

Research

Increasingly, schools and community agencies are forming one-stop centers for children and their families

All Together Now

Children learn best when their basic needs—including food, shelter, and clothing—are met and when their families are free from worry about employment, housing, health, and child care. Full-service schools aim to meet all those needs under one roof.

Providing educational and social services at the school site, many believe, is an effective and efficient way to provide what Joy Dryfoos calls “hope and solutions” for students, their families, and entire neighborhoods.

Already there are well over 1,000 full-service schools in the United States, according to Dryfoos, author of *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*. And she and others predict that, as word of their success spreads, many more schools and community agencies will form partnerships to support students and their families.

The learning connection

Research confirms that investing in children’s health and well-being raises academic achievement. For example, a 2003 report released by WestEd, the San Francisco-based Regional Education Laboratory, demonstrates “a significant relationship between school achievement scores and nonacademic factors” such as nutrition and exercise; low rates of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use; and safe and caring schools and neighborhoods.

Thomas Hanson and Greg Austin of WestEd’s health and human development program say their study indicates that learning and personal development are “complementary processes” that should be addressed side by side.

From 1998 to 2002, Hanson and Austin collected health risk and test score data from seventh-, ninth-, and 11th-graders in more than 1,700 schools. They found higher academic achievement in schools in which:

- High percentages of students were physically active and engaged in healthy eating habits;
- High numbers of students refrained from all types of substance abuse;
- Students experienced little crime and felt safe; and
- Students reported high levels of “resilience assets,” such as caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities to participate in meaningful community activities.

The researchers’ message is clear: Focusing exclusively on raising test scores without attending to students’ health and social needs will “leave many children behind.”

Other researchers agree. Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor of UCLA’s School Mental Health Project studied Iowa’s Success4 school improvement initiative, which brings schools, families, and communities together to provide services that support students’ social, emotional, and behavioral growth as a means of raising achievement. They found that schools providing these support services show increased student learning, plus improved attendance, interpersonal skills, family relationships, and school behavior.

And a recent study of a Full Service Schools Initiative (FSSI) in three Chicago



By Susan Black

public elementary schools reported several positive results. Samuel Whalen of the Chapin Hall Center for Children discovered that the FSSI school programs resulted in higher academic performance than was found in demographically comparable schools without full-service support. In addition, FSSI schools had less student mobility, less truancy, and higher attendance; greater teacher involvement in after-school student activities; and more supportive adult relationships with students.

The community role

Providing one-stop centers that meet children's and families' needs begins with collaborative partnerships in which each partner has its own appropriate role.

Dryfoos recommends that schools

concentrate on providing high-quality education through individualized instruction, team-teaching, cooperative learning, alternatives to tracking, parent involvement, and a healthy school climate. Community agencies, Dryfoos says, can complement the school's academic mission with support services for students and their families. Such services can include health screenings, dental programs, nutrition education, crisis intervention, community policing, job training, mentoring, and basic welfare assistance.

Boston Excels, a reform initiative sponsored by Boston Children's Institute (BCI), is putting these recommendations into practice in five public elementary schools. An estimated 80 to 90 percent of the 2,285 students attending these schools come from low-income families; most are minorities, and many are first-generation immigrants.

Community agencies determine each school's greatest needs, then tailor services to support that school's students, families, and neighborhood. For instance, one school might offer mentoring and tutoring, individual and family counseling, and training in conflict resolution and cultural adjustments. Another school might choose to provide crisis intervention, after-school programs, behavior management training for teachers, family education programs, and opportunities for parents to work and volunteer in the schools.

In a March 2000 briefing paper, BCI researchers reported that Boston Excels had "notable impacts" on students and families:

■ *Major academic gains.* One of Boston's lowest-performing elementary schools showed high improvement in reading and math scores.

Why full-service schools?

Why should schools join forces with community agencies to support children and families? Consider these purposes:

- Providing services that will result in better educational achievement for students.
- Combining resources to address the changing needs of families and children.
- Allowing schools to focus on student learning and achievement.
- Offering cost-effective services through combined fiscal management.
- Concentrating on preventive, rather than crisis, services.
- Making effective and efficient support services available at the school site.
- Providing services to children at an early age—often as early as infancy.
- Contributing to the health and well-being of the school's entire neighborhood population.

Source: Adapted from Dryfoos, Joy, and Sue Maguire. *Inside Full Service Community Schools*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2002.

Lessons learned

The concept of full-service schools is "easy to embrace but difficult to translate" into day-to-day operations, says Thomas McMahon of Yale University School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry. After working with teams to establish full-service schools in urban neighborhoods, McMahon has identified issues that are likely to arise and suggested steps to address them:

1. *Organizational model.* Define conceptual models, organizational structures, and operating procedures that will best meet the community's needs.
2. *Planning process.* Determine how to plan and implement a local model; decide on the use of consultants and facilitators and special appointments, such as a local coordinator and project director.
3. *Local politics.* Assess all political groups and their positions, including unions, town and city government, and school organizations.
4. *Fiscal resources.* Outline funding sources that have a financial stake in the program's long-term success.
5. *Collaborative partnerships.* Form

interagency teams that have competent leadership and expertise in services that will be provided to students and families.

6. *Community-school relationships.* Establish positive working relationships between and among constituents, including principals, teachers, parents, agency leaders, and staff.

7. *Administrative roles.* Describe the program's mission and goals and who will have authority in service areas.

8. *Legal and ethical matters.* Anticipate and be prepared to resolve conflicts and questions over law-related and fairness issues.

9. *Access to services.* Design models for ways students and families will be provided assistance for educational and social service problems.

10. *Evaluation process.* Set realistic expectations and ways of measuring outcomes; determine how results will be used for program improvement.

Source: Adapted from McMahon, Thomas, and others. "Building Full-Service Schools: Lessons Learned in the Development of Interagency Collaboratives." *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 2000, pp. 65-92.

Research

■ **High attendance.** A Boston Excels school had the best attendance record of all public schools in the city.

■ **Parent involvement.** Core groups of parents were involved in the schools at least three days each week.

■ **Guidance.** At-risk children received individual short- and long-term counseling, and many were supervised in daily after-school programs.

■ **Parent development.** Parents, including those with little formal education and limited knowledge of English, got jobs and drivers' licenses and attained U.S. citizenship. Many parents learned to help their children with homework, and many learned to help teachers in their classrooms.

Based on these encouraging results, BCI intends to expand the Boston Excels program to another five Boston public schools.

One principal's experience

When Sue Maguire became principal of Molly Stark Elementary School in Bennington, Vt., in the mid '90s, she recognized that her students and their families had several desperate needs. More than half of her students came from low-income families, and the school faced such problems as low achievement, high absenteeism, and lack of parent and student commitment. Students were verbally and physically aggressive, and many dropped out of school when they reached the upper grades.

Turning Molly Stark into a full-service school wasn't easy. Maguire had to deal with such issues as turf wars and disagreements over space and transportation. But working with focus groups of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members, she designed a school reform model that offered comprehensive support services to students and their families.

She started small, implementing a modest after-school program, then added mentoring and health services, including a retired dentist who set up shop inside the school and pediatricians and psychologists who provide on-site weekly services to students and parents.

To fund the program, Maguire turned

to federal, state, and local grants and resources. Obtaining funding turned out to be time-consuming, but Maguire says most of her time, especially at the outset, was devoted to planning. She recalls that it took a full year to define and coordinate partnerships with community agencies so directors and staff understood and accepted their roles and responsibilities.

Reflecting on her school today, Maguire says taking a risk to do the right thing has been worth the work. She knows she has helped create a school and community where kids feel valued, parents feel welcome, and staff feel proud. A Harvard evaluation documented reduced absenteeism, but most gratifying, Maguire says, is the evaluation's record of continuous improvement in student achievement.

Not for every school

Not everyone is convinced that full-service schools deserve accolades, however. William Davis of the University of Maine says that along with emerging opportunities, full-service schools face emerging threats.

The schools are often the target of criticism from several sources, according to Davis—including educational, social service, and business leaders who worry that public schools will deviate from their primary mission of teaching academic skills. And, he says, some religious groups view full-service schools as an affront to their beliefs, saying families, not schools, should assume full responsibility for children's social and emotional well-being.

Although Dryfoos, for her part, believes that all schools should be accessible to the community, she recognizes that not every one needs to have built-in health and social services. Barriers to learning are "heavily influenced by social class," she says. Children from middle-class and upper-class communities seldom face the dire needs that plague many children from low-income families. She recommends that schools consider their students' "volume and intensity of need" before deciding to pursue a full-service model.

Where the need is great, full-service schools can be the answer. Not only do

they, as Dryfoos points out, carry on the century-old convictions of Jane Addams and John Dewey that education and social services should be integrated under one roof, but they do so with abundant research on their side.

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