Introduction

Community schools are receiving increased attention in Pennsylvania and across the country as policymakers and practitioners strive to address the effects of poverty on academic performance, and provide more comprehensive supports for traditionally-underserved populations.

At the federal level, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan oversaw the scaling up of a community schools model during his superintendency in Chicago, and became a believer in their power to "attack the in-school and out-of-school causes of low achievement."[1]

Late last year, the long-awaited and bipartisan re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, now the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), maintained Promise Neighborhoods,[2] 21st Century Community Learning Centers,[3] and Full-Service Community Schools[4]—the three largest federal funding streams available to support extended services or implementation of a community schools model. And for the first time, the federal law explicitly encouraged low-income districts to utilize Title I funds for integrated student supports, and acknowledged that these services may be provided by external community partners using "evidence-based strategies."[5]

Here in Pennsylvania, Governor Tom Wolf cited former School District of Lancaster Superintendent Pedro Rivera's experience implementing a community schools model that "broke down barriers to student success" in remarks nominating Rivera as Pennsylvania Secretary of Education.[6] Both Rivera and the Governor have expressed interest in supporting the expansion of such a model statewide.

And in Philadelphia, Mayor Jim Kenney has called for the creation of 25 community schools over the next four years, and tapped South Philadelphia High School principal Otis Hackney to oversee the effort as his Chief Education Officer. Hackney cultivated many aspects of the community school model at Southern, including partnering with non-profits and community groups to expand programs and services for students and their families.

While many advocates and education leaders tout the promise of community schools, skepticism remains, in part because the model is difficult to implement and sustain, and supporting research is scarce and

[1] http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/fighting-wrong-education-battles
[2] http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html
[3] http://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/index.html
[4] http://www2.ed.gov/programs/communityschools/index.html
[5] Every Student Succeeds Act: Title I, Part A, Sec. 1003: http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/ESSA%20FINAL%20Conference%20Report.pdf
[6] http://www.lavozlatinacentral.com/cortes-named-to-again-head-pa-dept-of-state-rivera-to-dept-of-education/

mainly limited to comprehensive, long-running models. Some organizations have instead called for a charter or renaissance model of school turnaround, arguing that most community schools do little to address the need for rigorous curriculum and quality instruction, and therefore fail to improve student performance in chronically struggling schools.[7]

In this brief, Research for Action (RFA) examines existing research on comprehensive community schools. And because there is no, one "model" for community schools, we explore the evidence base on several common elements such as expanded day learning opportunities and health supports. We also examine two promising examples of community schools: the United Way of Greater Lehigh Valley's Community Schools; and the School District of Cincinnati, an urban district that has garnered national attention for the scale of its community school programming. We conclude by offering lessons learned on the creation, implementation, and sustainability of community schools, and we provide a set of policy considerations for both state and local education leaders.

What are community schools?

"Community Schools" is an umbrella term used to describe schools that adopt a broad and varying range of services to address the comprehensive needs of students, families, and communities. By definition, each community school should be unique to serve the specific needs of the local population. The actual composition of services and support might also vary due to funding constraints, policy considerations, or other factors.

A central element of community schools is the utilization of external partnerships to transform a school building into a neighborhood hub for social services and integrated student supports. The United States Department of Education defines community schools as providing "comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, students' family members, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children."

Common elements of community schools include:

- after-school programs or extended hours
- on-site child care
- health services
- counseling
- job and housing assistance, and
- food assistance programs

Community school design can reflect varying visions around outcomes and goals. A community school model may be seen as one piece in a much larger strategy to improve the health and wellbeing of a community. It may be aimed at improving student and parent engagement, or addressing issues of school climate. Many community school models have specific academic goals, such as increasing graduation rates or scores on state tests. The model may even be part of an explicit school improvement or turnaround framework prescribed to chronically low-performing schools. And, again, the approach will depend in significant part on availability of resources, as well as the will and capacity of potential partners to work across funding and administrative silos. Examples of this diversity in design can be seen in Table 1, which provides an overview of three community schools models.

[7] http://www.crpe.org/thelens/comprehensive-social-services-can%E2%80%99t-substitute-strong-schools

Table 1. Examples of community school models

INITIATIVE	DEFINING COMPONENTS	SCALE
Communities In Schools (CIS)	Comprehensive national model providing site coordinators, needs assessments, integrated support services, and monitoring and evaluation with specific goals around keeping students in school through graduation.	3,400 schools across the country
Elev8	Model funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and focused on providing Out of School Time programs, health services, and family engagement to support students through the middle grades and transition to high school.	19 schools across four regions: Baltimore, Chicago, New Mexico, and Oakland
Cincinnati Community Learning Centers	Largest district-run model in the country, providing site coordinators for each school and relying on external partnerships for a range of services and supports.	44 Cincinnati schools, or 80% of the district

Research on the impact of community school models

Meta-analysis on integrated student supports

The variety inherent in community school goals, design, and implementation makes research and evaluation a challenge, and can limit the generalizability of findings when they are available. A 2014 Child Trends meta-analysis reviewed 11 evaluations of three different community school models, all of which focused on integrated student supports, defined as "a system of wraparound supports for the child, the family, and schools, to target student's academic and non-academic barriers to learning." The analysis yielded mixed results[8] including small but statistically significant effects of integrated student supports on student academic progress across the majority of the evaluations, as measured by:

- Decreases in grade retention and dropout rates; and
- Increases in attendance, math and English language arts achievement, and overall grade point averages.[9]

However, the researchers noted that effect sizes were larger in quasi-experimental studies than in more rigorous random assignment evaluations.[10]

Child Trend's analysis also found that integrated student supports were firmly grounded in the research on child and youth development, and aligned with empirical research on the varied factors that promote educational success.

[8] http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-07ISSPaper2.pdf
[9] http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-05ISSWhitePaper3.pdf
[10] http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-07ISSPaper2.pdf

National evaluation of Communities In Schools (CIS)

One of the best and most rigorous third-party evaluations of a community schools model examined the impact of the national Communities In Schools (CIS) program over five years of implementation. Hallmark elements of CIS include an on-site coordinator in each school; delivery of both whole-school supports (e.g., health services) and targeted services (counseling, academic assistance, mentorship); and on-going reporting to school leaders and CIS affiliates. This approach requires significant resources, as well as buy-in from school leadership to support site coordinators in identifying at risk students, managing individual needs assessments, and providing referrals.

ICF's study, which examined school-level effects using a quasi-experimental design, found positive effects (effect size between .01 and .25) on eight of 10 outcomes, including drop out and graduation rates, and attendance at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. "High implementer" schools posted "substantively important positive effect[s]" (effect size greater than .25) for dropout and graduation rates, elementary level attendance, and math and reading performance in the middle grades.[11] The study also examined student-level impacts using randomized controlled trials, and found a number of positive effects in two of three districts studied; impacts were especially notable for middle school reading (in Jacksonville); and credit completion, high school attendance, and grade point average (Austin).

It is important to note that the effectiveness of the CIS model is closely linked to the strength and consistency of its implementation. Specifically, the evaluation of CIS found positive effects under the following conditions:

- **Integrated services targeted at transition points.** Resources focused on certain populations, for example sixth and ninth graders preparing to change schools, yielded significant impacts for students.

- **High fidelity of implementation and on-site coordination.** Effects were significantly larger when the model was implemented consistently over time and sites, and services were managed by on-site coordinators.

- **Two years of exposure.** Effects were significantly larger for students who received two years versus a single year of managed services.

Common elements of community schools

Most rigorous research that is relevant to the community schools concept examines only the effects of individual elements or strategies that are typically folded *into* community schools, rather than the impact of the broader model. Research on these components is summarized below.

[11] http://www.communitiesinschools.org/media/uploads/attachments/Communities_In_Schools_National_Evaluation_Five_Year_Summary_Report.pdf

- **Extended Learning Opportunities**. Extensive research has been conducted on extended learning opportunities (ELOs) such as before- and after-school programming, a common component of community schools. ELOs themselves take many forms, and the quality and implementation of programs matter when it comes to student outcomes. A meta-analysis by the Institute of Education Sciences and the Appalachia Regional Educational Laboratory of 30 rigorous and relevant studies on ELOs found improved literacy and math achievement when instruction was led by certified teachers. Overall effects were relatively small, but were largest for low-income students and those performing below standards.[12]

- **School-Based Health Centers**. Research on school-based health centers (SBHCs) has demonstrated improvements in delivery of preventive care such as immunizations, managing chronic illnesses (e.g., asthma and obesity), treating mental health conditions, and providing reproductive health services for adolescents.[13] While there is insufficient research to demonstrate a direct link between SBHCs and long-term educational outcomes, short-term impacts have been documented. A longitudinal study in Seattle found that use of SBHC services was related to one-third lower likelihood of dropping out of high school.[14] Studies have also shown that students receiving school-based counseling and referrals for mental health services experience fewer absences and earn higher grade point averages.[15]

- **Child Care**. While much anecdotal evidence[16] and several case studies[17] connect access to child care with decreased dropout rates for teen parents, there have been no rigorous, large-scale studies demonstrating a relationship between on-site care and the academic outcomes of teen parents. However, a strong research base exists on the impact of quality early care and education on both child outcomes[18] and parents' ability to enter and remain in the workforce.[19] This research has given rise to community school models which offer school-based child care and early education, as well as family support.

Out of School Time in Philadelphia

In Philadelphia, ELOs are provided by a diverse array of Out-of School-Time (OST) provider networks offering an estimated 32,000 publicly funded slots. Programs focus on providing a safe space for after school hours as well as life skills, academic enrichment, and college and career readiness. Some, such as 21st Century (21C) learning centers, provide academic support for youth attending high-poverty, under-performing schools. RFA's evaluation of 14 21C sites during the 2013-14 school year found that elementary students participating in OST scored higher than non-participants on standardized tests; high school participants were more likely to earn all credits they attempted. Effects were strongest when students participated at least 30 days per year.

The role of high-quality teaching and instruction

While the aforementioned integrated services can help better support students, they are not substitutes for attention to high quality teaching and strong academic supports. The Coalition for Community Schools, a

[12] https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/pdf/REL_2014015.pdf
[13] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3770486/
[14] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21383256
[15] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20159502
[16] https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/high-schools-offer-day-care-services-for-teen-parents-to-prevent-dropouts/2013/01/10/091d28de-408b-11e2-ae43-cf491b837f7b_story.html
[17] http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ624106
[18] http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/early_ed_qual.pdf
[19] https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/6812/Child%20Care%20Arrangements%20and%20Labor%20Supply.pdf?sequence=1

national organization working to promote high quality community school models, defines "core conditions for learning," which include:

- an instructional program with certified teachers;
- a challenging curriculum; and
- high standards and expectations for students.[20]

We can draw additional promising practices from comprehensive community schools that have demonstrated positive impacts. These practices include:

- **Aligning extended learning with classroom learning.** Comprehensive models like CIS and Elev8 build links between after-school enrichment, homework help or tutoring, and daily instruction. CIS encourages site coordinators to conduct diagnostic observations during class time, and meet with teachers and partner providers to gauge individual student progress.

- **Treating teachers and school leaders as essential partners.** The American Federation of Teachers and many local unions have long been strong proponents of community schools and advocated for a voice in their design and implementation.[21] Research supports empowering educators to make decisions about school policy and practice, and studies of teacher leadership have demonstrated positive correlations between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and collective responsibility and improved student achievement.[22]

Strong teachers and a rigorous curriculum are prerequisites of any successful school, whether based on a community model or not. Despite the fact that curriculum and instruction are not always the primary focus of a community school approach, the most effective community schools models emphasize the integration of academic and support services.

Cost and return on investment

The cost of implementing a community school model can vary enormously. For example, while in theory the relocation of some existing public sector services or non-profit programs to a school could be relatively inexpensive or even cost-neutral, in practice it may require substantial investment in zoning changes, facilities updates, or reforms to labor agreements. A community school model may also help maximize funds already available; for example, a school-based health center may be able to provide more services to the community and increase billing for Medicaid reimbursements.[23]

The experiences of well-established, comprehensive community schools models suggest that resources are needed to: 1) invest in initial facilities improvements necessary for co-location of services; 2) deliver a broader range of quality supports; and 3) fund a dedicated on-site coordinator in each building, which CIS has estimated at a cost of roughly $200 per year per student.[24] A 2010 review of 50 comprehensive community schools nationwide found that site coordination accounted for just seven percent of the total cost of community school programming but served an essential role in leveraging additional resources and coordinating services.[25]

[20] http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/faqs.aspx#FAQ4
[21] http://www.aft.org/press/speeches/convention-keynote-2008
[22] http://aer.sagepub.com/content/37/2/479.refs
[23] http://www.cincinnaticlc.org/sites/www.cincinnaticlc.org/files/pdfs/CCHMC-Independent_Evaluation-2012-13.pdf
[24] http://www.communitiesinschools.org/interactive_model/
[25] http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf

Approaches for obtaining these resources vary. In Cincinnati, initial building improvements were largely publicly funded after the Board of Education put forward a plan for district-wide redevelopment of schools[26] and voters approved a $1 billion Facilities Master Plan in 2002.[27] Today, the estimated annual cost of operating Cincinnati's community schools is roughly $65,000 per building, with much of the money coming from federal Title I funding. Taxpayers have also continued to support community schools; voters renewed an existing five-year tax levy in 2014 by a large margin.[28] Meanwhile, partner organizations leverage their own resources, public and private, to provide additional services.

In Oakland, Atlantic Philanthropies invested $15 million over four years to create five community schools in underserved neighborhoods under the Elev8 program.[29] These private funds were supplemented by $25 million in local funds.

There is some evidence that investments in community schools pay off. A 2013 evaluation of Elev8 in Oakland found a return on overall investment of $4.39 for every $1 spent. Importantly, this calculation included not only the initial foundation investment, but also money leveraged by program partners.[30]

Preliminary case studies at two comprehensive community schools in New York City also found that investment in the programs was fiscally advantageous, based on analysis of social return on investment. The report found a $1 investment in the two community schools produced a return in social value of $10.30 and $14.80, respectively.[31]

Case studies

The emerging research base on community schools begs a closer look at several promising models, their defining elements, and the strategies these schools employ in delivering and sustaining an extended range of supports to students.

Community school models in Pennsylvania

Community schools are not new to Pennsylvania. We highlight several examples below.

In 2005, the **School District of Lancaster** used a federal Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant to expand a full-service community school model to two schools; the initiative has since reached five schools and four partner agencies. Each school has a full-time community school coordinator, and hosts comprehensive services that align with best practices established by the National Coalition for Community Schools.

The **University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships** offers a series of school-based programs that form the components of the University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) model, which serves approximately 3,000 students and their families in five schools in West Philadelphia. UACSs work to educate and serve both students and the wider community through school day and after-school curricula addressing issues such as health, nutrition, and the environment. Each school site has at least one site director from the Netter Center and students from the university provide additional supports. Sayre High School has the most extensive set of UACS programs, including a nutrition initiative, college and career readiness supports, STEM instruction, an out-of-school time program, and school-based healthcare

[26] http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/7500%20Policy%20Community%20Learning%20Centers.pdf
[27] http://www.communityschools.org/resources/cincinnati_ohio_one_brick_at_a_time.aspx
[28] http://www.cps-k12.org/about-cps/financial-information
[29] http://ssir.org/articles/entry/integrating_youth_services
[30] http://safepassages.org/new/PDF/Elev8%20Oakland%20Community%20Schools%20Cost%20Benefit%20Analysis.pdf
[31] http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/CASE%20STUDY%20final.pdf

services and education. In the early years of Sayre's community school experience, it was one of very few Philadelphia high schools to achieve AYP, and reported graduation and college-going rates that were well above the district average.[32] More recently, the school faces significant performance challenges. Sayre ranks in the lowest quartile of district schools for achievement, climate, and postsecondary readiness.[33] Regardless of its performance level, Sayre's outcomes cannot be directly attributed to services typically associated with community schools. Analyses did not control for the wide range of significant external factors that could also contribute to the school's performance, including wide swings in funding and changes in student demographics.

Pittsburgh's **Homewood Children's Village Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS)** program began in 2011 and has been providing support both in and out of school addressing academic improvement, mental health, and student behavior. In 2015, Homewood was awarded a five year federal Full-Service Community Schools grant for nearly $2.5 million. The initiative has also received local foundation, corporate, and individual support. FSCS staff for each school include a school site director, den advisors who provide academic support to students, and a University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work intern who teaches life skills. The goal of the program is to meet the needs of the three individual schools it serves, focusing on improving literacy skills, graduation, and attendance.

One of the most comprehensive community schools models in Pennsylvania can be found in the approach of the **United Way of the Lehigh Valley**, which joined with a range of partners to support 14 community schools. This model relies on external partners and leadership teams, rather than the school district, to coordinate staffing, implementation, and evaluation. The schools also rely heavily on investments from corporate partners. Notwithstanding significant school finace challenges, this private support allowed services to not only be sustained, but expand over the past ten years.

Services are available in participating schools before, during, and after school hours and include on-site medical, vision, and dental services, school supplies, a food bank, a clothing closet and housing resources. Building on an earlier "family center" initiative that provided school-based information and referral services to parents, this more comprehensive community schools model began in 2005 and currently serves over 8,000 students in four Lehigh Valley School Districts: Allentown, Bangor, Bethlehem, and Easton. The high need schools were selected based on a number of criteria, including poverty rates, academic performance, and existing resources. The model started in elementary schools and grew to include middle schools in the feeder pattern; the plan is to expand to feeder high schools as well, for a total of 22 schools by 2022.

The United Way based its model on the six conditions of learning outlined by the national Coalition for Community Schools: basic needs met, families as partners, engaging instruction, safe schools and neighborhoods, positive youth development programming, and quality early childhood learning strategies. While the work is focused on using community partnerships to provide needed services, it is also about academic improvement: The goal is to increase the number of third grade students reading at grade level by 50 percent by 2022.

Each community school has the following components:

- **Corporate Partners,** such as Crayola, provide financial support for the community school for at least three years.

[32] http://www.aqeny.org/ny/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/COMMUNITY-SCHOOLS.pdf
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/HighSchools_CS.pdf
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/2009%20PA%20Community%20Schools%20Summit%20Brief.pdf
[33] http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/s/strategic-analytics/annual-reports/school-progress-reports

- **Lead Partners,** such as community organizations, institutions of higher education, and hospitals, employ a full-time **community school coordinator** for each school.

- **Core and School Leadership Teams** monitor the ongoing implementation and outcomes of their community school and develop strategies to leverage community resources to achieve their school's goals, respectively.

The United Way, corporate and lead partners, and school officials monitor progress regularly and community school coordinators shift intervention strategies to address outcomes. In the short-term, the United Way has documented improvements in chronic absenteeism and student behavior, but evaluation data on student academic performance is not yet publicly available.

Cincinnati's Community Learning Centers

Policymakers in Pennsylvania have looked to Cincinnati for lessons about the scale up of a comprehensive community school model in a large, urban district. Cincinnati's Community Learning Centers (CLCs) are notable for several reasons: They are now in over 80 percent of schools districtwide; they are run by the district but at a relatively low cost to the district itself; and they have been steadily expanding, with increases in the number of buildings staffed by resource coordinators each year since 2005.[34]

The Coalition for Community Schools has noted several conditions that helped to make Cincinnati's model financially feasible and sustainable:[35]

- **Public investment in a master facilities plan** that meant buildings were designed with co-located services in mind;

- **Significant foundation investment** in staffing on-site resource coordinators in schools;

- **Collaboration between district stakeholders** including the superintendent, school board president, and union president to maximize resources; and

- **District policy** that places community schools at the center of a broader school improvement strategy.

However, the district's evaluation methodology severely limits what can be said about the direct impacts of the model overall. Annual evaluations of Cincinnati's CLCs attempt to measure how well the sites have engaged and aligned resources to meet goals; a particular focus has been on a comparison of academic growth (2011-12 to 2012-13) between students in CLCs who receive targeted services to those in CLCs who do not receive those services, across a broad range of student outcomes. Students in CLCs who recieved tutoring , after school programs, and family engagement had the highest gains in reading achievement. Students who attended tutoring, college access, and youth leadership activities had the highest increases on at least one mathemathics assessment. Yet the study is limited to a single year of academic data, and the methodology fails to compare student outcomes of CLCs to non-CLCs with similar populations.

Both the district and advocates have pointed to the fact that since investing in community schools, Cincinnati has become the first urban district in Ohio with an effective rating from the state; between 2000 and 2011, high school graduation rates climbed from 51 percent to 80 percent and attendance rates

[34] http://www.cincinnaticlc.org/sites/www.cincinnaticlc.org/files/pdfs/History-Summary.pdf
[35] http://www.communityschools.org/resources/cincinnati_ohio_one_brick_at_a_time.aspx

increased from 88 percent to 95 percent.[36] Still, these outcomes, while undeniably positive, cannot be definitively attributed to the community schools model at this time.

Community schools in practice

While research on the effects of community schools on student outcomes is limited, lessons regarding

the design, financing, and sustainability of the model are clearer. Below, we highlight best practices drawn from initiatives nationwide, many of which have been embraced by the Coalition for Community Schools.

Creation and implementation

For districts or individual schools interested in expanding supports and services for students and communities, the logistics can be daunting.

The Coalition for Community Schools recommends that the process begin with a strategic assessment that includes an inventory of current resources; review of school data from previous years, surveys, and interviews to elicit feedback from parents and community members; creation of an action plan; and a transparent process for sharing findings and recommendations with the public.[37] The results of this assessment should set the stage for the district and its partners to define their goals and develop targets for both short- and long-term outcomes.

Next, the district must build school-level teams, made up of principals and teachers, whose continued feedback and support will be managed by either a lead partner agency or individual site coordinators. These school-level leaders may be more successful if they, in turn, are supported by centralized management and governance structures (i.e., an Office of Community Schools at the city or state level) to ensure that data collection from multiple sites is standardized and communication is ongoing. Some cities, like Chicago, have also found that creating and empowering central office staff to oversee community schools helped sustain the model despite leadership transitions.[38]

[36] http://www.districtadministration.com/article/schools-become-one-stop-shop-cincinnati-students
[37] http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/upload-docs/NCCS_Building%20Community%20Schools.pdf
[38] https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/01/pdf/community_schools.pdf

Lessons learned

In light of the research and emerging best practices gained from comprehensive and sustainable community schools models, RFA recommends that stakeholders consider the following lessons learned in approaching the design and implementation of community schools in Pennsylvania.

- **Consult community stakeholders, corporations, and service providers from the start.** Any true community schools model must build on the input of neighborhood leaders and parents. Representatives from the United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley stressed the importance of "making sure you are starting the work with all the right partners at the table." This would include, among others: education service organizations already working in schools, such as Out of School Time providers; representatives of labor; health and welfare providers; higher education institutions with a history of involvement in public schools, such as the Netter Center at the University of Pennsylvania; advocacy organizations; corporations; funders such as the United Way; as well as school districts and the communities they serve.
- **Integrate community school staff into a building-level team.** Integration is critical to successful school reform initiatives, including the development of community schools. For example, Coburn argues that reform must "spread within the school…into the fabric of the system."[39] As explained by Beth Tomlinson, Assistant Director for K-12 Education at the United Way, the community school coordinator should "work very closely with the principal…like a co-pilot, so that everything [s/he] does is really a reflection of the principal's vision…and is aligned with the school improvement plan." This helps foster trust, communication, and collaboration towards shared goals.

Evaluation: Benchmarks and outcomes

Community schools rely on long-term partnerships and external investments; it is therefore essential that they establish a theory of change that identifies assumptions regarding how specific interventions will affect both short-term benchmarks and longer-term outcomes, as well as the outcomes measures themselves, when designing the model. Attention to a corresponding plan to evaluate the model's implementation and effectiveness is also vital.

Benchmarks, or short-term measures of progress, need to be specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant (read: flexible) to the vision and goals of the particular community school.[40] Benchmarks generally have to do with knowledge and behavior change. For example, a short-term goal could be to increase family engagement at a community school over the course of the three year initial implementation, and an appropriate benchmark might be the percent of parents participating in parent/teacher conferences. These benchmarks can provide initial evidence of progress, as well as formative feedback during the implementation process.

Outcomes measures, on the other hand, help evaluate progress towards long-term goals. Significant change in academic performance would be considered a long-term goal, and school-wide standardized test scores a long-term measure.

Transparency about expectations for progress and the measures that will be used to document it can help partners, funders, and policy-makers understand the opportunities and challenges inherent in evaluating community schools.

[39] Coburn, C. (2003) "Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change." *Educational Researcher,* Vol. 23, No. 6, pp. 3-12.
[40] http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Evaluation_Toolkit_March2010.pdf

Lessons learned

- **Set expectations early that change will take time.** Short term benchmarks help demonstrate incremental progress and should be balanced with long term outcomes-based goals and a realistic timeline that takes into account the depth of the challenge. At the United Way, Tomlinson stressed that "this is hard work, it takes a long time, and it really needs stable leadership. Nobody should be coming into this work thinking they will see dramatic changes in two or three years."

Sustainability

Sustaining a community school model requires commitments on the part of parents, community members, districts, and external partners. This breadth and depth of commitment can be difficult to sustain. Community schools that rely entirely on public funds may be at the mercy of changing financial conditions and administrative priorities. On the other hand, sustainability can be problematic when models are seeded by substantial external, private funding.

Given these concerns, the best route to sustainability may be a blended model in which district and state policies support community schools, but funding streams are diversified. For example, Kentucky's commitment to "help academically at-risk students succeed in school by helping to minimize non-cognitive barriers to learning" has been enshrined in state law since passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990. KERA created a grant program to fund school-based Family Resource and Youth Service Centers and an Interagency Task Force to implement and sustain them.[41] State investment in the centers has hovered between $48-$57 million annually since 2002, and enjoyed bipartisan support.[42] However, the majority of services within those centers are still provided by community partners, helping to mitigate impacts in years when state investment is lower.

Lessons learned

- **Establish a process by which the district and partners agree on a vision** and coordinated effort to share the vision and early accomplishments with funders, media, and the public;[43]

- **Define and support a community schools strategy though laws, regulations, and other policies.** State and local policies can embed the community schools model in a larger strategy for achieving quality and equity in education, making it more likely to survive administrative changes;

- **Develop diverse funding streams.** Community school initiatives, like so many other reforms, can be vulnerable to fluctuations in funding. Districts may be able to take advantage of federal Title I funds, as well as funds for 21st Century Learning Centers, but they will also need non-governmental resources. Relationships with corporations, foundations and university partners may all play a role in the development of ongoing financial support, such as a community school endowment.

Policy implications in Pennsylvania

The majority of this brief has examined how community schools have been established in individual schools, in networks of schools, or in school districts. To establish a robust community school presence

[41] http://www.communityschools.org/multimedia/kentuckys_fryscs.aspx
[42] http://chfs.ky.gov/dfrcvs/frysc/aboutus.htm

across Pennsylvania, attention to a wide range of financial, policy, and other barriers at the state level would also be required. Points of consideration include:

- **School funding:** As mentioned earlier, a successful community school strategy requires stable, long-term partnerships and financial support. A new Basic Education Formula is one step towards more predictable state school funding, and several elements of the proposed formula would steer additional resources to districts that serve high numbers of traditionally-underserved students. But a new formula, by itself, will not correct for years of underfunding, or one of the nation's most inequitable distributions of state education resources. Policymakers interested in expansion of community schools will need to commit to adequate, sustained levels of funding for the new formula.

- **School facilities:** The state's dwindling—and possible total abandonment of—support for school facilities is another barrier: Years of deferred maintenance and other capital needs have contributed to inadequate learning environments in many district buildings, and especially in the state's most economically vulnerable communities. A community school approach that involves co-location of key neighborhood supports such as health clinics and early childhood education requires a commitment on the part of both the state and districts to make strategic investments in facility modernization.

- **School turnarounds:** Over the past year, the legislature has advanced several proposals for state takeover of struggling schools; the proposals would use the state's School Performance Profile, a measure overwhelmingly derived from standardized test results, to identify schools for interventions. Given the significant relationship between student test scores and rates of economically disadvantaged students, schools serving high numbers of students living in poverty would be disproportionately impacted by these proposals. State policymakers may wish to consider how state reforms could adversely impact community-driven approaches to supporting schools, and consider whether student measures associated with strong community school models—such as improved attendance and health indicators—might be more appropriate markers in determining whether schools are making gains.

- **Agency coordination:** Growing state support for community schools might benefit from resource sharing and more explicit partnerships among key state departments and offices. Such interagency coordination could allow for more seamless deployment of health, social services, job training, and other programs that may feed into various community school models.

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