CREATING SAFE & SUPPORTIVE SCHOOLS II: NEXT STEPS

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SESSION III: PROVIDING THE SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND MEDICAL SUPPORTS THAT STUDENTS NEED: A DELIVERY CONTINUUM II

Overcoming Poverty's Damage to Learning
By David Bornstein, *The New York Times* (April 17, 2015)

This profile of Turnaround for Children describes how schools can soften poverty's impact on learning with a makeover that takes the ill effects of toxic stress and early trauma into account.

Building Blocks for Learning: A Framework for Comprehensive Student Development
K. Brooke Stafford-Brizard (20150

This document presents the background and rationale for a framework to support and develop non-academic skills among all children in grades K-12. The "Building Blocks for Learning" framework is intended to serve as a platform for multiple stakeholders from the areas of policy, research and practice to build a more comprehensive approach to student development in schools.

Turnaround for Children: Mental Health Partnership
Turnaround for Children

This pamphlet describes how Turnaround helps coordinate between school staff and community health service providers, expediting connections between the families of students seeking mental health assistance to services, including intake, psychiatric evaluation and ongoing treatment.

Where It All Comes Together How Partnerships Connect Communities and Schools
Martin J. Blank & Lisa Villarreal, *American Educator* (Fall 2015)

Across the country, in places that have expanded and sustained community schools, leadership—at both the school-building and school-district level—has played a major role. This article provides a history of community schools, the many sources of leadership behind their establishment, the elements of community schools, the research that undergirds them, and the policies that nurture them.

Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers
Kristin Anderson Moore & Carol Emig, Child Trends (February 2014)

This paper summarizes the results of a comprehensive examination by Child Trends of the research and evidence base for integrated student supports, such as those offered by community schools, and the potential of such schools to help a range of disadvantaged, marginalized, or struggling students.

The Opinion Pages

FIXES
Overcoming Poverty's Damage to Learning

By David Bornstein   April 17, 2015 7:00 am

Fixes looks at solutions to social problems and why they work.

"What makes Turnaround's work so compelling is how it has broken down its long-term vision of school transformation into processes and chunks that are themselves teachable to educators and administrators."

In the weeks after 9/11, Pamela Cantor, a child psychiatrist specializing in trauma, was enlisted by the New York City Board of Education to lead a team studying the impact of the attacks on the city's public school children.

What the researchers discovered surprised them. Many children in city schools exhibited symptoms of trauma — but the problems weren't clearly attributable to 9/11 nor were they clustered near Ground Zero. Such symptoms were, however, concentrated in schools serving the city's poorest children. And the students' sense of threat or insecurity stemmed not so much from terrorism as from exposure to violence, inadequate housing, sudden family loss, parents with depression or addictions, and so forth.

"One-fifth of children met criteria for a full-blown psychiatric disorder, and 68 percent of kids had been exposed to a prior trauma sufficient to impair their functioning in school," said Cantor.

When Cantor visited a public school in Washington Heights, she was struck by how chaotic — and unsafe — it felt. "I asked myself, 'What is driving what we're seeing?' When we unpacked it, we saw that in classrooms where lots of kids are under varying degrees of stress, one child acting out can set off other kids and shut down the learning environment for everyone. If you have numerous children across the school with issues like that, you can produce a hugely negative culture and shut down learning in the building."

At the time, researchers were gaining deeper understanding into how stress impedes learning. "There's a whole sequence of neurological, psychological and physiological responses to threats that disrupts higher order cognitive functions," said C. Cybele Raver, a professor in the Department of Applied Psychology at New York University, who co-leads the school's Neuroscience and Education Lab. "Brains don't do well under threat. We knew some of this but we didn't know it as well as we do now." (PDF)

We can see its effects nationally. Across the United States, in six of the nation's nine largest school districts, average graduation rates have fallen below 50 percent. There is a pattern, says Cantor: Low-performing schools tend to share high stress, negative cultures (lots of yelling, punishments and inconsistent responses from adults), students with low readiness to learn who are two to four years behind grade levels, and teachers and staff members who have never been trained for these kinds of challenges.

"The bad news is that environments that are filled with stress will impact development in ways that negatively impact growth — specifically, important readiness skills for learning," added Cantor. "The good news is we can use this same knowledge to design environments to both correct for that negative impact but more importantly to set development on a healthy course."

The science about adversity and the developing brain is sobering, but it also offers hope. Brains are malleable. And adults can take specific actions to buffer stress for children and help them develop the self-regulatory skills they need in school and in life. Much of it boils down to creating trusting relationships and encouraging environments.

How do you do this?

Cantor's contribution was to found an organization called Turnaround for Children, which focuses on helping public schools in high-poverty areas lay a core foundation that will allow for academic growth. The group now works with 15 schools in New York City, Newark and Washington, D.C., and has worked with more than 80 over the past decade.

Turnaround takes a whole-school approach, inviting everyone in the school community to play a role in transforming the school's culture. That means the principal must have a vision of a different teaching and learning environment, and commit time and resources to building it; teachers need to acquire new skills and tools to manage classrooms in ways that build trust while engaging students in rigorous instruction; and students must come to see school as important to their success in life, and connect that idea to their own actions in the classroom.

All of that is very hard to do. But it can be done.

Take, for example, the experience of Karrie Hylton, who has been a middle school teacher for 12 years. Over the last three, at the Collaborative Arts Middle School (C.A.M.S.) in a high-poverty neighborhood in Springfield Gardens, Queens, she has shifted the way she interacts with her students, and it has radically changed her eighth-grade science classroom. It's part of a school transformation in partnership with Turnaround.

"My students come into the classroom with a lot of family issues and outside factors," Hylton said. "In the past, when children were being disruptive, I would think it's because they just wanted to be disruptive. Now I see a child being disruptive as a child crying out."

First, she will try to discover what's behind bad behavior, and help. She may take the student out to a pizza lunch to get to know him or her better. If necessary, she may ask the school's social worker to observe the child in class.

She has also changed the way she communicates. Rather than calling out students for misbehavior — "Why are you late to class?" or "Why aren't you doing the work?" — Hylton redirects them toward better behavior: "I expect you to be working on the assignment on page 29, questions three to eight." She also makes sure the students understand what she expects. "You think they should know, but sometimes they don't," she says. "Often they need to be reminded."

Hylton has also shifted to a cooperative learning approach, using a range of techniques known as Kagan Cooperative Structures. Gone are the rows of desks; students now work in small groups. "Before, with whole class discussions, many students would have no chance to answer a question or give their opinion," she said. "These structures make it possible for each kid to have equal voice and participation."

Those changes in individual teaching methods are not the whole story. What makes Turnaround's work so compelling is how it has broken down its long-term vision of school transformation into processes and chunks that are themselves teachable to educators and administrators. For instance, the program's social work consultants have experience in helping schools establish systems to identify and promptly assist students with severe emotional or behavioral needs.

Indeed, in Turnaround partner schools, more than 90 percent of students with behavioral needs get connected to appropriate services, typically within three weeks. This is a departure from the norm; research indicates that only about 20 percent of children or adolescents who need mental health care receive it, with unmet need greatest among minorities.

Timeliness is key. When emotional problems are not identified quickly, students fall far behind on schoolwork and their behavior can disrupt the learning of others. Over the past two years, Turnaround's partner schools have seen suspensions and serious behavioral incidents drop by 50 percent.

The program also provides a full-time instructional coach within each of its partner schools to support teachers one-on-one and in groups. "A big part of what we do is bring consistency of classroom management and culture," said Jeta Donovan, Turnaround's coach for C.A.M.S. "If every teacher in the building is taking a positive stance to student behavior, the overall climate of the school changes."

Donovan helps teachers establish rules and procedures, set expectations, and use techniques like "class builders" or "relationship building lunches" to foster trust. She helps teachers practice de-escalating and redirecting negative student behavior by modeling respect, rather than falling back on power. For instance, if a student is not lining up for lunch, a logical consequence is to require the student to take time from lunch to practice lining up, not to threaten to call the student's mother.

They anticipate problems — like the normal spikes of misbehavior that occur after holiday breaks — and plan strategies for responding to bad behavior without sharp reactions, which can be counterproductive.

"Prior to Turnaround I would just call students out," said Sheena Mathew, who teaches eighth-grade humanities at C.A.M.S. "Now

I realize each child is different. For some, you need non-verbal signals. For some, the best thing is to walk over and give a tap on the shoulder. 'Are you actively listening now?' The worst thing you can do to middle school students is shame them. Some students, if you call them out, they may not talk to you for the rest of the year."

All of this is part of creating a foundation in which learning can occur. "It's not 'care about kids and kids will thrive,' observes Raver, from N.Y.U. "It's 'care about kids and structure classroom environments and opportunities for learning in rigorous ways with high expectations' — and kids will thrive."

Tammy Holloway, the principal at C.A.M.S., sees the work as critical to the school's mission: "If you're in a class where you don't feel safe, where you feel like kids are going to ridicule you, or the teacher is going to respond in an unkind way, it will stop you. You can't persist in a place that's unkind and not encouraging, and our kids *need* to be persistent to succeed."

Turnaround's culture-change work is more difficult to evaluate than traditional academic interventions. It can take years to see higher test scores. So the program enlists independent evaluators who use the well-regarded Classroom Assessment Scoring System, developed at the University of Virginia. That system scores the quality of classroom relationships and the emotional and instructional support provided. By this measure, from fall 2012 to spring 2014, the proportion of teachers ranked five or higher (on a scale of one to seven) rose from 27 to 67 percent. "It's increasingly likely that people on our staff will be successful because they're receiving support that's creating classrooms that are both emotionally and physically safe," said Holloway.

Turnaround focuses on an important terrain within the school reform movement: how to get a struggling school, in Cantor's words, to "a place where they can make solid use of academic innovation."

Her vision is not to spread the program far and wide, but to demonstrate that an intentional focus on the so-called "nonacademic" skills is a prerequisite for success, rather than a frill. If successful, she hopes Turnaround's principles and practices will spread through a variety of platforms and be adopted by districts so they can improve the ways they train and hire staff, as well as assess school and student success.

"Development of nonacademic skills requires the same intentional and rigorous approach we take to any other instruction, like math or literacy," said Cantor. "Students need modeling, guidance, support and opportunities to apply these skills just as they do with academics."

"Children's cognitive, social and emotional development is wired," she added. "If we set up environment to be rich in relationships it will allow that development to flourish — and with that the expression of the full potential in every child."

David Bornstein is the author of "How to Change the World," which has been published in 20 languages, and "The Price of a Dream: The Story of the Grameen Bank," and is co-author of "Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know." He is a co-founder of the Solutions Journalism Network, which supports rigorous reporting about responses to social problems.

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR LEARNING

A FRAMEWORK FOR COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

K. BROOKE STAFFORD-BRIZARD, PH.D.

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INTRODUCTION

This document presents the background and rationale for a framework to support and develop non-academic skills among all children in grades K-12. The "Building Blocks for Learning" framework is intended to serve as a platform for multiple stakeholders from the areas of policy, research and practice to build a more comprehensive approach to student development in schools. This work contributes to a number of other efforts currently underway to create a more coherent field of policy, research and practice which focuses on comprehensive student development – the full set of skills and beliefs that students need to succeed in K-12 and to thrive in the years beyond. Turnaround for Children offers this framework as a contribution to a vital collaborative endeavor to deepen and transform K-12 education.

THE CASE FOR COMPREHENSIVE STUDENT DEVELOPMENT

Currently, the U.S. education system draws from a rigorous and well-developed set of academic standards for learning. However, success in the classroom and beyond relies on much more than mastery of these academic standards. If academic standards are *what* students need to learn, there are also skills and beliefs that prepare and support *how* students learn. Successful engagement in the classroom and in life relies on a set of cognitive and social-emotional skills and beliefs, which are not represented in academic standards.

When students face adversity and stress in their home environment or fail to access a quality preschool education (or both), the development of cognitive and social-emotional skills and beliefs is at risk. Thus, K-12 design must ensure that instruction, supports and assessments are in place to address this potential skills gap in school-age students. Currently, many schools function under the assumption that critical skills for learning are in place upon entry into K-12, leaving many students without the attention or support they need to develop as learners. **All students, regardless of socioeconomic background, need these cognitive and social-emotional skills to engage and thrive in a learning environment**.

When educators neither prioritize these non-academic skills and beliefs nor integrate them with academic development, students are left without tools for engagement or a language for learning. They become dependent on adult-driven procedures and routines rather than their own skills and motivation. To deliver the education all students deserve – one that prepares them for the life they choose – the U.S education system must address the essential elements of student development beyond academics. When students matriculate through K-12 without the skills necessary to engage in learning, they can't process the vast amount of instruction that comes their way each day and it becomes daunting, if not impossible, to stay on track. **This is the achievement gap.**

The *Building Blocks for Learning* represent a set of evidence-based skills and beliefs that facilitate and foster success in school and life. They have been proven by research to strongly correlate to and even predict academic achievement. While there is increasing focus on these skills and beliefs within the U.S. education system, K-12 schools have yet to be designed with the effective integration of these critical components of development in mind. But they can and should be. Moreover, when educators do emphasize non-academic skills, they generally do so in isolation from academic instruction, without the sound design and instructional practices that are often effectively applied toward academic development. It is well understood that students build academic skills through effective modeling, scaffolding (or support) and opportunities to apply and transfer them independently. It is also well understood that students must develop foundational academic skills before higher-order skills. Children's behavioral, social, emotional and cognitive development requires this same design, attention and support.

It is also important to consider that in K-12 schools student development occurs within the social context of a classroom through relationships between teachers, peers and other adults. Many current frameworks for student development are limited in their transactional approach between a student and academic content, which underrepresents this critical social dynamic. In the relentless focus on what students need to learn, the central role that human relationships play in student development is often overlooked. Relationships are the fuel for human development; they foster trust and belief, and are a buffer against

stress. Children learn through modeling from and interaction with others in the form of guidance, support and collaboration, whether this is a parent, teacher, other adult or a peer. Current focus on student development rightly prioritizes the academic skills and knowledge that students must acquire, apply and then transfer to new contexts, yet this prioritization cannot eclipse the fact that relationships drive this learning and development. The *Building Blocks for Learning* reflect a set of skills and beliefs that facilitate student success in a social context through inter- and intra-personal development. These are not just skills and beliefs to prioritize in addition to academics, these are the skills and beliefs to prioritize in service of academic success, as well as success in college and life. The *Building Blocks for Learning* are what students need to become successful, engaged and independent learners in K-12 and beyond.

THE *BUILDING BLOCKS* FRAMEWORK

Turnaround's "Building Blocks for Learning" framework represents the tools and beliefs that students use to access, acquire and apply the academic skills and knowledge prioritized in classrooms.

<u>Figure 1</u>

The skills and beliefs included in this framework were identified through the following guiding principles:

1. Alignment to the development of the **child as a "learner"** in an educational setting

2. A **measurable** and **malleable** skill, behavior or belief – differentiating between fixed personality/character traits and "teachable" learner attributes
3. A research base demonstrating impact of the skill, behavior or belief on **academic achievement**

Several popular skills, beliefs and traits did not meet these guidelines and are therefore not included as *Building Blocks.* For example, grit is considered a personality trait, and has not yet been proven to be teachable.[1] What are represented are key *Building Blocks* that contribute to the complex construct of grit and meet the framework's guiding principles, such as self-regulation and academic tenacity. As another example, creativity is a compelling and important skill to many, but has an inconsistent relationship with achievement in the research.[2] This might very well be due to the fact that traditional K-12 classrooms often do not reward creativity as much as compliance. While this is something to consider with ongoing research and practice, current evidence does not support the inclusion of creativity as a *Building Block.*

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

In the first or bottom row of the framework is a set of foundational skills that every child needs. Identified through research in the fields of neuroscience and child development, these skills rely on healthy brain development, supported through relationships and environmental conditions. These include the bonds that children make with adults, which provide emotional security, the skills to cope with and manage stressful conditions and the regulation of emotion and attention to effectively engage and accomplish goals. Research has demonstrated that chronic stress and adversity, often experienced by children growing up in poverty, significantly impact the development of areas of the brain responsible for these foundational skills. As a result, many of these students do not enter school with skills for controlling impulses, focusing attention and organizing thinking in a goal-oriented fashion.[3]

The second row of the "Building Blocks" framework represents a set of social-emotional skills and cognitive skills that contribute to a child's readiness to engage successfully in school.[4] Together these first two rows of skills are requisite for learning and are often prioritized in high-quality, early-childhood settings. These skills, predictive of achievement, are the gateway for engaging in the classroom, connecting to teachers and peers and building the habits of success that drive achievement. The "Building Blocks for Learning" framework proposes how these gateway skills, together with a set of beliefs that students have about themselves and school, contribute to higher-order skills that help students to persevere through school and succeed in life with capacity, confidence and independence.

The student-held beliefs, represented in the third row of the model, include the conviction that they are capable of success and that this comes with effort and hard work (self-efficacy and growth mindset), and beliefs that allow students to connect to school with an understanding that education is a path toward success (sense of belonging and relevance of school)[5]. These beliefs are placed above the gateway skills in the framework, but this does not mean they cannot be developed either simultaneously with or after the gateway skills, or even before. Where and how to focus on each belief remains an important empirical question that this nascent field of research will address over time. There is still much to learn regarding the developmental nature of this set of important beliefs students have about themselves and school. What is clear from research

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[1] Duckworth, A. L. & Eskreis-Winkler, L. (2013). True grit. *The Observer, 26*(4), 1-3

[2] Philliber Research Associates. (2013). *Beyond Content: Incorporating Social and Emotional Learning into the Strive Framework.*

[3] Blair, C. & Raver, C. C. (2012). Child development in the context of adversity: Experiential canalization of brain and behavior. *American Psychologist*, 67(4), 309-318. doi: 10.1037/a0027493

[4] As a note, many researchers include executive functions – including inhibitory control, flexibility and memory skills – as part of the construct of self-regulation, but as Diamond and Lee[4] note, "more complex EFs include problem-solving, reasoning and planning." Executive functions are a vital set of skills for accessing, processing and storing information, and develop with more complexity as a child develops, with two significant benchmarks in early childhood and adolescence. Due to the complexity and progression of these skills in relation to development, they are separated from the umbrella concept of self-regulation.

[5] Farrington, C. A., Roderick, M., Allensworth, E. A., Nagaoka, J., Johnson, D. W., Keyes, T. S., & Beechum, N. (2012). *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Academic Performance – A Critical Literature Review*. Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research.
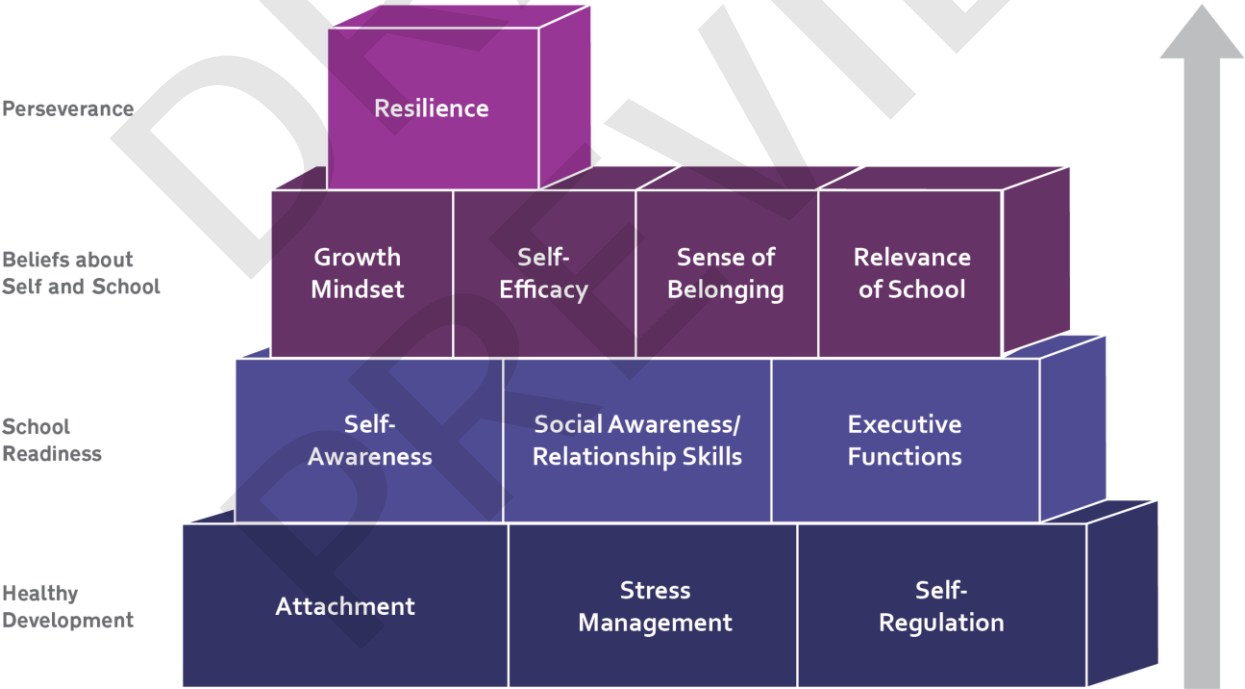
is that the gateway skills, together with the beliefs about self and school, contribute to the higher-order *Building Blocks*, such as resilience[6] and academic tenacity[7].

The top two rows of *Building Blocks* represent the skills that help a student to persevere through school toward commencement despite the barriers and adversity they might face. This includes resilience that allows students to recover and bounce back from harmful conditions that could derail their success. It also includes agency, or the ability to act with autonomy and advocate for oneself in service of individual values and goals. And finally, it includes academic tenacity, which helps students persevere toward long-term goals. At the top of the framework, the highest-order *Building Blocks* demonstrate the skills that allow students to chart their own course in life and pursue that course with independence. Self-direction, curiosity and civic identity are skills that capture (respectively): how students identify and pursue goals successfully, how they use the world to accomplish goals with inquiry and flexibility, and how they define their own contributions to the world.

While the lower-order *Building Blocks* do not comprehensively define the higher-order skills, they are powerful and consistent contributors to them, and therefore support the developmental perspective of the model. As an example, Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the lower-order *Building Blocks* that contribute to the development of resilience and academic tenacity, according to the research defining these skills. Ongoing research targeting the developmental connection between specific lower-order and higher-order *Building Blocks* will contribute to the development and validation of this framework.

Figure 2

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR LEARNING:
DEVELOPMENT OF RESILIENCE
Masten, 2007

| Perseverance | Resilience | | | |
Beliefs about Self and School	Growth Mindset	Self-Efficacy	Sense of Belonging	Relevance of School
School Readiness	Self-Awareness	Social Awareness/ Relationship Skills	Executive Functions	
Healthy Development	Attachment	Stress Management	Self-Regulation	

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[6] Masten, A. S. (2007). Resilience in developing systems: Progress and promise as the fourth wave rises. *Development and Psychopathology*, 19, 921–930.

[7] Dweck, C., Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). Academic tenacity: Mindsets and skills that promote log-term learning. Paper presented at the Gates Foundation, Seattle, WA.

Figure 3

BUILDING BLOCKS FOR LEARNING:
DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC TENACITY

Dweck, Walton & Cohen, 2011
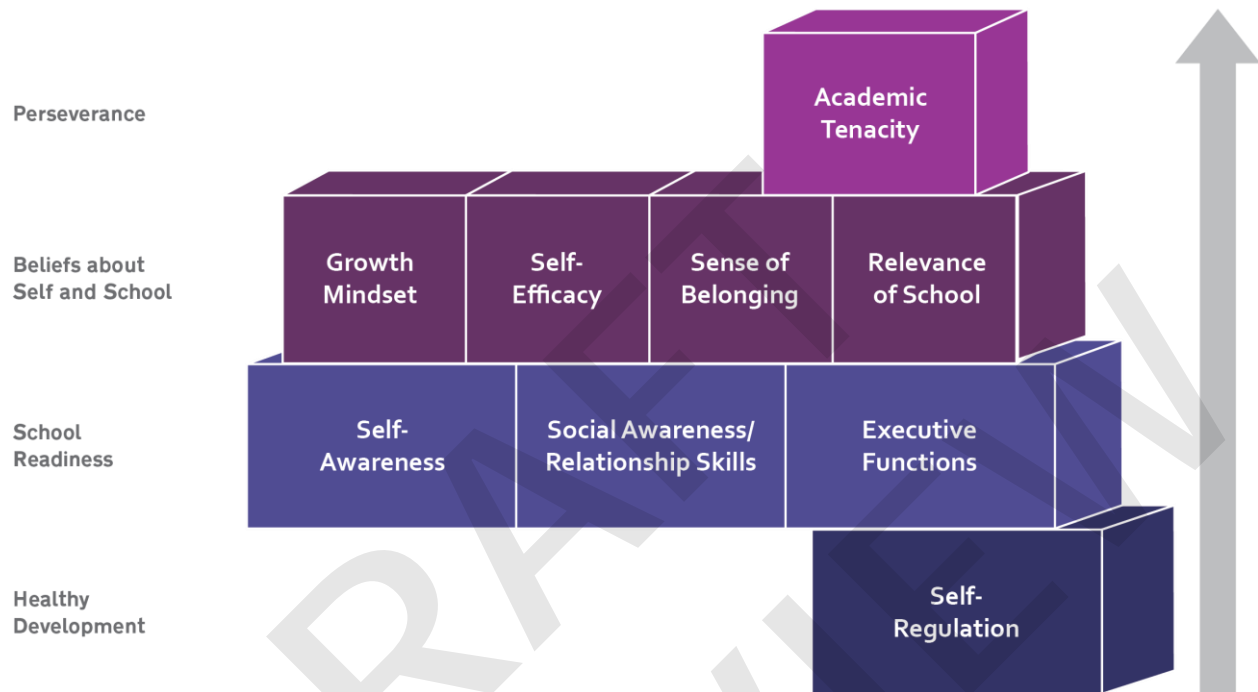
NEXT STEPS

There are numerous opportunities to test and strengthen this framework for student development and steps to take within the areas of research, practice and policy.

Research

As noted above, this framework provides a deep set of empirical questions and the platform for a rich research agenda that will contribute to the ongoing validation of the framework and the developmental connections within it. New learnings are surfacing from fields such as neuroscience almost every day, contributing to understanding of neural development and diversity, the neurobiology of stress and adversity, and how all of this impacts learning. Findings from this and other relevant fields, such as educational, positive and social psychology, will provide critical contributions to this developing framework. Moreover, research within and between each of the *Building Blocks* will help to answer important questions regarding age, gender and race as they relate to the perception, acquisition and application of these skills and beliefs. Further research will also inform which skills can or must be developed toward mastery and which fall on a continuum of performance.

While there is evidence to support the malleability of the *Building Blocks*, researchers and practitioners invested in this framework will need to address:

- How these skills and beliefs can be effectively taught and strengthened within school settings
- How they should be sequenced and overlap in their implementation
- What level of demonstration or mastery is required for progression up the developmental ladder

- Effective integration with academic development and pedagogical practice (e.g., personalization, differentiation), prioritizing alignment to the Common Core State Standards and leveraging the powerful connection to process skills outlined in these standards

Research can also contribute to the development of crucial measures of these skills and beliefs. The most common and accessible form of measurement for most *Building Blocks* is a self-report, which presents a number of threats to validity. Informant reports from parents, teachers or peers are also possible, as are behavioral tasks, which can be costly and time-consuming. A number of researchers have suggested a composite measure, including questionnaires and behavioral tasks, which should be pursued with attention to availability of resources (e.g., time and money) in schools. As all of these options develop, there must be strategic focus on a commitment to effectively embedding these measures into school design so there is time allocated for their administration, efficient analysis and effective use of the data as a formative tool for addressing student needs in these non-academic domains.

While the empirical questions and areas for development around the *Building Blocks for Learning* are significant, the opportunity to establish a rigorous and developmental framework for these skills and beliefs with deep connection to both academic and personal growth and achievement has the potential to dramatically improve the education provided for students across the country.

Practice

As emerging research informs this framework, the field of practice must use these findings to prioritize effective and integrated development of the *Building Blocks*. Today, the gap between theory and practice regarding the development and support of these non-academic skills and beliefs remains large. Practitioners will provide critical insights toward the successful identification and implementation of the *Building Blocks* within the complex environments of districts, schools and classrooms. Stimulating, supporting, documenting and measuring innovation in districts and schools is a critical piece of the work ahead. This also includes codifying many of the existing programs and practices that educators currently use. There is a tremendous amount of established practice that addresses this domain of student development and its effective integration with academics. Identifying where this practice exists and effectively documenting it will be a large contribution to the field.

The work of identifying and developing effective practice with regard to the *Building Blocks for Learning* will include:

- Leadership and teacher preparation, professional development and evaluation
- Support and guidance for effective school culture and climate
- Design and implementation of curriculum, assessments and pedagogical supports
- Tools and supports focused on development of the skills and beliefs represented in the *Building Blocks* (e.g., stress reduction and self-regulation through mindfulness and contemplative practice)
- Systems of support and intervention for students

Key learnings from the *Building Blocks for Learning* in practice will inform the work of K-12 and beyond, providing insight into how college environments and workforce development programs can be strengthened and reinvented. Attention to the full continuum of student development from early childhood to adulthood will also inform the creation of developmentally appropriate resources to support acquisition and application of the *Building Blocks*. Research and practice have demonstrated that many individuals, particularly those experiencing the stress and adversity of poverty, do not acquire these skills and beliefs at the developmentally appropriate age. In addition, neuroscientific research continues to demonstrate critical periods where neural development is possible, such as the teenage years. Just as the challenge of learning to read in older students and adults has been addressed through age-appropriate, engaging materials and instruction, the same can be done for the development of skills such as self-regulation and executive functions.

Policy

Finally, policymakers have an opportunity to support the impact of both research and practice by prioritizing the development of the *Building Blocks* as a core component of a successful district and school. Setting policy to establish the relevant resources, supports and accountability at the federal, state and local levels will reinforce a paradigm shift in K-12 settings and fuel innovation and progress in the areas of research and practice. Furthermore, while the *Building Blocks for Learning* offer a universal perspective on non-academic development (i.e., every child regardless of their background must develop these skills and beliefs), research supports the tremendous impact this framework can have on high-need populations, such as students with learning and behavioral issues. Federal, state and district policies that incentivize and support environments and instruction to develop the *Building Blocks for Learning* will address the large population of students, many from high-poverty backgrounds, who are currently moving through the K-12 system without the gateway skills for learning. As stated earlier, the absence of cognitive and social-emotional skills, such as emotional regulation, attention and memory, that are core to effective engagement in learning, contributes significantly to ongoing challenges and deficits in academic development and to the achievement gap. Policy can play a powerful role in this innovative and promising strategy for addressing that gap.

CONCLUSION

There may be great momentum in the field of non-academic development, yet many of the domains are neither aligned nor integrated, thereby contributing to competing vocabularies, taxonomies and confusion regarding what to prioritize when in service of student development. Furthermore, this field remains disconnected from academic development, often rendering non-academic skills and beliefs supplemental or ancillary in the K-12 classroom instead of prioritized and integrated as they should be to drive comprehensive student development. "Building Blocks for Learning" presents an opportunity to launch and prioritize a common framework for the development of non-academic skills and beliefs within K-12 schools which interweaves with academic development and builds toward independence and success for all students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The "Building Blocks for Learning" framework was developed through collaboration and insight from Turnaround for Children's team of leaders and practitioners, informed by the organization's efforts to address the adverse effects of poverty and stress on child development and learning in K-12 schools. I am extremely grateful for the vision this organization has brought to the K-12 space and for their pioneering role in redefining the source of the challenge that students growing up in high-poverty environments face. This framework was also developed with guidance and feedback from a number of external thought partners from the fields of research and practice. I extend sincere gratitude to the external partners, and to the many individuals at Turnaround for Children who contributed their thoughts and feedback to this developing body of work.

ABOUT TURNAROUND FOR CHILDREN

Turnaround for Children acts as a catalyst for change by addressing the challenges that affect any school facing adversity, particularly those in high-poverty communities. Turnaround breaks down the process of school transformation into strategies that reduce stress, increase readiness to learn and cultivate an environment poised for academic achievement and personal growth. Please visit www.turnaroundusa.org to learn more.

APPENDIX

Working Definitions of Building Blocks for Learning

Academic Tenacity: The beliefs and skills that allow students to look beyond short-term concerns to longer-term or higher-order goals, and withstand challenges and setbacks to persevere toward these goals.[8]

Agency: Student's individual decision-making and autonomous actions.[9]

Attachment: A deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space.[10]

Beliefs[11]

> **Growth Mindset**: Wherein students ascribe to the belief: *my ability and competence grow with my effort.*

> **Relevance of School**: A student's sense that the endeavor of attending and participating in school is interesting and holds value.

> **Self-Efficacy**: The belief that one can do something successfully, specifically a child's belief that he/she can take on and eventually master academic, social and extra-curricular challenges in school.

> **Sense of Belonging**: A sense that one has a rightful place in a given academic setting and can claim full membership in a classroom community.

Civic Identity: A multifaceted and dynamic notion of the self as belonging to and responsible for a community or communities.[12]

Curiosity: Desire to engage and understand the world, interest in a wide variety of things, and preference for a complete understanding of a complex topic or problem.[13]

Executive Functions: The cognitive control functions needed when one has to concentrate and think, when acting on one's initial impulse would be ill-advised. Core executive functions include cognitive flexibility, inhibition (self-control, self-regulation), and working memory. More complex executive functions include problem-solving, reasoning and planning.[14]

Relationship Skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively and seeking and offering help when needed.[15]

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[8] Dweck, et al., 2011

[9] Toshalis, E. & Nakkula, M.J. (2012) *Motivation, Engagement, and Student Voice. The Students at the Center Series*. Jobs for the Future.

[10] Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1973). The development of infant-mother attachment. In B. Cardwell & H. Ricciuti (Eds.), *Review of child development research* (Vol. 3, pp. 1-94) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

[11] Farrington, et al., 2012.

[12] Rubin, Beth C. (2007). "There's Still Not Justice": Youth Civic Identity Development Amid Distinct School and Community Contexts" Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey.

[13] Goff, M., & Ackerman, P. (1992). Personality-intelligence relations: Assessment of typical intellectual engagement. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *84*, 537-552

[14] Diamond A, Lee K. (2011). Interventions shown to aid executive function development in children 4 to 12 years old. *Science*, *333*(604) 959–964.

[15] Ibid.

Resilience: Positive adaptation during or following exposure to adversities that have the potential to harm development: (a) developing well in the context of high cumulative risk for developmental problems (beating the odds, better than predicted development), (b) functioning well under currently-adverse conditions (stress-resistance, coping), and (c) recovery to normal functioning after catastrophic adversity (bouncing back, self-righting) or severe deprivation (normalization).[16]

Self-Awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.[17]

Self-Direction: A process in which learners take the initiative in planning, implementing and evaluating their own learning needs and outcomes, with or without the help of others.[18]

Self-Regulation: Regulation of attention, emotion, and executive functions for the purposes of goal-directed actions.[19]

Social Awareness: The ability to take the perspective of, and empathize with, others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.[20]

Stress Management: Constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person.[21]

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[16] Masten, A., 2007.

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Kraag, G., Zeegers, M. P., Kok, G.; Hosman, C., & Abu-Saad, H. H. (2006). School programs targeting stress management in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis. *Journal of School Psychology,* 44, 449-472. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2006.07.001

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SCHOOL

Turn Around
PARTNERS IN SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION™

MENTAL HEALTH PARTNER

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A TURNAROUND MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP?

RAPID RESPONSE FROM MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC

Turnaround expedites the process of connecting families of students seeking mental health assistance to services, including intake, psychiatric evaluation and ongoing treatment.

COORDINATED COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOL & MENTAL HEALTH PARTNER

Turnaround facilitates communication to address all treatment needs, including identification of treatment goals and effective problem-solving to address barriers to care.

IN-SCHOOL SERVICES & HOME VISITS REFERRED BY A FAMILIAR SOURCE

Turnaround helps families navigate the mental health treatment system via a trusted school liaison.

ULTIMATE GOAL: SUSTAINABILITY

Our goal is for schools and community mental health partners to forge enduring partnerships that build upon the structures, systems and values introduced and established by Turnaround for Children.

By connecting schools to a community mental health partner, **TURNAROUND FOR CHILDREN BOOSTS THE POWER & EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES DELIVERED TO STUDENTS IN NEED** helping institutions achieve greater impact together.

Across our D.C. partner schools, treatment rates among referred students jumped:

54% 2013-14
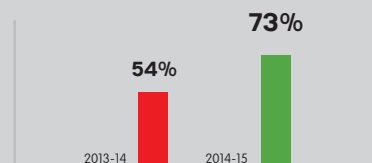
73% 2014-15

79 students were connected with mental health services in school year 2014-15

HOW A MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP WITH TURNAROUND WORKS:

A **Mental Health Coordinator** is assigned to each school in order to facilitate services. Each family is contacted for diagnostic assessments within seven days. The Mental Health Coordinator ensures rapid referral and guarantees that students are being seen for clinical services each week. Turnaround for Children pays the salary of the Mental Health Coordinator.

Turnaround's **Social Work Consultant** facilitates collaboration between school-based staff and the community mental health partner to monitor referrals and treatment, troubleshoot challenges and track progress towards goals. The Social Work Consultant particpates in regular meetings of Turnaround's student support and mental health teams and collborates with teachers to implement strategies introduced by Turnaround in the school.

MENTAL HEALTH PARTNER: FIRST HOME CARE

First Home Care is a core service agency that provides services to children and adolescents and their families to promote healing and social-emotional growth.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL:

- Emotional, behavioral and social difficulties
- School-related problems (suspensions, negative peer relationships, fighting, truancy, etc.)
- Adjustment difficulties (parent/family incarceration, death of a loved one, etc.)
- Home disruptions (shelter placement, foster care placement, etc.)
- Mental illness

FREE
FOR STUDENTS
WITH D.C. MEDICAID

SERVICES PROVIDED:

- Diagnostic assessment (school-based)
    › Clinical assessment in the school that determines eligibility for services
- Community support (primarily school-based)
    › Therapeutic interventions focused on helping develop effective coping and decision-making skills
- Community-based intervention (school, home and community)
    › Mental health services focused on reducing out of home/community placement
- Counseling (school and home)
- Psychiatric medication management (office-based)
    › Administration, monitoring, education and supervision of mental health-related medication

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

- D.C. Medicaid
- Resident or ward of the District of Columbia
- Evaluation yields a mental health diagnosis

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

MIKE LAMB
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Where It All Comes Together

How Partnerships Connect Communities and Schools

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KAZUSHIGE NITTA

By Martin J. Blank and Lisa Villarreal

The modern-day community schools movement reached a new plateau in 2008 when Randi Weingarten made community schools a central element of her platform as the new president of the American Federation of Teachers. The AFT's action was a milestone on a journey that began a decade earlier, when advocates for community schools determined that it was necessary to renew a core American value—that our public schools should be centers of flourishing communities where everyone belongs and works together to help our young people thrive.

The AFT's leadership understood then, and continues to understand now, that students need the organized support of their communities to succeed, and that schools alone cannot provide all the educational and developmental experiences young people need to graduate and succeed in life.

Leaders in local government, local United Ways, community foundations, higher education institutions, community-based organizations, and beyond are coming to the same conclusion. Across the country, they see a public school student population that is more than 51 percent poor[1] and increasingly diverse. And they see young people who are more isolated and distrustful,[2] and who face deep and pervasive inequities.

Community schools purposefully partner with youth organizations, health clinics, social service agencies, food banks, higher education institutions, businesses, and others to meet students' and families' academic and nonacademic needs, so teachers are free to teach and students are ready to learn. Community schools are becoming the chosen strategy for action among these leaders. Such schools represent a comprehensive—and transformative—school reform strategy that views young people holistically and expects everyone to step up to support them.

The Coalition for Community Schools, which was organized in 1997, has become a driving force in the community schools movement. With 214 partners in education, health and mental

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health, youth development, civil rights, local government, child and youth advocacy, philanthropy, and local community school initiatives, the coalition has helped raise the visibility of community schools and has led many partners to pursue the development of community schools as part of their own agendas.

In this article, we outline how far the community schools movement has come since the AFT made community schools a priority in 2008. We explain why the movement has grown, clarify what exactly makes a community school different from other schools, lay out how community schools work, and show the positive results that community schools are attaining. We conclude with a brief discussion of the challenges that lie ahead.

The Rise of the Community Schools Movement

Approximately 5,000 schools in more than 150 communities across the country currently employ the community school strategy, serving around 2 million students. Exact numbers are hard to determine because community schools come in so many shapes and sizes and often don't follow a formal model. Large school districts (such as Baltimore; Chicago; New York City; and Oakland, California), medium-size districts (such as Cincinnati; Evansville, Indiana; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Salt Lake City), and smaller districts (such as Vallejo, California; Evanston, Illinois; and Allentown, Pennsylvania) are embracing community schools. University-assisted community schools, where higher education institutions partner with schools, are also growing, as is Communities In Schools, a national nonprofit focused on eliminating the barriers that contribute to students dropping out of school. These places and approaches cut across political perspectives, reflecting the fact that gathering the community at the schoolhouse in order to better support young people and the community is a traditional American idea.

Significantly, these school districts and communities are not just organizing individual community schools; they are working to transform every school into a community school, where both the school district and the community share responsibility for ensuring better outcomes for young people.

Multiple factors have led to the continuing adoption of community schools. First, the test-based accountability movement simply has not achieved what its architects set out to do: dramatically improve student achievement, especially for poor children and children of color. While that movement has illuminated the achievement gap, it has not addressed the inequities in young people's lives, the toxic stress,[3] and the sense of isolation that come from growing up in racially and economically segregated neighborhoods. Nor has it addressed health disparities, chronic absence, school discipline, the lack of social capital, and other challenges receiving growing attention today.

The increase in poverty among our nation's students cannot be overemphasized as well. The majority of public school students now come from low-income families, and that number seems likely to grow as the squeeze on the middle class continues. Our country's population is also more diverse than ever,* with the percentage of English language learners continuing to increase,[4] and the number of languages spoken and cultures present in public schools continuing to challenge a predominantly white teacher workforce.

*For more about the increasing diversity of language and culture in the United States, see the article by Claude Goldenberg and Kirstin Wagner on page 28 of this issue of *American Educator*.

Also, a growing recognition that children learn and develop across multiple domains has bolstered the community schools movement. The success of young people depends not just on their academic achievement but on their cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and ethical growth, as well as their civic participation. This realization harkens back to the work of Abraham Maslow, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and James Comer,† who have argued for the importance of these multiple domains and for addressing the needs of the whole child.[5]

Moreover, as Robert Putnam demonstrates in his new book *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*,[6] too many of our young people lack access to opportunities to find their talent for art, music, athletics, and other abilities—opportunities that help them

> Our public schools should be centers of flourishing communities where everyone belongs and works together to help young people thrive.

develop vital skills and build connections and relationships to adults. The contrast in access to opportunity is stark for low-income children compared with their upper-middle-class peers.

The rise of community organizing efforts calling for community schools is another significant development. Family and community engagement have always been key components of the community school strategy. Now, families, young people, and community residents are coming together in deeper ways, demanding that their public schools not be closed. Community members are calling on state and district officials to give their schools the option to become community schools.[7] They want the stable institutions their communities deserve—places where their children can get the education they need.

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†For more on the work of James Comer, see "School Ties" in the Spring 2013 issue of *American Educator*, available at www.aft.org/ae/spring2013/dubin.

For more on the history of community schools and how coordinated partnerships meet students' academic, health, and social service needs—and also free teachers to teach—see the Summer 2009 issue of *American Educator*, available at **www.aft.org/ae/summer2009**.

These community organizers have come together under the banner of the national Journey for Justice Alliance, a coalition of grassroots organizations. They also belong to the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, a broader union-community organizing coalition that has helped introduce community schools legislation in 10 states.*

Finally, teachers know firsthand the impact that a changing student population and difficult family circumstances have on a child's education. In a recent survey by the Council of Chief State School Officers of 46 state teachers of the year, 76 percent

named family stress and 63 percent named poverty as significant barriers to student achievement.[8] And in a Communities In Schools survey, 88 percent of teachers said poverty is a major barrier to learning.[9] Additionally, a survey conducted by the AFT in spring 2015 highlighted the workplace stress that teachers face—stress that many educators believe impedes instruction and demeans the profession.†

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*For more on the Journey for Justice Alliance and the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, visit www.j4jalliance.com and www.reclaimourschools.org.
†For more on the AFT survey, visit http://go.aft.org/AFT-Workplace-Survey.

Conditions for Learning

- Early childhood development is fostered through high-quality, comprehensive programs that nurture learning and development.
- The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students.
- Students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school.
- The basic physical, social, emotional, and economic needs of young people and their families are met.
- There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents and school staff.
- The community is engaged in the school and promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful, and that offers students access to a broader set of learning opportunities.

SOURCE: COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, *COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: PROMOTING STUDENT SUCCESS; A RATIONALE AND RESULTS FRAMEWORK* (WASHINGTON, DC: COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, 2010), 10.

We can no longer afford to ignore the voices of teachers, who know our children best, or the data on the conditions in young people's lives that influence their learning and development. And more and more school and community leaders agree. That is why they are partnering to establish community schools.

Elements of a Community School

To be clear, academic achievement is central in community schools. After all, we all want young people to be ready for college, career, and citizenship.

But if we focus on academics alone, we fail to understand that young people develop, as we previously discussed, across multiple domains, and we fail to see that it is the responsibility of the school, family, and community, working in concert, to fulfill the necessary conditions for learning (for more on these conditions, see the box to the left).

From a community school perspective, fulfilling these conditions requires deep, respectful, and purposeful relationships among educators, families, and community partners. These partnerships ultimately help build and integrate the common elements of a community school: (1) health and social supports for students and families, often called wraparound services; (2) authentic family and community engagement; and (3) expanded learning opportunities inside and outside the school building that support the core curriculum and enrich students' learning experiences. For school and community leaders, community schools are not a "silver bullet" but a strategy for developing collective trust, collective action, and collective impact.

By establishing partnerships with child and family services organizations, community health centers, mental health agencies, and hospitals, community schools can respond to the fear, hunger, physical pain, and psychological distress that many students experience. Such partners place mental health counselors in schools and sometimes work with schools to operate and house health, dental, and vision clinics inside the actual school building. If such clinics are not located within community schools themselves, the schools link students and families to clinics located in the community.

Family resource centers that connect students and families to the services they need are also common in community schools. And it is not unusual for staff members from community partner organizations to sit and participate on student support teams.

Restorative justice programs have increasingly become a feature of community schools, as well. The term "restorative justice" describes approaches to discipline that help students "proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing."[10] Such programs can improve student behavior and help students avoid the pipeline to prison. By coordinating these services, community schools can reduce chronic absences due to poor health, decrease disciplinary issues and truancy rates, and help create a more stable living situation for children at home.

Authentic family and community engagement is the second dimension of a community school. Research clearly shows the important role that families play in their children's learning and development.[11] To that end, community schools seek to build mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families, and school staff. Community schools don't happen *to* families but *with* their active involvement.

Working with community-based partners, educators at many community schools interact with families beyond traditional parent-teacher conferences. Often, community schools embrace parent-teacher home visits,‡ participate on academic teams of parents and teachers, work with parents in leadership development, and engage in the work of community organizing groups. At community schools, families are seen as valuable resources for the education of their children. Such collaboration between teachers and parents helps create a more welcoming, respectful, and supportive culture and climate across the entire school. As teachers know all too well, the better the school climate, the more teaching and learning occur.

Finally, the enriching learning experiences that community schools offer can take place before, during, and after school, and may even extend into the summer. These experiences engage young people in real-world problem solving around issues of critical concern to students, families, and their neighborhoods. Issues such as decreasing violence, improving the

environment, increasing access to healthcare and good nutrition, and others enable the community to become a focal point for learning, with service learning as a common strategy. In community schools, partnerships with businesses, higher education institutions, and healthcare systems and hospitals offer students career-focused learning experiences, apprenticeships, and internships.

How Community Schools Operate

Strong leadership across multiple institutions, a focus on results, and the presence of a community schools coordinator are among the key ingredients for bringing community schools to life. School and community leaders have learned about these and other key ingredients for organizing effective community schools over the past two decades (see the box on page 8), and they are learning how to grow systems of community schools where partners and educators develop relationships with multiple community schools that coordinate resources, share best practices, and get results.

‡For an example of how parent-teacher home visits can work, see the article on the Parent/Teacher Home Visit Project on page 24 of this issue.

Focusing at the systems level is essential if community schools are to become a permanent part of the education and community landscape, and if they are to avoid the pitfalls of leadership transitions, policy shifts, and other forces. There are more than 150 places scaling up community schools, among the most recent being New York City, where Mayor Bill de Blasio has overseen the development of 128 community schools and has set a goal of establishing 200 by 2017.

Growing systems of community schools has become a key priority for the Coalition for Community Schools. Our experience shows that establishing interactions among a community-wide leadership group and site leadership teams from community schools within the same school district, with the support of a strong intermediary organization, is the key to building a successful system of community schools. In the coalition's guide *Scaling Up School and Community Partnerships: The Community Schools Strategy*, we outline the structural elements that experience tells us are necessary for the most sustainable system.[12]

> Community schools can reduce chronic absences due to poor health, decrease disciplinary issues and truancy rates, and help create a more stable living situation for children at home.

The community-wide leadership group, made up of members from the school district, local government, United Ways, businesses, teacher unions, and community- and faith-based organizations, is responsible for setting the overall vision, developing policy, aligning resources, and outlining accountability plans to build and sustain a system of community schools. A school-site leadership team, consisting of parents, residents, principals, teachers, school staff, community partners and usually a community coordinator, and students, is responsible for school-based decision making, which includes planning and implementation, and satisfying local needs that align with the school's academic mission. An intermediary entity (an organization or a working group composed of key managers from one or more partner agencies) provides planning, coordination, and management. Intermediary staff ensure communication among community-wide and school-site leaders. With these leadership structures in place, educators and partners can increase the number and effectiveness of community schools across a school district.

It's important to note that community schools are well-suited to engage with related efforts to help young people, families, and communities. For instance, the Becoming a Man program,[13] a prototype for President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative,

was designed by Youth Guidance, the lead partner in a number of Chicago community schools. (For more on the Becoming a Man program, see page 11.) Other community school initiatives also have taken up the call of My Brother's Keeper—to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color so all young people can reach their full potential.

Similarly, in addition to major organizational partners (e.g., the Afterschool Alliance, the School-Based Health Alliance, the National League of Cities, the School Superintendents Association, and United Way Worldwide), the coalition works with broad national initiatives that are related to community schools, including Attendance Works, the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the Promise Neighborhoods Institute, Partners for Each and Every Child, and the National Opportunity to Learn Campaign. Community schools welcome such efforts because each one requires the active engagement of the school and community to succeed. This makes community schools a powerful vehicle in collective impact and place-based strategies.[14]

Community Schools Are Effective

Multiple research studies show that community schools work, including a recent Child Trends meta-analysis that found that community schools support young people's needs, reduce grade retention and dropout rates, and increase attendance, math achievement, and grade-point averages.[15]

Key Ingredients of an Effective Community School

- A principal who knows his or her community, sees achieving equity as fundamental to his or her work, and makes the school building a place where educators, partners, and the public feel comfortable working together.
- Skilled teachers who have high expectations for their students, enjoy collaborative relationships with families and community partners, and offer students robust learning experiences that draw on community resources and expertise.
- Community partners with the expertise to help achieve the goals of the community school, and who are well integrated into the life of the school.
- A community schools coordinator who serves as a bridge between the school and community, aligns the work of educators and community partners toward a common set of results, and supports a site leadership team.
- A site leadership team that gives families, students, and residents a voice and involves them, along with educators and community partners, in the planning, implementation, and oversight of the community school.
- A community assessment that identifies the needs of the school, students, families, and community, as well as the assets of individuals, formal institutions and agencies, and informal organizations in the community that can be mobilized to meet these needs.
- A focus on results and accountability that uses data to define specific indicators that the community school seeks to improve, and the capacity to collect and analyze data to measure progress.

In Chicago, which has been subject to a variety of reforms over the years, research by Carnegie Foundation president Anthony Bryk and his colleagues found that schools with community school characteristics were more successful in terms of academic achievement in reading and math scores, and in reducing chronic absenteeism, along with other key indicators of student success.[16] Spanning many years, the research concluded that successful schools had robust parent-community ties, a student-centered learning climate, and instructional guidance. Trust among school leaders, teachers, families, and community members was also an important predictor of school success.

Similar findings appear in studies of community schools across the nation. For example, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, students in community schools that successfully implemented student and family supports had math scores that were 32 points higher and reading scores that were 19 points higher than their counterparts in other Tulsa schools.[17]

Students involved with City Connects in Boston community schools showed higher reading, writing, and mathematics report-card performance in grades 3–5, and higher third-grade math scores on the state standardized test. In middle school, students earned higher overall course grades in grades 6–7, and performed better on math and English language arts state tests in grades 6–8.[18]

Evaluators of Baltimore's community school initiative found that schools that had been implementing community school practices for five or more years had significantly better attendance rates and lower chronic absence rates than noncommunity schools. From the 2009–2010 to 2013–2014 school years, these community schools increased average attendance by 1.6 percent, compared with a 1.8 percent decrease for noncommunity schools, and decreased chronic absence rates by 4.1 percent, compared with a 3.6 percent increase for noncommunity schools.[19] (For more on Baltimore's community school initiative, see page 11.)

Finally, a study by the Finance Project shows that community schools return $10 to $14 in social benefits for each dollar invested.[20]

The Policy Environment for Community Schools

At the federal level, we continue to impress upon policymakers the importance of addressing the challenges that community schools take on. Progress is incremental but promising. As Congress debates the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the coalition has been promoting the authorization and funding of the Full-Service Community Schools Act[21] as a specific program, while also advocating for a set of principles that reflect the operational elements of community schools.

Key principles include a broader accountability framework, with elements such as health, wellness, and discipline; language undergirding the role of community school coordinators; professional development that enables principals, teachers, instructional support personnel, and community partners to work more effectively with families, communities, and each other; and capacity building that supports community school partnerships and better aligns and coordinates programs. In our discussions with members of Congress, these principles have received a positive reception.

At the state level, we have seen a marked increase in interest in community schools. New York and the District of Columbia have appropriated funds for community schools. Legislation supporting community schools has been enacted in Connecticut, Maine, and New Mexico. And in July 2014, the West Virginia Board of Education approved a policy framework endorsing community schools for statewide implementation.

A number of other states, often at the behest of community organizers, have already introduced or plan to introduce legislation this year to support community schools, including California, Georgia, Maine, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin. (For more on legislative efforts in Texas, see the article on page 12.) Passing bills will not be easy, but in the short term, introducing legislation raises the visibility of the community school strategy and strengthens the foundation for future growth. To support state efforts, the coalition is convening state-level community school advocates in order to promote supportive policies, provide technical assistance, and create a statewide peer learning group.
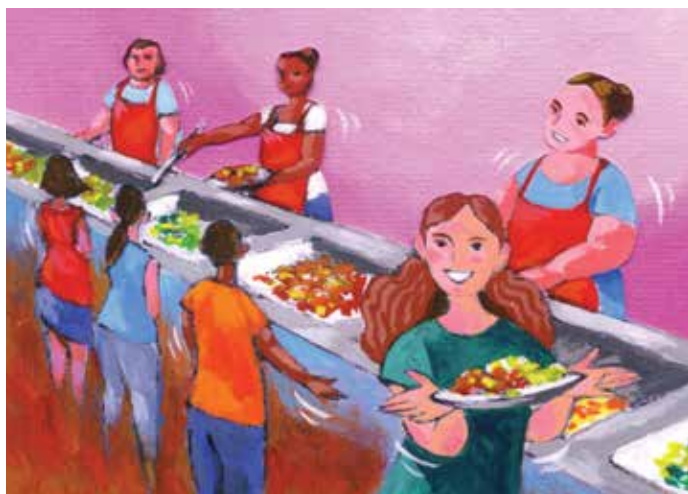
The Way Forward

Across the country, the widespread adoption of community schools shows great promise. The way forward is hopeful, but challenges as well as opportunities lie ahead.

Viewing Our Young People Differently: A fundamental transformation in the way our society sees young people is necessary. Our society must view our youth as assets to be developed, not problems to be addressed.[22] We must rebuild their trust in the people around them and help them to develop the agency—the sense of control over their own lives—so important to success.

Engaging Teachers and School Staff: Teachers and school staff members, who all play an enormous role in helping to create a safe school climate and culture, are becoming more deeply involved in the planning and implementation of community schools. And they are making clear the importance of addressing poverty, family stress, and other issues for success.

But there is more work to do to engage teachers in school-based decision making and in the nuts and bolts of community schools. With both the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association strongly committed to community schools, there is a significant opportunity to strengthen local ties between teachers and community partners.

Changing Mindsets, Enhancing Leadership, and Strengthening Professional Development: Leadership and professional development programs in education, social work, community development, and other fields need to offer a sharper picture of the inequities that influence public education. Principals and teachers not only need to be able to lead and deliver instruction, they must be prepared to work more effectively with families, community residents, and community partners. So too must the mindset of community partners change. They need to understand the culture of public schools, and as education allies, they must find effective ways to share their expertise.

Preparing Coordinators for Community Schools: Community school coordinators require interdisciplinary expertise in youth and community development, social work, and student learning, as well as data-driven decision making and strategic planning. To date, much of the preparation of these individuals has been handled at the local level, with limited resources. Only the University of Chicago offers a comprehensive master's-level

Across the country, the widespread adoption of community schools shows great promise.

program.[23] Much greater attention must be given to how coordinators are prepared and to professionalizing their role as the field grows.

Providing More Extensive Support for Capacity Building: There is a paucity of funding for capacity building of community schools, with minimal federal and state investment. While the National Center for Community Schools at the Children's Aid Society provides assistance, as do other local and regional groups, the support of public and private funders is essential.

Becoming a Community School District: As more school districts and communities work to bring community schools to scale, districts and community partners must consider ways to build and sustain their relationships. All partners must ask how they must change as an organization.

Districts will need to answer questions such as: How must data systems, leadership, professional development programs, facilities planning, and other practices change? How does the district integrate the assets of community partners into its school improvement planning so that the work of educators and community partners is aligned toward common results? How does it support principals and teachers in that endeavor?

Where Community Schools Are Strong

Across the country, in places that have expanded and sustained community schools, leadership—at both the school-building and school-district level—has played a major role.

Union leadership also matters, including representatives of both teachers and school support staff. When unions partner with community organizations and the school district, they can more effectively promote a common vision for public education. By their very nature, unions have the organizational infrastructure to organize educators and community members and do what they do best, which is to mobilize and engage around educational issues and student support.

In many cases, schools and communities must rebuild, strengthen, and/or create trusting relationships. Those who work in our schools and those who live in our communities have different assets and needs. The only way to provide access to opportunity for all children is for schools and communities to collectively come up with solutions that go beyond organizational self-interests. Effective community schools make decisions by consulting with school staff members, students, parents, and community partners.

National and local unions have supported such schools and see their potential. Organized labor and community organizations each bring their own kind of leverage and political power that can help schools and communities work toward a common vision of how to support children and families.

In moving the community school strategy forward, we need to be intentional about ensuring that labor groups, school officials, and community members are working together to drive school-based decision making and deepen the work of community schools nationwide.

A particular strength of the community school strategy is that it fosters local decision making, so that educators, parents, and community stakeholders can determine what's best for each child. The school-site leadership team—composed of a community school coordinator, parents, residents, principals, teachers, school staff, community partners, and students—makes school-based decisions that involve planning, implementation, and school improvement.

This team also focuses on making decisions that fulfill the needs of students, families, and the immediate community, all the while aligning those needs with academic goals.

Examples of how unions are helping to grow community schools include:

- **Helping to create state and local coalitions that can push for policy changes to support and fund community schools.** This work is taking place in Baltimore, New York City (pictured to the right), Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. For example, in partnership with the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, local and state union affiliates have formed statewide coalitions to advocate for state community school legislation.
- **Ensuring that community schools are part of political platforms, including in mayoral races and school board elections.** The United Federation of Teachers collaborated with community organizations across New York City, including the Children's Aid Society, to make sure all 2013 mayoral candidates included the expansion of the community school strategy in their platforms. As a result, after his election, Mayor Bill de Blasio made a commitment to invest $52 million to create more community schools.

  Additionally, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and the organization Great Public Schools Pittsburgh specifically endorse school board candidates based on their commitment to bring community schools to Pittsburgh Public Schools.
- **Building awareness around the community school strategy in their communities and with their members.** Education on what community schools are and how various stakeholders can get involved is crucial to ensuring that union members, community members, parents, students, and others are part of the conversation when it comes to creating community schools. For instance, the Baltimore Teachers Union created the Education Roundtable in partnership with a variety of stakeholders—the Family League of Baltimore, the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland, Maryland Communities United, CASA de Maryland, and the Baltimore/Maryland Central Labor Council, among others. Together, they are building awareness around community schools by holding trainings at schools for their members as well as for community members and parents.

AFT PHOTOS

- **Using this strategy as common ground for labor-management relationships.** Conversations with school districts around the creation of community schools must take place, even in the instances where strong relationships don't yet exist. Ultimately, having labor groups, community members, and management working together on this strategy will be a key factor in its sustainability. For example, in Cincinnati, where community school work has been taking place for more than 10 years, the superintendent closely works with the Community Learning Center Institute (which leads the district's community school effort) and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers. Thanks to this partnership, the school board implemented a policy that codifies the community school strategy.

–AFT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES DEPARTMENT

AFT Resources
- Visit **www.bit.ly/1fhBSon** to watch AFT members discuss the importance of community schools.
- Visit **www.bit.ly/1JbFkg8** to learn more about what makes a school a community school.

A Community Hub

As shown below, a community school functions as the hub of its community. Partners such as unions, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, businesses, and higher education institutions collaborate to ensure that both academic and nonacademic needs are met for students and families so that students can focus on learning and educators can focus on teaching.

Building Character in Chicago

Male students at John Hancock College Preparatory High School, a community school in Chicago, are building character and learning how to solve conflicts in Becoming a Man, a dropout- and violence-prevention program that helped inspire President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative. And Working on Womanhood is doing the same for young women.

A signature program of Youth Guidance, the lead agency at Hancock, Becoming a Man provides students with mentorship experiences and peer support. Group sessions, field trips, and afterschool sports focus on developing social-emotional skills in young men through stories, role playing, and group exercises. The lessons are intended to teach impulse control, emotional self-regulation, and how to read social cues and interpret others' intentions.

An evaluation by the University of Chicago Crime Lab found a 44 percent reduction in violent crime–related arrests for students in the program, and at Hancock, there has been a decline in school suspensions since Becoming a Man began. While school staff members refer students to the program, many students also "self-refer" because they want to be part of the enriching field trips and afterschool sports activities, says Kathryn Rice, Hancock's resource coordinator.

The creation of a care team, consisting of community partners and school staff members, has helped to increase the attendance at the school from 78 percent in 2010 to a current all-time high of 88 percent. Every other week, the eight-member team pores over names of students considered at risk and plans strategies for improving outcomes for those students. Because of that structure, "We don't have students who just slip through the cracks," Rice says.

Family League of Baltimore

"Leading collaborations" is how the Family League of Baltimore describes its work to improve outcomes for Baltimore's students. This approach was apparent three years ago when the league made a strategic decision to require social service organizations and other community groups that wanted to work with afterschool providers to demonstrate a commitment to community schools in order to receive funding. The goal was to create a more integrated approach to improving outcomes for students through an array of enrichment, health, and social support programs for students and their families.

While some were skeptical about the new direction, says Julia Baez, the senior director of initiatives for the Family League, providers now see that "this relationship is mutually beneficial."

Participation rates in afterschool programs have increased, and because each of the city's 45 community schools has a full-time coordinator, Baez says there is "constant communication" involving teachers and providers around which students would most benefit from additional learning and enrichment in extracurricular activities. Students who attend afterschool programs for at least two years have higher school attendance rates and are less likely to be chronically absent.

The Family League has also devoted considerable resources toward making sure new community school coordinators and community partners develop the skills that will help them be more effective in their roles. In 2014, 113 professional development opportunities were provided, reaching roughly 1,400 participants. Sessions for coordinators included topics such as the Common Core State Standards and youth development best practices.

The growing support of the community school model throughout the city is also being reflected in organizations such as the Y of Central Maryland, which has made community schools one of its priorities.

Community schools are a central piece of the city's plan to renovate or build new schools. Collaborative spaces will be included in the design of buildings, health services are being planned, and schools will be open extended hours to meet the needs of students, families, and community members.

–M.J.B. and L.V.

Adapted with permission from the Coalition for Community Schools' "2015 Community Schools Awards Profiles," available at www. bit.ly/1DCLZiQ.

Where It All Comes Together

(Continued from page 9)

A similar set of questions must be asked of community partners: How must their policies, practices, and professional development change to sustain a community school? The emerging experience of school districts and communities in taking community schools to scale provides the foundation for a set of standards that the coalition is currently developing.

Strengthening Leadership Networks: The coalition now coordinates networks of community school leaders, superintendents, community school coordinators, United Ways, higher education institutions, and funders. Expanding the reach of these networks to share lessons learned and broaden participation is crucial to achieving the coalition's goal of having 200 school systems and their communities adopt a community school strategy in the next five years.

Investing in Our Children: Inequities in school funding formulas in many states, and inadequate funding for critical opportunities and supports (e.g., early childhood education, afterschool programs, and mental health services), are obvious to many education observers. These funding gaps must be remedied at the federal, state, and local levels. A strong economy and equitable society require such investments.

Ultimately, community schools benefit students, families, and teachers in three important ways: They reduce the demand on educators and other school staff by addressing the academic and nonacademic challenges that students bring to school. They nurture students' social and emotional development. And they enable students and families to build social capital—the networks and relationships that support learning and development, and that enable young people to envision and enjoy a successful future.

In sum, the community school strategy is built on recognizing that the education and development of our children is a shared responsibility. Only together can schools and communities achieve positive outcomes for young people and our society. □

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Integrated Student Supports:
A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers

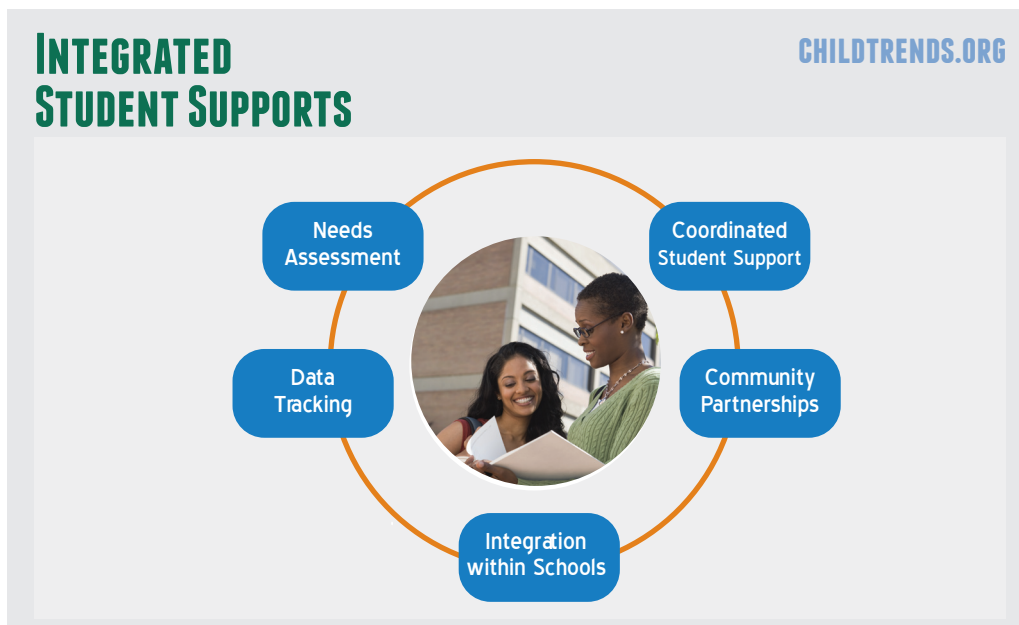## By: Kristin Anderson Moore and Carol Emig

Education remains the surest route to success in the United States. While education levels for many Americans have risen substantially in recent decades, there are still troubling disparities, especially for many minority and low-income students. Indeed, graduation rates among black and Hispanic youth continue to lag behind rates for white and Asian youth.

Closing educational achievement gaps is central to improving social mobility and increasing opportunity. As such, the education field continues to test a variety of approaches to promoting academic success, especially for disadvantaged students. Integrated student supports (ISS) is one promising approach taking hold in communities across the country, often in tandem with education reforms that focus on teacher quality and curricular improvements.

But what are integrated student supports, and are they effective at improving educational outcomes? This paper summarizes the results of a comprehensive examination by Child Trends[1] of the research and evidence base for ISS, and its potential to help a range of disadvantaged, marginalized, or struggling students.

WHAT ARE INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS?

Integrated student supports (ISS) are a school-based approach to promoting students' academic success by developing or securing and coordinating supports that target academic and non-academic barriers to achievement. These resources range from traditional tutoring and mentoring to provision of a broader set of supports, such as linking students to physical and mental health care and connecting their families to parent education, family counseling, food banks, or employment assistance. While ISS programs take many forms, integration is key to the model—both integration of supports to meet individual students' needs and integration of the ISS program into the life of a school.

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS

CHILDTRENDS.ORG

- Needs Assessment
- Coordinated Student Support
- Data Tracking
- Community Partnerships
- Integration within Schools

THE REACH OF INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS PROVIDERS

Today, ISS programs serve more than 1.5 million students in nearly 3,000 elementary and high schools across the country. Nearly all of these programs target at-risk children. Child Trends estimates that Hispanic and black students account for more than 75 percent of the students enrolled in ISS programs. The major providers of ISS include (in alphabetical order): Beacon Initiative, Children's Aid Society Community Schools, City Connects, Comer School Development Program, Communities In Schools, Elev8, Say Yes to Education, School of the 21st Century, Turnaround for Children, and University-Assisted Community Schools. Communities In Schools, operating in almost 2,200 schools, is the largest ISS provider.

While the model varies across providers, several characteristics are common to most ISS models:

- ISS staff conduct needs assessments, develop or locate needed supports in the community, and work with providers to coordinate those supports so that students receive a set of mutually reinforcing supports tailored to their individual needs.

- Supports address both academic and non-academic barriers to student success; these can include supports to a student's family;

- ISS programs seek close partnerships with school leadership and staff to enhance program effectiveness, so ISS staff are usually based in schools, or at least within the school district;

- ISS staff are data-driven and track student needs and outcomes over time for the students they serve.

In sum, while individual programs vary somewhat in the ways they provide integrated student supports, all ISS providers employ common components (needs assessment, integration within schools, community partnerships, coordinated supports, and data tracking); all provide wrap-around supports to improve students' academic achievement and educational attainment; and all embrace the premise that academic outcomes are a result of both academic and non-academic factors.

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS
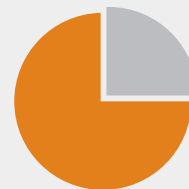## ESTIMATED REACH IN THE U.S.

CHILDTRENDS.ORG

1.5 Million Students
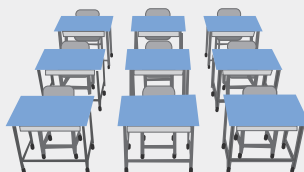
3000 Schools

75% Black/Hispanic students

Child Trends estimate among major ISS models in the U.S.

DOES ISS WORK? ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE FOR INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS

Are integrated student supports effective at improving educational outcomes, especially for at-risk students? Is ISS a "proven" approach with a solid evidence base behind it? Or is it more accurately a "promising" but as yet unproven approach?

To answer these questions, Child Trends undertook a comprehensive and rigorous review of the theoretical, empirical, practice, and evaluation findings that underlie integrated student supports as an approach. We drew on research in child and youth development, examined the empirical research on the factors that affect school success, conducted additional quantitative analyses, examined existing program evaluations, and interviewed numerous leading practitioners in the ISS field. The key findings are summarized below, followed by a longer discussion of each finding and the implications for research and policy.

KEY FINDINGS

1. There is emerging evidence, especially from quasi-experimental studies, that ISS can contribute to student academic progress as measured by decreases in grade retention and dropout, and increases in attendance, math achievement, reading and ELA achievement, and overall GPA. This finding is based on 11 rigorous evaluations completed to date. The evidence is stronger from quasi-experimental studies, however, than it is from more rigorous random assignment evaluations. Because the number of evaluations is limited (and only four were randomized-controlled trials), and because they assessed only three program models, we would characterize this as an emerging body of evidence and advocate for more evaluations to further build the evidence base.

2. ISS, as a student-centered approach, is firmly grounded in the research on child and youth development. Consistent with recommendations that stem from research and theory in child and youth development, ISS models embrace a "whole child" perspective that recognizes the importance of a child's health and safety, socio-emotional development, behavior, and relationships to his or her educational success. ISS also recognizes that educational success is affected by multiple contexts, in and out of school. These represent important differences from some education initiatives that focus primarily on educational inputs. Research clearly indicates that the likelihood of academic success, especially for disadvantaged students, is enhanced by a more comprehensive set of supports.

3. Integrated student supports are also aligned with empirical research on the varied factors that promote educational success. A large body of empirical research, as well as new analyses by Child Trends, indicate that school success (or failure) is the product of multiple and varied factors at the individual, family, and school levels. This suggests that providing an array of academic and non-academic supports in a coordinated fashion, as ISS does, is a more effective strategy than focusing on one, or a small set of, supports.

4. Preliminary studies find a positive return on investment in ISS. To date, there have been three studies of the long-term payback for investments in ISS. While methodologies, assumptions, and the magnitude of the return varied across the studies, all of the studies found positive ROIs, ranging from more than $4 saved for every $1 invested to almost $15 saved for every $1 invested. These analyses also warrant further consideration and assessment, including the assumption that supports available in the community are not included as a cost; but it does appear that this approach yields a positive return on investment.

5. Higher quality is related to the effectiveness of ISS programs. This finding is consistent with others across the child-and youth-serving field, including those from studies of early childhood and after-school programs. High-quality implementation is key to achieving positive outcomes. However, evidence from ISS implementation evaluations about which specific practices and/or services contribute to better outcomes is mixed and inconclusive, warranting further study.

Taken as a whole, Child Trends concludes that there is an emerging evidence base to support the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of integrated student supports in improving educational outcomes. To test this evidence base further, we recommend additional evaluations, especially randomized-controlled trials (RCTs). Fortunately, at least six additional evaluations are underway now, including two RCTs.

Child **TRENDS**

To build the field further, Child Trends also recommends additional studies to identify the key program components that drive positive outcomes, as well as the conditions under which ISS is most likely to contribute to better student outcomes.

For the remainder of this white paper, we discuss each finding in more detail and explore relevant policy implications.

Finding 1: There is emerging evidence, especially from quasi-experimental studies, that ISS can contribute to student academic progress—as measured by decreases in grade retention and dropout, and increases in attendance, math achievement, reading and ELA achievement, and overall GPA.
However, Child Trends' evidence review is based on a limited number of evaluations (11 total), that assessed only three ISS models, posing a significant limitation. Four of the evaluations were randomized-controlled trials (RCTs)—the "gold standard" of evaluation—and seven were quasi-experimental studies (QEDs).[2]

Overall, effects on academic outcomes are promising, with QED studies yielding more promising findings than RCT studies. Specifically, QED findings indicated significant, positive effects on student progress (for 3 out of 4 evaluations), school attendance (3 out of 3 evaluations), math achievement (4 out of 6 evaluations), and overall grade point average, or GPA (2 out 2 evaluations), and reading achievement (4 out of 6 evaluations).

In contrast, RCT findings were less consistent. For math achievement, 1 out of 4 evaluations had at least one significant impact. Impacts on other outcomes were also found to be sparse, with significant impacts found for zero out of 2 evaluations of student progress, 1 out of 4 evaluations of school attendance, zero of 3 evaluations of reading achievement, and zero out of 4 evaluations of overall grade point average.

Because the number of evaluations to date is relatively small, we would say that they provide initial or emerging evidence of the effectiveness of ISS for improving academic outcomes. This evidence suggests that the ISS approach may promote positive academic outcomes, including decreases in grade retention, dropout, and absenteeism and increases in attendance rates, math achievement, and English/reading achievement.

Fortunately, several additional outcome evaluations are in process. Four ISS models[3] are currently being evaluated in quasi-experimental studies. Two random-assignment evaluations and one quasi-experimental evaluation, all involving Communities in Schools, are also under way. One RCT is part of an i3 evaluation; the other is part of a Social Innovation Fund evaluation.

Finding 2: ISS, as a student-centered approach, is firmly grounded in the research on child and youth development.
Hundreds of research studies have identified a number of tenets about the development of children and youth that are widely accepted across disciplines. These include:

- The whole child perspective, recognizing that children's development includes multiple domains, including health, educational achievement and cognitive attainment, social and emotional outcomes, and behavior. Problems in one outcome domain often spill over into other domains, while success in one domain can enhance development in another.

- A child-centered focus. Each individual child has unique developmental needs, interests and accomplishments. Regimented approaches that treat all children uniformly cannot meet these individual needs; but a tiered approach that provides additional supports to students who have greater needs can be helpful, as can having additional staff in a school building who are attentive to the needs and concerns of specific students.

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2 The RCT evaluations summarized for this review include one 1999 evaluation of the full Comer SDP model, conducted in Prince George's County, Md., and three 2005 evaluations of the partial CIS model, or case-managed services component of the CIS model, resulting from a multi-site evaluation conducted in Austin, Texas, Wichita, Kan., and Jacksonville, Fl. The QED evaluations summarized findings from a 2011 national, multi-site evaluation of the CIS model; a 2000 evaluation of the full Comer SDP model in Chicago; and 5 evaluations of the full City Connects model (4 of which employ propensity score analyses).

3 Beacons, Elev8, Say Yes to Education, and University Assisted Community Schools.

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- <u>A life-course perspective.</u> Experiences that occur at an earlier life-cycle stage are regularly found to affect development and well-being in subsequent life-cycle stages. This implies the value of a strong, stable, ongoing program that supports children across the stages of development.

- <u>The ecological model.</u> A child's development is affected by a range of influences, beginning with the child's own biology and temperament but including family, peers, school, neighborhood, community, and the larger society. These influences interact; for example, the implications of experiencing toxic stress in the family can vary depending upon the characteristics of the school.

- <u>The importance of families.</u> Children's family experiences are a strong and continuing influence at every developmental stage. Not surprisingly, then, family factors are critical to children's happiness and attainment.

- <u>Positive youth development.</u> Programs that invest in children and youth to support them and work with them to develop positively have shown much greater success than programs focused on didactic education and scare tactics.

- <u>Relationships matter.</u> The quality and continuity of positive relationships, and the detrimental effect of negative and turbulent relationships, have been repeatedly documented.

The alignment of ISS with these foundational tenets of child and youth development is impressive. Integrated student supports place the child—the whole child—at the center of a model that incorporates the school, the family, and the larger community. Students are served over time in a context that recognizes the importance of relationships.

Finding 3: Integrated student supports are also aligned with research on the varied factors that promote educational success. Empirical research indentifies many factors at the individual, family, school, community, and policy levels that influence student success. Educators have used this research to target interventions to specific factors. For example, a program might focus on improving teacher effectiveness or parent engagement, or preventing teen parenthood.

Very few studies have looked simultaneously across a broad array of factors. Instead, the vast majority focus on single influences rather than scanning across contexts. To address this gap, Child Trends conducted new analyses

that cut across contexts and domains of development to predict educational success. By including many variables representing various contexts into a single model, we attempted to model educational success in a realistic developmental setting.

This broader analysis identified many predictors of high school completion and post-secondary enrollment that span developmental contexts. But most of these predictors have small effect sizes once all other factors are taken into account. Thus, while each factor contributes to educational outcomes, research finds that each factor alone is a small piece of the puzzle and is unlikely on its own to drive significant improvement.

However, of those factors that had larger effect sizes, many were non-academic (for example, not having a child in 10th grade was a strong predictor of high school graduation).

Whether we examine factors individually or simultaneously, the conclusion remains that multiple factors across multiple domains affect educational attainment. These findings suggest that interventions like ISS that address a wide array of academic and non-academic needs across a variety of contexts (individual, family, school) are more likely to be successful than are interventions that focus on single factors in isolation.

Finding 4: Preliminary studies find a positive return on investment in ISS. Estimating the cost effectiveness of social interventions is a recent, rapidly-evolving field. Three cost-effectiveness studies of integrated student supports' models have been identified—Communities in Schools, the Children's Aid Society, and Elev8. While these studies differ in a number of ways, all three find integrated student supports to have a very positive return on investment (ROI). The payback takes some time to accrue; but the benefits relative to the costs are large enough that, even if they are overestimated in some ways, it seems clear that a dollar invested in an integrated school model has a significant return.

- "The Economic Impact of Communities in Schools," completed in 2012 by Economic Modeling Specialists Inc., estimated a return of $11.60 for every $1 invested in a CIS program, over 53 years. The investment is estimated to reach a break-even point after nine years.

- "Measuring Social Return on Investment for Community Schools—A Practical Guide," completed in 2013 by The Finance Project, provides a case study of the Children's Aid Society's community school. It estimates a social return on investment of $10.30 for an elementary school and $14.80 for a middle school.

- "Oakland Community School Costs and Benefits: Making Dollars and Cents of the Research", prepared by the Bright Research Group in 2013, provides two distinct ROI estimates of Elev8. Considering all investments made in the program, not just the initial foundation investment, the return on investment is $4.39.

The precise assumptions made in these studies and the specific methods differ, and there would be value to the field in visiting these models and discussing the assumptions jointly. In the absence of data on program impacts from a random-assignment experimental evaluation, it is also a challenge to ascertain how much of any measured improvements are due to the program.

Additionally, all three studies assume that the costs of implementing an ISS model include the coordination work and the services and supports provided to students by the ISS program, but not the supports provided to students that are available in the community. This decision is well aligned with the conceptual model underlying integrated student supports—that supports are available in the community that can be accessed to benefit students, and therefore the cost of these supports should not be counted as a program cost. It bears asking, though, whether communities actually have unused capacity that can be accessed by ISS programs. Are there truly no incremental costs to the larger community, or to taxpayers? Alternatively, is the ISS model a more efficient service delivery mechanism? Since benefits to the community in terms of reduced crime and increased tax revenue are included in the estimation, the field should carefully consider whether, and how, and how much the cost of community supports should be incorporated. Also, new sites need to consider whether adequate supports are available in their local communities to implement an ISS model by accessing available supports.

Finding 5: Higher quality is related to the effectiveness of ISS programs. Initial findings from a limited set of studies strongly suggest that high-quality implementation appears to be key to program success; one study found that low-quality or partial implementation is no different than no program at all. In fact, in this study of CIS, students receiving supports from low-quality ISS programs fared no better than students who received no supports at all. These findings echo previous findings on the importance of implementation quality in early childhood education and out-of-school time programming.

In ISS programs, and within the broader child/youth supports field, evidence is mounting that fidelity to a proven model and quality implementation are essential elements of successful programs. However, evaluation evidence from implementation evaluations about whether and which specific practices and services contribute to better outcomes for ISS is mixed and inconclusive. Since this is also a gap in terms of basic research, the need for research and evaluation evidence on the value of particular practices is especially noteworthy.

It may be that ISS models should offer certain specific mandatory supports plus an array of optional supports. Alternatively, perhaps a fixed set of supports is necessary. Or it may be that it isn't so much the specific supports that are offered as it is the use of a clear set of best practices for delivering supports and working with students that is critical. Most likely, a hybrid is required. For ISS to become a coherent and consistently effective model, though, such questions need to be addressed.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

While the emerging body of research is encouraging, it could be strengthened in a number of ways. In particular, it is important to understand which elements of the ISS model represent core components and which are adaptable. In addition, there is a need for a carefully-validated quality rubric, one that, presumably, addresses both program structure and services, as well as processes of delivery and practice. Approaches to estimation of return on investment would also benefit from a crosswalk of the assumptions and methods that are and can be employed. In addition, more assessment of the implications of the ISS approach for varied subgroups of students is needed. And, of course, additional experimental evaluations of the impact of the ISS model compared with business-as-usual models are needed.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Research in child and youth development clearly indicates that success in school (and in life) is more likely when young people's well-being is met across multiple domains—in other words, when their health, safety, social/emotional, and cognitive needs are consistently met. Yet this fundamental principle is not central to many education discussions today. Education reform has largely focused on academic factors (improving teacher quality, strengthening curricula, school choice, etc.), and assessments of students' needs and strengths have been largely limited to academic measures. An integrated student supports approach offers an opportunity to broaden the focus of education initiatives and funding, recognizing that student success is driven by multiple academic and non-academic factors. Initial evidence suggests that ISS' more comprehensive approach has merit.

Our review of the evidence related to integrated student supports suggests several policy implications:

ISS seems appropriate for a variety of "at-risk" students. Because integrated student supports are child-centered rather than school-centered, the specific mix of supports varies depending on a specific child's needs and circumstances. For example, in the ISS model, children with mental health needs receive a different set of supports than children whose families have become homeless. For children in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, ISS staff can coordinate with agency caseworkers to supplement and align supports. Because ISS programs rely on and coordinate with community-based supports and service providers, they are more likely to deliver a system of supports that are culturally appropriate to minority populations.

ISS complements other school reforms. Integrated student supports focus on the very important challenge of ensuring that students are ready, every day, to do their best in school. They do not focus on whether schools are ready, every day, to do their best for students. So it may be that students will do best when they attend schools that provide both integrated student supports and reforms focused on curriculum, teaching, and assessment. They are complementary approaches.

ISS aligns with other developments in the education field:

- Social–emotional learning—the notion that the best learning occurs in the context of supportive relationship that help students manage their emotions and set and achieve goals.

- Growing knowledge of the profound negative effects of trauma on children—including the trauma of sustained poverty and family turbulence—and the need to design and implement interventions to address the causes and effects of trauma.

- Increased recognition of the value of quality early childhood programs—programs that prepare "at-risk" children for school. These programs have been proven to offer educational and economic benefits well into adulthood. Quality early childhood programs are steeped in the "whole-child" approach, addressing children's needs across all domains of development, and offering a valuable lesson to the K-12 system.

The ISS approach should also appeal to other child/youth-serving fields. For example, the child welfare field is focusing intensively on strategies to improve educational outcomes for youth in foster care. The focus of the ISS model on coordinating a range of supports to meet the specific needs of specific students would fit well with this population of students. Since having a child by the 10th grade was found empirically to be strongly associated with high school dropout, integrating teen pregnancy prevention into ISS models should be appealing strategy, along with strategies to keep teen parents in school.

Well-implemented ISS programs meet policymakers' and funders' desire for approaches that are research-based, data-driven, cost-effective, and powered by local communities. Fortunately, the leading practitioners in the field have demonstrated their commitment to a rigorous approach through outcome evaluations, gathering and tracking data on student performance, quality assessments, and calculations of their return on investment. Additionally, community partnerships and integration into local schools and school districts are core components of ISS, necessary to its success. They help tether ISS programs tightly to the communities they serve and give communities a sizable stake in the success of a program.

In sum, while the evidence base is still emerging, the fact that this approach is solidly based in the literature on child and youth development, practitioner experience, and studies of education represents a critical asset. Integrated student supports are a promising approach for helping more disadvantaged children and youth improve in school and have a brighter path in life.

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