with the

stated objectives of the conference, participants were provided with commissioned background papers prior to convening. The nationally-recognized authors of these commissioned papers, like the other invited participants, bring their diverse expertise to bear on the problems collaboratives face. Précis of their papers are presented in this issue of the *CEIC Review*.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented by the work groups at the conference encompass a broad range of topics, including issues about data, purpose, infrastructure, funding, and governmental policies concerning these collaboratives.

DATA

- Data sharing and the ability to disaggregate it at the local level need to be significantly improved. Data need to be available in forms that are accessible and user-friendly. Improvement will entail developing ways to align data and follow students across systems.
- Federal, state, and local agencies should work together to develop common outcomes and indicators.
- Researchers should work with practitioners to identify and develop appropriate tools for evaluation and assessment. Core indicators could be focused on the strength of families, the health of children, and the children's school preparedness, clear indicators which policy makers can readily appreciate.

- Researchers need to provide assistance to local community leaders and parents in applying data to partnerships.
- In response to data and to identified community concerns, research institutions should be able to provide information on the appropriate best practices.

PURPOSE

- From the beginning, a partnership must clearly define its nature and goals, the roles the partners will play, and what methods will be employed to achieve those goals.
- Partnerships should focus their efforts on supporting student success, which should be defined at the local level. This need not necessarily be defined in terms of improved achievement test scores, though improving the situation for children and their families through school/community/family partnerships may have that effect.
- Partnerships should seek to build their capacity to fund early childhood programs, such as preschool programs for 4-year-olds and full-day kindergarten, parent-child engagement programs, and parent educator programs.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- State and local communities should map resources and establish state-level clearinghouses to coordinate all resources and therefore avoid duplication. District- or county-wide councils, aided by planning maps of publicly owned properties, should oversee the development and

use of such properties, including their cross-use with schools and support agencies.

- Both state and local powers need to create an environment that supports and nurtures partnerships and their leaders. This environment should include professional development in technology, training, and mentoring methods for collaborative leaders, leading to their certification. Such certification would validate their expertise and engender support for their work in this capacity.
- The preparation of teachers, administrators, and health and human services professionals should include training in community partnerships.

FUNDING

- Collaborations need to have assured funding sources.
- Successful programs—those that meet the outcome goals of both the local community programs and the broader goals of the funding stream—should be rewarded by sustained funding over longer periods of time.
- New initiatives and funding must include capacity-building strategies.
- Programs and their funding need to be flexible enough to achieve goals established by the community.
- Increasing flexible funding shared across state and federal systems, including incentive funding for youth development, prevention, and early intervention

programs, and family support programs, would enhance the efficacy of partnerships.

- Title I funds might effectively be redirected to support partnerships' endeavors to create early childhood programs.

POLICY

- State regulations should only be developed in view of broad-based and representative community input.
- The federal government should neither dictate who should be on the collaborative nor define what constitutes a collaborative.
- The federal government should encourage new coalitions to use existing collaborative structures.



The CEIC
REVIEW

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