
Editor-in-Chief's Notes

New schools for a new era: Catching up to a new social, health, and educational reality

THIS VOLUME, edited by two of the most respected leaders of the community school and full-service school movements, Joy Dryfoos and Jane Quinn, represents a testimony to the progress of the past years. In city after city across the United States, educators, activists, foundation staff, donors, and civic leaders have introduced and supported pilot schools, model programs, and demonstration sites. To introduce individual schools is very important but typically does not represent a full-community approach. The work is now making a transition from pilots and demonstration phases to a systemic approach encompassing entire school districts, health services, universities, and youth-serving organizations. This is, indeed, good news and deserves a status report about the field, the different strategies for partnering, and how sustainability could be accomplished.

So what have the participants of this social and educational experiment been learning? This question is at the heart of our current issue of *New Directions for Youth Development*.

Full-service and community schools are both important because they address a large part of a young person's waking hours—the obligatory school time and the choice-based out-of-school time. This “double institutionalization” can make for greatly dysfunctional experiences for a young person, but it does not have to be that way; fortunately, prolonged time in a social institution can lead to many good outcomes.

The dangers inherent in full service long days in school are rarely mentioned in the literature and oblige practitioners and policymakers to build a new sense of engaged time for an all-day

experience. This new day finally corresponds to the realities of working families who need safe and educationally rich settings for their children. This long day in a young person's life cannot just extend the school hours, as many politicians are calling for, but requires an innovative approach to making these environments rich and explorational, as well as choice- and voice-oriented.

The goal of extending the day without creating a longer traditional school day is embraced by a large movement of after-school education and care that uses this journal as a central outlet. After-school programs are not necessarily part of the community and full-service school movements, but they are often the first step in the creation of such schools. It is very important to develop a plan of collaboration and coordination between these two significant movements. Opinions about how to do this often differ considerably. After-school intermediaries in different cities and large organizations that serve youth after school often believe that it is difficult enough to establish good after-school programs without engaging all the other institutions and issues, such as mental health, health, social services, family programming, nutrition, legal services, and so on. They know of the importance of these issues but want to first get the after-school part "right."

Full-service and community school protagonists often agree with this tactical point of view but believe that the problems facing children, families, and teachers cannot be solved without active community involvement. They also believe that the school needs to become a center where the barriers to health and mental health services are reduced and where parents and siblings find a home away from home. Even the best after-school program cannot address all of these issues, but full-service schools potentially can.

Thus an important question arises: What are the risks and benefits to taking one of two roads: (1) to map out a full-service and community agenda but begin with an after-school program that has the seeds of the larger vision already implanted (for example, inclusiveness of all children, staff trained to detect mental health needs, strong parent involvement, and so on), or (2) develop an after-school program that serves the needs of young people as an after-school program and, as it matures, incorporate other

aspects of a full-service school when capacity and funding become available? From this perspective a good after-school program is by itself a possible step toward a community and full-service school without incorporating any full-service components.

This issue has to be at the center of any strategic thinking about community schools. Although there remains a significant amount of apprehension by educators about the management issues of community schools, after-school as a new social space that is needed in every school and every community has become a widely accepted reality. Many principals are daunted by the organizational complexity of running full-service schools and sometimes are very worried about true community input into their school. But they typically recognize that parents work and that children are not safe on the streets or by themselves at home. They also recognize the need for help with homework. Even this kind of organizational extension poses a great deal of apprehension for school personnel, but it seems more manageable than all other matters of social, health, and adult development practices. It does not help that schools of education have by and large ignored the new social realities and are training teachers and principals as if we still live in an old order.

As this volume attests, the voices for a fuller approach to the needs of children and their families than after-school programs can supply are on the rise. The typical superintendent, principal, and teacher recognize that the educational mission of schools can only be reached if hunger, child abuse, deportation, homelessness, incarceration—all-too-typical experiences in urban and poor rural environments—are responded to “in the best interest of the child.” But it is one thing to recognize modern realities of families and children and another thing to manage a setting that addresses some of these social ills and personal tragedies. Even if all the community organizations and the available services congregate in the school and make it a living hub of human concern and collective problem solving, the one who has to coordinate “the traffic” and fully buy in is the principal and her superior—the district superintendent. That is how the bureaucratic power lines are established and maintained.

The need to establish lines of power brings us to the issue of training leaders and teachers. There is, at present, no clear set

of trainings in full-service schools for future superintendents, principals, teachers, and guidance counselors. It is an urgent matter to create such materials and training institutes and to do so across universities and colleges in the form of consortia that can have a wide and immediate impact. We need a new educational workforce that can manage this new educational entity. We also need to spend time on providing technical assistance to existing schools and leaders, as the Children's Aid Society (CAS) has done so productively over the past decade. But the needs are overwhelming, and no single institution can address them alone.

Full-service and community schools are essentially collaborative enterprises. It is high time for us, as practitioners in the field, as policy makers and researchers, to develop training and technical assistance, as well as good theory and research on the issue of partnership. Partnering is like being in a committed relationship or marriage—one of the essential tasks most adults want to solve productively and one that can create the difference between heaven and hell on earth—and yet one that no one gets trained for. Partnerships are maybe not as intense, but the success of any enterprise depends on a trusting, fair, and healthy collaboration. Check any university or college Web site, and you will see the paucity of courses on this topic. How much more successful we could be if we had some training and did not have to make each mistake all over again and could simply pass on the earnings from our victories!

And victories are many, as this volume of *New Directions for Youth Development* demonstrates. We can be proud that so many dedicated, creative, and intelligent people have banded together in municipality after municipality to make a reality out of a dream. If we could save only one child from despair and suicide, provide one family with help gaining legal status, or help one struggling reader become fluent, the effort would be worthwhile. But the impact of increasing the numbers of full-service community schools and new legislation will touch millions of children, youth, and families, and we will have created deep reform of separate systems that can achieve their goals only together.

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