

## Chapter 12

# The History and Development of a Partnership Approach to Improve Schools, Communities and Universities

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**Abstract** The compelling, important, and innovative idea of “university-assisted community schools” originated at the University of Pennsylvania. Today it is an advanced, international exemplar. The main ideas merit attention and scale-up. For example, universities and other higher education institutions located in challenging urban neighborhoods and rural places have important resources to offer local children, families, communities, schools, and neighborhood organizations, starting with their talented faculty and highly energetic and creative students. These resources position these higher education institutions to serve as anchors and hubs for the kinds of complex, multi-faceted innovations needed to improve community outcomes, as well as mutually beneficial outcomes for the higher education institutions doing this important work. Starting in the mid 1980s, the leader-authors of this chapter and their school and community partners seized this idea and then rolled up their sleeves to make it happen. For example, they pioneered and scaled-up important innovations such as academically-based community service—where professors teach their courses in local community schools and other community settings—while also demonstrating how higher education institutions and leaders of research universities in particular can become transformational agents for beneficial social change. This chapter describes the journey toward this advanced exemplar, including the development of the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, the growth of the international network of university-assisted community schools, and the several awards that nominate this model as an international exemplar.

**Keywords** Engaged university • Service learning • partnerships • Cradle-to-career pipelines • Community development • Anchor institution • Area-based initiative • Community school • At-risk youths

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## Introduction

Our position is simple: No radical reform of American higher education, no successful education reform. The radical reform of higher education, we contend, is most likely to occur in the crucible of significant, serious, sustained, active engagement with public schools and their communities. Splendid abstract, contemplative, inner-ivory tower isolation will neither shed intellectual light nor produce positive democratic change.

We strongly agree with the Chilean sociologist Eugenio Tironi that the answer to the question “What kind of education do we need?” is to be found in the answer to the question “What kind of society do we want?” (Tironi, 2005). Education and society are dynamically interactive and interdependent. If human beings hope to maintain and develop a particular type of society, they must develop and maintain the particular type of education system conducive to it. Stated directly, *no effective democratic schooling system, no democratic society*.

From our experience of more than 20 years of work with West Philadelphia schools and neighborhoods, we believe that university-assisted community schools constitute the best practical means for democratically transforming universities, schools, and communities in order to develop participatory democracy (Benson, Harkavy, & Puckett 2007).<sup>1</sup>

## The University-Assisted Community School Approach

“Community schools” bring together multiple organizations and their resources not only to serve and educate young people but also to democratically engage all members of the community in which the school is located. Essentially, this idea extends and updates John Dewey’s theory that the neighborhood school can and should function as the core neighborhood institution—one that provides comprehensive services and galvanizes community institutions and organizations to help solve the myriad problems individuals and communities confront in a rapidly changing world. American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey recognized that if the neighborhood school were to function as a genuine community center, it would require additional human resources and support. But to our knowledge, he never identified universities as a key source of broadly based, sustained, comprehensive support for community schools. We emphasize “university-assisted” because we have become increasingly convinced that colleges and universities are uniquely well-positioned to provide strategic, comprehensive and sustained support for community schools (e.g., academic and instructional resources, health and human services, college access

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter draws significantly from a previous article written by the authors: Ira Harkavy, Matthew Hartley, Rita Axelroth Hodges & Joann Weeks (2013), *The Promise of University-Assisted Community Schools to Transform American Schooling: A Report From the Field, 1985–2012*, *Peabody Journal of Education*, 88:5, 525–540, DOI: 10.1080/0161956X.2013.834789

programs, and evaluation) that effectively engage students, their parents and guardians—indeed all individuals living in the neighborhood (Benson et al., 2007).

The university-assisted community school strategy assumes that community schools, like colleges and universities, can function as focal points to help create and foster healthy urban environments and democratically engaged communities. The strategy also assumes that universities and colleges function best in such environments. More specifically, the strategy assumes that public schools can function as environment-changing institutions, and can become strategic centers of broadly based partnerships that engage a wide variety of community organizations and institutions (Harkavy & Hartley, 2009). Since public schools “belong” to all members of the community, they should serve all members of the community.<sup>2</sup> More than any other institution, public schools are particularly well suited to serve as neighborhood “hubs” or “centers” around which local partnerships can be generated and developed. When they play that innovative role, schools function as community institutions *par excellence*. They then provide a decentralized, democratic, community-based response to rapidly changing community problems. In the process, they help young people learn better, and at increasingly higher levels, through action-oriented, collaborative, real-world activities.

For public schools to successfully function as integrating community institutions, however, local, state, and federal governments, as well as nongovernmental agencies, must be effectively coordinated, and the assets of higher educational institutions strategically leveraged to provide the significant resources community schools will need to play the greatly expanded roles that we envision them playing in American society. We discuss this issue more fully at the end of the article.

When institutions of higher education give very high priority to actively solving real-world problems in their local communities, a much greater likelihood exists that they will significantly advance research, teaching, learning, and service, as well as interdisciplinary collaboration, and simultaneously reduce what Penn’s founder Benjamin Franklin stigmatized in 1789 as “ancient Customs and Habitudes,” that impede the development of mutually beneficial, higher education-civic partnerships (Hartley, Harkavy, & Benson 2009).<sup>3</sup> More specifically, by focusing on solving universal problems that are manifested in their local communities (such as poverty,

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<sup>2</sup>Public schools are not, of course, the only places in the community where learning and social organization occur. Other “learning places” include libraries, museums, private schools, and faith-based organizations. Ideally, all of these places would collaborate.

<sup>3</sup>The college Franklin envisioned broke radically with the classical tradition and gave instruction entirely in the vernacular language. Instead of imitating English colleges, Franklin theorized, an American college’s curriculum, methodology and texts should be appropriate for the education and development of American youth. For a college in Philadelphia to insist on instruction in Latin and Greek and a curriculum dominated by intensive study of classical texts in their original languages, Franklin believed, simply exemplified the disastrous tendency “in mankind [to] an unaccountable prejudice in favor of ancient customs and habitudes, which inclines to a continuance of them after the circumstances, which formerly made them useful, cease to exist.” Reinhold, Meyer, 1968, “Opponents of Classical Learning in America During the Revolutionary Period,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 112 (4): 224.

poor schooling, inadequate healthcare), institutions of higher education will generate knowledge that is both nationally and globally significant and be better able to realize what we view as their primary mission of contributing to a healthy democratic society.

American colleges and universities have deep civic roots. The vast majority of our institutions of higher learning were established to serve their local communities and to prepare leaders for their communities and society (Hartley & Hollander, 2005). This history strongly supports our belief that the democratic mission is, and should be, the primary mission for U.S. higher education. The founding purpose of the early colonial colleges and historically black colleges and universities founded in the nineteenth century was to educate young people for service to others. Fulfilling America's democratic promise was the founding purpose of land-grant universities. And the emergence of an urban-serving mission for higher education dates from the late nineteenth century, notably the founding of the Johns Hopkins University, the first modern research university, in 1876. William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, was perhaps the most eloquent and powerful proponent for the engagement of universities with their cities and communities (Benson et al., 2007). He helped the University of Chicago become arguably the greatest university at the turn of the last century by acting on the premise that involvement with the city, particularly its schools, would powerfully advance faculty research and student learning.

Harper's (1905) devotion to pedagogy logically derived from two propositions central to his vision for the University of Chicago in particular and for American universities in general:

1. "Education is the basis of all democratic progress. The problems of education are, therefore, the problems of democracy" (Harper, 1905, p. 32).
2. More than any other institution, the university determines the character of the overall schooling system: "Through the school system, the character of which, in spite of itself, the university determines and in a larger measure controls. . . . through the school system every family in this entire broad land of ours is brought into touch with the university; for from it proceeds the teachers or the teachers' teachers" (Harper, 1905, p. 25).

The societal, indeed global, reach of universities also makes them particularly important partners in school-system reform, as well as community-wide improvement in areas such as health, education, and economic development. In this era of global information and communication, local school systems are powerfully affected by larger national and global schooling systems. But local changes cannot be sustained if they remain only local and unconnected to broader national and global developments. Significant systemic change not only must, therefore, be locally rooted and generated; it must also be part of a national/global movement for change. For that to occur, an agent is needed that can simultaneously function on the local, national, and global levels. Universities are that agent. They are simultaneously the preeminent local (embedded in their communities) and national/global (part of an increasingly interactive worldwide network) institutions.

To help accelerate progress to the point where major changes become firmly institutionalized and produce significant results, we have called for an action-oriented acceptance of the following radical proposition: all colleges and universities should make solving the problem of the American schooling system a very high institutional priority; their contributions to its solution should count heavily both in assessing their institutional performance (by themselves and others) and be a critical factor when responding to their requests for renewed or increased resources and financial support (Benson et al., 2007). Actively helping to develop an effective, integrated, genuinely democratic pre-K through higher education schooling system, we contend, should become a primary mission of American universities and colleges. It is also one that all types of higher educational institutions can and should embrace. Whether teaching or research focused, large or small, rural or urban, colleges and universities have intellectual and tangible resources that can be brought to bear in partnerships with their local schools. These reciprocal partnerships not only assist schools and the children and communities they serve, but they also promote powerful advances in learning and knowledge for students in the university through problem-solving learning.

At this time, moreover, when public colleges and universities in particular are facing serious and severe strain resulting from large-scale, significant cutbacks in governmental funding, particularly at the state level, they are also under increased scrutiny by the government to demonstrate that they are serving the public good. “Community benefit” has become an essential component of funding appeals to many donors and foundations, as well as governmental agencies. Simply put, higher education understands more fully than ever that it is in its enlightened self-interest to be civically engaged with their local schools and communities.<sup>4</sup>

In order for colleges and universities to act effectively, however, they must overcome the burdens of history and tradition. In particular, they need to overcome the fragmentation of disciplines, excessive overspecialization, and the false dichotomy between the arts and sciences and professions that is particularly characteristic of all major research universities. These departmental and disciplinary divisions too often produce narrow, solipsistic research, resulting in our knowing more and more about less and less. They have also increased the isolation of universities from society. A report published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development entitled *The University and the Community: The Problems of Changing Relationships*

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<sup>4</sup>For a case study on how one institution, Oregon State University, transformed itself in the face of declining public financial support by focusing on its land grant mission, democratic processes, and community connections, see: Ray, E. J. (2013). Institutional change in a culture of democracy. In S. Bergan, I. Harkavy, & H. van't Land (Eds.), *Reimagining democratic societies: a new era of personal and social responsibility* (229–236). Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. The Coalition for Urban Serving Universities also powerfully advocates for federal support of public urban research universities based on their significant contributions to the development of the nation's cities and metro regions: <http://www.usucoalition.org/>. For more general discussion on the challenges of governmental cutbacks, see: Newfield, C. (2011, August 28). Public education for the public good. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Available online: <http://chronicle.com/article/Public-Education-for-the/128824/>

pointedly observed, “Communities have problems, universities have departments” (Center for Educational Research and Innovation, 1982, p. 127). The statement neatly indicates a major reason why universities have not contributed as they should. Quite simply, their un-integrated, fragmented, internally conflictual structure and organization work against collaborative understanding and helping to solve highly complex human and societal problems.

However, it is also the case that if colleges and universities can succeed in transforming themselves into genuinely engaged civic institutions they will be better able to achieve their self-professed, historic missions of advancing, preserving, and transmitting knowledge; and they will help produce the well-educated, cultured, truly democratic citizens necessary to develop and maintain a genuinely democratic society. Implementing that organizational revolution poses extraordinarily complex intellectual and social challenges. However, as Dewey argued, working to solve complex, real-world problems is the best way to advance knowledge and learning, as well as the general capacity of individuals and institutions to do that work (Benson et al., 2007).

## **Organizational Learning: Our Experience at the University of Pennsylvania**

Admittedly, the history of Penn’s work with West Philadelphia public schools has been a process of painful organizational learning and conflict; we cannot overemphasize that we have made many mistakes and our understanding and activities have continually changed over time.<sup>5</sup> Penn is only now beginning to tap its extraordinary resources in ways that could mutually benefit both Penn and its neighbors and result in truly radical school, community, and university change. We have come to see our work as a concrete example of Dewey’s (1910) general theory of learning by means of action-oriented, collaborative, real-world problem solving. Conceptualizing our work in terms of schools as the strategic components of complex urban ecological systems represented a major advance for us.

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<sup>5</sup>For further discussion on the history of the University of Pennsylvania’s engagement in West Philadelphia, see Puckett, J. L. & Lloyd, M. F. (2015). *Becoming Penn. The pragmatic American university, 1950–2000*. University of Pennsylvania Press. Etienne, H. F. (2012). *Pushing back the gates: Neighborhood perspectives on university-driven revitalization in West Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. Hodges, R. A., & Dubb, S. (2012). *Road half traveled: University engagement at a crossroads*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press. Netter Center for Community Partnerships. (2008). *Anchor institutions toolkit*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, available at [www.nettercenter.upenn.edu](http://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu). Rodin, J. (2007). *The university and urban revival: Out of the ivory tower and into the streets*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Benson, L., Harkavy, I., and Puckett, J. (2007). *Dewey’s dream: Universities and democracies in an age of education reform*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. Maurrasse, D. (2001). *Beyond the campus: How colleges and universities form partnerships with their communities*. New York: Routledge.

When we first began work on university-community relationships in 1985, we did not envision schools or universities as highly strategic components of urban ecological systems. What immediately concerned us was that West Philadelphia was rapidly and visibly deteriorating, with devastating consequences for community residents, as well as the university. This included increased blight, crime, and poverty, as well as Penn's ability to continue to attract and retain outstanding faculty, staff, and students. Given that "present situation" (as Dewey would have phrased it), we asked, what should the university do? (Dewey, 1916, p. 222). Committed to undergraduate teaching, one of the authors, Ira Harkavy, and distinguished Penn historian Lee Benson designed an Honors Seminar aimed at stimulating undergraduates to think critically about what Penn could and should do to remedy its "environmental situation." Intrigued with the concept, the president of the university, Sheldon Hackney, himself a former professor of history, agreed to join them in teaching that seminar in the spring semester of 1985. The seminar's title suggests its general concerns: *Urban University-Community Relationships: Penn-West Philadelphia, Past, Present, and Future as a Case Study*.

When the seminar began, Harkavy and Benson literally knew nothing about Dewey's community school ideas. They also knew nothing about the history of community school experiments and had not given any thought to Penn working with public schools in West Philadelphia. For present purposes, we need not recite the process of trial, error, and failure that led them, and their students, to see that Penn's best strategy to remedy its rapidly deteriorating environmental situation was to use its enormous internal and external resources to help radically improve both West Philadelphia public schools and the neighborhoods in which they are located. Most unwittingly, during the course of the seminar's work, they reinvented the community school idea. They developed a strategy based on the following proposition: universities can best improve their local environment if they mobilize and integrate their great resources, particularly the "human capital" embodied in their students, to help develop and maintain community schools that function as focal points for creating healthy urban environments.

By 1989, particular interest was focused on Turner Middle School, largely due to the interest and leadership of its principal, to create the model that is now referred to as university-assisted community schools. The principal appointed a community school coordinator who was a Turner teacher released on special assignment. From the beginning her role was to work with Penn, the community in Turner's catchment area, and the Turner faculty and staff. The community school would be university-assisted but school staff-controlled and managed, rejecting university control (exemplified by Boston University's take-over of a school district) or community control (experienced in Ocean Hill-Brownsville in New York City) (Benson & Harkavy, 1991).

Observing the work of their students and their partners in the West Philadelphia community schools over a number of years led Harkavy and Benson to develop a key principle that has guided their thinking and practice in a wide variety of ways and situations. That principle can be formulated as follows: at all levels (K through 16 and above), collaborative, community-based, action-oriented service-learning

projects, which by their nature innovatively depart from customary, teacher-dominated school routines, allow and encourage both teachers and students to participate democratically in school and classroom governance and functioning. Such projects create spaces in which school and classroom democracy can grow and flourish. In their judgment, as well as ours, that general principle can be instrumental in inspiring and developing effective programs for democratic citizenship in a wide variety of schools (at all levels) and communities.

Over time, the seminar's increasingly successful work stimulated a growing number of Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses (Penn's term for service-learning) in a wide range of Penn schools and departments, developed and implemented under the auspices of the university's Netter Center for Community Partnerships. ABCS courses focus on action-oriented, community problem solving and the integration of research, teaching, learning, and service, as well as reflection on the service experience and its larger implications (e.g., why poverty, racism, and crime exist).

To date, approximately 200 such courses that work with schools and community organizations to solve strategic community problems have been developed at Penn. In the 2014–2015 academic year, 63 courses, across 8 schools and 26 departments, involving approximately 1600 Penn undergraduate and graduate students, were offered. Over the past 20-plus years, an increasing number of faculty members, from a wide range of Penn schools and departments, have revised existing courses, or have created new courses, providing innovative curricular opportunities for their students to become active learners, creative real-world problem solvers, and active producers (as opposed to passive consumers) of knowledge. That relatively rapid growth has resulted largely from the organizational innovation described in this article.

For example, in 1991, Professor Francis Johnston, a renowned expert on nutritional anthropology who had recently concluded a lengthy tenure as chair of the Anthropology Department decided to redesign a course, Anthropology 210, to address the community-identified problem of poor nutrition, with the initial work at Turner Middle School. It became the prototype for Academically Based Community Service courses. Over the next few years, a widening circle of Penn faculty and students worked with Johnston in collaboration with local middle school teachers and students to understand the nutritional practices in the community. The course also sought to address the problem through a series of projects aimed at encouraging better nutrition. These included an educational program, a school-based garden, an in-school market that provided healthy snacks, and a nutritional outreach program for the community. Anthropology 210's success not only influenced the anthropology department (which went on to develop an academic track on Public Interest Anthropology), but it also inspired other Penn departments and schools to become involved (Johnston and Harkavy, 2009; Benson et al., 2007). Furthermore, it led to the development of the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative—a central component of University-Assisted Community Schools, which engages and empowers youth, university students, and community members to promote healthy lifestyles and build a just and sustainable food system. Today, the Agatston Urban Nutrition



Initiative works with 20 Philadelphia public schools, serving more than 10,000 students.

Moelis Access Science is another example of the reciprocal, democratic partnerships that Penn has developed through University-Assisted Community Schools and ABCS courses. Begun in 1999 with initial support from the National Science Foundation, Moelis Access Science works to improve science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education of both K-12 students and undergraduate and graduate students at Penn (Access Science, 2007). Faculty and students from across campus provide content-based professional development for teachers and direct classroom support for implementing quality hands-on and small group activities. For example, a series of six ABCS courses in Penn's Earth and Environmental Science Department focus on environmentally based and environmentally triggered diseases, particularly those related to asthma, tobacco, lead poisoning, air quality, water quality, and community health. Working together, Penn undergraduates and faculty, West Philadelphia public school students and teachers, and community members engage in environmental research to help improve the students' homes, schools, and neighborhoods.

As of 2015, there are five university-assisted community schools in West Philadelphia—three elementary schools with kindergarten to 8th grades, and two high schools. The Netter Center employs a community school coordinator full-time at each school as well as additional part-time staff who work in the afterschool and summer programs. Staff from its others programs such as Moelis Access Science and the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative are also regularly working in the schools. The work is further supported by the efforts of Penn faculty and students in ABCS classes, as well as by Penn students funded through the Federal work-study program, or as interns or volunteers. The community school coordinators also work to engage other community resources in the schools.<sup>6</sup>

## Promising Findings

Problems like poor nutrition, under-resourced urban schools, and poverty are complex and systemic. We certainly make no claims about solving them. However, studies of the Netter Center's work have found important and positive outcomes for both Penn and West Philadelphia. For example, one study compared Penn undergraduates taking Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses to those in similar courses without a community engagement component: 47 % of ABCS students reported an increase in research skills versus 36 % of non-ABCS students. Additionally, students in ABCS courses more often reported an increase in their desire to act morally and ethically, to become an effective community leader, to

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<sup>6</sup>Additional information on Netter Center programs is found at: <https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/programs>

develop a meaningful philosophy of life, to be concerned about urban communities, and to become a volunteer in the community (Johnston & Weinreb, 2002).

Penn students participating as classroom fellows (paid interns, work-study or volunteers working in K-12 schools) through the Netter Center's Moelis Access Science program also reported positive outcomes: 95 % reported an increased ability to present science and math ideas; 100 % reported an increase in communication skills; 95 % reported increased ability to work with children and adolescents; and almost half (45 %) of new undergraduate fellows indicated that their experience with the program would be influential in their thinking about their career, indicating the possibility of teaching or entering the field of education (Access Science, 2007).

Philadelphia public schools continue to face severe challenges, including the impacts of massive funding deficits that have shrunk or eliminated the number of teachers and support staff (counselors, nurses, non-teaching aides) and other services formerly provided by the District itself. At the neighborhood level, the schools that the Netter Center works with enroll young people most impacted by the high poverty levels in these communities and significant racial isolation. While the work continues to be difficult, we are still encouraged that the university-assisted community school—by providing and integrating resources from Penn and other community partners—can improve this situation.

Through a most generous naming gift in 2007 from Barbara Netter and the late Edward Netter (a Penn alumnus), the Netter Center has, among other things, been able to make a significant commitment in recent years to comprehensive evaluation of its work with the community by hiring a full time evaluator, Gretchen Suess. Dr. Suess is working with a distinguished committee of faculty advisors from across diverse disciplines at Penn, as well as a team of undergraduate and graduate student interns. The Evaluation Team is taking a mixed-methods, developmental evaluation approach to tracking and analyzing longitudinal data to determine impacts at Penn, the school, and the overall community. These impacts include individual-level impacts, as well as organizational and institutional change. Below are some examples of data that have been collected.

In the 2013–2014 school year, 285 students were enrolled in Netter Center-supported afterschool programs at three K-8 UACS sites. In the spring of 2014, 67 teachers were surveyed about changes they had witnessed among the regular participating students (those who attended 30+ days of programming). Teachers reported that among the students who needed to show improvements in different areas, over two-thirds of the students improved their participation in class (79 %), 72 % of students improved academically, 65 % were more attentive in class, 65 % of the students were coming to school motivated to learn, and 63 % of the students were completing their homework to the teacher's satisfaction. Data also showed that 70 % of all regular participants with a disciplinary issue in 2013 reduced their suspensions in 2014 (Research for Action, 2014).

The Netter Center has also worked with its school partners to bring in needed resources at the school. For example, at Comegys Elementary School a playground was built on site through the partnership of the Philadelphia Eagles football team and the City of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program. The partnership regularly builds

playgrounds at Philadelphia schools that lack such facilities, but had never done an evaluation of the impact of these playgrounds. The Netter Center agreed to do the evaluation for the project, which factored significantly in Comegys School being selected as a site for a playground. The 18-month evaluation of the Eagles Youth Partnership (EYP) and Mural Arts Program (MAP) Playground Build Project at Comegys Elementary, supported by the UACS partnership with the Netter Center, found that the investment of multiple local anchor institutions contributed to positive trends in helping stabilize the school as a beneficial neighborhood resource.

Fifty-nine percent of all students at Comegys in 2013 reported exercising more because of the new playground space; however, this accounted for only 49 % of female students versus 71 % of male students. Female students took 7.3 steps for every 10 steps male students took (Suess et al., 2014). Students whose teachers used the outdoor classroom/garden during the 2012–2013 school year were three times more likely to learn about healthy foods, three times more likely to learn about science, and two times more likely to learn about math than their peers who did not use the outdoor classroom (Suess et al.).

Penn's institutional investment had a scaffolding effect, which was subsequently deepened following the playground build project. The principal at Comegys expressed this idea of how partnerships can continue to build upon partnerships: "If it wasn't for the fact that we had the University of Pennsylvania partnership, which was connected to the Netter Center, we probably wouldn't have gotten the Eagles partnership, so everything works together" (Suess et al., 2014). In addition, it was on the turf field built as part of the Eagles partnership where Penn Men's Lacrosse team began working with Comegys students to teach them a new sport. Young Quakers Community Athletics is now an afterschool initiative between the Netter Center and Penn's Division of Recreation and Intercollegiate Athletics.<sup>7</sup>

Penn and the Netter Center have also received significant recognition for civic and community partnerships based on external evaluation of its work. The Netter Center received the inaugural W.T. Grant Foundation Youth Development Prize that

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<sup>7</sup>Young Quakers Community Athletics (YQCA), directed through the Netter Center's University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) program, creates mutually beneficial partnerships between select Penn intercollegiate athletic teams and West Philadelphia K-8 public schools. The Penn players mentor the children on the field and off. In addition to the mentoring, the program provides staff, coaches, uniforms, sports equipment, bus transportation, and access to the University's world-class playing fields at no cost to the schools or their students. The program participants also benefit from the Netter Center's comprehensive UACS programming, which brings additional academic, human, and material resources from Penn to their schools during the school day, after school, and in the summer. Founded in 2012 with boys' lacrosse at Comegys, YQCA has grown quickly to include girls' lacrosse at Comegys and co-ed track at Huey and Lea Schools with plans for reaching even more students through additional sports in the future. Preliminary results of YQCA have shown positive results for both the K-8 students and Penn students. For example, from a survey of Young Quakers in 2013–2014: 93 % responded that YQCA has helped them learn to treat all people with respect; 89 % reported that YQCA has motivated them to try harder at school and make better choices in life; and 84 % said that YQCA has helped them to focus in school. See Suess, G. (2014). YQCA PR spring 2014 post program prelim findings 2014. Unpublished internal document, Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania.

was selected by the National Academy of Sciences in 2003. This award honored the university-assisted community school program for its “high-quality, evidence-based collaborative efforts that generate significant advances in knowledge while increasing the opportunities for young people to move successfully through adolescence with ample support and care.” Recognition of this work has grown during the tenure of President Amy Gutmann and is supported by Penn Compact 2020, her strategic vision for propelling the University forward in its core endeavors of teaching, research, and service based on the following tenets: “increasing access to Penn’s exceptional resources; integrating knowledge across academic disciplines; and engaging nationally, locally and globally to bring the benefits of Penn’s research, teaching and service to individuals and communities at home and around the world” (Gutmann, 2013, p. 3). Under her leadership, the University has twice received the Presidential Award of the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll (the highest federal honor a college or university can receive for its commitment to community service) in 2008 and 2012. And in 2009, Penn was named, along with the University of Southern California, “Best Neighbor” university in the national *Saviors of our Cities: 2009 Survey of Best College and University Civic Partnerships*.

## Adaptation

Beginning in the early 1990s, a number of institutions began to express interest in the model of university-community-school collaboration being developed by the Netter Center and its school and community partners, what was then known as the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC). In 1987 and 1988, the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. supported education study tours involving WEPIC partners that resulted in a publication by the Brookings Institution (1989) entitled, *Schoolworks: Reinventing public schools to create the workforce of the future, innovations in education and job training from Sweden, West Germany, France, Great Britain, and Philadelphia*. Increasing numbers of visitors came to learn about the university-assisted community school program. Local and national press coverage, as well as the speeches and writings of the Center director and Penn colleagues, drew attention to the work at a time when colleges and universities, particularly those in urban areas, were just beginning to seriously explore campus-community partnerships and the service-learning and civic engagement movements were in their early stages (Hartley, 2009).

In 1992, the Center entered into discussions with the Wallace Foundation (then the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund) about the replication of the university-assisted community school model, particularly the Center’s work at Turner Middle School, which was the most developed site. The cohort of students involved in WEPIC’s school, afterschool, weekend and summer programs were demonstrating better attendance, fewer suspensions and improved academics. A planning grant creating the WEPIC Replication Project was awarded for an 18-month period to

explore the feasibility of adapting the model nationally. The WEPIC Replication Project hosted a series of visitors and conferences, and then issued a request for proposals that were reviewed by its independent advisory board. A one million dollar implementation grant supported Miami University of Ohio (for work in Cincinnati), University of Kentucky-Lexington, and the University of Alabama-Birmingham for an initial 3 years, including training and technical assistance activities.

With additional grants from the Wallace Foundation and the Corporation for National Community Service's Learn and Serve America program, 23 university-assisted community school (UACS) programs were funded across the country through 2004, including 2- and 4- year colleges and research universities.<sup>8</sup> In 2000, the Mott Foundation funded the Netter Center to support the Foundation's training efforts for the rapidly expanding Twenty-First Century Community Learning Center programs, particularly to focus on the role of higher education-community-school partnerships. Through 2005, 75 partnership teams came to Penn for training, far exceeding our original expectations about levels of interest.

The early adaptation activities also sought to create an informal network among the colleagues who were adapting Penn's university-assisted community school model. Meetings of the site leaders were held at Penn as well as at the funded replication sites, including meetings in Lexington, Cincinnati, Birmingham, Albuquerque, and Denver. This network grew through annual conferences hosted by the Netter Center, as well as the numerous site visits to Penn, and the work occurring around the country was documented in the Netter Center's *Universities and Community Schools* journal.

With the naming gift to the Netter Center in 2007, the strategy for adaptation shifted from funding individual university-assisted community school partnerships to creating regional training centers, based at higher educational institutions that have demonstrated significant experience and commitment to the work. The long-term goal is to create a national network encompassing communities, cities, and regions across the U.S.

In 2008, the Netter Center began supporting the development of multi-state regional training centers on the university-assisted community school model. The University of Oklahoma-Tulsa was selected as the first regional training center in the southwest. Although funding through Penn concluded in 2011, the Netter Center's Tulsa partners continue their important work through the Higher Education Forum of Oklahoma an anchor institution consortium comprised of nine higher educational institutions and other community partners that links high schools to col-

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<sup>8</sup>The 23 colleges and universities that were funded are: Bates College; University of Southern Maine-Lewiston/Auburn College; University of Rhode Island; Rhode Island College; Johnson and Wales University; Miami University of Ohio; Temple University; Lock Haven University; Slippery Rock University; University of Dayton; Central State University; Clark Atlanta University; Morehouse College; Mercer University, Macon, Ga.; University of Kentucky-Lexington Campus; Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis; University of Denver; Regis University; Community College of Aurora; University of Michigan-Ann Arbor; University of New Mexico at Albuquerque; New Mexico State University; and West Virginia University.

leges through academic service-learning projects, college readiness, and career exploration. Since September 2012, the Higher Education Forum has been housed at Tulsa Community College. The Forum has partnered closely with Tulsa, Union, Broken Arrow and other local school districts, giving particular focus to college access and better alignment between high schools and post-secondary education under the theme of “One Agenda.” Other partners in this work include the Tulsa Chamber of Commerce and Junior Achievement. The Higher Ed Forum also developed a “Request for Academic Partnerships” protocol “to support the processes involved with identifying, creating, evaluating, and sustaining academic partnerships between P-12, higher education, and community agencies.” The RAP process has helped ensure an inclusive, transparent approach to higher education-community-school partnerships in Tulsa and is informing the work of other colleges and universities (Higher Education Forum, n.d.).

In September 2011, the Netter Center selected the Center for Service and Learning at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) to develop the second regional training center, the Midwest Center for University-Assisted Community Schools. The IUPUI proposal was selected from a strong pool of university applicants from across the country, given the depth of its engagement in the community schools in Indianapolis, particularly the award winning George Washington Community High School. The Midwest Center worked to deepen the model in Indianapolis, provided training to Indianapolis School District (IPS) principals and principal licensure candidates, as well as provided professional development on UACS strategies for colleagues throughout the Midwest. IUPUI is sustaining the work of the Midwest Center for UACS by permanently housing it, as of fall 2014, in the University’s new Center for Family, School, and Neighborhood Engagement.

In September 2014, the Netter Center selected the University of Connecticut (UConn) as its third regional training center. UConn’s Office of Public Engagement created the New England University-Assisted Community School Collaborative, which is further developing its partnerships with community schools in Hartford, as well as throughout Connecticut, in addition to providing guidance on the university-assisted community school model for higher educational institutions and their school partners throughout New England.

The Netter Center has also supported national networks in support of community schools. In 1997, it was one of the founding partners of the Coalition for Community Schools, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, to promote and advance community schools. Over 160 regional and national organizations are now partners in the Coalition. The Netter Center’s director served as the chair from its inception until spring 2012. With a growing number of colleges and universities engaged in community schools, the Netter Center worked with the Coalition to develop a University-Assisted Community Schools Network in 2015 to share resources, best practices, and advance the work. The University-Assisted Community Schools Network is working to create a professional learning community among faculty members, administrators, and practitioners who are engaged in university-community partnerships and community schools.

Additionally, the Netter Center's director is also a founding member of the Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF). He chaired a Task Force of twenty university presidents and academics that produced a report for incoming U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan on, "Anchor Institutions as Partners in Building Successful Communities and Local Economies" in February 2009. The report emphasized the need for more collaborative policy approaches, promoting HUD's potentially catalytic role in stimulating interagency cooperation across the Federal government. The group, impressed with the extraordinarily positive response to their report, decided to form a permanent Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF). The AITF is now a formal organization with the mission of forging democratic civic partnerships involving anchor institutions. With over 600 members, AITF is guided by the core values of collaboration and partnership, equity and social justice, democracy and democratic practice, and commitment to place and community (Marga Inc., n.d.).

## **A Developing Framework**

We recognize that local context is critical in the UACS model—each higher education institution (whether a community college, college or university) has different needs, strengths and resources just as local public schools and communities have distinct assets, needs, and interests. However, we suggest that there is a framework that helps to produce an optimally functioning university-assisted community school. The key elements of this framework, based on two decades of our own work and research and the experience and research of our replication sites, are:

1. A central office on campus that coordinates university resources. For this work to sustain, it must become integrated into the mission of the higher educational institution, and not remain the effort of a few faculty members.
2. Engagement across the campus that involves multiple schools and departments.
3. A school principal who welcomes and encourages the partnership, and conveys this philosophy to the school faculty and staff.
4. A coordinator at the school site who is the link between the school, the community, and the higher educational institution. The coordinator may be an employee of the university, the school, or from the community.
5. Community school staff that are integrated into the school's operation, so that planning for and provision of supports for students, their families and the community are as seamless as possible.
6. Parent/community involvement through advisory boards or other mechanisms to advise on the supports needed in the school and the delivery of such services.

Numerous colleges and universities continue to adapt the university-assisted community school model. The University of Dayton (UD) is a key partner in the Dayton Neighborhood School Centers. Initiated after the end of court-ordered busing in 2002, the Neighborhood School Centers adapted the community schools

approach believing that community building was the prerequisite to the programming in the schools. Five neighborhoods and their elementary schools and local leaders, coordinated by UD, began a process of building sustainable partnerships. The five Neighborhood School Centers, each with a local nonprofit as the lead agency, offer a diverse range of programming, all emphasizing development of the assets of youth and the community. The University at Buffalo, through the UB Center for Urban Studies, is similarly advancing school and community development through a range of partnerships focused on neighborhoods in Buffalo's East Side. Futures Academy (a traditional Pre-K through 8th grade public school) is the site for its "Community as Classroom" initiative that advances student learning and development through community improvement activities. The students study their neighborhood's history, especially the built environment, and work on projects to improve the community. For example, Futures Academy students worked with UB students and area residents on the Futures Garden project, transforming a vacant, derelict lot near the school into a community garden and ArtPark.

In Miami, Florida International University has established the "Education Effect," its university-assisted community school partnership with Northwestern High School to improve learning and college access, which is funded in large part by JPMorgan Chase Foundation. The partnership is increasing the number of dual enrollment classes at Northwestern High, creating an aquaponics science lab, and bringing the high school students to FIU to learn about college life. Many others—Binghamton University—State University of New York, Johns Hopkins University, Montclair State University, Seattle University, University of California-Los Angeles, University of Maryland-Baltimore, and University of Tennessee-Knoxville to name a few—are also developing a university-assisted community schools approach.

The partnerships between higher educational institutions and their communities that have adapted this approach demonstrate a range of positive impacts, including improved achievement in K-12 schools; application of undergraduates' and graduates' knowledge to local, real-world settings; growth of faculty involvement in engaged scholarship; and genuine, collaborative relationships between universities and their local communities.<sup>9</sup> University-assisted community schools have also enabled schools of education at many of these sites to assume new leadership roles within their institutions, as their concentration of relevant expertise puts them in a position to help formulate and guide university-wide engagement strategies with local schools. Through this role, schools of education can better prepare teachers to understand and implement strategies that support parent and community involvement, as well as a pedagogy that engages students in real-world problem solving.

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<sup>9</sup>For Penn data, please see section on Promising Findings above. For data on other sites, please see Harkavy, I., & Hartley, M. (Issue Eds.). (2009). *Universities in partnership: strategies for education, youth development, and community renewal: new directions for youth development*, 122. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Periodicals. In particular, see pp. 19–40 for information on University at Buffalo; pp. 41–60 for Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis; and pp. 81–106 for University of Dayton. For data on Florida International University, see O'Neil, D. (Winter 2011–2012). The education effect. *FIU Magazine* (pp. 17–21). Miami, FL: Florida International University Division of External Relations.



Participation in the Netter Center's fall 2012 international conference, hosted in celebration of its 20th Anniversary, is a powerful indicator of the ever-increasing reach of the university-assisted community school concept. The two-day conference on "The Role of Higher Education-Community-School Partnerships in Creating Democratic Communities Locally, Nationally and Globally" drew over 500 participants from nearly 80 colleges and universities and 110 local, national, and global organizations across the U.S. and seven other countries. The meeting featured a number of major plenaries and thematic sessions on key topics related to university-community-school partnerships, including college access, nutrition and health, STEM, arts and culture, education and citizenship, poverty and race, anchor institutions, as well as perspectives from university and college presidents.

## Conclusion

Even with partnerships dating back over 20 years with schools and the community of West Philadelphia, an expanding group of faculty and students involved in academically based community service teaching and learning, and visible and sustained support for the Netter Center from President Gutmann, serious impediments have prevented Penn from realizing the potential of university-assisted community schools in practice. These impediments—including intellectual fragmentation, a discipline-based faculty rewards system, and the legacy of the ivory tower—have also had the impact of slowing Penn's development as a truly democratic, cosmopolitan, engaged, civic university (Hartley et al., 2009; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2010). They have reinforced, in Franklin's wonderful phrase, an "unaccountable prejudice in favor of ancient Customs and Habitudes" (Reinhold, 1968, p. 224), rather than helping to realize Franklin's original vision for the university to educate students with "an *Inclination* join'd with an *Ability* to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family [Original Emphasis]" (Franklin, 1749).

Indeed, university-assisted community schools now being developed at Penn and elsewhere have a long way to go before they can fully mobilize the powerful, untapped resources of their own institutions and of their communities, including those found among individual neighbors and in local institutions (such as businesses, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, and hospitals). Among other things, this will require more effective coordination of public and private funding streams and services. Government is indispensable in this process. Through financial incentives and the bully pulpit, government should encourage community colleges, colleges, and universities *to do well by doing good*—that is, to better realize their missions by contributing *significantly* to developing and sustaining democratic schools and communities (Harkavy & Hodges, 2012).

Institutions of higher education are essential for solving schooling and educational problems. In recent years, as we have discussed, civic and community engagement has developed among an increasing number of higher educational institutions through the development of university-assisted community schools. That engagement needs

to be both deeper (more significant, serious, and sustained) and wider (involving many more colleges and universities). Nonetheless, we think that recent history indicates that university-assisted community schools are a promising approach for effective and efficient school reform, pre-K through higher education.

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