

Policy Research

Policy Climate

The current policy climate surrounding the full-service school movement is quite multi-layered, lying at the nexus of education, youth development, community, health and human services and works across the government and non-profit sectors, at district, state, and federal levels. Given the historic development of isolated departments such as education and health in different executive agencies and departments, the disparate funding streams within the federal government have been challenges to the development of full-service community schools. In order to run effectively, full-service schools have faced a mighty challenge in capturing a diverse range of funding streams and navigating archaic legal barriers in forming effective partnerships with diverse service providers.

Breaking Down Silos

Currently, a primary aim of the Coalition for Community Schools (CSS) is to shape public and private sector policies to support community schools and help develop sustainable sources of funding. The group identifies the appointment and funding of a community school's coordinator, flexible funding, and a willingness to share resources (Blank, Melaville & Shah, 2003, pp. 61-63) as necessary factors in the development of full-service community schools; It is in this area that district, state, and federal policymakers can make a real difference. Martin Blank (2005), the Director of the CCS, states that any policy framework, “must demonstrate how to cross many different institutional boundaries and link state and federal funding streams into an inherently local endeavor” (p. 251). This is the largest hurdle for policymakers to overcome (A. Weiss & J. Sproul, personal communication, October 27, 2009).

Historically, resources within different governmental agencies at the district, state, and federal levels have been siloed, impeding the development of full-service community schools. As previously discussed, the federal government's development of ‘place-based’ policy signals a new level of commitment to cross-agency coordination at a federal level. Furthermore, the acknowledgement that, “change comes from the community level and often through partnerships; complex problems require flexible integrated solutions” (Orszag, Barnes, Carrion & Summers, 2009, p. 5), demonstrates an

understanding of the bottom-up nature of reform by the administration. Full-service community schools are an example of a flexible integrated solution to the complex problem of student achievement in low-income communities.

Vertical Alignment and Horizontal Coordination

There is a consensus in the full-service schools community around the need for the development of coordinating entities at each level of implementation (local, district, state and federal) whom help to facilitate the vertical alignment and horizontal coordination of resources and agencies.

With successes like the Harlem Children's Zone¹ (HCZ), policy is currently being shaped by practice. Upcoming federal legislation entitled the "Promising Neighborhoods Initiative" aims to replicate Geoffrey Canada's HCZ project in twenty cities across the nation. In order for this model to be both scalable and sustainable, HCZ and PolicyLink (2008) identify the need for a new federal governance structure and suggest the formation of an independent, autonomous agency with cross-agency advisors, similar to the existing Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) or the Missouri Caring Communities Initiative (p. 2) that will provide clear leadership, accountability, and ensure that the Promising Neighborhoods Initiative retains a comprehensive vision. In a revised version of this policy document (2009) they advocate that this agency reports directly to the U.S. Secretary of Education and have the federal department heads of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Health and Human Services and the Environmental Protection Agency as members (Harlem Children's Zone & PolicyLink, 2009).

At the state level, the CCS has advocated for the creation of State Community Learning and Development Councils (PolicyLink, 2009, p. 4) which would be facilitated by the Governor, include the Chief State School officer, and representatives of other state agencies to

develop changes in state level data systems, academic standards, and assessment frameworks, and also formulate the state professional development and capacity building strategy. State teams

¹ Harlem Children's Zone is a community-based organization offering education, social-service and community-building programs to children and families in designated blocks of Harlem, NY

also would be charged with adjusting state funding practices to enable LEAs and their communities to better align state and federal programs. (Coalition for Community Schools, 2009, p. 2)

Nearly all models of community schools have a coordinating services position at either the school site or with a lead non-profit partner. There is a disparity of views on where this position should be housed, but there is consensus around the pivotal role this position plays at the service-level in ensuring the horizontal coordination of services and the leveraging of resources. The recent guidelines issued by the Department of Education for the use of Title I Funds state, “Title I, Part A ARRA funds might be used to hire a coordinator to facilitate the delivery of health, nutrition, and social services to the school’s students in partnership with local service providers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 29). This is essential ‘glue money’ that allows schools to focus on teaching and uses a coordinator to pull together out-of-school supports and services to improve student school readiness.

Legislation and Funding Streams

Funding streams currently available to full service community schools are minimal and exist within: Title I, Title V (after school learning), and a federally dedicated \$5 million, established in 2008, under reauthorization of ESEA called The Full-Service Community Schools program that is a part of the Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE).

In 2001, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer visited Children's Aid Society's IS 218 school in New York and subsequently co-authored the Full-Service Community Schools Act, which did not pass. However, another version of the Full-Service Community Schools Act is currently pending as a Senate Bill, put forth by Hoyer and Senator Ben Nelson in September 2009. This act will encourage the development of full-service community schools with an initial budget of \$200 million for 5 years. If passed, this Act will legitimize the role of full-service community schools within the educational landscape (J. Dryfoos, personal communication, October 3, 2009).

The CCS, a key player in promoting the cause of full-service community schools, has taken a two-pronged approach to influencing policy development at a federal level. Whilst they acknowledge the

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importance of specific legislation, such as the pending Full-Service Community Schools Act, 2009, as a source of discrete funding for full-service schools, they have prioritized the embedding of full-service school friendly language and options into existing policy (M. Blank, personal communication, November 2009). This strategy attempts to capture multiple sources of funding and resources by making full-service schools eligible for a range of funding pool monies across various forms of legislation. It also seeks to embed the concept of full-service community schools in the fabric of legislation and create a common language around full-service schools.

The Context of the Stimulus Package

Under Obama's new education reform and stimulus package, there are increased opportunities for the development of full-service community schools. The Stimulus package consists primarily of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, which provides funding for the education programs, Race to the Top, Title 1 School Improvement Grants, and Investing in Innovation Fund among others. This stimulus law extends the federal government's control into local school affairs and is a key leverage point for federal leadership in education reform. The Race to the Top fund provides \$4.35 billion for states and the framework for the bulk of these funds is a highly competitive system for which states must apply. Secretary Duncan has repeatedly stressed that these funds are about reform, not the status quo (Arne Duncan, conference call with reporters, November 12, 2009). The guidelines require states to take a systematic reform approach to standards and assessment, effective teachers and leaders, data systems and struggling schools. States will be judged on their past track record with reforms and their capacity to enact reform.

Under the reauthorization of the ESEA in 2002, allowance for The Title I School Improvement Grants was made to provide states and districts the money they need to leverage change and turn around chronically underperforming schools. Under NCLB, Title 1 schools that do not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) targets for five consecutive years are mandated to restructure. The recently released application guidelines require every state to identify the lowest five percent of its Title I schools and then the adoption of four strategies to reform schools: a Turnaround Model - with new leadership, 50 percent

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new staff, changed governance, more flexibility over budget and curriculum; a Restart Model where the school is converted to a charter or contracted with a Education Management Organization; a Closure Model; or a Transformation Model that utilizes extended learning time, community-oriented supports, and family engagement. Full-Service schools sit within this Transformational Model.

The CCS successfully lobbied for the promotion of the transformational model (which includes provisions for Full-Service Community Schools) to the list of four options that a local education agency can take to school reform, from a previous position of only being an option if the other three options had failed. Amendments were also made to the Race to the Top application that incorporated the concept of horizontal coordination at school, district, and state levels and acknowledged that high needs students would benefit from opportunities and services, “that are beyond the capacity of a school itself to provide” (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p.7). These changes along with other modifications show a growing role for full-service community schools in education reform and an acknowledgement of the importance of community, social, and health services in supporting student learning at school.

However, policy is only as good as the practice it produces. In order to understand full-service schools, we must investigate how they function in practice.

Note. From “Full-Service Schools: Policy Review and Recommendations” by R. Campbell-Allen, M. Pena, R. Sullendar, A, Shah, & R. Zazove, 2009 (Wiki Project, GSE A100 - Introduction to Educational Policy, Harvard Graduate School of Education). Reprinted with permission.

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