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## UNIVERSITIES AND COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

*A Publication of the University of Pennsylvania*

**Statement of Purpose**

*Universities and Community Schools* will not duplicate the work of any existing publication or association. Its unique purpose is to help establish an international informal “visible college”—or network of—academics and practitioners working, in different places and ways, to increase the contributions universities make to the development and effectiveness of community schools. Establishing such a systematic, sustained network is mandatory, we believe, for the university-school connection to function positively and significantly. (“University” is broadly conceived, i.e., all “post-secondary” institutions of “higher education.”)

We envision *Universities and Community Schools* as helping to spark a worldwide informal movement which aims to overcome major community and societal problems by developing mutually beneficial, innovative partnerships between universities and schools.

There is no subscription price for receiving *Universities and Community Schools*. We would like all those interested in the focus and purpose of this journal to receive copies. We, therefore, encourage those on our mailing list to contact us. Please write or call us at the following address and phone number.

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*This issue of Universities and Community Schools is funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation as part of a multi-year grant to support the Netter Center's training and technical assistance activities on the university-assisted community school model. The mission of the Mott Foundation is to support efforts that promote a just, equitable and sustainable Society.*

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## Introduction

For more than 20 years, the Netter Center for Community Partnerships has developed university-assisted community schools in collaboration with its West Philadelphia school and community partners. Seeking to transform local public schools, university-assisted community schools (UACS) help education, engage, empower and serve all members of the community in which the school is located. As the same time, working with community members to create and sustain university-assisted community schools provides a powerful means for universities to advance teaching, research, learning, and service, as well as the civic development of their students.

The Netter Center has worked to advance the university-assisted community schools nationally by supporting replication/adaptation of the model, hosting training workshops, site visits and conferences, as well as visits to local partnerships. Further, with a major gift to the Netter Center, a southwest regional training center on the model has been established at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa, led by its Community Engagement Center.

The articles featured in this journal are by colleagues who are part of a growing network of universities and colleges that are committed to the UACS approach. Hal Lawson, then at Miami University of Ohio, was among the earliest adapters of the model. Soon after, IUPUI and its community partners in Indianapolis turned to community schools as the approach for the reopening of George Washington High School. Henry Taylor, University of Buffalo, has long-focused on the interrelationship of school reform and community revitalization. Working in mental health, University of Tennessee-Knoxville professor Bob Kronick came to focus on community schools through the influence of noted education researcher Joy Dryfoos, and then, with colleagues such as Nissa Dahlin-Brown, developed further the linkages to the university's missions of teaching, research and service. UT professor Steven Waller and his colleagues outline how their work is benefiting students with disabilities. Finally, Shawn Schaefer and Pamela Pittman from the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa report on the deep engagement of OU-Tulsa with community schools in Tulsa and Union Public School Districts and the development of the regional training center at OU-Tulsa. Penn's Frank Johnston also reflects on one of the Netter Center's signature UACS programs, the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative, and how this university-community-school partnership works to address the ill-structured problem of obesity.

The interest in university-assisted community schools continues to grow. The Coalition for Community Schools, a coalition of over 160 national organizations and regional community school networks, offered its first track on this approach at its April 2010 National Forum, co-hosted by the Netter Center in Philadelphia for its nearly 1,100 attendees.

The statement of purpose for this journal notes that *Universities and Community Schools* is to “to establish an international informal ‘visible college’—or network of—academics and practitioners working in different places and ways, to increase the contributions universities make to the development and effectiveness of community schools;” these articles and the significant work being done across the country indicate how far we have come—and the potential to do so much more.



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# An Appreciation and a Selective Enhancement of the Developing Model for University-Assisted Community Schools\*

Hal A. Lawson

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\*I am grateful to Rita Axelroth, Joann Weeks, and Ira Harkavy for the supportive critiques.

It is timely to complete an appreciation (Vickers, 1995) of university-assisted community schools because what was once a compelling idea has become an important national and international model. Model status is a special achievement. It indicates that university-assisted community schools have had, and will continue to have, profound influence on research, policy, and practice. Factors contributing to this special model status start with leaders' visions, theorizing, and persistence. Equally important factors include collaborative leadership by educators and neighborhood leaders in local community schools and their surrounding neighborhoods; a strategic, sustainable research and development agenda; scale-up and replication sites with their own success stories, research findings, innovations, and lessons learned; and enduring support from the University of Pennsylvania, starting with several Presidents and encompassing a significant cadre of faculty and students.

Model status presents an important opportunity for appreciative inquiry. Under ideal circumstances, appreciative inquiry stimulates dialogue, research, additional theorizing, and advanced planning, all of which will facilitate learning and improvement. Such is the aim for the appreciative inquiry undertaken in this article.

This aim helps to explain the progressive verb *developing* in the title. *Developing* does not connote flaws and limitations. To the contrary, *developing* is an apt descriptor because the university-assisted community schools model is dynamic by design. It is continuously under construction. This dynamism derives in part from four core properties. These properties are:

- *Creative and generative propensities*, which make it a powerful incubator for innovations
- *Adaptability*, which makes the model amenable to tailoring to fit local needs, cultures, and contexts
- *Elasticity*, which makes the model amenable to expansion and contraction as it is tailored to fit local needs, cultures, and contexts
- *Complexity*, which makes it a suitable candidate for initiating and guiding the kinds of complex change initiatives needed in neighborhood communities challenged by a powerful, terrible trilogy of poverty, social exclusion, and social isolation (Lawson, 2009).

These core features and the model's overall dynamism derive in large part from its leaders' orientations. Although Ira Harkavy, Joann Weeks, Lee Benson, and other leaders talk about replication, the usual requirements for cookie cutter-like replication are conspicuous in their absence. For example, these leaders do not view replication as a rigid, "follow the numbers" implemen-

tation schedule. Common elements in many replication plans such as compliance-oriented supervision, training, and technical assistance are nowhere to be found.

Scale-up is a more apt construct and for two related reasons. First, leaders actively extend to new adopters and implementers unusual degrees of freedom. Second, leaders know that University of Pennsylvania is a unique, special university, and so are the community schools it assists. Consequently, they shy away from rigid prescriptions. Instead, they offer the equivalent of design specifications and principles (several of which are identified, described, and justified in the ensuing analysis). Together these specifications and principles comprise the essence of the university-assisted community schools model. Together these design features prioritize essential structures, operational processes, and desired outcomes.

My formal appreciation of this model begins with a concise summary of its main design features and several advantages. The following question guides this initial section of the analysis: What is the essence of this model? What are its core design specifications and principles? What are the degrees of freedom? Rephrased in lay terms, the question is: How would you know this model if you saw it?

Then the analysis turns to key aspects of this model's accompanying rationale and attendant benefits. Here, the guiding question is: Why should others adopt the developing model of university-assisted community schools?

Mindful that a systematic appreciation includes a constructive critique, the final section of this analysis attends to needs and important issues. Here, the guiding question is phrased in strengths-based, solution-focused terms. What are the timely opportunities for model-related learning, development, and improvement? In other words, what enhancements merit consideration?

## **Appreciating the Developing Model: The Generic View**

The university-assisted community school model is a model for something special. It is a normative design, rather than an exact, prescriptive model mirroring an ideal state of affairs. Unpacking this special something is itself a complex undertaking. It requires at least two levels of analysis, one generic and the other specific. The generic analysis has two parts.

### *The Model as an Incubator for Two Kinds of Innovations*

The model promotes two related, but different kinds of working relationships. The first is partnerships among organizations, starting with universities and commu-

nity schools and including neighborhood organizations, youth development agencies, and local businesses. The second is genuine collaboration among people—professors, students, educators, social/health service providers, neighborhood leaders, governmental officials, youth, and entire families. Both organizational partnerships and inter-personal collaboration are incubators for two kinds of innovations (e.g., Lawson, 2004). Both are evident at Penn and in the sites that have adopted and enhanced the developing model.

*Product innovations* refer to the substantive changes generated by the model. For example, health and social services re-located at schools, new parent and family initiatives, and innovative programs for students' out of school time are school-based product innovations directly attributable to this developing model. University service learning programs for students, academically based community service courses and projects, and community-based, participatory research also are product innovations.

*Process innovations* refer to new operational procedures and interactions generated by the model. They are the equivalent of new ways of doing business. For example, this model structures new modes of collaborative decision-making, along with new modes of communication and interaction. When this model is in evidence, fewer people operate alone without ready access to assistance, social supports, and resources. In some sites, leadership becomes distributed and collaborative, an important process innovation in its own right. Furthermore, improvements in the quality of existing structures and operations also comprise important process innovations. In other words, when people behave and perform more efficiently and effectively, one or more process innovations have been developed.

Of course, these two kinds of innovations are related in some sites and inseparable in others. After all, process innovations often give rise to product innovations and vice versa. The university-assisted community school model has the added benefit of facilitating the integration of these two kinds of innovations.

#### *The Model as an Intervention and Facilitator for Theories of Change*

The idea of a theory of change has gained currency in the past decade (e.g., Baum, 2003; Clark & Grimaldi, 2005; Riggan, 2005). Essentially, a theory of change provides the wherewithal—key processes, structures, resources, and mechanisms—for moving people, organizations, communities, and governmental agencies from “here” (the present state of affairs, typically sub-optimal)

to “there” (a more desirable state). To borrow leadership guru James Collins' (2005) root metaphor, a theory of change provides a *map* of often-uncharted territory as well as a *compass*, which provides direction and enables leaders to chart progress, learn, and improve.

More concretely, a theory of change maps and then guides the way toward the achievement of desired *results* and impacts. Results are the beneficial outcomes for people (e.g., improved learning and academic achievement by university and school students; increased job satisfaction and retention of school principals and teachers); and also for their organizations (e.g., reduced school dropout rates; improved quality in teaching and learning).

*Impacts* are the improvements effected in people, professions, organizations, communities, and systems (e.g., Miller & Shinn, 2005). Impacts especially refer to new capacities developed in individuals, families, neighborhood organizations, neighborhood organizations, and local governments. They include new roles, rules, and responsibilities for helping professionals, especially their relations with everyday people—notably, persons professionals now call “clients” and “students.” These impacts are indicative of systems change and cross-systems change as well as readiness for it. They take time and require resources for training, technical assistance, and overall capacity-building. Perhaps above all, they may not be immediately apparent and measurable.

#### *A Case Example*

An example is in order, and it merits a first person narrative. In 1994 Katharine Briar-Lawson, yours truly, other colleagues at Miami (Ohio) University, and our partners from Cincinnati, Ohio were selected as one of the first cohorts of replication sites for the then fledgling model of university-assisted community schools. Together we targeted the West End Community of Cincinnati and its schools because both the community and its schools, while rich in assets, confronted daunting challenges and needed to address multiple needs stemming from poverty, social exclusion, and social isolation. From 1994-1998, we developed promising community school and university innovations as we strived to develop an entire feeder pattern of university-assisted community schools.

Alas, key people left, including this author, a superintendent, and several principals. As a new century dawned, only the vestiges of the university-assisted community school model remained. Two years later, most of the vestiges also were gone. Shortly thereafter, the school buildings were demolished, school attendance areas were reconfigured, and an ambitious building plan com-

menced.

On the surface, the investments made in replication of the university-assisted community school model produced little or nothing of value; and what may have been valuable in short term was not sustainable. Had the story ended here, the conclusions would have been obvious. The initiative had failed, and investments in it were lost.

Some seven years later, another conclusion is warranted. Thanks to a visionary superintendent and her staff, and especially to an extraordinarily gifted and talented advocate for children and youth (Darlene Kamine), community schools are being implemented district-wide in Cincinnati. At the time of this writing, community school leaders, district administrators, community partners, professional development specialists and outside consultants are determining how best to create an integrated, seamless model of school improvement; and to connect schools to higher education.

Arguably, the leading spokesperson for this integrated, seamless community school model—and also its operational expert where the principal's roles and responsibilities for community school leadership are concerned—is Ms. Patricia Stewart-Adams. Significantly, Ms. Stewart-Adams acquired a significant portion of her expertise while serving as principal at Heberle Elementary School in the West End of Cincinnati. More to the point, Stewart-Adams was the new principal when Heberle began its work as a replication site for university-assisted community schools.

Today, Ms. Stewart-Adams is more than an embedded expert principal. She is the district-wide director of “Project Grad”—an innovative initiative designed to safeguard student success, prevent dropouts, and facilitate postsecondary education entry and completion. She brings a community school orientation to this 21st Century agenda.

Here, then, in the person of Ms. Stewart-Adams is a powerful example of what was once a hidden impact. Once identified and its implications explored, the investments made in Cincinnati's West End schools and neighborhoods have new import. Identifiable impacts have surfaced as returns-on-investments, including leadership development, awareness, and readiness on both the “school side” and “the community side.” A narrow focus on immediate results would have missed these benefits.

#### *Impacts in a Theory of Change Framework.*

All such impacts have special import in a theory of change framework. In many cases, penetrating, sustainable impacts—e.g., new capacities, new roles, rules, rela-

tionships, and responsibilities—are prerequisites to, or antecedents for, improved results—e.g., improved healthy development, decreases in family transience or mobility. More to the point, although the community school model may have immediate impacts on the school and its surrounding community, increases in students' academic achievement may not be realized for several years (e.g., Baum, 2003; Riggan, 2005). After all, increases in academic achievement depend fundamentally on increases in academically engaged learning time, access to expert teachers, and student engagement (cognitive, affective, and behavioral) in learning and schooling. Academic learning and achievement increases also depend on multiple kinds of learning during out-of-school time (Lawson, under review), together with fresh configurations of the school day—a new day for learning (Mott Foundation Task Force, 2007).

Of course, this relationship between impacts and results signals one of the key challenges associated with dissemination, replication, scale-up, and policy change. Policy makers, especially in the current political climate, expect immediate results. Knowledgeable leaders, mindful of the profound changes required of school communities, universities, neighborhood communities, and their partnership-driven relationships, simply must be prepared to help policy makers appreciate the multiple systems changes needing to be implemented before results will increase substantially and consistently. Perhaps above all, schools, community agencies, neighborhood organizations and higher education institutions alike need to develop new capacities.

Ultimately, the university-assisted community school model, with its process and product innovations, yields both important results and impacts. Figure 1 (attached) depicts this implicit, causal relationship.

In fact, when this model's causal relations are depicted explicitly (as in Figure 1), its true identity becomes apparent. *The university-assisted community school model is a complex intervention.* This developing intervention has the potential to generate powerful theories of change, especially ones tailored for cities and other communities challenged by poverty, social exclusion, social isolation, and their correlates. Worldwide, leaders in these vulnerable, asset-rich localities are struggling to find complex interventions and theories of change suitable for the formidable challenges they confront. Chief among these challenges is the ability to meet multiple needs and solve complex problems simultaneously. Linear, one-at-a-time problem solving, characteristic of industrial age schools and human services organizations, simply cannot keep pace.

The complex, university-assisted community school intervention model provides a powerful resource for meeting needs for simultaneous problem-solving to addressing co-occurring, interlocking challenges. Although this model is not “the answer” to pathways out of poverty, and it cannot by itself end social exclusion, it offers immediate relief for social isolation. More than this, the university-assisted community school model serves as an anchor institution (Nutter Center for Community Partnerships, 2008). The university and other higher education institutions serve as anchors, and so do the community schools in their respective partnership networks.

Notwithstanding the contributions of anchor institutions to social development and participatory democracy, anchor institutions are drivers for economic development. Obviously, they employ people, including neighborhood residents and youth.

More than this, the university-assisted community school model is easily fitted to emergent P-16 (pre-school through the undergraduate degree) frameworks (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2007). Here, “higher eds” and schools in partnership contribute to human capital development. They prepare young people and adults for the jobs and careers of the new economy, the majority of which require post-secondary education. Such economic-occupational-career anchoring and development, via P-16 and “Cradle to Career” configurations, is a special enhancement offered by anchor institutions. Without it, “the achievement gap” will even more of an economic opportunity and career development gap. Without it, multiple disparities will not just endure. With the decline of the manufacturing sector and manual labor overall, disparities will increase.

### Appreciating the Model’s Three Interdependent Components

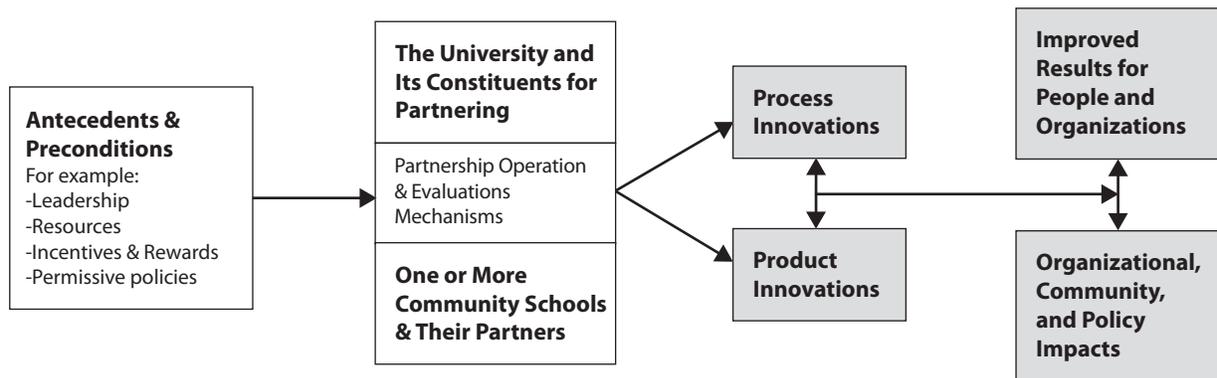
Figure 1 presents a simple depiction of a three-component model. Two components of the three components depicted in Figure 1 are highlighted in the label *university-assisted community school(s)*—namely, the university and the community school. The third component is the least developed of the three.

This third component is implicit in the relations between the first two. Typically, it becomes explicit when university and community school relationships are cemented by an official partnership. An official partnership usually is marked by legally binding contracts or memoranda of understanding. When a partnership reaches this phase, a *partnership infrastructure*, the third component, becomes necessary.

This infrastructure includes operational structures and processes for collaborative leadership, shared governance, evaluation-driven learning and improvement, resource allocation and sustainability, barrier-busting and troubleshooting, data management, and knowledge generation and dissemination. Intermediary people—called variously “go-betweens,” linkage agents, boundary spanners and crossers, community school coordinators, and knowledge synthesizers—operate in this third space circumscribed by the boundaries of universities and community schools (e.g., Lawson, 2004; Sarason & Lorentz, 1995). Some such intermediaries also work inside the boundaries of the university, the community school, or both.

This bridging and operational infrastructure is depicted, albeit in shorthand, in Figure 1. Partnership infrastructure, it shall become apparent, is a top, future

**Figure 1:**  
**A Generic Outline for a Theory of Change**



priority and much-needed enhancement. More specifically, greater knowledge and understanding are needed regarding how a university partnership infrastructure is connected to the partnership system(s) characteristic of a community school.

### The Community School Component

Owing in part to the Coalition for Community Schools (e.g., Blank, Melaville, Shah, 2003), the Children's Aid Society of New York (e.g., Chu-zhu, 2005), and investments made by charitable foundations (e.g., Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997) consensus is growing about community schools' rationale, essential features, resource requirements, main functions, and predictable results.

Nevertheless, the community school model is subject to various interpretations. Two historical trajectories help to explain this variability.

#### Two Important Trajectories

One stems from the work of Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, John Puckett, and Cory Bowman (e.g., Bowman, 2005; Harkavy & Puckett, 1994). Their work on Jane Addams' and John Dewey's collaborative work in creating schools as social settlements early in the 20th Century is particularly noteworthy. This prototype provides an important blueprint for today's community school model.<sup>1</sup>

The second trajectory involves the full-service school (e.g., Dryfoos, 1994), also called the "extended service school" and the "multi-service school" (e.g., Payzant, 2005). Although a strong case can be made that these health and social service configurations located in schools are not synonymous with the community school model—because most were designed primarily as social-health service experiments with schools simply serving as convenient sites<sup>2</sup>—in reality these two models often get conflated.

This conflation is facilitated by an interesting, important development. Full service and multi-service schools, initially defined almost exclusively by the co-location of social and health providers in these schools' facilities, have evolved into self-proclaimed *full service community schools* (e.g., Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). These special schools often are popularized and justified via slogans such as "one stop shopping for children, families, and neighborhood residents" and "everything under one roof."

These full service community schools apparently are advantageous in some school-community settings. For example, the successes of the Children's Aid Society

schools in New York City and their scale-up initiatives in other cities indicate that this kind of school appeals to leaders in selected settings.

Even so, this full service community school model and its slogans create development and implementation problems. For example, the claim for "full services" is misleading because it is nearly impossible and also inappropriate to co-locate every program and service vulnerable children, youth, and families may need inside one school facility. Moreover, some such schools, thanks to their label "full service schools," have the unintended effect of deflecting school leaders from their primary mission for learning. Others perpetuate a deficit-oriented view of poor and minority children insofar as these social and health services promote a "fix, then teach" orientation (e.g., Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the idea of all services at the school, especially health clinics and the tendency to provide safer sex education programs, generates opposition in conservative sectors of school boards, neighborhood communities, and governments.

All such problems related to full service (community) schools signal fundamental issues regarding the definitions and functions of a community school. Arguably, the most important issue is whether every program and service must be located "under one roof" to qualify as a community school.

#### The Community School Model and Conditions for Learning

These two historical trajectories signal the need for a more concise, accurate, and testable rendering of the community school model. Such a developing model must satisfy at least two criteria: (1) It must lend itself to scale-up ("flexible replication" in the Penn approach); and, at the same time, (2) it must maintain the model's core features (generativity, adaptability and elasticity, and complexity).

So, how would you know a community school if you saw one? The Coalition of Community Schools offers one approach. Emphasize five conditions for learning—namely:

1. The school has a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum, and high standards and expectations for students;
2. The students are motivated and engaged in learning—both in school and in community settings, during and after school;
3. The basic physical, mental, and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed;

4. There is mutual respect and effective collaboration among parents, families, and school staff; and, (5) In combination with school efforts, community engagement promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive and respectful, connecting students to a broader learning community (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003).

All of these conditions are important contributions. All announce that community schools comprise an important model for school improvement.

On the other hand, these five conditions are not unique to community schools (see, for example, Adelman & Taylor, 2005). In other words, these five conditions and their sub-components (see Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003) do not enable model developers to answer the main question (how would you know a community school if you saw one?). In fact, condition 1 (the core curriculum, etc) is a defining feature of every school. Conditions 2-5, viewed in the intervention framework provided by Figure 1, are more like outcomes than core, defining features. They qualify as results (e.g., students are engaged) and impacts (e.g., an improved school climate).

### *Conceptualizing and Defining Community Schools*

Here, then, is one definition for a community school. A community school employs strategic partnerships to expand the boundaries of school improvement; and, at the same time, to increase the stakeholders who make decisions about the school and its relations with surrounding neighborhood-communities. This boundary and stakeholder expansion is designed explicitly to maximize, mobilize, and utilize family, neighborhood-community, and university resources to accomplish three primary aims simultaneously.

Community schools aim to:

1. Improve and enrich children's learning, healthy development, success in school, and overall well being, facilitating their successful transition into productive, adult citizenry;
2. Strengthen, support, and stabilize family systems to improve school engagement, reduce school and neighborhood transience, and empower parents to make a difference in their children's lives and in their own lives; and
3. Enhance the revitalization of neighborhood communities, including the development of collective efficacy (e.g., Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999), accompanying civil society associations for strong democracy, and both economic and occupational development via P-16 type configurations.

In the community school model, these three aims ultimately are interdependent; achieving one entails achieving the others.

In contrast to contemporary prototypes such as full-service community schools, this rendering of the community school model *does not* require "everything under one roof." Instead this developing model draws on a growing research base documenting the beneficial outcomes stemming from new school-community relations, especially collaborations and partnerships (e.g., Baum, 2003; Delgado-Gaitan, 2002; Hatch, 1998; Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Shirley, 1997; Warren, 2005).

This new, community school model combines *school-based programs* and services with *school-linked* programs and services.<sup>4</sup> Consistent with the emergent research in support of community schools (e.g., Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003; Dryfoos, Quinn, & Barkin, 2005), decisions about school-based and school-linked programs and services belong to local leaders and their key stakeholders. Place, cultures, timing, and local needs as well as gaps influence these pivotal decisions.

Thus, some community schools are, like some of their forerunners, grand co-location experiments. Others combine school-based and school-linked approaches. Still others are exclusively school-linked. All are community schools to the extent that they are designed to achieve the aforementioned three aims and maintain the core principles associated with this developing model. Additionally, all incorporate in their configurations the following six core components:

1. An explicit focus on integrated socio-emotional and academic learning, including a designated role in the curriculum for place-based, or community-centered, learning and teaching (Bowman, 2005);
2. A coherent, research-supported plan for health and social services for children, youth, and their families, including direct links to classrooms in support of teachers (e.g., Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997) and a solid plan for addressing non-academic barriers to learning (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2005);
3. A coherent, research-supported plan for out-of-school time programs for children, youth, and families, especially programs that achieve the balance among positive youth development, academic learning and achievement, and family support;
4. Programs, services, and initiatives for parents and families, including innovative family support programs involving, for example, school-based and -linked parent and family resource centers with parent leadership and

occupational development academies (e.g., Briar-Lawson, 2001);

5. Firm connections to neighborhood revitalization initiatives, including the school's contributions to social and economic development planning and especially to anti-poverty initiatives (e.g., Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002; Taylor, 2002); and
6. Genuine decision-making power and authority for youth, families, and neighborhood residents manifested in local site decision-making councils for schools and governing boards for university-assisted community school configurations.

In a "mature" community school, all six core components are evident, whether through school-based configurations, school-linked configurations, or both. They are design specifications without which the model is not being implemented with fidelity or integrity.

Moreover, in a mature school, they are interwoven in a clear, coherent, comprehensive, and feasible school and community improvement plan, one that penetrates to classrooms and improves interactions between teachers and young people. Absent are fragmentation, incoherence, and the twin ideas that new, school-based programs and services are merely "projects" and their providers are "tourists." In brief, this is an expanded, integrated model for school improvement, one that simultaneously yields family and community benefits.

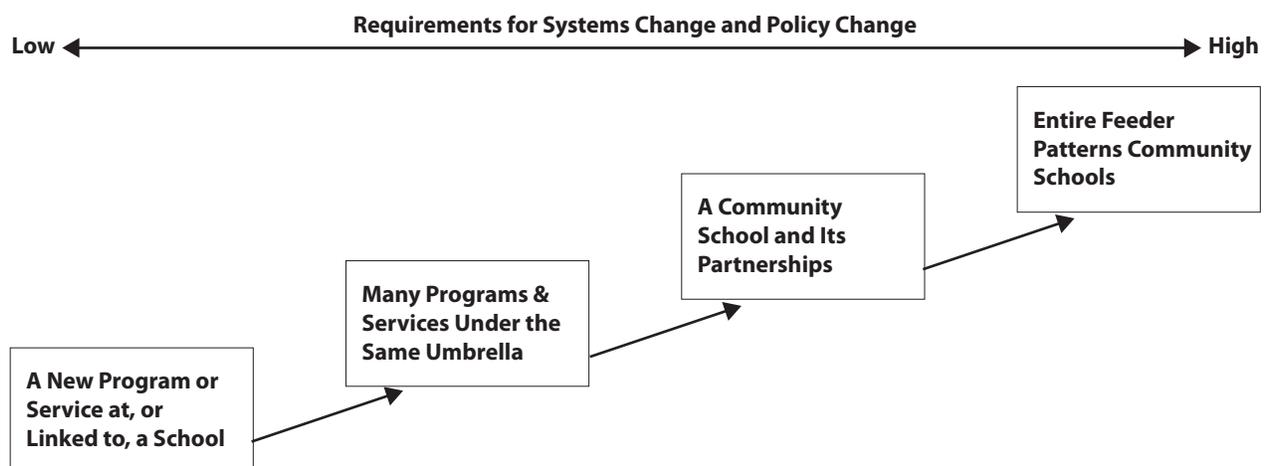
Clearly, the developing community school model manifests considerable complexity. In contrast to industrial age, stand-alone schools operating with linear, one-at-a-time improvement strategies, community schools have as one of their main features and advantages the demonstrated capacity to meet multiple needs and solve

interdependent problems simultaneously. This special, complex problem solving depends on an infrastructure for community schools, including:

- Structures and processes for collaborative leadership and management, especially ones designed to distribute leadership and support principals and superintendents
- Structures and processes for governing and managing the community school's partnership systems, including intermediary organizations (also called "lead organizations") and intermediary leaders
- Structures, processes, and people for connecting and integrating school-linked and school-based programs and services, including mechanisms for improving life in classrooms for teachers and students
- Structures, processes, and people for embedded evaluations, including mechanisms for using the data for continuous learning and improvement
- Structures, processes, and people designated to deliver training, technical assistance and professional development
- Structures, processes, and people for inter-school articulations, including support for transitions and inter-school resource and program sharing arrangements
- Structures, processes and people aimed at addressing critical needs for sustainability and systems change—namely, changes in district policy; changes in roles, responsibilities, incentives and rewards; and inter-system (e.g., education, child welfare, juvenile justice) resource pooling.

These several specifications also help to define the university-assisted community school model. They are indicative of new capacities needing to be developed and impacts of the new configurations involving community

**Figure 2:**  
**A Common Developmental Progression for the Development of Community Schools**



schools and their connections to universities. Together with the other design specifications and principles presented earlier, these make it abundantly clear that the model entails more than school reform. *The university-assisted community school model ushers in social institutional change.*

### *A Lingering Question*

Mindful of these pervasive, institutional changes and also the time and resources they require, an important question arises. Can schools with something less than the mature prototype call themselves, and be considered, community schools?5

This penetrating question invites multiple answers. One marks a return to the idea of historical-developmental trajectories. Although some of today's mature community schools became such by patterning themselves after a clear model or prototype, others, for various reasons, have evolved gradually toward it (e.g., Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997). Figure 2 depicts a typical developmental pathway toward a community school. It implies that, when in doubt, include (don't exclude) school communities with dynamic, ever-evolving improvement plans because their present status does not signal automatically more of the same in the future.

A second answer provides a bridge to the university component of this model. One of the primary reasons for developing a formal model is to provide a blueprint for school communities who otherwise are left to their own devices as they strive to improve (Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997). Mindful of this need and the accompanying potential for helping school community leaders, more extensive research, additional theorizing, and evaluation-driven development are needed, in turn indicating the need for talented people with critical knowledge resources. Together these needs comprise fertile grounds for the engagement of university faculty, staff, and students.

### **The Engaged University Component**

The university-assisted community school model benefits from, and also serves as a national model for, engaged universities (e.g., Soska & Johnson Butterfield, 2005; Pasque, Smerek, Dwyer, Bowman, & Mallory, 2005) and their "outreach" agendas (e.g., Lerner & Simon, 1998). Ira Harkavy, above all, has played a pivotal role, internationally as well as nationally, as an engagement scholar, disseminator, and advocate.

### *Democratic Renewal Through Civic Engagement*

Amid multiple discourses and reasons for university outreach and engagement, there is a dominant discourse

associated with the university-assisted community school model. This is the discourse of democratic renewal through civic engagement (e.g., Benson & Harkavy, 2002). When so much emphasis is being placed on the economy, reminders about education's role in democracy and democratic renewal are timely.

In the Penn approach, this discourse positions engagement through university-assisted community schools as a top university priority—as evidenced by the Netter Center for Community Partnerships' being located in the President's office. Importantly, Harkavy, Benson, and other Penn leaders have drawn on John Dewey's theories of education, democracy, and their relations. These leaders have strengthened the community school-university partnership by extending this Deweyian democratic discourse to the aims and operations of community schools.

### *Core Components of the University's Assistance to Community Schools*

Building on the fertile grounds developed at Penn, leaders in replication sites have contributed to the developing university model for assisting community schools. Owing in part to Harkavy's leadership and also to Joann Weeks' coordination and facilitation, today it is possible to aggregate these components and label this collective product innovation a model for "the university side."

Presently, this model includes ten components. All engage faculty, students, and staff in local community school settings.

- Service learning programs (e.g., Jacoby, 2003) for undergraduate students, some involving discipline-specific content extensions and applications (e.g., teaching chemistry to middle school students), others involving service for its sake (working with Habitat for Humanity to build housing), and still others involving the community school's place-based, community problem-solving pedagogy (Bowman, 2005)
- Special internship programs for graduate professional students (e.g., student teaching, social work field placements), as well as for undergraduates
- Academically based community service initiatives wherein faculty export their entire course or seminar from the university, offering it instead in a community school setting (e.g., Johnston & Weinrab, 2002)
- Community-based, participatory research (e.g., Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003), including participatory action research and action science
- Academically based community scholarship (e.g., Lawson, 1998) involving teams and communities of prac-

tice and integrating teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and outreach-engagement

- University employment programs aimed at local residents, especially persons challenged by pervasive underemployment and poverty
- University student recruitment programs aimed at students of all ages, and especially populations historically underrepresented in higher education
- Joint grant development and other revenue-generating programs and services, which give expression to the idea of “university-assisted” in the model.
- Initiatives designed to provide training, technical assistance, and capacity-building supports to schools in transition toward the community school model.
- A centralized office with stable, visible, and talented leaders, thus providing community school leaders and other intermediaries with a single point of contact and a firm basis for ongoing communication and partnership management.

As with the challenges of developing complex community schools, developing all ten components in a coherent, integrated framework takes time. This developmental process is influenced by contexts, cultures, assets and opportunities, available resources, and both incentives and rewards.

How would you know an engaged university if you saw one? As with determinations of what constitutes a true community schools, there is little to be gained by enforcing an “all or none principle.” Universities with two or more of these components surely qualify as engaged universities actively assisting community schools. As this model is refined and disseminated, university leaders will be able to accelerate the development of whatever components may be missing.

### **The Developing Rationale for this Model**

Not by accident, community schools have gained traction in places and contexts where conventional schools, with walled-in improvement plans developed by site-based teams, have not been successful. Not coincidentally, these schools serve considerable numbers of students and families challenged by poverty, social exclusion, racism, and their correlates. Too many mirror Kozol’s (2005) fresh description of the sorry state of American schools and the “savage inequalities” associated with them. All may be legitimated in part by Richard Rothstein’s (2004) persuasive argument regarding the need for comprehensive, integrated approaches to social, economic, and educational reform.

Mounting evidence, some cited earlier in this ap-

preciation, adds to this developing rationale. Simply stated, community schools are not merely a different way to organize and improve schools. When certain preconditions such as poverty, social exclusion, social isolation, and racism prevail, community schools provide a better way.

The rationale for the university “side” of the partnership follows suit. For example, the growing research on university partnerships yields the following planks in a foundational rationale:

- When partnerships are formed with elementary, middle, and secondary schools, they benefit the society as a whole, the economy, and also the university (because students are more qualified for university entry and advanced work).
- Partnerships also facilitate the recruitment and retention of talented faculty, staff, and academic leaders.
- Partnerships enable a broader, superior approach to knowledge generation through community-based, participatory research and the multiple, emergent methodologies it promotes
- Partnerships provide unique, superior opportunities for learning and professional development for students, faculty, and partners in external settings
- Partnerships provide unique, superior opportunities to integrate, in community settings, teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and service
- When partnerships are strategic, they build the university’s capacities for innovation and its infrastructure supports for work with external constituencies.

These several benefits also signal institutional changes in the university. Others are waiting to be developed; they are timely opportunities for model development.

### **Appreciating Some Timely Opportunities Deriving from Enduring Needs**

Each of these three components (the community school, the engaged university, and their partnership infrastructure) comprising the developing model entails considerable complexity and requires institutional change. Essentially, institutions are history-driven systems of roles, rules, structures, operational processes, and relationships. The university-assisted community school model inherently changes aspects of these roles, rules, structures, operational processes and relationships. To reiterate: This model thus has the potential to change the course of history through the reformation and transformation of existing institutions and also through the creation of new institutions. Daunting in every respect,

this conclusion also occasions an important historical reminder.

Working more than a century ago, John Dewey and Jane Addams envisioned new institutions such as the community school. They were surrounded by Progressive Era reforms and institution-builders with comparable visions. The then-new, industrial age provided indicators of need and a suitable context for their work.

Today's 21st Century world, hailed variously as the Global Age, the Information Society, and the Post-industrial society, provides comparable indicators of need and a suitable context for the institutional work involving university-assisted community schools. For, already it is clear that industrial-age schools and industrial age health, welfare, and social service systems are mismatched in fundamental ways with today's challenging and emergent realities. Place-based, concentrated poverty, social exclusion, and social isolation mechanisms, especially in the nation's cities and often including racial and ethnic segregation, provides a case in point. Although all such localities enjoy assets, they also are challenged by co-occurring, interlocking needs, ones that industrial age schools and other systems are ill-equipped to address.

These new social-geographic realities need to be framed alongside the growing ethnic diversity in American. Together they serve as indicators of the need for the university-assisted community school model's approach to institutional change. They mark a return to the special potential this model offers for meeting these complex needs.

Aiming to enhance this potential, this appreciation concludes with three basic enhancements to this model. They are presented as opportunities for model development, and they invite embedded evaluations to gain

knowledge about their effects.

**From University-assisted to University-connected Community Schools**

Presently, the university component is justified and promoted through the discourse of civic engagement and democratic renewal. This discourse is an imperative in view of one of the most fundamental challenges for developing an engaged university—namely, organizing, mobilizing, and drawing on the resources of the entire university. In brief, this discourse provides both a compelling, legitimate justification as well as a common denominator for purposeful engagement. Both are needed to attract, recruit, and retain the diverse constituencies comprising the university.

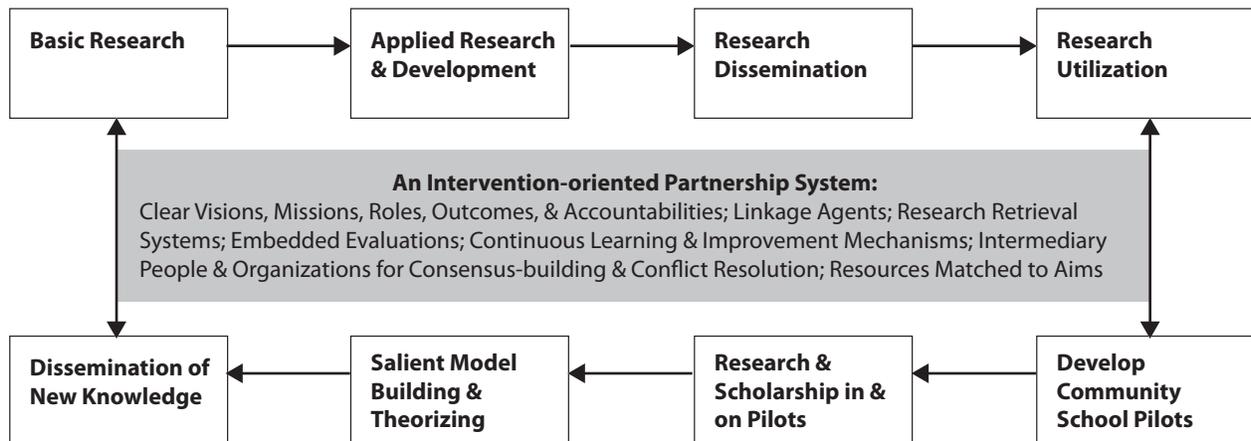
Unfortunately, this dominant, democratic discourse constrains engagement even as it facilitates it. In other words, while this discourse is absolutely vital, it also is insufficient to engage key university constituencies (potential stakeholders) in community schools. Gaining these constituencies' sustainable engagement depends fundamentally on additional discourses, ones that intersect with the enlightened self-interests of under-represented constituencies.

These additional discourses necessitate a fundamental shift in this developing model's name and also in its operations. *These discourses recommend a university-assisted and connected community school model.*<sup>6</sup> A three part justification follows.

*The University's Knowledge Missions and the Epistemological Turn*

Although the late Donald Schön (1995) may be the most visible analyst of the knowledge-related changes

**Figure 3:**  
**A Dual Knowledge System and Its Infrastructure**



accompanying engagement and new research methodologies, countless others, including Harkavy, have documented the need for a broader view of science and scientific research, including what counts as valid knowledge. This epistemological turn and its accompanying discourse provides a timely opportunity to recruit, mobilize, and engage other constituencies; and, at the same time, to link this developing model to the core knowledge operations of public universities.

Specifically, community schools, as incubators for multiple process and product innovations, add a practice-to-research component to the conventional research-to-practice component. Figure 3 depicts this new knowledge system and the accompanying partnership infrastructure needed for it. Here, it is important to note that expanded knowledge systems and infrastructures like this one comprise a top priority for federal, state, and charitable foundation funders as they pursue the facilitators and conditions conducive to research-supported and evidence-based policies and practices.<sup>7</sup>

This dual knowledge system is indicative of a mutually beneficial, symbiotic, and interdependent relationship. While the university's constituencies certainly assist the community schools, it also is apparent that community schools and their partners assist universities. That's why they are connected; they fundamentally depend on each other.

### *Understanding and Addressing Wicked Problems to Gain Knowledge and Build Capacity*

High poverty school communities, both rural and urban, provide a special way to frame the new knowledge-related opportunities presented by this developing model, in part because of the special problems they present. Nearly 25 years ago, Mason and Mitroff (1981) claimed that new, "wicked problems" were replacing tame problems.

Essentially, tame problems are simple, predictable, and certain. They are amenable to reduction, easy categorization, and isolation. Here, each special problem can be paired with a special solution or intervention. When tame problems prevail, linear, one-at-a-time planning and problem-solving are efficient and effective, and industrial age professions, organizations, and institutions suffice.

Wicked problems challenge this industrial calculus because they manifest many, if not all, of the following characteristics:

- There is an obvious lack of a definitive formation or theory of the problem

- Problems are inter-connected and maybe interlocking
- There are multiple explanations for every aspect of the problem
- Direct links between cause and effect are ambiguous or lost
- Competing theories of the problem mandate different, perhaps competing and contradictory, solutions and strategies (and resources are scarce)
- The problem never ends: There is an unavoidable lack of closure
- Persistent dilemmas plague action planning
- Wicked environmental conditions persist: High uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, and many surprises are normative
- Contradictory policies operate; and, chaos and contradictions appear to be socially manufactured
- There are multiple targets and needs for development, learning, and improvement
- Needs are evident for multi-modal, multi-lateral, and multi-level solutions, capacities that industrial era professions, organizations, and institutions lack

In short, wicked problems accentuate uncertainty, novelty, complexity, ambiguity, and interdependence. They compel non-dichotomous, integrated knowledge frameworks and action systems. Some of these frameworks and systems take as their point of departure psychologist Kurt Lewin's important claim in support of action research and action science—namely, *the best way to gain knowledge about any phenomenon is by trying to change it in its surrounding contexts*. The university-connected community school is one of the few available models for this action-oriented knowledge work.

### *The Professional Schools and Colleges*

Professional schools, colleges, and departments are the main sites for action-oriented knowledge, research, and education (Lawson, 1998; 2002). They include education, social work, planning, psychology, nursing, criminal justice, medicine, family and consumer sciences, sport and exercise science, and public administration; all have vital resources to offer and multiple benefits to gain from the university-connected community school model. For example, professional students' internships (not to be confused with service-learning) provide research-supported services to people and organizations in need. At the same time, process innovations and product innovations in community school configurations offer knowledge-related opportunities to faculty and students.

While replication sites have experienced modest

successes, the present civic engagement discourse has not managed to engage these professional units in mutually beneficial configurations. The knowledge-related opportunities associated with the university-connected community school model comprise a new discursive opportunity.

A companion discourse accompanying the idea of simultaneous renewal and reform (Goodlad, 1994) is especially noteworthy. Basically, this renewal agenda reflects and promotes the opportunities and practical necessities accompanying university-community school partnerships. Without this renewal, innovative learning and development fostered through professional education stands to be “washed out” when new graduates begin their practice. Alternatively, when schools and other organizations innovate and university faculty and their programs are not connected to them, every new graduate must be re-trained to meet the actual demands of practice.

Thus, this concept of simultaneous reform and renewal unites and benefits both the professional unites and community schools. It is salient to both specialized professional education and interprofessional education and training aimed at collaborative practice and leadership in community school settings (e.g., Lawson, 2002).

**Getting to Scale with Community Schools: Connections with Human Capital Development Through P-16 Initiatives**

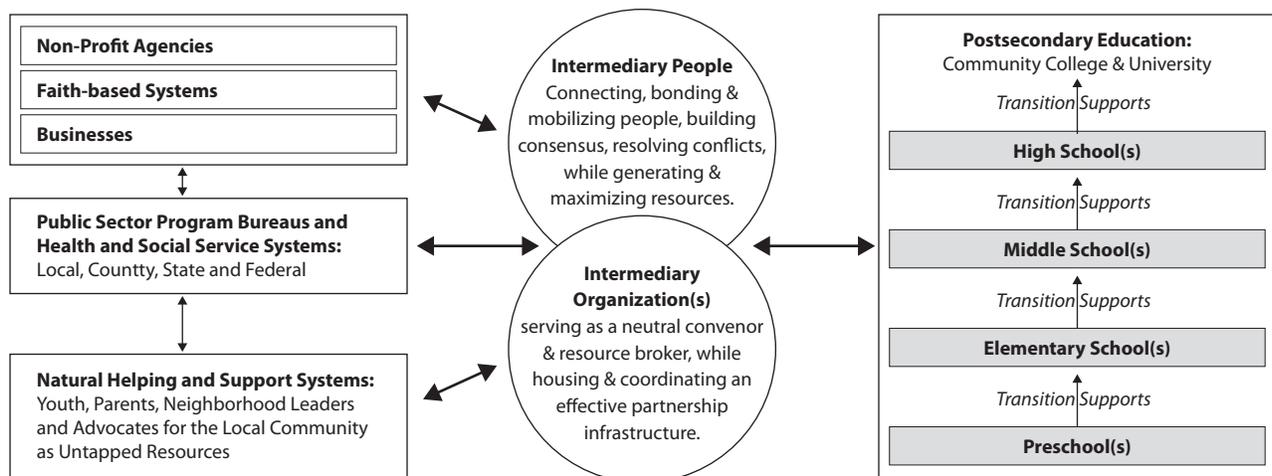
As globalization and its accompanying deindustrialization trigger sweeping changes in the economy and wreck havoc in so-called “rust belt” states and their constituent communities, policy makers in the United States and elsewhere in the world are implementing new

plans for social and economic development. Arguably, every such plan depends fundamentally on the quality of the workforce. This workforce quality is captured in the concept of *human capital development*, an idea that refers to the workforce’s capacities and talents. Human capital development depends on more and better education—especially access to post-secondary education and the preparation it provides for the new jobs in the new economy—along with better health and well being.

The development plan proceeds with the following logic: Provide more and better education to the future workforce, ensuring that they are healthy and enjoy high levels of well being; and then this workforce will serve as one key driver for social and economic development. Toward this end, a growing number of states have implemented P-16 (preschool through the undergraduate degree) articulation plans, including provisions for preparing students historically under-represented in higher education. These human capital-oriented, P-16 plans present a timely opportunity and an attendant discourse for both university constituencies and community school constituencies.

Coincidentally, research and practice on community schools points to an important need and opportunity. The need is manifested when just one school (e.g., a middle school) in a feeder pattern becomes a community school. In cases like this one, elementary students need to be re-socialized when they enter the middle school; and when they leave and enter a high school that is not a community school, genuine gains made possible by the middle school experience often are eroded and “washed out.” In these school communities, the challenges of going to scale present themselves, i.e., of having all of the schools in the feeder pattern structured and operating in

**Figure 4:**  
**A P-16 Planning Framework for University-connected Community Schools**



a community school mode. Such a scale-up supports for transitions between the schools and district level policy changes in support of them (e.g., Adelman & Taylor, 2005).

Here, then, is a timely opportunity. P-16 human capital development initiatives can be joined with scale-up initiatives involving community schools in an entire feeder pattern, especially preschools, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools serving high poverty populations and communities. Figure 4 provides a school-linked depiction of this structural configuration. Important for all that this new configuration does for the locality, state, and region, it also provides an expanded discourse for attracting, recruiting, and retaining new constituencies in universities, school communities, and governments.

In today's fiscal climate, as all public sector organizations struggle for resources and strive to sustain successful innovations, this kind of P-16 scale up will require resource reallocations made possible by policy change (as indicated in the top part of Figure 2). These policy changes will eventuate to the extent that advocates for this developing model can provide evidence of its significant results and impacts for community schools, the university, and their relationship (Figure 1).

Furthermore, the causal relationships that account for these results and impacts will need to be specified and tested. For example, this theory of change-related work entails getting inside "the black box" of the community school, with all of its programs, services, and people; and figuring out how, when, where, and why results and impacts develop. Put differently, this work entails matching interventions to outcomes, including figuring out the intervention "dosage" to get these outcomes. Clearly, this important work requires the talents of university faculty and students working with a two-way knowledge system and supported by a facilitative infrastructure (Figure 3).

### **Refining and Extending the Partnership Infrastructure**

These aforementioned, additional discourses involving the university's knowledge missions and functions, the challenges and opportunities of addressing wicked problems, the simultaneous reform and renewal of its professional units, and P-16 human capital development emphasize the importance of this model's third component—its partnership (bridging) infrastructure. As indicated earlier, this component appears to be the least developed of the three. If so, then infrastructure development presents a timely opportunity, one that needs to be studied carefully to gain more knowledge and un-

derstanding about complex change and multi-sectoral mobilization for it.

Community schools are defined in part by their multiple partnerships. So are engaged universities, including their partnerships with local community schools. The question is, can one partnership infrastructure serve the universities and, at the same time, a feeder pattern of community schools? And, if so, how will it eventuate and operate?

A growing body of research on complex community mobilization initiatives, some called coalitions, others collaborations, and still others partnerships, indicates that a single infrastructure can be developed. In fact, such an infrastructure is a practical necessity when complex systems change is involved.

University-connected community schools involve bi-directional changes. They involve changes in horizontal relations (e.g., among schools and their community partners) and vertical relations (e.g., new rules, roles, and relationships involving front line practitioners, principals and other middle managers, and superintendents and other top level leaders). All such changes require oversight, coordination, harmonization, and resource maximization. These requirements necessitate centralized, integrated governance, leadership, and management systems, including the partnership components depicted in Figure 3. Developing, evaluating, and improving this kind of infrastructure is a key part of the agenda that lies ahead.

### **A Concluding Observation Regarding this Appreciation**

Ultimately, appreciative analyses like this one have a dual character. Consistent with the everyday meaning of "appreciating someone or something special", these analyses are designed to express gratitude to special people for their extraordinary, pioneering work and to the organizations supporting them. Penn's leadership team and the University of Pennsylvania writ large surely merit this kind of appreciation. The same can be said of participating schools and community organizations in Philadelphia. This analysis has been structured in part to express this appreciation.

Vickers' (1995) appreciative inquiry is the other side. It is a methodology for gaining knowledge for and about policy, including the identification of needed policy changes. Although this analysis has implicated policy needs, it has stopped short of identifying firm policy recommendations. These policy recommendations in support of the university-connected community school model comprise an important priority for the future.

Insofar as these recommendations entail inter-policy coherence and inter-system relationships, this new century policy work will add to the complexity of this developing model for university-connected community schools. If this appreciation facilitates this complex policy development, additional theorizing and research, and, all in all, stimulates spirited, targeted planning dialogue focused on the university-assisted and -connected community school model, it has achieved its aim.

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## Endnotes

1. Addams' and Dewey's original theories of change are more implicit than explicit. They merit a fresh historical analysis with reference to today's change theories for university-assisted community schools.
2. This is one reason why these schools and companion full service community schools have had minimal impacts on preparation programs and faculty research agendas in education colleges, schools, and departments. Services are the focus, it is assumed, and they are added on to existing operations. Hence, the social and health service disciplines are the ones with preparation needs; and their faculty should do the research.
3. The idea that services provide a quick fix to poverty, including children in poverty and schools serving them, is engrained in the history of American education and social welfare policy, despite its obvious flaws and the objections provided by indigenous leaders in high poverty neighborhood-communities.
4. A new community collaboration model for school improvement, developed and being implemented in Ohio through the Ohio Department of Education, provides a new, exciting example (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, et al., 2004).
5. Henry Louis Taylor, Jr. raised this important question at a Penn invitational symposium. It merits a detailed, separate analysis.
6. I am indebted to Ira Harkavy for the reminder that "assisted" remains in good currency even as "connected" is added. The anchor institution concept, identified earlier, justifies the "assisted" descriptor.
7. Major changes in federal science policy are especially noteworthy. The post World War II science policy associated with Vannar Bush and promoting basic scientific research is tilting toward problem-solving research and related capacity-building initiatives, both of which require partnerships with external constituencies.

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# The Obesity Culture: Problem-Solving through University-Community School Partnerships

Francis E Johnston

University of Pennsylvania

“If you want to truly understand something, try to change it.”  
Kurt Lewin (1890-1947)

The obesity epidemic is the greatest public health failure of the past century. Despite the medical, the economic, and the psychological burdens imposed on our society, and regardless of the enormous expenditures by government agencies, non-government organizations, and entrepreneurial initiatives, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased steadily, especially since the 1970's. According to national data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the percentage of American adults who were obese rose from 15% in 1976-80 to 34% in 2005-06. The increase is all the more striking when compared to a study of the records of Civil War veterans; in 1890-2000, only 3.4% were obese (Helmchen, 2001). The picture is even more striking when we consider children and youth. Among US 6-19 year olds, the rate of obesity in 2003-04 was 18%, a quadrupling of the rates reported for the 1960's: 4.5%.

The picture is not quite as bleak in the other developed countries. However, the gap between America and the rest of world is steadily closing. In a recent analysis of current data, Kelly et al (2008) have estimated that, if current global trends continue, over 3 billion persons worldwide could be either overweight or obese by 2030.

### **The Burden of Obesity**

Obesity imposes a significant burden on the physical and psychological well being of those affected, and, more broadly, on society itself. Johnston and Harkavy (2009) have noted the following examples:

- Obesity raises blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels, tends to raise the risk of cardiovascular disease, raises blood pressure levels, and can induce diabetes;
- Obesity in young adults is associated with an increased risk of disability in the later years;
- Society discriminates against the obese in hiring, salaries, promotions, employment and day-to-day social interactions. The overweight are seen as lacking self-discipline, sloppy in their dress, disagreeable, and emotionally unstable.
- Medical expenses attributable to obesity accounted for 9.1 percent of total U.S. medical expenditures in 1998 and may have reached as high as \$78.5 billion;
- In 2000, over 110,000 deaths from all causes were attributable to obesity.

### **Overweight and obesity in Children and Youth**

Overweight and obesity are increasingly prevalent in children and youth as well. From the 1960's to 2003-04, the increase in children has been fourfold, generally similar to the figures for the adult population. So-called

"diseases of aging" are now diagnosed more frequently among younger and younger persons. For example, type-2 diabetes is a form of the disease in which the body produces the hormone insulin, but the system does not respond; it is "insulin resistant." A generation ago this form of diabetes was restricted almost exclusively to adults and referred to by terms such as "maturity-onset." However, along with the dramatic increase in obesity, type-2 diabetes is on the increase in all ages, but most notably among children and youth (Wilkin and Voss, 2004).

The accumulation of evidence over the last half-century points to the fact that there is a significant likelihood that obesity during adolescence will carry over into adulthood, and that such early-onset obesity is especially difficult to reverse. Do overweight and obese youth become overweight and obese adults? Over the years a number of researchers have studied the probability that overweight and obesity during childhood will persist into the adult years.

In an earlier review of the literature, Serdula et al (1993) concluded that:

- About a third of obese pre-school children and about half of obese school-age children were obese as adults
- The risk of adult obesity was at least twice as high for obese children as it was for those who were not obese
- The later in childhood that obesity persists, the greater the likelihood that it will continue into adulthood.

The risks to health that are associated with obesity are clear and significant. But it is equally clear that it is more than just a health-related condition. Obesity is a marker, an indicator of a society that some have characterized as out of control, a culture whose underlying values and practices have created conditions that are responsible for the dramatic increases. The obesity culture is at the root of the problem, the complex and poorly understood problem that must be confronted through effective and sustainable efforts (Johnston and Harkavy, 2009).

Clearly, this problem cannot be solved using the traditional approaches of our health agencies, regardless of their intentions, their expenditures, or the initiatives that have been implemented. The enormous amount of research on the subject—experimental and epidemiological—that is largely archived in the scientific literature has produced detailed descriptions of the problem and demonstrations of highly specific interventions with defined and controlled samples. With relatively few exceptions, their combined utility is limited and their results have been either disappointingly small or limited to the controlled setting of research based on experimental

models. With few exceptions, they show what might be accomplished under identical conditions, but due to their lack of successful implementation (see, e.g., Churchman and Mitroff, 1994)

The plethora of commercial weight loss programs has done little more than transform obesity into a commodity. Weight-loss programs can cost an individual from \$108 to \$2,120 for 12-weeks. In the aggregate, Americans, in 2003, spent some \$40 billion to lose weight.

Nor is the evidence for the efficacy of such programs encouraging. It has been estimated that 95% of dieters will regain the weight they have lost. And not much weight is lost. Tsai and Wadden (2005) have concluded that a participant in a commercial weight reduction program is likely lose less than 5% of his or her starting weight.

### Obesity as a complex, ill-defined problem

Obesity is not simply a result of a lack of will power, the evil-doing of corporations, the lack of exercise, over-feeding our children, or any of the other solutions that appear on a regular basis. Obesity is a complex issue; it falls into a category that includes many of the dilemmas that are faced in the day-to-day world, called complex, ill-defined problems. They cannot be specified with any certainty, nor can their parts be related to each other in any clearly structured framework. In a 1997 paper, Gallagher (1997) discussed ill-structured problems and, in particular how they differ from those that are well-defined. She described characterized them as follows:

- More information than is initially available is needed to understand the problem and decide what actions are required for its resolution
- No single formula exists for conducting an investigation to resolve the problem
- As new information is obtained, the problem changes
- One can never be sure that the “right” decision has been made.

It is the complexity and lack of a clear structure that characterizes the problem of obesity and that has stood in the way—and continues to do so—of developing and applying workable solutions. Successful programs must draw broadly on the resources of all stakeholders working together in authentic, democratic, and mutually supportive and partnerships whose members work jointly to solve the problems that are the roots of obesity.

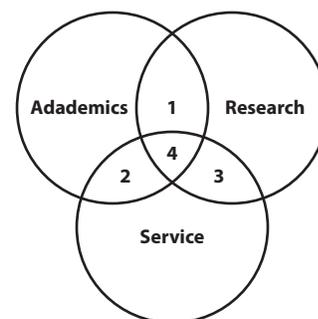
### Obesity and University-Community School Partnerships

Obesity is a disease that, in many individuals, requires medical intervention. But it is more; it is an indicator of a complex, poorly defined problem, one that is rooted in the in the structure and fabric of society along with the culture that dictates that structure and the values and behavior that result. Public health workers have long known that, in developing countries, undernutrition can only be reduced by changing society and culture, it is increasingly apparent that the problem of obesity can only be solved by changing the culture of obesity, aptly described as obesogenic.

This is the problem to be solved: how do we work together to understand the obesity culture and transform it into one whose values promote healthy lifestyles? How can we utilize the concept of democratic problem-solving to bring about changes in the beliefs and attitudes responsible for those obesogenic values and resulting behaviors that increasingly characterize modern society? How can we enhance and focus the resources of universities, communities, and schools in ways that lead to effective partnerships that, as part of an active learning curriculum, will promote healthy behaviors and improve youth development?

Among the most promising approaches for success is academically based community service (ABCS), an extension of service-learning that focuses the resources of the engaged university on eliminating the structurally based inequalities that afflict societies, in particular the community of which an institution is part. ABCS does so by consciously integrating the three historic missions of higher education: academics, research, and service and can be defined as service rooted in and intrinsically tied to teaching and research. ABCS can be visualized schematically as a Venn diagram with three overlapping circles corresponding to the tripartite mission of higher education. The overlapping segments of the circles indicate areas of overlap.

Figure 1:



Colleges and universities frequently integrate—or attempt to—any two of the circles:

1. *Academics/Research*: Teaching students to conduct research through participation in faculty directed projects, e.g. as laboratory assistants.
2. *Academics/Service*: Service learning (as described above).
3. *Research/Service*: Conducting research in the community, with or without the active participation of community members, e.g. students in medical or nursing schools learning to measure blood pressure and aggregating the results into a description of the problem: a needs assessment.

Academically based community service goes to the next step, moving beyond these paired combinations—1&2, 2&3, 3&4—to the integration of all three: 1&2&3. While retaining the basic features of service learning—self-discovery, reflection, and values clarification—ABCS completes this new synthesis by integrating all three components into a single problem-solving initiative, a true implementation that brings together the full range of resources of the engaged university with the context provided by the community. The result is a partnership in which all stakeholders participate jointly through their own expertise (see number 4 in the figure). The creation of knowledge, its transmission to all learners, and the transformation of communities become a single process leading to an outcome that is greater than the sum of the parts.

The Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative and the Obesity Culture: Transforming the Obesity Culture through University-Community Partnerships

The Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative is a comprehensive ABCS program of the Netter Center for Community Partnerships. AUNI was originally formed in 1990 as a school-based partnership between the University of Pennsylvania and the West Philadelphia community. While AUNI's roots remains in West Philadelphia neighborhoods, it has extended its programming to over 20 selected schools elsewhere in Philadelphia and is currently adapting and replicating itself to cities elsewhere in the USA. The goal of the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative is to enhance the nutrition and health status of the West Philadelphia community (including Penn's students, staff, and faculty). It also works to enhance learning—K-16+—through the application of the principles of active, hands-on learning carried out within a real-world problem-solving curriculum. The partnership core components of the partnership are the academic programs of the university and the university-assisted community schools, working together on several fronts:

- To help all students, from kindergarten through the postgraduate years, to enhance their nutritional health and develop healthy lifestyles;
- To improve their educational experiences and increase learning by means of a curriculum that involves active, hands-on, service-centered learning;
- To instill a greater civic awareness and participation in society through working to change the structural problems that afflict modern, urban society;
- To enhance specialized training in academic disciplines and research methods through a curriculum that emphasizes problem-solving through participatory action research; and
- To develop a model for change that can be extrapolated, with appropriate modifications, to other settings both nationally and internationally.

AUNI is about researching, developing and implementing integrated and thematic initiatives that are curriculum-centered while at the same time creating substantial and broad community participation. As noted above, it began in 1990 as a University of Pennsylvania undergraduate course in Anthropology: Nutrition and Community Schools. The course was designed and implemented at the request of community members and school staff—who have continued their involvement in a variety of ways—and was centered at the John P. Turner Middle School, about 2½ miles from Penn's campus. The initial class of 18 Penn students worked together with Turner students in a range of participatory action research projects dealing with healthy foods, physical growth, dietary intake, and obesity status, the results used in planning subsequent activities. These have led to the continued implementation and expansion of an ongoing ABCS program that has continued to the present. The original name was the "Turner Nutrition Awareness Program." However TNAP was renamed the Urban Nutrition Initiative in 1996 as it expanded into several partner schools—elementary through high school—in West Philadelphia. UNI was renamed the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative name in 2007. At present it is partnering with the School District of Philadelphia and other organizations to coordinate programs in 24 schools along with targeted activities in others that engage 10,000 public school and university students across Philadelphia in hands-on nutrition education that, in addition to classroom instruction, involves growing, tasting, cooking and selling healthy foods. It has become one of the largest community outreach programs at the University of Pennsylvania, anchored by the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, and linked to academically

based community service courses across multiple disciplines and schools of the university.

The premise underlying AUNI is that universities are uniquely positioned to solve complex and interconnected problems of the American city. Through linking teaching, research and service, in particular by means of ABCS courses and activities from across the schools of the university in problem solving. This collaboration involves many stakeholders, including Penn students, faculty and staff, school staff, students and their families. The linkage of real-world problem solving to the curriculum helps students from kindergarten to the postgraduate years work to improve nutrition and academic learning as well as integrating the work into courses at the university level as well as the public school curriculum in ways that are likely to be sustained through the years.

### **AUNI activities in 2008**

AUNI is a program whose beginning goes back to 1990. As such, its activities in any university-assisted community school have broadened to include new initiatives that enhance its activities, along with improving existing ones. For example, one of the earliest components of AUNI was a fruit and vegetable stand, designed and operated by 6th grade students, with the assistance of Penn students (as part of their courses). The items that were sold were purchased in bulk and brought to the school, where they were prepared for sale. After a few years, a small area became a garden where students could gain valuable experience in growing their own in an environmentally friendly way while the experience of growing their own was incorporated into the curriculum as hands-on learning. With the expansion of the program into other schools, the scope of these experiences increased as well. Secondary school students planted seeds and raised plants indoors during the winter, transferred the plants outdoors in the springs and grew a much wider range of foods, which were sold at an expanded market. Just as university students worked with high school students, so did these students become peer educators with pupils in a neighboring K-8 school.

Because of the fluid nature of AUNI, its history is a narrative of innovation, change, even occasional retrenchment. The best way to gain a picture of it is to draw on its most recent annual report, for the period 7/1/2007 to 6/30/2008, (<http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/programs/agatston-urban-nutritioninitiative.html>).

AUNI works with education systems, food systems, and other agencies and entities emphasizing the local environment. Its primary expression is through university-assisted community schools as centers for

improving nutrition and wellness, while reducing the burden of obesity, for the students and the entire community. AUNI organizes school day, after school, and summer learning opportunities in some 20 Philadelphia public schools, serving more than 10,000 students every month. Its success is based on the engagement of young people—university and public school students—as community problem solvers. In addition to its partnerships with an increasing number of schools and community partners, AUNI, at the same time, has become a vital component of numerous ABCS courses at Penn, spanning multiple departments and schools

The concepts that guided AUNI when it was formed over 15 years ago have been refined into set of core principles that express its commitment to hands-on nutrition education, community-problem solving and participatory action research to foster and enhance long-term school and neighborhood partnerships. These principles are:

*Building Capacity through University-Community Partnerships*; like its parent organization, the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, AUNI is rooted in the premise that universities—and by extension, other institutions of higher education—are uniquely positioned to help solve the complex and interconnected problems of the American city. Universities are producers of knowledge through the research that they carry out and the scholarship that results. And they transmit that knowledge to their students and to society as a whole. The role of universities in educating their students for continued civic engagement cannot be overemphasized as it contributes to the development of alumni who form an educated and engaged cohort of problem-solvers.

*University-Assisted Community Schools*; in addressing community problems and effecting concrete and systemic change, AUNI supports university-assisted community school programs—including evening, weekend, extended day and summer activities—that are anchored to and in a close partnership with the school day curriculum. Extended day and school day programs emphasize the integration of service learning with academics and job-readiness and involve parents and families.

*Real-World Problem Solving*; AUNI goes beyond traditional models of nutrition education by engaging learners in hands-on efforts to improve their local food system while working to solve the systemic problems that are manifested in nutrition-related disease. Students internalize healthy eating habits as they work to share these messages with the broader community. AUNI is based on the idea that program participants must be active participants in designing, operating and evaluating

interventions if they are to be long-lasting and successful.

*A focus on the local community;* AUNI embodies the meaning of the phrase: “think globally and act locally.” The problems of nutrition and health on which it focuses are international ones that can only be dealt with successfully by understanding the cultural, social, economic, and political context of the local setting—an ecological approach—and then by aggregating and integrating this understanding into a critical mass of activities in a network university-assisted schools and their neighborhoods. Such an approach leads to the continuing involvement of children and families working for neighborhood environmental change, even as knowledge is generated that is applicable to broader settings, beyond the immediate.

### Major Activities

AUNI’s major activities fit into four general categories.

*Integrated School Day Nutrition Education and Academically Based Community Service;* Through Eat Right Now, the School District of Philadelphia’s Comprehensive Nutrition Education Program, AUNI conducts nutrition education programs in 20 Philadelphia public schools. The primary focus of Eat Right Now is on increasing the nutrition knowledge of K-12 students. AUNI incorporates as many hands-on components (such as monthly healthy food tastings) into this program as possible. In many cases, university students enrolled in nutrition-related service-learning courses work with public school students to explore and address specific nutrition-related issues in the community.

*Increasing Access to Healthy Foods;* AUNI engages young people in organizing nutritionally better choices for their communities through school and community based efforts. Through AUNI, public school students work to improve lunchroom choices and operate after-school fruit stands. AUNI also works with public school students to help neighborhood food stores create convenient healthy food stations and to operate community farmers’ markets.

*Increasing Opportunities for Participation in Regular Physical Activity;* through school day, after-school and summer programs AUNI improves opportunities for youth and families to exercise regularly. AUNI works with PE teachers and school coordinators to improve exercise opportunities during PE class and recess time and, through the Netter Center for Community Partnerships’ community schools program, AUNI offers family-oriented exercise classes during evening programs.

*Youth-Led organizing, Peer Education and Internships;* Increasingly, people recognize the important role that youth can play as organizers of solutions to societal problems on a variety of levels; as the deliverers of social and educational services, as the developers of model programs, and as key informants to policy makers. In addition to school day peer education, AUNI coordinates job-training and youth leadership programs for high school students. The AUNI internship program engages teens in organizing better food choices in their communities by working after school for 10 hours per week. AUNI interns combine direct service approaches, which include teaching healthy cooking classes and growing healthy foods in school gardens for sale at farmers’ markets, with advocating for broader systems change. This spring, AUNI high school interns are organizing the Youth Action Council for the Philadelphia Urban Food and Fitness Alliance (PUFFA). They have also been highly involved in youth organizing on a regional and national level.

### Evaluation of the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative

The evaluation of a program involves the systematic collection and analysis of data in order to answer two broad questions:

1. How was program implemented and how did it operate? These questions focus on understanding the program, usually with an eye to interpreting the results and making appropriate enhancements for its future. It is called a process evaluation and is essential to assessment, especially if the program will be ongoing.
2. Did the program accomplish what it was intended to do? Answering this question allows one to judge the value of a program at the end of its activities. This is called impact evaluation.

Evaluating AUNI is not an easy task for a number of reasons:

1. It was designed to solve a complex, ill-defined problem utilizing a variety of initiatives, most of which were implemented at different times,
2. It is a dynamic program that has evolved over the 15+ years of its existence as internal and external conditions have changed,
3. Rather than employing a quasi-experimental research project designed to test a specific and limited hypothesis, AUNI research is action-oriented and participatory, viz. participatory action research (Mittelmark et al 1993).

Evaluating AUNI has been an ongoing process, beginning at its inception when a needs assessment was employed as part of its design. It is not possible here to describe in any detail the evaluations that have been—

and are still being—carried out. Nevertheless, some examples will be presented as examples.

One means of assessing the success of a program is its recognition by external bodies and groups. AUNI has been nominated for recognition by the federal government and U.S. foundations. In each case, an external committee visited the Netter Center for Community Partnerships and AUNI schools, interviewing staff, teachers, students and senior administrators. The awards and citations include:

- In 2003 AUNI was cited by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as one of four promising models for improving health and nutrition among children in the United States.
- In 2003, the university-assisted school programming of the Netter Center, of which AUNI is a core component, was named by the US National Academy of Science as the winner of the inaugural W.T Grant Foundation Youth Development Award.
- In 2003 the Pennsylvania State Horticultural Society recognized the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative school garden at University City High School and Drew K-8 school as the best school garden in Philadelphia.
- In 2004, AUNI was cited by the Community Outreach Partnership Centers Program of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development for its collaboration with the local community, helping to improve it through empowering residents and the organizations that serve them, and strengthening relationships between campus and community.
- In 2005 AUNI was recognized by the Campus Compact as one of eight exemplary Campus Community Partnerships in the United States.

In addition to the above, of 23 universities and colleges nationally that have to date adapted and replicated the Netter Center for Community Partnerships model of university-assisted-community schools for their own institutions, most have included a nutrition component that has been developed along the lines of AUNI.

As part of the assessment carried out under the direction of the AUNI Evaluation Coordinator, focus groups have been held the last two years with teachers from the partner schools. Following are excerpts from the 2006 groups:

- “I’d like to comment on the nutrition lessons also. They are both excellent educators and their lessons plans were outstanding because when they went into the classrooms they had hands-on activities, they had appropriate materials for kids to read and respond to, and the children learned a wealth of information...”

- “The social studies aspect was wonderful. Some of the fruits and vegetables, they actually traced the origin and how it arrived here in America. And that was great because some of it tied right in with my social studies. . . .”
- “It’s great to have kids cooking, and you can measure that success, because they’re hanging out in here eating on their lunch break and after-school. Kids definitely seem to enjoy it. . . . I think it’s really important to establish a cooking culture. They’ve been so isolated. . . . So it’s really great that they’re so interested.”

*Impact evaluation;* Analyses of the impact of AUNI on dietary intake and nutrition and health-related behavior have been designed and carried out by university students as part of their ABCS coursework. In one study, the diets of 200 12th-grade high school students who had been part of AUNI for four years were healthier than were those of grade 9 students who were in their first year of UNI. For example, 12th grade students consumed twice as many daily servings of fruits and vegetables than did the 9th graders. In another research study, 6 and 7-year old first graders consumed up to three times the servings of fruit on the day following the school store compared to other school days or to students from a non-AUNI control school.

One of the principles underlying AUNI is that participation leads to behavioral change associated with improved nutrition and overall healthier lifestyles. One early study examined the impact of participation in the design and construction of a school fruit stand on the subsequent visits to the stand. Two classes of 6th grade (11 to 12- year-old) students planned and implemented the initial fruit stand at the Turner School in 1995. The number of visits and purchases by them in the weeks following were compared to those of two other classes who had not taken part in the planning. All students had been exposed to school-wide announcements of the store and its times of opening. Those who were participants were significantly more likely to visit the store in the following several weeks and to make purchases. Participation in the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative has been shown to be associated with more positive attitudes and beliefs in themselves and a greater willingness to try new foods than was found in non-participants. And finally, the parents of 1st and 2nd graders were more likely to know about and make purchases from the fruit stand if their children were involved in it. They were significantly more likely to learn about the stand from their children rather than by seeing it themselves.

## The Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative and Youth Development

Youth development is a process that young people experience as they move from childhood to their adult years. This pathway is structured by the culture within which development occurs with the goal—conscious and unconscious—to produce a person who functions in ways that are appropriate in society. The more conscious of itself that a society is, the more likely that it will design and implement experiences that are congruent with the needs of the individual and the values of society such that, overall, positive outcomes are achieved.

The University of Minnesota Extension describes youth development as the process of growing up and developing one's capacities, listing the keys to quality youth development as: "hands-on activities, appropriate adult mentors and community service" (<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/youthdevelopment/DA6715.html>, accessed 10/28/09). These keys are basic components of the Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative, interwoven in ways that are aimed not only at providing as seamless as possible transition into adulthood, but also at helping to develop adults who work actively in their communities to promote change through collaborative problem-solving.

### Concluding thoughts: Obesity as a mirror on society

James Tanner, formerly Professor of Child Health and Growth of the Institute of Child Health, University of London, is internationally known for developing the concept of growth as a "mirror" of the state of a society. He has written that "the growth of children amongst the various groups which make up a contemporary society reflects rather accurately the material and moral condition of that society" (e.g., Tanner, 1986).

This idea has been applied extensively to assessments of community and population health among the disadvantaged segments of the modern world as well as to lesser-developed countries savaged by high levels of malnutrition and infectious disease.

How can this concept be applied to the obesity culture? How can it help our understanding of, and efforts to, remediate it? One fruitful approach is to apply Tanner's understanding of the physical status of children in disadvantaged societies and communities to the problem of obesity, especially in more affluent populations. And, just as with malnutrition and disadvantage, obesity becomes a mirror on advantaged societies, an indicator of something that has gone terribly wrong; to paraphrase Tanner, a reflection of our "material and moral" condition.

The phrase "thinking globally, acting locally" is a powerful metaphor for action, in particular for solving complex, ill-defined problems. Global problems such as the obesity culture can only be understood by dealing with the cultural, social, economic, and political context of the local setting: i.e. by an ecological approach. While thinking globally, the solution comes via the accumulation of local, community-focused initiatives that based on the processes explicit in participatory action research (Whyte, 1991). The problem of obesity can only be solved by using a process rooted in community participation and participatory action research, organized as mutually supportive partnerships. The resulting experiences can be adapted as appropriate to other settings with the results being a collage of experiences that, taken collectively, present a new whole that grows ever wider and more productive to the issue at hand, in this case, obesity.

The term "local action" leads to a focus on "place," a set of interactions—an ecosystem—which must be understood and analyzed in its own context. A community orientation is essential, pointing to a process that begins with a specific goal that can be achieved as a first step. The Agatston Urban Nutrition initiative began with one academically based community service course on nutrition with 16 university undergraduates and one instructor partnered with some 30 middle-school students and one teacher. The goal was to promote a dialogue centered on obesity-related issues, to enhance the capacity of all concerned, and to begin the process of forming a process. It has grown to a program operating in over 20 schools across Philadelphia and involving over 10,000 students and staff and 100+ university students enrolled in more than some 10 ABCS courses or working as interns.

The Agatston Urban Nutrition Initiative (AUNI) embodies the principles of the Netter Center for Community Partnerships, through its participation in the Center's university-community partnerships. Since its implementation, AUNI has contributed to a new perspective on obesity that understands it not as a target in itself. Rather, obesity is a primary health indicator of a broader societal problem that requires a different set of comprehensive, democratically based, problem-solving approaches.

- Obesity is a complex, ill-defined problem that cannot be solved by a reductionist science that is based on a model derived from laboratory experiments. The problem of obesity requires a science that is focused on working to solve the problem through comprehensive interventions and participatory action research.
- Obesity is not itself the problem; it is an indicator of a much broader problem, one that points outward to our

culture and the structure of our society rather than inward to the individual who manifests the condition. To solve the problem, our focus must be not on obesity *per se*, but on its causes and the pathways through which they operate.

- Solving the obesity problem requires an approach that is based on democratic, collaborative problem-solving. This approach is best realized through mutually beneficial partnerships.
- The foundation of such partnerships is the collaboration between the community and the university. Neither entity is sufficient unto itself. While other kinds of partnerships are possible, among the most effective, the most promising, and the most sustainable are those that draw on the engagement of universities with communities, in particular through university-assisted community schools.

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# The “Community as Classroom Initiative:” The Case of Futures Academy in Buffalo, New York

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This paper will examine efforts of the U.B. Center for Urban Studies to build a *university-assisted community school* centered neighborhood development initiative in the Fruit Belt, a distressed community in Buffalo, New York. The goal is turn Futures Academy (School 37), a traditional Pre- K through 8th grade public school into a university-assisted community school that drives the neighborhood regeneration process in the Fruit Belt.

*University-assisted community school-centered* neighborhood development is a concept based on two inter-related ideas. First, a *university-assisted community school* is both a place and set of partnerships and activities that turn a traditional school into a “hub” for the community and an entity that helps to educate, engage, empower and serve all members of the community in which the school is located. In these schools, there is an integrated focus on academics, social services, community-based activities, and neighborhood development. An authentic community school, then, is a vital neighborhood anchor, which not only educates students, but that also provides services. Because of its community connection, residents view the school as a neighborhood institution that should be preserved and developed.<sup>1</sup>

Second, within this context, an authentic *university-assisted community school* turns its “set of partnerships” into a *collaborative* that drives the comprehensive, integrated development of the distressed neighborhood in which the school is located. As the “central hub” around which neighborhood life evolves, community schools are strategically positioned to lead the regeneration process. This notion is based on the principle that a significant relationship exists between better schools and better neighborhoods. Therefore, school reform and neighborhood redevelopment must march in tandem. Put another way, underperforming public schools and distressed neighborhoods are interrelated problems that must be solved conjointly.<sup>2</sup> This strategy is based on the belief that public schools can function as *neighborhood change* agents and strategic centers of collaboration which engage residents and stakeholders in authentic struggles to transform their community. In this community school model, we emphasize “university-assisted” because universities possess the fiscal and human resources necessary to provide sustained and comprehensive support for community schools.<sup>3</sup>

In this essay, we situate the problem of underperforming schools and distressed neighborhoods in the broader context of building the *new urban metro*; a critical task for regions in the United States.<sup>4</sup> For reasons discussed below, recreating the urban metropolis is key to developing a prosperous and sustainable nation, with

vibrant local communities that provide a high quality of life. Central cities should be the backbone of this *new urban metro*.<sup>5</sup> For this to happen, distressed neighborhoods must be turned into places capable of functioning as building blocks for cities, which will then produce robust cities that are able to anchor the *new urban metro*.<sup>5</sup>

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part analyzes the interactive relationship among underperforming schools, distressed neighborhoods, and the building of the *new urban metro*. The second discusses the pedagogical model that provides the foundation for our *Community as Classroom* initiative at Futures Academy. Part three examines the community context in which Futures is located and discusses our quest to transform this institution into an authentic *university-assisted community school* capable of driving the neighborhood regeneration effort.

### The Challenge

The most critical challenge facing urban regions in the 21st century is the building of a *new urban metro*, one based on participatory democracy and racial and social justice.<sup>6</sup> The current growth model embraces economic and population decentralization: as metros expand, jobs decentralize, inner city neighborhoods become distressed, poverty suburbanizes, central cities and inner suburbs decline, and communities sprawl. This process of growth contributes to regional fragmentation, environmental degradation, global warming, residential exclusivity, race and class segregation, and ultimately increases significantly the cost of governing.<sup>7</sup>

The socioeconomic consequences associated with this dominate approach to developing urban regions necessitates the creation of a new type of urban settlement—the new urban metro. In this approach, urban development is driven back toward the central city and inner suburbs, and metros are built that are based on race and class diversity, dense settlement patterns, mixed land-use, and the creation of inter-modal transit systems that are efficient, environmentally friendly and capable of moving people and goods throughout the metropolitan region in an efficacious manner.

### The Distressed Neighborhood Problem

This brings us to the problem of distressed neighborhoods. This is the most strategic problem facing central cities and it must be solved if cities are to become the foundations of the *new urban metro*. As long as the middle-class views the central city as the epicenter of crime, violence, poor schooling, and declining property values, the new urban metro cannot be built successfully.

*Fear* will catalyze opposition to policies that encourage recentralization and promote housing affordability and residential inclusivity.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, transforming distressed neighborhoods into great places to live, work, and raise a family will not be easy. Neighborhood distress is a *wicked problem* characterized by a host of interrelated issues, including underperforming schools, poverty, crime, violence, bad housing and a decaying infrastructure, as well as a growing underclass that lacks the education and training required for successful participation in our increasingly sophisticated, high technology, and computer-based society.<sup>10</sup> Within this context, underperforming schools have become the symbol of distressed neighborhoods. Characterized by poor academic achievement and high dropout rates, these schools are blamed for many of the socioeconomic problems faced by troubled communities.<sup>11</sup>

The problem of neighborhood distress, however, is a more complex one. We believe that underperforming schools are only one symptom of problems whose roots do not lie in the classroom and corridors of educational institutions, but in the broader fabric of the neighborhood, the city and the region in which the school is situated.<sup>12</sup> Thus, an interactive relationship exists between underperforming schools and neighborhood distress. Consistent with the 'neighborhoods matter' and 'resilience' literature, this viewpoint posits that vibrant neighborhoods produce positive socioeconomic outcomes for residents, while troubled communities have the opposite effect. Neighborhoods that function in a healthy, productive manner provide protective factors for the residents, while dilapidated and violent communities place residents at risk.<sup>13</sup> To acquire a level of security, human and economic, all children need to feel safe and secure at home, in their neighborhood and in school. This sense of safety is necessary to grow, learn and develop, to become a conscious participant in the world and to have not only the desire but also the ability to be a social and political actor in life.<sup>14</sup> Students who learn in safe, positive environments are more successful than those subjected to risk.

Given the complex, interactive nature of this *wicked problem*, the only way to solve the problem of underperforming schools is to transform simultaneously both the underperforming schools and the distressed neighborhoods in which they are located.<sup>15</sup> Geoffrey Canada, who founded the Harlem's Children's Zone, put it this way: "Fix the schools without fixing the families and the community, and children will fail; but they also will fail if you improve the surrounding community without fixing the schools."<sup>16</sup> Canada's provocative thesis suggests that the 'neighborhood-place' is the basic unit and focal point for

urban regeneration and the revival of community spirit and culture.

Given this reality, we believe the *university-assisted community school* centered neighborhood development strategy is the best approach to solving the problem of underperforming schools and distressed neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup> The goal of turning neighborhoods into the building blocks of strong, solid cities will be realized in practice only by turning public schools into the engines that drive the transformation process.

### **Building a University-Assisted Community School Centered Neighborhood Development Initiative**

Turning a "traditional public school" into a "university assisted community school,"<sup>18</sup> which is capable of functioning as a catalytic agent within the neighborhood, is an extremely complex process that involves the realization of three interactive enterprises:

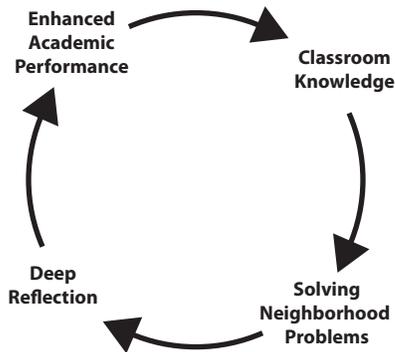
1. Developing an action-oriented, problem-based pedagogical model that enables students to apply the knowledge learned inside the academic classroom to solve real-world neighborhood problems outside the school building, along with popularizing the academic based community service learning courses within the university;
2. Transforming the school into a "hub" of neighborhood life and culture and a "laboratory of democracy" where parents, teachers, students, and residents and stakeholders work collaboratively to build the neighborhood and enhance the school;
3. Turning the community into an environment where residents and stakeholders are engaged in lifelong learning, are highly supportive of academic achievement, and are engaged in the quest to improve the school; *a learning community*.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Community as Classroom Pedagogical Model**

Developing an authentic, fully developed university-assisted community school centered neighborhood development initiative is not an event, but a process that occurs over an extended time period. Therefore, the first step in this protracted effort is the establishment of a student-centered academic program that connects learning to neighborhood development and place-making activities.<sup>19</sup> The neighborhood is also a classroom where students work with residents and stakeholders to use knowledge and skills gained in school to make the neighborhood a better place to live and work. In this approach, there is a sequential, looping feedback system among classroom knowledge, its application to the resolution of neighborhood problems, deep reflection and enhanced

academic performance by the students (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:**  
**Community as Classroom Learning Paradigm**



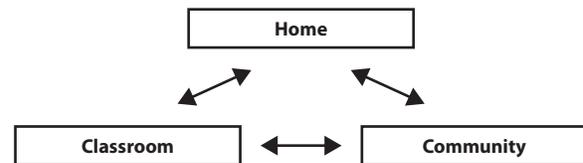
This type of academic program must be grounded in an action-based pedagogical model, which is capable of contextualizing the learning experiences of children in neighborhood problem-solving and place-making activities.<sup>20</sup> Developing and implementing such a teaching method in a public school setting, therefore, is the first stage in the process of building an authentic *university assisted community school centered* model of neighborhood development.<sup>ii</sup>

The pedagogic model used in our approach is based on a fusion of the work of John Dewey, Paulo Freire and other theories of active learning. We view learning as a continual activity, taking place at home, in the school, and in the community (Figure 2). Learning experiences in one place trigger questions and build upon knowledge accumulated in the other places and spaces, thus forming continual feedback and feed-forward loops that reinforce one another and that form the basis of the *community as classroom* initiative.<sup>21</sup> The goal is to develop critically conscious students who love to learn, recognize that their entire environment is their “classroom” and who are thus more apt to become civically engaged citizens who are aware, productive and care for and about their neighbors.<sup>22</sup>

This model is based on the hypothesis that students from distressed neighborhoods are not motivated to learn because they do not see a relationship between the lessons learned in the academic classroom and their ability to make their own lives better or to improve the conditions inside their community. Education is typically advertised as a ticket out of the neighborhood, a way to achieve the good life; it is a form of individual advancement that eschews group loyalty. Education is meant to be individually and personally rewarding, not communally transformative.<sup>23</sup> Thus, if you embark on the

education express train, it will take to a world of happiness, success, and material rewards, far away from the neighborhood where you began your journey.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 2:**  
**A Child’s Three Interactive Learning Environments**



However, even in this context, many young people do not believe the advertisement. “Students make judgments about what goals are important to them and also they make judgments about their ability to accomplish these goals.”<sup>25</sup> They see many educated people who continue to struggle, who do not live the good life; and they are further conflicted by the idea that education, when used as a vehicle to escape, often causes one to leave family, friends and community behind.<sup>26</sup> In the inner city, then, education, which is informed by individualism and consumerism, and which is not linked to the development of *critical consciousness*, will not inspire most students to prioritize schooling.<sup>27</sup>

The renowned African American scholar, Carter G. Woodson, referred to this type of education, which is devoid of *critical consciousness*, as “miseducation.” By this Woodson meant that *authentic* education must be used as an instrument for freedom and liberation, and not as a mechanism to reinforce subordination, passivity, and the acceptance of injustice.<sup>28</sup> With little faith in the transformative power of education, many students from depressed neighborhoods do not even bother completing high school—they just dropout. This is extremely problematic due to the fact that in today’s society, “a high school diploma is the minimum qualification for full participation in the U.S. economy,”<sup>29</sup> and those without one are doomed to a life of struggle on the economic margin.

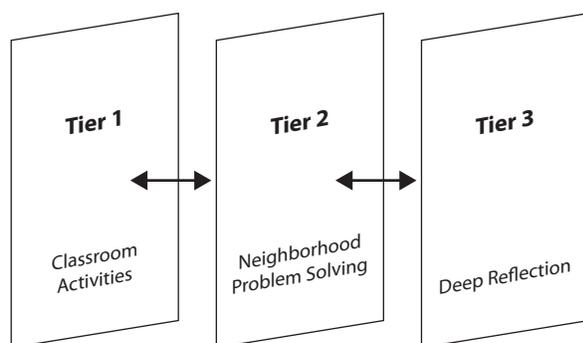
To change this “anti-education” mindset among students in distressed neighborhoods, we need a pedagogical model that enables students to apply the knowledge gained in the “academic classroom” to improve conditions their neighborhoods and in their own lives; a model that asserts the power of knowledge, not only to equip one to earn a living, but to also create a world worth living in. Toward this end, we root our model in an active learning modality in which students are continu-

ously engaged in the process of neighborhood development and place-making, as part of a collective process of building a democratic community, which is anchored by the principles of solidarity, collaboration, reciprocity, racial and social justice and cosmopolitanism.<sup>30</sup>

The idea is to develop an academic program that is child-centered, action-based and that fosters problem-solving skills by engaging students in place-making activities and by working on real world neighborhood development issues. It is critically important for students to see the relationship between the knowledge gained in the classroom (math, science, reading, writing, history, literature, etc.) and their ability to use that knowledge to improve neighborhood conditions, as well as to make their own lives better. In this sense, we want to construct a learning environment where students (and teachers) learn how to value and use "community" knowledge to expand and enrich "academic" knowledge, which they, in turn, use to problem solve, place make and build the neighborhood.

Deep reflection on their learning experiences is an essential part of the knowledge acquisition process in this approach.<sup>31</sup> Real knowledge acquisition, we argue, comes from the integration of classroom learning with action-based problem solving and deep reflection.<sup>32</sup> These three dimensions of knowledge acquisition are interconnected. Classroom activities provide students with the first tier of knowledge and skills, while the application of this knowledge to neighborhood problem-solving provides the second tier of knowledge acquisition and skill development. Deep reflection, the third tier, involves critically thinking through all of the learning experiences, mistakes and successes, and then drawing lessons for the future (Figure 3).<sup>33</sup> Knowledge that is obtained at each tier reinforces knowledge that is obtained at the other tiers, thereby, producing a powerful *learning synergism*. Thus, in this model, knowledge acquisition is both sequential and multi-directional.

**Figure 3:**  
**Three Dimensions of Knowledge Acquisition**



This reflective activity will enable students to forge a *critical consciousness*, as they learn how to situate their experiences in historical, cultural, and social contexts and how to recognize their ability to improve the conditions in the world outside of their traditional classroom--their own neighborhood.<sup>34</sup> In this way students will come to value knowledge as a tool that enables them to bring about changes in the real world. This approach reinforces John Dewey's notion that the intelligence and maturity of children develop best when they are involved in the quest to solve the puzzling real-world problems confronting them and their families and when they are given the opportunity to reflect deeply on these problems.<sup>35</sup>

Teachers, in this approach, serve as guides that move the students through each of the learning tiers and then show them how to apply the knowledge learned to new "problem" situations. The fundamental principle is that "real life" issues provide opportunities for teachers and students to collaborate, problem-solve, and reflect and this process models an authentic participatory democracy.<sup>36</sup> This type of pedagogical method is critical in an inner city setting, where so many students underperform academically, drop out of school, and make poor choices that sometimes lead to premature death or incarceration. This happens, we argue, because inner city students do not see a relationship between education and the ability to improve their lives and make their neighborhoods better places to live. Without understanding this vital connection between education and community building, we do not believe students will be motivated to learn and develop fully their talents and skills.<sup>37</sup> Thus, our pedagogic model is not only a method of teaching, but it is also a community building activity that contributes to the holistic development of young people—good students, engaged neighborhood residents, and community change agents.

## The Neighborhood and School Context

### *The Neighborhood: The Fruit Belt*

Futures Academy is located in the Fruit Belt, one of Buffalo's "official" downtown neighborhoods (Figure 4). Situated on the eastern side of Main Street, it contains the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Center and is within a stone's throw of the artsy *Allen Town* and *Downtown* neighborhoods.<sup>iii</sup> The Buffalo-Niagara Medical Center is the center of Western New York's health and life science industries and is the foundation of the region's knowledge intensive economy. The concentration of health related industries within the Medical Center itself, along with the concentration of businesses, retail establishments, community-based agencies, and public schools in

**Figure 4:**  
**Fruit Belt Neighborhood**



and near the Fruit Belt, make the area a major regional employment center. For example, within a half-mile radius of the community, there are close to 30,000 jobs, and with the continued investment of the University of Buffalo in the medical campus, the area will become even more prosperous.<sup>38</sup>

The Fruit Belt, unfortunately, has not benefited from this economic prosperity and the community possesses all the characteristic features of a highly distressed neighborhood. According to the City of Buffalo's Neighborhood Condition Index, which ranks neighborhoods on the basis of quality of life, the Fruit Belt is #52 out of a total of 54 neighborhoods. This residential neighborhood, which is predominantly African American, has fewer than 2,000 people. The neighborhood population base is very unstable and dropped from 3,837 in 1990 to about 2000, in 2008, a population loss of approximately 48% in about 18 years. About 58% of the households are headed by women, and the average household income in 2000 was approximately \$23,000, less than half of the Buffalo area median income of \$46,900 per household. The 2000 unemployment rate was 25% with only 47% of the eligible workers participating in the labor force. As of the year 2000, only 13% of the adult population had an associate's degree or higher, and a staggering 47% of the population lived below the poverty line.<sup>39</sup>

#### *The School: Futures Academy (School 37)*

Futures Academy is a pre-K–8th grade neighborhood magnet school, which draws its students from inside the neighborhood and across the city. Although originally designed to offer students a curriculum that prepared them for futuristic careers, Futures Academy now uses its magnet school status only for recruiting students citywide. About a third of the 694 students re-

side in the Fruit Belt, with the remainder being drawn from other low-income neighborhoods in Buffalo. The school is predominantly African American, with a handful of whites, Latinos, and Native Americans. Nearly all students attending Futures meet eligibility standards for free or reduced price lunches and the school performs well below New York's learning standards in English Language Arts and Math classes at all grade levels. Most of the teachers at Futures have more than three years of experiences and about 19% have a Master's degree or higher. The school is led by a progressive, M.D. educated, African American principal, who often reminds students that she, herself, grew up in the Fruit Belt neighborhood.<sup>40</sup> This is extremely helpful in reinforcing our learning *credo* that education is not about *escaping* the neighborhood, but using one's knowledge to regenerate it.

#### **The Intervention Strategy: Building an Authentic University-Assisted Community School**

In the fall of 2001, the UB Center for Urban Studies (CENTER) started working with Futures Academy with the intent of transforming the school into a *university-assisted community school*, capable of driving the regeneration of the Fruit Belt neighborhood. The CENTER, in partnership with neighborhood residents, also launched a neighborhood revitalization effort at the same time. Our long term strategy, then, is to connect school reform at Futures Academy to the neighborhood regeneration process, and to ultimately turn the school into the engine that drives that regeneration process.

Two factors make this quest especially challenging. The first is that students at Futures are recruited from both inside the neighborhood and across the city and only a third of these students actually live in the Fruit Belt. This means that for many of the children, the changes they help bring about in the community will not have a direct impact on their lives because they live elsewhere. Even so, the literature on traditional, K-12 service learning programs shows that these initiatives have a positive effect on students, even when the service does not take place in their own community. Moreover, studies show that learning activities focused on solving real-world problems are superior to traditional teaching methodologies that often focus on didactic information delivery and memorization. The brain fatigues quickly if only factual information is delivered. The best learning occurs when a student is aroused and stimulated. When both the emotional and cognitive parts of the brain are activated in a positive way, the brain releases chemicals that actually enhance learning and recall.<sup>42</sup>

The *community as classroom* is an engaged learning approach and will have a positive impact on student academic development. This will not only lead to improvement in the local community but provide students who live elsewhere, with tools to use in the development of their own neighborhoods. When students attend schools that focus on engaged, achievement oriented teaching, that is relationally tied to *community*, an environment is established that promotes academic and social competence, and that in turn promotes self-esteem, autonomy, problem-solving and connectedness.<sup>43</sup>

The second constraint is that Futures, along with all Buffalo Public Schools, has a very rigid curriculum, which is geared toward students meeting the New York State Academic Standards.<sup>iv</sup> In this setting, it is challenging for teachers to immediately integrate our *Community as Classroom* pedagogical activities into their regular classroom activities. Most teachers at Futures often feel overwhelmed and are not likely take on new activities that are perceived to add to their workload. For this reason, we developed a program that *compliments* the existing school curriculum, although it is not an "official" component of the school curriculum. Nonetheless, we do involve teachers, in varying degrees, in both the development and implementation of the *Community as Classroom* initiative. For example, an eighth grade science teacher assists in the development of programs and coordinate our activities within the school. The art teacher works with us on various projects, and a number of teachers participate in the annual Clean-A-Thon, which will be discussed later.

Given the complexity of this challenge, we understood from the beginning that the transformation of Futures into an authentic university-assisted community school was going to be a long-term process. The strategy, then, was to introduce an action-oriented, problem-based learning program into the school environment that *complemented* the existing curriculum. Then, gradually, over time, the objective was to infuse activities and projects based on this pedagogy throughout the school curriculum. It was anticipated that the successes of the program would trigger interest among other teachers and students. Toward this end, we would use a variety of methods to arouse teacher and student interest and involvement in the program. Moreover, as teachers became convinced of the positive impacts of this approach, we posited that they would find ways to integrate real-world problem-solving activities into their own classroom activities.

## The Program: The Community as Classroom Initiative

The *community as classroom* uses the Fruit Belt neighborhood as a classroom where students use the knowledge and skills learned in the traditional classroom to work with neighborhood residents and stakeholders to solve problems in the 'neighborhood' classroom. There are four components that comprise the initiative: *Neighborhood Building*, *Community Heritage*, *Community Parks and Gardens*, *Community Art*. The varied components are highly interactive and relate to different aspects of the community development process. The *community as classroom*, as previously mentioned, compliments the school's curriculum, but it is not integrated into regular classroom activities. All of our activities occur during the school day, with students participating in the program being given release time from their science/social studies blocks. Referrals to the program come from the school guidance counselor, principal, and teachers, with some students referring themselves, after hearing about the program from participating students.

### 1.0 Neighborhood Building

The *Neighborhood Building* component introduces students to the dynamics of building and developing their community and consists of two interactive programs – the *Future City* and *Clean-A-Thon* projects. The goal of the *Future City* program is to show students that a connection exists between public policy and the city and neighborhood development process. The idea is to debunk the notion that conditions in distressed neighborhoods or elsewhere are the products of a natural developmental process, rather than the outcome of a human decision-making and resource allocation process. Through their participation in these community-focused experiences, the students will come to understand the role that public policy plays, along with human agency, in the building and maintaining of their neighborhoods. In this way, they can truly appreciate how collaboration with residents, stakeholders, and government agents can lead to policy and program change and ultimately improve neighborhood conditions.

#### *Future City*

The *Future City*<sup>TM</sup> competition engages the students in a simulated problem-solving activity with real world implications. Each year, as part of a broader national competition, we develop one or two teams of no more than 10 seventh and eighth grade students, who use *SimCity*<sup>TM</sup> software to build a futuristic city based on a specific theme such as nanotechnology, transportation, or alternative energy sources. In this process, they

explore various policy choices and decide which ones to apply in the building of their city. In addition to developing a computerized city, they must also construct a scale model of a smaller portion of the city. The students take field trips, using the broader community as their ‘classroom’, to deepen their understanding of the theme and to gain insight into ways that the policy and decision making process shapes neighborhoods and cities. Local engineers and urban planners volunteer to work with the students in the development of their projects. This further facilitates neighborhood connections and deepens the ties between students and role models in the larger community. Literature on risk and resilience for children concludes that fostering bonding experiences and connections with prosocial people helps to mitigate risk, increasing chances for student success.<sup>44</sup>

In addition to hands-on project work, the students actively reflect on each day’s activity in a semi-guided hand-written journal. Between September and January, the students are involved in the construction of their computer city and a scaled model of a smaller section of the city. After the January competition, the students are required to reflect on their experiences. Not only do they engage in group discussions about lessons learned, but they must also write a short essay on their experiences. After the reflection exercise, they spend the remainder of the school year working on select neighborhood projects. The idea is for them to use the knowledge and skills learned in the Future City competition to work on “real life” problems in the Fruit Belt.

### *The Clean-A-Thon*

The Community Clean-A-Thon is a community building project, which seeks to create linkages between Futures Academy and residents and stakeholders by using a neighborhood clean-up to improve the health and visual image of the community. A major objective is show students that even with limited resources a community can improve its living environment. The guiding principle is that *citizen participation* and *building partnerships* are the keys to building a strong community. Thus, the Clean-A-Thon is an empowering strategy and an organizing vehicle that connects Futures Academy to residents and stakeholders.

The Clean-A-Thon is organized around the theme, “Collective Work and Responsibility,” which stresses the importance of the entire community taking control of the neighborhood’s destiny. The Clean-A-Thon evolves through two stages. The first stage occurs from September through March. During this time, the students study neighborhood blighting patterns and develop plans on

how to deploy “cleaning brigades” on the actual day of the Clean-A-Thon. What sets the Clean-A-Thon apart from other programs is that teachers at Futures Academy drive the event. The CENTER funds the program, but the school, under the leadership of one the teachers, is responsible for most of the event’s organization. The Clean-A-Thon day is divided into two segments. The morning segment is devoted to cleaning up the neighborhood, while the afternoon is set aside for a community celebration. The goal of the festival is not only to celebrate the successful clean-up, but also to deepen the bonds betwixt and between teachers, students, residents and stakeholders.

## **2.0 Community Heritage**

Neighborhood pride and identity are critical community building components because they create attachment to place and give students, along with residents, a stake in the neighborhood development process. The purpose of the *Community Heritage* component is to provide students with an opportunity to gain insight into the Fruit Belt’s history, its process of development, and forces that have driven its development over time. The ultimate goal is for students to learn how to reflect on the past in order to gain insight into the present and formulate perspectives for the future. The *Community Heritage* project represents an effort to begin the systematic analysis of the neighborhood’s history.

This year, the students initiated a study of the social history of houses in the Fruit Belt. This is the first stage of a long-term project that will end with the implementation of a neighborhood housing preservation plan. The current focus is on an investigation of the ways that successive generations of residents have grappled with the adaptive reuse of neighborhood houses within the con-

**Figure 5:**  
**Clean-A-Thon 2008**



text of the social, cultural and technological changes taking place in society. By locating the housing units at different points in time, the students are able to understand how residents continually remake dwelling units, and the neighborhood, to meet their changing needs. The project covers the period from 1850 to 1940 and identifies all the neighborhood homes built during that epoch. A profile was developed on each house which includes a history of the occupants and key neighborhood, city and national events that took place at different moments in the life-cycle of each home.

### 3.0 Community Parks and Gardens

The development of community parks and gardens is one the most important neighborhood place making activities in the *Community as Classroom* initiative. It is a community building activity that brings residents, stakeholders, and students together to turn unkempt vacant lots into parks, vegetable gardens, playgrounds, and recreational areas. This initiative consists of three ongoing and highly related activities.

#### *Futures Garden*

The goal of this project is to maintain the Futures Garden and to transform it into a community ArtPark, which reflects the culture of young people. The garden stretches along Carlton, from Orange to Peach Street, directly in front of Futures Academy. In 2003, the site occupied by Futures Garden was nothing more than a series of unkempt vacant lots, which symbolized the powerlessness of students, teachers, and residents. These lots were a vivid daily reminder to the school community that this was a worthless and uncared for part of the city. Futures Academy students, in partnership with neighborhood residents and the Center for Urban Studies, decided to change this message. UB graduate students assisted the students in planning a passive garden, acquiring control over the land, and overseeing the construction of a park. The Futures students learned that even with limited resources, they had the power to alter the visual image of the community through a vacant lot management strategy. Students continue to maintain the garden and also work with other students in the CommunityArt component to transform Futures Garden into an ArtPark, which reflects youth culture.

#### *The Vegetable Garden*

The CENTER, in partnership with neighborhood residents, and Futures students, is also developing a model vegetable garden. For a number of years, a vegetable garden was managed by the Friendly Fruit Belt

Block Club. However, current club members, who are growing more elderly, can no longer manage the garden alone, and a collaborative of stakeholders and residents have evolved to develop a model garden to hopefully encourage other community members to join in the development of gardens across the Fruit Belt. Within this framework, we use the garden, again as a part of the 'community classroom', to teach Futures students about gardening, nutrition, and environmental issues, and to popularize gardening among community residents, especially young people. For example, this past spring, the children participated in a bioremediation project conducted by the Buffalo Museum of Science in which they learned how to use mustard plants to cleanse the soil of specific contaminants.

#### *Creative Playspace*

The creative playspace initiative is a new project aimed at developing a play area for young children that is designed to spark their creativity, resourcefulness and imagination, as well as stimulate sustained physical play. There is both a health and education dimension attached to this project. Children who participate in active play are healthier; they are less likely to be obese or to develop obesity-related health problems. However, in the Fruit Belt, playgrounds are scarce and the playgrounds that do exist are conventional in design and contain standardized play equipment that fails to sustain long-term interest among the children. The playspace initiative seeks to solve this problem by constructing a recreational area that presents the types of physical and intellectual challenges that will sustain interest and encourage physical play. As Albert Einstein said, "imagination is more important than knowledge" because it leads to the type of innovative, *out-of-the-box* thinking that is so crucial to the development of complex problem solving skills. Creativity, then, is the generator of novel ideas, concepts and approaches to solving complicated problems. We hypothesize that *creative playspace* can contribute to the development of imagination and creativity in young children, thereby facilitating their interest in learning and enhancing academic growth.

This project is informed by the methodology that we used in the design and construction of *Futures Garden*. We organized a team of students to design the *creative playspace*, which will be located on the campus of the CAO-UB Center for Community Wellness and Neighborhood Development. The idea is to build a play space that will become a focal point of activity for children between the ages of 8-11, who live in the Fruit Belt. In the fall of 2008, six students, two from each fifth grade

classroom, were assigned to the *Creative Playspace* Design Team and are responsible for designing the creative playspace, under the guidance of a Center for Urban Studies fellow in landscape design.

Work sessions last for one-hour and begin with students spending time reflecting and writing down thoughts and ideas in their journals. The remainder of the sessions focuses on various design activities. The first part of the year, between September and December, the students completed a site analysis of the playspace area. During the second part of the year, they have been developing and testing various design scenarios. They will complete the design of the creative playspace before the school year ends. Next year, the students will develop a budget for the playspace and begin to fund raise.

#### 4.0 Community Art Project

The community art project involves students in the struggle to change the visual image of their community by adorning it with a range of art projects. The principle is to show students how they can change the way their neighborhood looks and feels. Dilapidation and a forlorn environment do not have to be the characteristic features of distressed communities. Within this framework, we want students to think aggressively about ways to re-image their community and to imbue it with the energy of youth culture. Over the past five years, the students have produced some rather dramatic projects. For example, working in partnership with the Locust Street Art Class, they produced a mural, which consists of about four hundred small panels, to cover the fence surrounding a small neighborhood park. They also designed and built two benches for the park.

They students produced a unique sign, which consisted of a bench and a decorative archway, for a block-long garden/park designed by Futures students and built by the UB Center for Urban Studies. Moreover, while Futures was being rehabilitated, the students were permitted to develop a mural, along the wall fronting the entrance to the school. The mural consisted of several hundred small tiles, with a different design painted on each one. Now, the first thing they see when entering the school is the mural, which symbolically proclaims, "This school belongs to you." And the first thing they see when they leave school is the sign and garden that symbolically says, "This neighborhood belongs to you."

They students have also developed art projects designed to get young people to "stop the violence" and to turn derelict old houses into works of art. The public spaces, on which the community art projects have been erected, have become "sacred" places, which are never

vandalized. Thus, the actual work of the students is becoming a real part of their community, not only increasing the aesthetic value of the environment but sending positive, uplifting messages to all who live and work there. This is a real sign of active citizenship.

#### The Diffusion Strategy: Popularizing the Community as Classroom Initiative

A fundamental goal of the *Community as Classroom* initiative is for our active learning and problem-solving pedagogy to become integrated into the regular classroom activities of teachers at Futures Academy. For this to happen, teachers must be convinced that this approach to teaching and learning will bolster the academic performance of their students. Building awareness and support for the initiative is the first step in the process. Here, the goal is to popularize the *Community as Classroom* concept and demonstrate that participation in it can enhance student success.

Toward this end, we have adopted several strategies to popularize this initiative and demonstrate its effectiveness. First, students in the *Community as Classroom* initiative participate in the weekly grade-level teacher meetings, which are attended by the principal and from 3-6 teachers from a particular grade level. Also, included in these meetings are a number of support teachers for the grade level. The students prepare their own presentations and then respond to questions. This activity not only informs the teachers of the various activities being carried out in the *Community as Classroom* initiative, but also it allows them to assess students' abilities to coordinate a presentation, express their ideas, and think on their feet. This is a very transparent way for teachers and administrators to evaluate student performance in a variety of areas.

To encourage further teacher participation in program development, occasional surveys are distributed. For example, in the fall 2008, we surveyed teachers in grades 1-3 to get their ideas about how to involve the younger students in the annual Clean-A-Thon. They suggested that these students could help create a sense of "community" in the school by cleaning up the school grounds and participating in some activity within the school to improve conditions. The teachers volunteered to coordinate this activity and it was included in this year's Clean-A-Thon. In the fall 2009, a survey will be conducted among 6-8th graders to determine if a relationship exists between student's views about neighborhood life and their academic performance.

We are hypothesizing that students who feel a sense of attachment to their neighborhoods and who be-

lieve they should be engaged in making their neighborhoods a better place to live will perform better than those students who are more disengaged. By discussing these surveys with the teachers and then sharing the results, we are creating another opportunity to talk about the program and its value. In this sense, even if the hypothesis does not produce robust results, we have still created a venue where program implementation and improvement can be discussed.

In terms of popularizing the program and demonstrating its value, two activities stand out. The first is the CommunityArt program. This program produces tangible products that bolster the visual appearance of the neighborhood and the school. For example, the Futures Garden not only dramatically improves the visual appearance of the school's campus, but both the mayor and Superintendent of Schools attended the dedication of the garden. Moreover, the mural on the wall fronting the school's entrance, produced by the CommunityArt program, reinforces student attachment to the school and symbolizes their human potential. Second, the Clean-A-Thon is extremely important because it *involves* the entire school. The Center for Urban Studies funds the initiative, but the school is responsible for planning and carrying out the event in partnership with residents and stakeholders. Thus, in this way, the school as a neighborhood anchor institution is deeply involved in improving life in the Fruit Belt.

### The Evaluation Challenge

This initiative is based on three interrelated hypotheses. The first is that students from inner city neighborhoods are not motivated to study because they do not see a relationship between what is learned in the classroom and their ability to improve either their neighborhoods or their own lives. The second is that an action-based pedagogy that grounds student learning in problem-solving activities designed to improve neighborhood conditions will enhance student academic performance. The final hypothesis is that this approach to learning will not only improve student academic performance, but also lead to tangible improvements in the neighborhood.

The big issue is how to design an evaluative framework capable of testing these hypotheses. To answer this question, we sought to resolve the question: *does the evaluation tool shape the teaching and learning paradigm or does the teaching and learning paradigm shape the evaluation tool?* We believe that it is the latter; therefore, our task is to develop an evaluative tool that is capable of testing our assumptions about the teaching and learning paradigm. Developing such an evaluative tool, we believe, is a pro-

cess rather than an event. The first step toward the development of such an evaluative tool is to obtain insight into the relationship between a student's attachment to place and his/her attitude toward neighborhood place making. We are hypothesizing that students with attachments to place and favorable attitudes toward place making will have a higher grade point average than students with less attachment to place and less favorable attitudes toward place making. We have developed a survey instrument to test this hypothesis and this will be implemented in the fall of 2009.

A second challenge is to develop a method to determine the impact of student activities on the improvement of the Fruit Belt neighborhood. Our approach is based on the thesis that student's efforts to solve neighborhood problems will improve both their academic performance and conditions inside the neighborhood. Therefore, we must develop an evaluative framework that also enables us determine the impact that student activities are having on neighborhood development. Since a goal of the program is to engage students in systematic work on neighborhood development projects, one way to measure community impact is to focus on those projects that impact the visual image of the community and other place making activities. We can, for example, use digital photo analysis to determine if the project has visually improved the neighborhood, and we can survey the residents in the immediate vicinity of the project to gauge its impact on their visual perception of the area. Also, we can develop an evaluative tool to determine how effective the Clean-A-Thon is in reducing the presence of blight in the neighborhood. Evaluation of both student and community benefit is the ultimate goal. Information is not only needed to determine the effectiveness of the program, but to empower students by showing them that their actions are actually making the neighborhood a better place to live.

### Conclusion

The Center for Urban Studies is still in the early stages of turning Futures Academy into an authentic university-assisted community school that can drive the neighborhood development process in the Fruit Belt. We have developed a teaching and learning model to inform our programmatic activities and we have established a good mix of programs that connect academic classroom learning to problem solving activities in the Fruit Belt neighborhood. Moreover, we have put into place a strategy for popularizing the program throughout the entire school. Now, the central task lies in strengthening the existing program and increasing the number of students

participating in the *Community as Classroom* initiative. Currently, we are able to work with only about 60 students per year, not including the approximately 300 students that participate in the annual Clean-A-Thon. The key to increasing the number of students impacted by the *Community as Classroom* Initiative is to popularize academic based community service (ABCS) at the University at Buffalo. By increasing the number of university-based ABCS programs at Futures Academy, not only will we increase the number of students served, but also we will accelerate the possibility of teachers integrating active learning and problem-solving programs in their day to day activities. Moreover, this will strengthen the connection between the University and the school.

Lastly, before our program is significantly expanded we need to develop and refine the evaluative tool necessary to test our assumptions. Even at this point, early anecdotal data, including commentary from both students and teachers, suggest that the program, as a whole, is producing more engaged and productive students. Thus, during its early stages of development, the *Community as Classroom* is reinforcing Dewey's notion that the intelligence and maturity of children develop best when they are involved in the quest to solve the puzzling real-world problems confronting them and their families and when they are given the opportunity to reflect deeply on these problems.<sup>45</sup>

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## Endnotes

- i For a in-depth discussion of the philosophical foundation of the university assisted community school that we are attempting to build, see Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett, *Dewey's Dream* and Taylor, H. L., Jr. (2009). *Inside El Barrio: A Bottom-Up View of Neighborhood Life in Castro's Cuba*. Sterling Drive: Kumarian Press, 86-95.
- ii Ira Harkavy argues that academic-based community service (ABCS) is the main building block in the development of university assisted schools. We agree. In our approach, the first step in the construction of this building block is the creation of a pedagogical model that informs academic-based community service. This means that ultimately, to build an authentic university assisted community school, we must succeed in popularizing ABCS at the University of Buffalo and to link this activity to our work at Futures Academy.
- iii Since its founding, the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus insists that is not in the Fruit Belt, but represents a "neighborhood" of and in itself.
- iv New York State standards are benchmark indicators that the child is expected to reach by the completion of his/her grade level. Scores on standardized test are used to determine if students are meeting these standard and the curricula is geared toward teaching the learning performance standards.
- v In 2009, we expanded the post-competition grade levels to include 6th graders who could be "incubated" as the core of the competition team for 2010.
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Collaboration and Prevention:  
Looking Back on Eleven Years of a University-Assisted  
Community School

Robert Kronick and Nissa Dahlin-Brown  
University of Tennessee

Collaboration and Prevention—this is the mission of a group of university-assisted community schools in Knoxville, Tennessee. For the past 11 years, the project director, Dr. Bob Kronick, a University of Tennessee education professor, has collaborated with community educators and volunteers and directed a special group of ever-changing university students in this project to offer university assisted community schools. The need these schools fill can be seen in the stories that follow. The goal for the past 11 years has been to break the cycle of poverty, crime, and lack of education that plagues many of these poor, inner city communities and to give these kids and their families hope.

### Schools, Families, Community: Part of a System

Over the past 20 years, society has forced our schools to take on many roles in addition to that of teacher, such as caregiver, doctor, disciplinarian, social worker, etc. It could be because the parents are not there or just feel overwhelmed by the role of provider and parent, or maybe never had such a role model themselves. To have any hope of breaking this cycle, the child must be viewed as part of a system that contains many separate systems (the family, the school, the neighborhood, etc.) with each interacting and influencing the other. This systems theory viewpoint has been held by many as far back as the 1930s. The idea that behavior was a function of the individual and his or her environment was provided by social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) in his 1936 theory  $B=f(P,E)$ . (Behavior equals Function of the Person and their Environment - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt\\_Lewin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Lewin)). Systems thinking theory was also promoted by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005), a developmental psychologist, who contributed Ecological Systems Theory in 1979. This theory described four types of nested systems that contained roles, norms and rules that could shape human development:

1. *Microsystem*: Immediate environments (family, school, peer group, etc.)
2. *Mesosystem*: Connections between immediate environments, i.e., home and school.
3. *Exosystem*: External environmental settings which indirectly affect development
4. *Macrosystem*: The larger cultural context of diverse cultures, economy, politics, etc.
5. *Chronosystem*: Environmental events and transitions over the course of life. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological\\_Systems\\_Theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_Systems_Theory))

Before Bronfenbrenner, child psychologists studied the child, sociologists examined the family, anthro-

pologists the society, economists the current economy, and political scientists the political structure. His approach connected the disciplines, which allowed findings to emerge about which key elements in the larger social structure and across societies, were vital for human development. From Bronfenbrenner's perspective, the community school emphasizes that the exigencies of the family and community impact the child before he or she hits the steps of the school house door. Therefore all aspects of the school, community and the family must be considered. The works of Carl Upchurch (1996) are informative here:

*"I grew up believing that I deserve society's contempt just because I was black. With each act of violence, disappointment and rejection, each stabbing, each shooting, each fight that I witnessed, each bitter rebuke from my mother, each meal that was not provided, each time I had to go to school in dirty clothes, I retreated further inside myself to a place of empty distress and growing anger."* (Upchurch, 1996, pages x and xi).

*"Everything I had experienced in my childhood was the opposite of what I needed to survive socially, intellectually and psychologically at school."* (Upchurch, 1996, page 17)

Upchurch goes on to describe how when he went to school with dirty clothes, un-brushed teeth, uncombed hair, that when he walked into the school no one said hello to him, not even the teacher.

Prevention of juvenile and adult crime, mental illness, and poverty are key goals of the community school. They provide outcome measures of success or failure based on outcome objectives including reading and math scores, attendance and tardies, behavioral measures (including referral to the principals office), suspensions and expulsions. If these objectives can be met, then the long term goals are at least attainable. At a macro systems level, change rather than amelioration is possible when these objectives and goals of prevention are attained.

The focus of this project in Knoxville has been pre-schools and elementary schools, all Title I, with mobility rates of students ranging from 35% to 52% and free and reduced lunch hovering at 88%. The philosophy of the project was to locate the community schools where the need was the greatest, where crime rates and poverty were often staggering. What is often termed intersectionality of socioeconomic status, race, crime, delinquency, and mental illness, is what typifies the communities where these community schools were initially placed. However, with any kind of luck, this model will eventually reach suburban schools.

Everyone knows that struggling schools and communities are located all across America. At a 2008 Philadelphia Higher Education Network Neighborhood Development (PHENND) conference at the University of Pennsylvania, a panel presented the current state of affairs in Chester, Pennsylvania. Their school situation seemed abysmal. Good and well-meaning people from three universities in the area discussed their efforts to improve life in the community, by recruiting local students to attend their colleges. The numbers were extremely low, if any at all were enrolled. None of the institutions and programs addressed preschools or elementary school children, though one university had recently opened a charter elementary school, after a lawsuit forced them to give up the idea of a public school. It was suggested to a social activist from Chester at the conference that the panelists consider working with younger children in a preventive model. By starting at a lower level of school age, the possibility of these children having successful high school and post high school aspirations, expectations and successful behaviors, plus the development of a community with social capital and dreams for the future, might be a possibility.

As Upchurch so clearly illustrated previously, when he found himself in the Youth Development Center, he felt that it was the normal place for him to be. After all, this was the type of community that he came from, where people just ended up. In fact, it sounded like there was a very strong relationship between Chester and the penitentiary system, much like the one that Jonathan Kozal delineated between Hunts Point and Riker's Island in his book, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (2005). Upchurch said bluntly,

*I arrived at Young Development Center November 1962. I felt no shame about being there. After all, most of the men in my neighborhood, young and old, had spent time in a succession of prisons. I figured it was a normal pattern of life—YDC was where I was supposed to be,*” (Upchurch 1996, page 31).

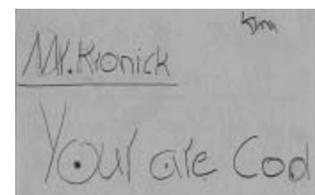
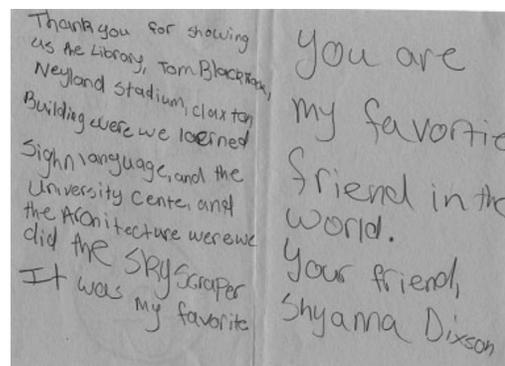
A recent study found that the number of people incarcerated in America has risen to an all-time high; one in one hundred people. This scary fact also illustrates the importance of university-assisted community schools, particularly one that has as part of its philosophy the prevention of crime, both juvenile and adult. Jerome Miller in his classic study *Search and Destroy*, (1996) pointed out that an African-American male, by the time he reached 25, has a 75% chance of being under the auspices of the Department of Corrections. Upchurch said,

*There's a predictable pattern to the lives of most black*

*intercity boys. I say boys only because I was one, with no authority to give you a first person account of the lives of black intercity girls except to tell you that both begin in poverty and both are surrounded by drugs, violence, and gangs. The pattern of young black urban males that they are destined for the most part to be drug users and/or sellers, to become proficient with street weapons and to end up either dead by age 21, or under the direction of the criminal justice system or both.”* (Upchurch 1996, page 199).

How interesting that Upchurch by sentiment and Jerome Miller by statistics came to the same conclusion regarding the correlation between socioeconomic status, race, and incarceration. This is a problem that America must address.

One way the Knoxville community school project has worked to prevent this cycle of despair and acceptance from continuing is through fall and spring semester visits to the university campus by the 50 – 75, fourth and fifth graders from one of the Title I schools. In all three years of this biannual event, these children have been exemplary. The teachers report that the students raise their level of aspirations after visiting the university. They no longer say they want to do hair (be a hairdresser) or draw (as in draw a welfare check). In other words, this trip to the university, which they have never seen even though it is only a few miles away from their school, has a tremendous impact on them. One student remarked that he could not believe that the library was seven stories tall! Some of the thank-you notes are shown below:



## Background of the Project

The University-Assisted Community School (UACS) project described in this paper grew out of twenty-five years of work in corrections and ten in mental health by the project director. Working with children in these two settings was often rewarding, but the behaviors that led to hospitalization or incarceration of children in the 1970s are still seen in the schools today. What this reflects is that children's mental health and corrections has become increasingly insidious. Recent reports from the federal government also show that abuse of children in correctional facilities is on the rise. At the same time, treatment options have become constricted. Acceptable length of hospital stay is shortening as an increasing reliance on medication has made the mental healthcare for children very complicated. At the same time, correctional care for young offenders has had an increasing number of serious and dangerous offenders incarcerated. Many children are incarcerated because states do not have viable alternatives to incarceration for these children. State agencies may buy a certain number of beds in a community agency only to find no beds available for a child in their custody to place them there.

Corrections and mental health agencies often disagree over the appropriate placement for emotionally disturbed delinquent children. Courts often struggle with this conundrum, but most often will rely on the secure placement for children in the situation, which is of course, corrections.

Thus a concern for children motivated the push for UACS. The school was selected as the site to deliver the services. It seemed clear that children and families were in schools, hence the best place to deliver services to them was at the school. The bottom line is that the move to develop the UACS was for prevention and to make some systemic changes as opposed to ameliorating the problems. The philosophy early on was that people had problems in living as opposed to being problem people.

It is these types of situations that set the stage (and desperate need) for the creation of UACS with an emphasis on prevention in the community. Systems theory and collaboration are the base or the philosophical underpinnings of these schools. For this particular project, the year was 1998. Dr. Kronick attended the American Educational Research Association (AERA) conference and was on a panel with Joy Dryfoos. Later, Dryfoos was invited to the community and came in November of that year. This event and her 1994 book on full service schools was a major force in the development of the UACS project. The initial plan was to create a school as a human service agency. The local architects of the UACS model had

experience in human service education, which stressed a multidisciplinary approach to teaching and learning. The first issue was should services be school-based or school-linked. After group discussion this issue was decided in favor of a school-based approach with co-location of services. The school would be a hub of services, one stop shopping and a key force within the community. All of this was done without an awareness of the Coalition for Community Schools or the various programs at the University of Pennsylvania. Initial successes can be attributed to the interdisciplinary nature of the program and the teamwork with community agencies, which came about from this model. Community agency interaction with schools is a major component of this project.

The next step was to implement these ideas into the schools. The first superintendent approached in 1998 was not interested in this concept. Like many educators, new ideas were anathema to this superintendent. At the same time, there was also very little support for this from the College of Education or the University, nor would there be until 2007. But with the selection of a new superintendent in 1999, the full service school model was presented once again. This time the superintendent granted permission to try it in some of his schools. Kronick chose only elementary schools and those that were most in need, i.e., Title I schools, so Sarah Moore Greene, Green Academy, and Inskip were selected to offer students medical, dental and mental health care, along with tutoring and after-school programs. These programs were tied to his research and to his teaching of an Honors course in service learning. As a result, Dr. Kronick has had an average of 300 undergraduate and graduate students working with 2,100 elementary students each year. These University students serve as tutors or after-school activity coordinators and have written grants to obtain services or equipment for the schools. One grant provided Red Cross Clinics at the schools and another purchased unicycles at Green Academy. Students in the unicycle club have been featured riding their unicycles at events around the community. Membership on the unicycle team instilled a "can do" attitude and sense of pride that many students never experienced in a traditional classroom. At Inskip Elementary, Dr. Kronick secured a pediatrician, dentist and mental health counselors. He also created after-school and summer classes in reading, music and art. In the fall 2006 he arranged for art shows at Inskip and Green Academy. These shows were attended by many in the local and business community and some students sold their art, resulting in a sense of accomplishment many of them had not experienced in the past. And on a more utilitarian level, Dr. Kronick convinced Lowe's

to donate and install a washer and dryer at the school to help deal with the problem of dirty clothes and lice. The washer and dryer have also served as a time for parents to come to the schools to discuss their child's progress with the teachers, staff or university student volunteers. As one school administrator said to a student volunteer,

When Dr. Kronick started coming here and sending his students to us, I was sure it wouldn't last. But he keeps coming back. Seven years now, and he's still sending them back to us. We've never seen that kind of support from any university.

Throughout this time various community schools experts visited the project including, Dryfoos, Jane Quinn in 2002, Marty Blank in 2005, and most recently Ira Harkavy in 2007. Each visit motivated the project team to continue and grow. All of these experts said positive things about what was being done and this has been heartening and has kept the program going, even though they have toiled in virtual isolation from other programs across the country. This is beginning to change with the collaboration ongoing presently with the Netter Center at the University of Pennsylvania, the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy at UT and other UT and community organizations.

Another prime motivator for the project has been the support and hard work of certain schools' principals, especially Elisa Luna, Blenza Davis, Gussy Cherry, Susan Esposito and Mamosa Foster. Davis and Cherry have retired in the past three years, but Davis is still involved as an advisor/consultant to the project. Two schools have withdrawn from the program because of lack of support from the principal and not wanting to do the work necessary to be a community school. The children are another motivator for keeping the project going. The director has gotten to know many of them over the past decade. Teachers and staff who buy into the model further motivate moving the project forward. It might be pointed out that there has been little or no support from the school system itself. In fact, the support that could best be described from the school system is one of benign neglect. Current motivators from the university include:

- Doug Blaze, UT College of Law
- Nissa Dahlin-Brown, Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy
- Brad Fenwick, Associate Vice Chancellor of Research and Engagement
- Rita Geier, Associate Vice Chancellor, who sued the university years ago for being a segregated institution and is now helping us with community involvement

- Bob Rider, Dean, College of Education, Health and Human Sciences
- Robert Cunningham, Department of Political Science, retired

Dr. Cunningham has been with the project from the very beginning and often kept the team motivated. His students, who volunteer at the schools, are going to be public administrators. Initially they found absolutely no reason to be involved in a community school, but three weeks into the project they saw how working with school children could inform their future work in the business world. They also had a better understanding of how the bills and laws that they were interested in would affect these people. The following excerpt is how one student reflected on his time at Inskip Elementary (2008).

*I have been working with Mrs. Green's first grade class for an hour and a half each week. Each week I am surprised that I am confronted with many different situations that can be applied to management. Management of first graders is much more difficult than I imagined.... I have also realized that the degree of compassion I use in communication with children should also be used with adults...In the short time I have been mentoring I have learned details about every child's family and favorite activities. By extending this same type of inquiry to employees, a more trusting open relationship can be formed between manager and employee. If I was an agency manager greeted with even a degree of the excitement the children I work with show, I would look forward to work every day... I am very impressed I have learned so much about myself and management from what seemed like a simple experience.*

### **Collaboration & Prevention: One Answer**

In the goal of preventing crime, mental illness, and poverty the UACS project at the University of Tennessee has built a collaborative model using systems theory and prevention.

Collaboration is the critical element within the operation of this project and the most difficult to achieve. Collaboration might be visualized as a covered dish supper where one brings one dish but is able to take away more than they brought. Collaboration is the process of choice because of the complexities of human behavior. Behaviors have multiple causes and if change is to come about, then a collaborative model is the only way to bring this about.

Collaboration must occur within the university and between the university, the schools, and the community agencies that are involved. The process must be one of

shared responsibility, not one of top dog/under dog. This partnership has applied for a federal grant for full service schools. The team is collaborating on the grant proposal and will decide who the applicant should be based on who is most likely to be funded. Those involved include the school system, Tennessee Voices for Children, a parent advocacy group, and the University. The group is encouraged by the fact that no one has said “What’s in it for me?”, which illustrates the collaborative mode of this UACS project.

The following story illustrates what actually goes on in UACS. The project provides needed services such as counseling, healthcare, and tutoring. The after-school program reflects statistically significant data from the services provided (Walker, Kronick, and Diambra 2008).

### Stories from the Field

Ms. Luna wanted me to speak to a girl who was staying in her class all day because she had been having trouble in her own class. Her mother had brought her in that morning and said she was going to give her up. Her mother is bipolar and was yelling that she could not take it anymore and that her husband had walked out on her for the third time,” (personal communication, 2000).

The DSM4 – *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, published by the American Psychiatric Association (<http://www.psych.org/MainMenu/Research/DSMIV.aspx>), reported that in 2000, 60% of those people defined as mentally ill had children (DSM-IV-TR). Given the poverty and often dysfunctional dynamics of the families this project works with, a community school can and must work with these children and families. These facts explain behaviors like those cited above and reaffirms that behaviors do not occur in vacuums, that environmental context helps us understand and intervene on behaviors presented by children in the community school. This vignette occurred in 2000. Since that time there have been numerous stories that duplicate this one and emphasize the importance of getting to know the context, culture and the environment of the children and families’ lives.

In 2008, a graduate student who is a middle-level manager for the state Department of Children Services and a professional with fifteen years experience, asked for some consultation regarding this student she had been seeing for the past two years. He was suspended for four days. This was his eighth suspension since the beginning of the school year and his twentieth since she had been working with him. What is known about this young man

is that he lives with his grandmother. The grandmother does not cooperate with school people and appears sometimes to be bewildered according to the school people when they see her with the child. She may only be 40 years old because his mother was 14 when she gave birth to him. Both nature and nurture are exerting influences in this powerful situation. Only personal interaction with this child and his family system will bring about positive change within his life. This boy and the previous story about the girl whose mother wanted to give her up, span a period of eight years, yet they share a common core of characteristics that typify many of the children that are found through an after-school program, through a one-on-one relationship between a university student and a child, and in other ways that only a personal interaction through a community school can provide.

Another vignette that illustrates why this project is ongoing is a fourth grader who came into the school clinic the day before spring break with a bruise on his shoulder. He said he got the bruise from falling out of a car. The school nurse and the community school director, who happened to be there that day, spoke with the boy after the nurse examined him. During the course of the conversation the boy disclosed that he often slept in different places during the week. One of these was at his grandparents. He also shared that he often slept on the floor while his family dealt drugs. The mark on his shoulder was a spider bite he received while sleeping on the floor of his grandparents’ home. A perusal of the corrections department computer site revealed that the boy’s grandparents were on their “radar” as drug dealers. Within due time, the entire family was arrested. But what happened to the fourth grader? He went into state custody. Not a particularly good outcome in this state, because so many of these youths end up in prison as adults. The state corrections department has reported that those going into state custody are 50% more likely to end up in prison, than children NOT put into state custody. This next case is a perfect example of school correction collaboration and illustrates clearly the roles of the community school personnel:

The presenting case here was very interesting because it had so many different levels of involvement and analysis in it. The child being referred to the community school project was a fifth grade boy, eleven years old, who would come to school every day and start a fight with the first student that he saw. On one day, he threatened to kill his teacher. This teacher told the community school director that if he had in fact had a gun that day, she believed he would have killed her.

It is worthy to note that this was a teacher who had twenty-five years of experience in an inner-city school. In looking at the child's record, the term anger management ran throughout his clinical file. In bringing the child in as has been evident throughout these stories and vignettes, it was revealed that at this young age there were two other children living in his home, that his aunt was in prison pregnant and when she gave birth the infant was going to come live with his family, and he was responsible for raising these children. What would happen is that when he made a mistake, the "father" would beat the boy with a belt buckle. Since he couldn't fight back against this larger human being, he started fights with everybody he could. A multilevel intervention was made where a male student from the university was assigned to this boy, and the community school director checked to see if the "father and mother" were on either probation or parole. It turned out they both were. The community school made an arrangement with the parole office that they would put the family on notice, because if they were both sent to prison for probation violations, all these children would come into state custody and once again there would be the nightmare of where they would end up. This case worked out successfully because the boy came to school, continued and finished the fifth grade and went on to middle school. It was during his time at the middle school that he called the teacher that he threatened to kill, informed her that it was he on the phone, and told her that he was going to school. The community school director also, just by happenstance, happened to be in the school that day and she turned to him and said with tears in her eyes, "*I would adopt him if I could.*"

These vignettes illustrate what community school folks actually do as they work in urban Title I schools. In order to deal with the vagaries of life, the following model has been put into place at each community school with modifications based on the special needs of each school. Community schools do not follow "cookie cutter blueprints," rather through listening to the constituents of the school, special nuances are attached to and programs are put into place based on these special needs. Nonetheless, a somewhat "typical day" is described below. The reader is reminded that the entire labor force is university students, the program operates on a zero budget and the programs offered depend on the special talents of students enrolled during that particular semester.

### Typical Day at School

7 – 7:45 am	Breakfast club and Reading and English tutoring for children whose primary language is not English, i.e., Spanish, Russian, and some African languages. The Foreign Language Department at the university has provided a tremendous service here.
7:45 am – 2:45 pm	Mentoring, tutoring – mostly in Reading and Math. Help with social skills. Counseling provided by master's seeking students. Medical clinic staffed by pre-medical majors, the Clinic Vols.
2:45 – 4:45 pm	After school snack, exercise, tutoring and study skills and enrichment, i.e., art, music, dance, unicycles, nutrition, gardening, American sign language, soccer, etc. These enrichment offerings are based on the skills of the students who are enrolled this particular semester.

It cannot go without stating that not only do the Title I students gain from the project, but the university students gain immensely. The reflections that students have provided over the years are another motivation that keeps the project going. These next two should be illustrative:

I'm a little lost as to what to say about my fieldwork. I'm coming to the realization that the child I'm helping is not so much in need of help as in need of attention.

In speaking of the virtues of mainstreaming, this university student says:

I think she tries harder by being in class with these children who are excelling in the first grade and it makes her feel better about herself when the University of Tennessee students come in to work with her.

The next student goes on to say:

The UACS program is without a doubt the most fulfilling activity I've ever participated in. In my mind the goal of a UACS is to provide opportu-

nities and service where those children would not have them otherwise. While we are providing a wonderful service by offering the drama class, it frustrates me to see the kids getting on the buses when I arrive at school and knowing that some of those children could really use the extra attention and the stimulation the drama provides.

It is evident from the quotes of these university students and the previous student of Dr. Cunningham's, that they were also benefiting from the service that they give. University students engage in reciprocity with these children in that the children gain from them, but they also gain from the children.

Transportation is a major consideration in establishing after school programs and has been one of the biggest road blocks that the program has had on the road to a fully developed after school program. Despite transportation problems, other initiatives have been developed. Some of these activities have succeeded and done very well, and some for whatever reasons have not. Taking time to reflect back on these activities will help the program leaders plan better for the future of university-assisted community schools in this region of the country. The initiatives included:

1. Established the Tennessee Consortium for the Development of university assisted schools. The Consortium was a group of people that lived and worked in the mid-east region of Tennessee. The Consortium essentially stopped being an active entity in 2003 due to the lack of travel funds for state employees.
2. Developed a comprehensive resource book entitled *The Essentials of Starting a Full Service School*. This document is still an organic viable document and is used by graduate students interested in community schools.
3. Developed a library of books and resources related to community schools which still exists within the Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling at UT.
4. Assisted area school systems in writing Full Service School grants, though not much success was garnered in this area.
5. Established realistic evaluation strategies and hired an outcome evaluator, who has been semi-active since 2000.
6. Established a growing pool of professionals who volunteered their time for the development of community schools.
7. Established a speakers' bureau for presentations at various conferences.
8. Facilitated the housing of professional agencies within area schools, though this has declined since 2002.
9. Attended professional meetings such as the Coalition of Community Schools meeting in Kansas City, Missouri and in Portland, Oregon in April 2008.
10. In short, much has been done primarily on a volunteer basis, by those who deem it critical to the success of these children.

### **Why the Project Continues**

Not long after she told me that I didn't have to play with her if I didn't want to, I was so shocked. She picked up on my body language so quickly. It wasn't really that I didn't want to, it was more that I thought she didn't enjoy it.

A teacher with behavior problems in a class may blame the family conditions and respond "his dad's in prison," "she doesn't have a father," and "he is neglected and sometimes is not even bathed." These responses reinforce the need to teach children the proper morals, ethics, values, and feelings and more importantly to give them a vision.

This experience has opened my eyes to education policy and makes me wish that the law makers of our country could see these problems first hand and therefore involve the right people in the creation of the policy, which would allow for easier, more successful implementation.

Another student stated:

Though these children may struggle with certain problems, there's always one constant: they try incredibly hard to please whoever is teaching them. This is why they become so terribly frustrated when they have problems.

The student went on to say:

Some of them have 'colds' that have not been treated and some don't have warm coats, but overall they're doing OK. The only thing that distresses me about these kids is that they have already learned to give up on themselves. I also believe that if these kids can be helped early, then a change can be made for the better. Not only so the taxpayers will not be paying taxes for Welfare and prisons where many of these kids will end up, but also for the benefit of the child.

The student summed up by saying:

The UACS program is without a doubt the most fulfilling activity that I have ever participated in.

### **Successes and Failures**

The following points must be taken into consideration when looking at the overall success or failure of the

UACS in this community. The following were set up as goals in 2000 for the program:

1. Work toward the best teaching and learning practice as possible. At the same time see that each child has a significant appropriate adult in their life, whether teacher, counselor, principal, or volunteer. This requires collaboration of educators and all types of practice personnel. Certainly as this paper reflects, there have been many successes, but there is so much more that can be done in this area. The program clearly needs to push for a stronger co-location of services and that the extended day should run later than 5 o'clock. The biggest obstacle to moving beyond 5 o'clock is transportation.
2. Develop and implement an extended day program. Most juvenile crime occurs between 3 and 8 p.m. Hence viable after school programs are a must and this has been known from the very beginning of the program. Crime happens at this time, but other inappropriate activities such as overeating, and there is an overabundance of obese children in these schools.
3. Create collaborative relationships between and among professionals. On March 7, 2008, the advisory board for Counselor Education department at the university met and the number one concern expressed by the board was the need for mental health professionals to be in schools. By this, they did not mean school counselors. They meant mental health counselors who would work in schools. They all reported a lack of collaboration between mental health providers and school personnel.

In their defense, many mental health professionals are overworked and they do not have time to look at any new merchandise so to speak. But this new merchandise is clearly what is needed and it is at the level of the system that these programs need to be realigned. After three years of mental health counselors and university assistance, statistics from Inskip Elementary show how important these are. This school with 92% economically disadvantaged students had a suspension rate of 6%, as compared to 11.5% across the Knox County district with an economically disadvantaged rate of 54.7%. Their advanced proficiency scores in reading, writing and language surpassed the averages for the district and their students making advanced proficiency in math was equal to the district average, once again with a 92% economically disadvantaged rate (Kronick, 2005). These statistics have resulted in Inskip being ranked second in East Tennessee in Average Yearly Progress. Coincidentally, Boone's Creek Elementary in Gray, Tennessee is ranked number one and is a school that this project has collaborated with, sharing ideas and suggestions with the project director of that program, Dr. Pat Stern and his Community Care Wellness Center. Today, Inskip con-

tinues to grow thanks to the efforts of the principal and project member, Elisa Luna. Following a visit to Penn's Sayre School in February 2008, Elisa took many of their ideas and is in the process of implementing them as can be seen in the following email.

Our first free, community exercise class will begin tomorrow at the school. Parents, staff members, students and community members have been invited. I wrote a grant, which was approved, that allowed me to purchase some exercise equipment. The mayor's department is providing a certified exercise instructor through May (classes every Thursday after school). To sustain this activity, I am having a parent as well as a staff member trained so they can implement this next school year. I also had another meeting this morning at the school about the garden project. We found a perfect place for the garden! I am working on getting trees cut down in the area as well as a stump removed. Students are lined up and ready to begin creating the garden plots as well as sowing the seeds. This activity will continue during the summer. We plan on going to the farmer's market in August and September to sell the produce we grow. We are also going to sell the produce in the housing communities. To sustain this program, 3rd and 4th grade students will be involved this school year. They will move up, of course, next school year to 4th and 5th grades. My intentions are for the 4th grades to train the 3rd graders at the end of every year and for my 5th graders to continue the project at Gresham Middle School when they are 6th graders.

### Conclusion

Systems thinking, as mentioned at the outset of this paper, is what community schools are all about and for this project to grow and thrive, more support must be found so that the whole child and the whole system is treated. This is happening in Knoxville, Tennessee due to the diligence of the project director, the enthusiasm of the university students and the dedication of many community and university professionals. The present plans are to increase awareness of university assisted schools and community engagement through speakers brought to campus, such as Dr. Ralph Rosen from the University of Pennsylvania. He spoke to students, faculty and the community at three specially targeted events in April 2008, about his work offering Academically Based Community Service Courses. Then in the fall of 2008 the project group brought Professor Henry Louis Taylor, University of Buffalo, to campus to continue the awareness campaign. This was followed by a conference of southeastern deans to begin the process of building a network of higher education institutions across the

south united in the mission and vision to be engaged in their community and thus engaged in their community schools. Concurrently the group plans to launch some of their own ABCS courses in addition to the ones Dr. Kronick teaches and to continue to promote this concept to faculty, administrators, students, and the community. And to think it all began with a conference eleven years ago, continued with the present leadership and was re-invigorated and expanded with the help of a number of university faculty, community educators and students, who heard an impassioned speech from Dr. Ira Harkavy in Fall 2007 and have jumped on the bandwagon. As they say, the best is yet to come.

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# George Washington Community High School: A Community-University Partnership Success Story

Jim Grim

George Washington Community High School

Starla Officer

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## I. Introduction

A meandering White River separates the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) campus from the neighborhoods of Stringtown, Hawthorne and Haughville that make up the community of WESCO (Westside Cooperative Organization). Although the river that separates the two represents a historical as well as geographic boundary, the city bridges that join the university campus with its west side neighbors are both symbolic as well as utilitarian. Rich connections that have developed between IUPUI and the Near Westside have taken years to develop and are best illustrated at the nearby George Washington Community School (GWCS).

The very existence of this school is a community/university partnership achievement, a significant one according to Robert Bringle, Director of the IUPUI Center for Service and Learning and professor of psychology. "When we started working with the WESCO community and they said they wanted to reopen their closed high school, we thought it was a rather remote possibility," Bringle explained. "Never underestimate the power of determined, united people. Four years later it had students in classrooms."

The building was once home to George Washington High School. The high school had nearly 70 years of rich tradition that included multiple athletic milestones (half a dozen alumni ABA and NBA players among them) and had closed in 1995. The closure, designed to reduce costs for the financially challenged urban school district, devastated the Near Westside. However, its reputation on the athletic field had not matched with high academic achievement (e.g., 40% graduation rate) and this helped tip the scales in favor of closure. Logical financial reasons for closure did not matter to the community it most affected. Five neighborhood schools had already been closed, and the closure of the final two meant no schools were left in the three neighborhoods. No public schools remaining in WESCO galvanized a grassroots movement, under the leadership of neighborhood leader Danny Fugate, to form the Westside Education Task Force, which was focused on getting schools back into the neighborhoods.

## II. History of the Westside Education Task Force

### *A Desegregation Order*

WESCO, founded in the early 1970s, served as a catalyst for improving the quality of life in the Near Westside. WESCO challenged residents to strengthen the capacity of neighborhood-based organizations, em-

powering community leaders as advocates and instruments of positive change. The formation of WESCO coincided with a federal court desegregation order in the early '70s that resulted in the mandatory busing of African-American students from inner city neighborhoods to suburban schools. The federal desegregation order accompanied a mass exodus of higher-income families from urban Marion County to the suburbs. The population shift to avoid busing resulted in the decline of many of the neighborhoods located inside the remaining Indianapolis Public Schools district and, consequently, the closing of all seven public schools in the Near Westside community.

Combining the movement of higher-income residents from the area with the closing of its schools, the Near Westside witnessed a considerable deterioration of economic and organizational infrastructure, as evidenced by vacant school, commercial and residential buildings throughout the neighborhoods. While the city made a substantial investment in the nearby White River Park Corridor also across the river from IUPUI, this did little to change the socioeconomic environment of the area further west.

### *Westside Education Task Force Forums*

In October 1998, IUPUI, in partnership with WESCO, organized a Community Education Forum to inform residents of the impact of recent court action to overturn the desegregation order. The partnership between IUPUI and WESCO started out of a Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) grant from the HUD Office of University Partnerships. An important outcome of this forum was the formation of the Westside Education Task Force. Members of the West Indianapolis Neighborhood Congress (WINC), which represents the community south of WESCO, were invited to participate in the Westside Education Task Force as both communities were impacted by mandatory busing and the court order to reverse it. Since its inception, the Task Force has organized education forums, coordinated education study circles, conducted surveys of educational needs and interests of residents, collaborated with IPS staff and the superintendent to improve educational opportunities in WESCO, and promoted the reopening and development of George Washington into a full-service community school.

In the fall of 1999, the Westside Education Task Force, led by the late Danny Fugate, played an important role by advocating that the IPS Board of School Commissioners re-open a public school in WESCO. Community meetings were sponsored by the Westside

Education Task Force, and for the first time Westside residents met with the newly appointed IPS superintendent, Duncan Pat Pritchett, to voice their dreams for a neighborhood school. The Westside Education Task Force received a commitment from Superintendent that George Washington High School, one of the most visible community symbols in WESCO, would re-open in fall 2000 as a middle school.

IUPUI played a strategic, deliberate role in these educational issues, which was helped by the HUD COPC grant.

“IUPUI has self-consciously tried to create a new model of public higher education for the challenges of a new era,” Executive Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculty William M. Plater explained. “The basic premise is that we want to be involved at the highest level globally in the discovery and use of knowledge so that we can effectively apply these capacities to our own community—to bring to Indianapolis the best and most effective resources the world has to offer, while we share our experiences with others, especially in urban centers. This commitment certainly extends to helping the city develop one of the most successful K-12 public school systems anywhere, and we are honored to work with community leaders, teachers, parents and students to re-establish a community-oriented school in our own neighborhood. A strong school will ensure a strong and vital neighborhood—our neighborhood.”

### *Community Education a Vision*

The Westside Education Task Force advocated from the beginning of its work that schools should be an integral part of the community by providing services beyond the classroom for their students, their families and the larger community. They believe this can be accomplished most successfully through the implementation of the community school model. Essential to the success of community schools is a strong partnership between the school, social service providers, parents, and the community to provide a seamless network of services for schools to become the center of community life. Members of the Westside Education Task Force visited model schools across the country to study what might work best in their neighborhoods.

Following the 2000-01 school year, Westside Education Task Force supported the school’s goal of becoming a model community school as well as adding high school grades, one year at a time, beginning in August of 2002. As a result, the school board officially changed its name to George Washington Community School and it has been recognized by the National Association of Sec-

ondary School Principals, MetLife Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Coalition for Community Schools and the KnowledgeWorks Foundation as an exemplary model.

### **III. Development of GWCS**

Before the doors of George Washington Community School re-opened in fall of 2000, the principal, teachers and other educators met with parent, neighborhood leader, university, service providers and faith-based representatives to plan how this community-focused school concept could be implemented. Front and center, parents and community played a key role in designing how this school would work.

This school models collaboration with the community. Principal Eileen Champagne tells the teachers and staff at the beginning of the school year: “We are invited guests here. Our parents and community partners fought for us to be here. We wouldn’t have our jobs here if it wasn’t for them.”

Currently, the school is educating children with the help of 46 community partner organizations providing some 60 academic support services. With this support 986 students receive onsite medical, dental, mental health, tutoring, after-school, and behavioral care. But this does not tell the whole story. A significant part of the story is the increased academic achievement of individual student report card grades, reading levels, as well as standardized test scores. The school has seen unparalleled parent and family participation. For example, monthly Family Nights that invite families of students as well as residents from the surrounding community consistently have 200 + people in attendance. Additionally, a majority of eighth grade students’ parents sign their children up for a college scholarship program. This is significant in a community in which only 5.1 % of residents over 25 years of age have a college education (2000 Census Data). The resources of the community work hand-in-hand with the school, aimed at graduating students prepared for post-secondary education and a meaningful life.

### *A True Reflection of a Community*

George Washington is considered the Indianapolis Public School district’s flagship full-service community school, and it is doing that in neighborhoods that are predominantly blue-collar neighborhoods in which the average household income is \$18,819 and a third of the households are single-parent. The community’s economic base is further reflected in the school’s Universal Feeding status that provides all students free breakfast and lunch daily. About 24 percent of the students are also

served in Special Education programs. A recent West Indianapolis Child Care Needs Assessment by Step Ahead ranks the community among the county's highest in: low income, lack of education (76 percent high school drop out rate), teen pregnancy, domestic disturbances, and children in poverty and in need of services. The student body of GWCS reflects the racial makeup of the community with 51 percent of students being Caucasian, 28 percent African-American, 19 percent Hispanic, and 2 percent other. Before this school building re-opened, the Hispanic population constituted less than 1 percent. This dramatic immigration of Spanish-speaking families into this area of the city is a reflection of the changing face of the community and has meant that both the school and the community have had to be responsive to the changing needs of residents.

### *A Non-Traditional Approach to Learning*

In a full-service community school like George Washington, the classroom is anything but traditional. First and foremost, the teacher is no longer alone in the process of educating students. Community-supplied support services place the teacher as a partner in the educational process with numerous community resources. Although the teacher remains the driving force, the process often takes on a new approach.

When particular classroom supplies cannot be found in Teachers Treasures, an onsite warehouse-like depository of donated items from offices and businesses for teachers throughout the city to collect at designated "shopping" time slots each month, the school partners step in to get the teachers needed classroom supplies. Community-driven activities provided nearly every band instrument students play, performance risers and microphones for the choir, restored and dry-cleaned band uniforms and choir robes. In addition, the IUPUI University Library provided \$3,000 in new books last fall for the newly added ninth grade library and nearby businesses devised a plan to furnish three brand new state-of-the-art science labs with necessary technology and equipment. These are powerful examples of how everybody pitches in to help support teaching and learning at the school.

Supplementing a school-wide focus on basic skills, an IUPUI-sponsored America Reads program involving a dozen AmeriCorps and work-study students, helps specifically targeted students with one-on-one tutoring through a proven curriculum delivered in the school Media Center. By the end of last year, 85 percent of the America Reads students scored at or above their appropriate reading level and 77 percent showed improvement

of one or more reading levels, using the Basic Reading Inventory. Such progress illustrates how the university/school/community model augments academic programs.

### *Community Relationships Key to Academic Success*

Valuing the resources of its community as much as the teachers and textbooks is entrenched in how the school functions. Potential teachers, when interviewing for positions, often ask if the school is public or private. The Community School Coordinator says this educational process of involving the community as an integral part of the day-to-day operations of the school is all about relationships. The structure of learning in this school community values close relationships between teachers, parents, students, community leaders, service providers, businesses. They are all viewed as stakeholders in the learning process. The school's structure is built around this philosophy by creating an atmosphere that is welcoming to outsiders and including systems that support community involvement, such as a Community Advisory Board. Full accountability will take place on graduation day in June 2006, and this school community is systemically focused in the direction of successfully graduating its students.

The concept of the entire village engaged in raising each child is the key to real education reform at GWCS. In the community school, stakeholders from throughout the community come together to identify their unique barriers to learning, discuss potential remedies, and invite others with access to such remedies to join them. This is done through a monthly Community Advisory Board, involving community representatives in interviewing of new school staff and faculty, including community representatives in faculty orientation and professional development days, and school staff participating in community sponsored meetings and initiatives. Like the pebble in the pond impact, this collaborative community action ignites positive change for youth at the school, within their families, and throughout neighborhoods. In 2002, a neighborhood group in WESCO contemplated the answer to a final question in a federal Weed & Seed grant reauthorization application: "What single activity would you identify to address neighborhood deterioration?" As some pondered ideas like new paint, roofs, sidewalks, curbs, a retired lady active in the community, Miss Loretta Day, confidently responded that the answer had already been determined: "We're going to improve our high school graduation rate." With that statement, Miss Day illustrated the systemic change the community had identified in its remedy for barriers to economic growth. Few foundations for economic development efforts are

as powerful or poignant.

While this school is more than two years short of its first graduating class, the numbers already show success on the path to such a day. Standardized test scores have steadily increased for students in tested grades:

- 6th grade students meeting language arts standards have increased from 15% in fall 2000 to 36% in fall 2003; 6th grade students meeting math standards have increased from 26% in fall 2000 to 45% in fall 2003; and 6th grade students meeting both standards have increased from 11% in fall 2000 to 25.7% in fall 2003
- 8th grade students meeting language arts standards have increased from 27% in fall 2000 to 34% in fall 2003; 8th grade students meeting math standards have increased from 12% in fall 2000 to 38% in fall 2003; and 8th grade students meeting both standards have increased from 9% in fall 2000 to 24.3% in fall 2003
- In the first round of testing of GWCS 10th grade students in the fall of 2003, they earned the school district's second highest rates of students meeting or exceeding state standards: 47% in language arts; 46% in math; and 33.3% in both.

When parents and community members joined the principal and teachers to persuade the Board of School Commissioners to add high school grades and call it George Washington *Community* School, their intention was for the students to graduate in the school that this community has so profoundly valued and supported. Academic gains serve as benchmarks along the way to meeting this goal. Meanwhile, parent and community involvement has intensified over time. Decades of academic research show this is a key for success—particularly in an urban area like the Indianapolis Westside.

#### **IV. Implementation of IUPUI/GWCS Service Learning Initiative**

The initiation of service learning into the classrooms of GWCS was an obvious extension of the partnership between GWCS, IUPUI and the communities of WESCO and WINC. The established relationships among the community, university, and school provided the catalyst and environment that allowed the IUPUI/GWCS Service Learning Initiative to develop. Naturally, the idea had to be presented to all stakeholders for approval and input before it could move forward as true collaborations build consensus among partners by involving them in all aspects of the decision-making process.

The proposal to develop service learning at GWCS that would draw on the expertise of the campus, community and school was brought to a Westside Education Task Force meeting and to Principal Eileen Champagne.

Immediate endorsement allowed all parties to pursue the initiative and suggest project structure, potential new partners, and resources. Including the partners in early developmental decision-making solidifies ownership and involvement in the initiative, allowing partners to collaborate in problem-solving and identifying additional support resources. In the fall of 2001, the project received funding from the Corporation of National and Community Service through a subgrant from the University of Pennsylvania's Community-Higher Education-Schools Partnership Project.

During discussions between school, community, and university representatives, it was determined that the initiative should include: teacher training, integration of service learning into classrooms, connections to community partners and distribution of project information to educate others about the purpose and potential benefits of service learning. Through a brief application process, teachers from GWCS applied to be Service Learning Fellows. This process included attending an introductory workshop on service learning and preparing a written statement of their interest and knowledge of service learning. All partners had an opportunity to review the teacher applications and provide recommendations on final candidates. The most important quality among the successful applicants was not their current knowledge of service learning but rather their openness to learning a new method of teaching and an appreciation of the value of the community as co-educators.

#### *Treading in New Territory*

Despite the national attention service learning has received, the partnership learned quickly that it is still a foreign concept to many. While George Washington teachers understand that the community is a key component of the school, there is some trepidation about how the community can become involved in classroom instruction. Most of the visible community involvement with the school is through community organizations providing services and resources to the school. Although this includes support in the classroom through tutoring, guest speakers and classroom assistance, much of it occurs through out-of-classroom services such as onsite medical, dental, mental health, tutoring/mentoring and after-school programming. Service learning becomes a valuable tool for bringing the school and its students into the community and involving community partners as co-educators.

Teacher training was a requirement of all Service Learning Fellows, and included workshops and a graduate-level summer course, Service Learning Ideas

for K-12 Educators. The workshops provided interested teachers with an opportunity to develop practical knowledge of service learning and how it fits within the context of their classroom instruction. The graduate course built upon this working knowledge by further exploring service learning as a teaching tool, providing hands-on experience in the community, introducing community-based organization staff and providing an opportunity to develop a project plan that could be implemented in their curriculums. Service Learning Fellows indicated that one of the most helpful course aspects was the opportunity to engage in service in the community and to interact with community-based organization staff. This allowed teachers to learn firsthand about issues and needs in the community, identify potential community partners, share ideas with community representatives, receive feedback and develop valuable, authentic relationships.

When it came time for the Service Learning Fellows to implement service learning into their classrooms, the community/university/schools partnership gave them a network of support that made trying something new less intimidating. The Service Learning Fellows were able to readily call on representatives from the community and IUPUI to assist with volunteers, supplies, transportation, service sites and guest speakers. Although the Service Learning Fellows expressed anxiety in what could happen when their students were “let loose” in the community, this network of support allowed them to take the leap knowing that others wanted them to succeed and would help them do so.

### *Taking Chances Can Pay Off*

The Service Learning Fellows involved in the project soon learned of the power of service learning as a teaching tool. One fellow, Tonya Flannery, who teaches students with disabilities in an inclusion classroom, was especially anxious during preparation of her project about how students would act in the community due to behavioral problems experienced in the classroom. Her project involved pairing middle school students with kindergarten students in a mentoring project that included multiple visits into the neighborhoods. Initially, she considered excluding students who had the most significant behavioral problems. However, after much deliberation, she included all students. Ms. Flannery’s decision was rewarded when the students she was most concerned about engaged intently with the kindergarten students, and for the first time during the school year, completed the project without a single behavior incident. She was sold on the concept.

“This is the best thing I have ever done in the class-

room,” Ms. Flannery explained. “I think all teachers should try it at least once. Some of my most challenging students were more engrossed in this project than anything else we have done in class.” With just this one experience the teacher became an advocate for service learning and has encouraged other teachers to try it.

The fellows were provided with guidance from the community and university representatives with experience in service learning, but the design and implement of the service learning was up to them. Staff and graduate students from the IUPUI Office of Neighborhood Partnerships helped the Service Learning Fellows to work through logistics and provided further assistance as needed.

### *Students May Lead the Way*

Some of the Service Learning Fellows let their students decide what their service project would involve. Because students come from the surrounding neighborhoods, who better to decide the issues in their community that needed to be addressed. Although it was more time intensive to put students in charge of the decision-making process, this extra effort helped students to be more invested and take ownership of their project. The students first created a list of issues they thought were of concern in their neighborhood (e.g., safety, drug and alcohol abuse, literacy, litter). Students then ranked their top three neighborhood issues of concern, and then voted on the collective top three. Through this process, safety was identified as their number one neighborhood concern. The Service Learning Fellows then worked with the students to determine how best to address safety. The students decided that they wanted to teach young children about how to stay safe and what to do in emergency situations.

At first, the Service Learning Fellows was challenged by this idea of putting students in the role of teacher for younger children. However, they called upon a contact they had made at nearby Hawthorne Community Center and discussed the idea. The contact was enthusiastic about the idea, and with this assurance, the project advanced.

As service learning projects moved into their planning stages, Service Learning Fellows continued to work with community, university, and school representatives to identify resources, other helpful community contacts, and problem solve. For example, when volunteers were needed to help chaperone a visit to a community agency, university staff and students helped out. When the class that identified safety as its issue wanted to have a representative from the fire department participate in a

presentation to preschoolers at Hawthorne Community Center, the teacher called upon a community contact to find out who within the fire department they should invite.

In an effort to encourage other teachers to consider using service learning as a teaching tool and further establish an educational link between GWCS and its community, publicizing the successes of the GWCS/IUPUI Service Learning Initiative was an important part of the project. The target for much of this publicity was teachers and staff from the school, parents, and community leaders. This included presentations at school staff and Westside Education Task Force meetings, distributing a newsletter, sharing information at school family nights, and displaying pictures and materials from the various projects in the school. Additionally, an Introduction to K-12 Service Learning Handbook provided interested teachers with a tool to learn about service learning, share research results on its effectiveness, and resources to gather further information. A draft copy of the Handbook was reviewed and edited by several K-12 teachers who were not currently part of the GWCS/IUPUI Service Learning Initiative. This step was intended to ensure the Handbook's usefulness for its audience (K-12 teachers) and is another example of how the community/university/school partnership helped to support and strengthen the work.

While service learning can often be the catalyst for the development of Community/University/School Partnerships, in this case it was the existing partnership that created the window of opportunity for the development of service learning at GWCS. Although the school principal was uniquely experienced in service learning and supportive of teachers undertaking it, her attention was necessarily focused on other responsibilities of running the school and providing leadership for the school's expansion. Thus, the partnership provided the vehicle for ensuring the necessary integration of service learning.

## **V. Elements of Successful Community/Higher Ed/School Partnerships**

In considering the collaboration of George Washington Community School, the WESCO and WINC neighborhoods and IUPUI, certain ingredients have built a truly successful partnership. Struggles and failures along the way helped to deepen the collaboration that brought resources together from multiple entities to work in concert for the greater community good. Key ingredients that have been important to this success are:

- Window of opportunity

- Strong community leadership to guide the cause
- Inclusive stakeholder group that invites anyone to participate
- Flexibility

The old adage that timing is everything certainly played a significant role in the success with IUPUI and its West Indianapolis neighborhoods, particularly with regards to GWCS. Given a community-driven desire to re-open the closed high school, both neighborhood leaders and university representatives had a clear goal to focus collaborative attention on. Other timing factors included a new, community-minded school district superintendent with decades of experience within IPS and its neighborhoods throughout the city, the ending of a federal desegregation order and the appointment of key leaders within the school and community to help move the vision forward. Such visionary leaders included the principal and community school coordinator who had extensive experience in university-assisted service learning and community schooling, respectively. Likewise, the university's COPC grant helped to mobilize campus resources that otherwise might not have been employed due to initial funding or lack thereof.

Leadership within the neighborhoods themselves served as an equally important factor in this partnership. While the community clearly had focused its attention on getting the school re-opened, neighborhood leaders stepped up to the plate in their efforts to improve the conditions of their community. In doing so, they formed the Westside Education Task Force and worked with university representatives to research and plan a potential school model to meet their educational needs. Throughout this collaboration, they led the journey and kept their families, neighbors and friends abreast of the movement and its goals. A key ingredient to both the collaboration and the open communication was the inclusive way they invited all stakeholders to participate. Anyone with an interest in improving the neighborhoods, particularly by restoring a public educational institution, was encouraged to participate. The diversity of their collaborative efforts helped to make the cause successful.

Success also hinged on flexibility. Community leaders and university partners employed both patience and compromise in reaching their goals. Getting the school board to agree to re-open the school, for example, meant agreeing to begin as a middle school, then later add high school grades one year at a time. It also meant building a full-service community school with multiple supports to ensure basic needs were met to enhance student learning. In doing so, it required flexibility also on the part of

school administrators, faculty and staff. It meant sharing facilities, student time and being open to parent and community input. Flexibility became a necessity from the start.

“This unique combination of conditions helped us form a solid partnership between the university, the community and the school district,” Bringle notes. “As a result, the bridges over White River connecting West Indianapolis and the campus are truly symbolic, and the relationships that have been forged greatly benefit the university and its neighboring communities. As a university community, we are pleased with this ongoing relationship and the possibilities for further collaboration, particularly with service learning and proposed dual-credit high school/college courses. This is just the beginning of this rewarding partnership.”

### **IUPUI/GWCS/Community Partnership Programs**

- *America Reads/Indiana Reading Corps Tutoring Program*, Center for Service and Learning
- *America Counts Tutoring Program*, Center for Service and Learning
- *GWCS/IUPUI Service Learning Initiative*, Office of Neighborhood Partnerships
- *Family Financial Literacy Workshops*, Office of Neighborhood Partnerships
- *Community Health Education Program*, School of Nursing
- *Tutoring/Mentoring by service learning students*, Departments of Psychology, Communications, and Sociology
- *College Preparatory Initiative*, University College
- *Classroom/after-school mentoring*, School of Education
- *Making Communities SAVI Technology Project*, The Polis Center
- *Pre-College Program*, National Society of Black Engineers
- *Basketball & Books Library Support Initiative*, University Library
- *Early College/High School Dual-Credit Program*, School of Education and Community Learning Network
- *Economic Education Teacher Training*, Center for Economic Education
- *Math and Technology Teacher Training*, School of Science
- *Twenty-First Century Scholars Program*, University College
- *School Community Advisory Board*, representation
- *Westside Education Task Force*, coordination

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# Creating a Program for Transforming School Facilities to become Centers for their Communities

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Many existing primary schools are becoming not just educational institutions but centers for their communities. The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities' Citizen's Guide for Planning and Design explains that a school becomes a center for the community by effectively integrating with the community and extending the learning environment to use the community's resources (Bingler, et.al. 3). Schools are manifesting this transformation in a variety of ways. Classes are being offered to adults in the evening and on weekends, ranging from cooking classes to English as a second language to professional continuing education. The schools are being used as social hubs for the elderly or youth groups and being used for everything from sporting events to town hall meetings. Social services including childcare, nutrition and food aid, counseling and healthcare are being offered and expanded. The school grounds are often being used as playgrounds, gardens and public parks. These expanded uses put a strain on existing facilities already suffering from a shortage of space and the effects of deferred maintenance.

While working with three community schools in Tulsa, Oklahoma graduate students from the University of Oklahoma Urban Design Studio became familiar with the pressures on older school facilities to fulfill both their educational and community roles. The student planners undertook an effort to develop master plans for the buildings and grounds for two schools in the Union Schools District: Briarglen Elementary and Grove Elementary and one school in the Tulsa Public Schools District: Celia Clinton Elementary (University of Oklahoma Urban Design Studio website). The students worked with site teams at each school comprised of district administrators, the school principal, teachers, school staff and the community school site coordinator. After several weeks of documenting the schools by creating plans, taking photographs and talking to school users, the students met with the site teams to determine the facilities' issues and needs.

The student planners found the older school, Celia Clinton, had many deferred maintenance issues, too little space for the growing student population and security and hygiene issues. Windows have been painted over to keep out the afternoon sun. Bathrooms are not adequately ventilated and their layout requires teachers to limit student access. Storage space is used for small classes and portable trailers are scattered around the site for larger ones. Yet despite these shortcomings, the old building has a logical layout and well designed classrooms.

The newer Union Schools on the other hand were in excellent condition and had adequate space but suf-

fered from poor floor plans from the open plan trend of the 1960s and 1970s. Students frequently disrupted classes while routinely moving around the building. Students also had to traverse the main entry to reach the cafeterias and gymnasiums located outside the secure areas behind the main offices.

All schools however suffered from a lack of space devoted to community activities and were not welcoming to visitors. School policy also prohibited after hour uses in some cases. The graduate students devised alternative design schemes for the site teams to correct the schools' design flaws and proposed interventions to create a welcoming school to the community. They discovered that the community needs for the three schools are similar and they developed a program for a building addition or community wing that is suitable for the conversion of any school to a community school. Since existing schools range greatly in age and style, this program addresses space and functional needs without addressing the vocabulary of the architecture.

Before considering the programmatic needs of the building addition, it is worth considering its relationship to the site and the existing facility. The new community wing should have a separate entrance that is visible from the street and parking areas and is distinct from the school's main entrance. If existing parking and public transit access is already adequate then no parking need be added since the community uses often occur at hours when school staff and visitors are not present. In a related way, since the community wing will be active at times the rest of the school is receiving little or no use; it should be possible to restrict access to the existing facility while retaining adequate emergency egress in both parts of the building. Adjacency to other parts of the schools that might be used for community events, such as the gymnasium and cafeteria, is also desirable. These areas might have separate entrances into both the community wing and the existing school. Ideally, the community wing should also have safe access to the playgrounds and open space adjacent to the school. A community garden for use by students and the surrounding neighborhood might also be developed on the site if space, soil and climate conditions permit. Construction of the wing should be undertaken with the least impact and interruption to the existing school activities with the new wing only connecting at one or two circulation points with no structural modifications or major demolition.

The community wing will house four primary functions: meeting space, health and community services, food and nutrition, and school support. These spaces will be designed both for community functions and the needs

of the school. All of the spaces should open onto a common lobby and circulation space that can be used as a staging area for events. The lobby space should have a weatherlock or vestibule to prevent drafts from the entry, ample natural light and views to the outside for comfort and security. The lobby should have areas for displays and posting notices. The lobby space may also have a seating area for waiting.

A primary community need is a place to hold gatherings, both formal and informal. Events might include lectures, smaller classes, town hall meetings, banquets and celebrations. The space could be used during the school day as overflow teaching space or space for special instruction such as music. To meet this need, a large, flat-floored meeting room capable of holding 100 to 120 persons in movable seating is envisioned. A low stage or podium should be included at one end of the room. The room should have the capability to be subdivided into three smaller rooms holding 30 to 40 people each. The main room and each smaller room should have acoustics supporting vocal presentations without the need for amplification. The dividing partitions must provide a complete audio and visual separation. The main room should have several adjustable lighting sources for a variety of uses. Daylighting is encouraged, but the room must be able to be darkened for audio-visual presentations. A digital projector, viewing screen and associated audio-visual equipment should be provided for the main space. Whiteboards should be placed so all three rooms have writing space. A furniture storage closet should open into the room with capacity for all the tables and chairs needed for various configurations, as well as an upright piano. Handicap accessible restrooms configured for adults of both genders should be located conveniently near the meeting room and lobby.

Another need is space for community services, particularly healthcare. The community schools in Tulsa have a partnership with the university to provide primary health care not only to students, but to their families, as well as the school staff. These clinics now operate part-time in closets or out of nurse's offices. The clinic should have a waiting area which is accessible and visible from the lobby with a reception desk and adjacent area for chart storage, a standard clinic examination room with lavatory, an office for the school nurse, an infirmary with bed to isolate sick children waiting to be picked-up by parents, a handicap accessible toilet room and an area for storage of medical supplies and materials. Office space for a counselor or therapist should be provided and a hotel or temporary office with internet access and telephone should be provided for visiting physicians, social

workers and other providers of care. These offices should provide visual and acoustic privacy. The new clinic will in many cases allow the school nurse to move out of existing space often near the main school office freeing up needed space for expansion of the administrative suite.

Food often brings a community together. Many of the meetings scheduled for the community wing might include serving food and refreshments. The need for both instruction in healthy cooking and nutrition is also growing as the nation struggles with the obesity epidemic. Furthermore, many existing school kitchens are undersized and serving school populations larger than designed for. If located near the existing school kitchen, the new kitchen might also be used as food preparation space during the school day. A combination kitchen that could be used for demonstrations, serving and preparing food is recommended. The kitchen would be equipped with a demonstration kitchen with a large mirror installed over the cooking island, as well as equipment for washing, preparing and presenting of a variety of foods. A sampling bar and an area for classroom seating would be located in front of the cooking area. Three hands-on cooking stations or mini-kitchens complete with counters, oven, cook tops, refrigerators, dishwasher, sinks and other standard kitchen equipment would be provided for participants in classes to come and prepare their own dishes under the supervision of the instructing chef. Parents and grandparents could also come to this facility to prepare meals which can be frozen and stored for use later on. The kitchen requires areas for cold and dry food storage and waste bins. Access to the outside is needed for deliveries and disposing of waste. Adjacency to the existing school kitchen and the community garden located on site are both highly desirable.

School support space is the last, but not least, need to be considered. Many community schools have site coordinators or program administrators located on-site which need to be accommodated with an office and storage space. Equally important is a resource room with computer access and reference materials for parents and community members to use when the facility is in operation. Another requisite is a room for temporary childcare during events, complete with private restrooms for children. This room may also be used for before and after school care. A close proximity to the main school office is attractive for these spaces whose users are working closely with administrators.

The new community wing should be created using the latest standards of construction and design. The wing should have state-of-the-art life safety systems including fire detection devices and automatic sprinklers. The

facility should not only comply with the American with Disabilities Act but be designed using Universal Design Principles to insure easy and equitable access for all users (Center for Universal Design website). The facility should also use best practices of sustainable design to conserve energy, protect the natural environment, and create healthy indoor spaces. These principles also reduce the operating costs of the facility which will most likely be shouldered by the school districts.

The student planners completed their projects by producing a detailed building and grounds plan for each school that they presented to the site team and district officials. The proposed community wing for each school will require approximately 5,280 square feet of assignable floor space and a gross area of approximately 7,040 square feet. According to the 2008 School Construction Report the median construction cost for school facilities in the region including Oklahoma is \$141.37 per square foot. The median national construction cost is \$157.05 per square foot (Abramson 13). Therefore the estimated cost to build a community wing in Oklahoma is \$995,245. The estimated cost to build a community wing using the national median is \$1,105,632. A million dollars is a substantial investment, but in order for these schools to truly become centers of their communities they require the infrastructure and facilities needed to function. Since the community wing is conceived as a stand-alone addition it may be possible to procure alternative funding to the standard school bond financing by tapping private foundations and grantors.

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**Table 1:  
Space List**

<i>Meeting Space</i>	
Lobby / Concourse	1,000 sf
Multi-purpose Meeting Room	1,000 sf
Furniture Storage	120 sf
Accessible Adult Restrooms	400 sf
<i>Community Services</i>	
Waiting / Reception	200 sf
Charts	50 sf
Exam Room	100 sf
Infirmary	100 sf
Nurse's Office	100 sf
Accessible Restroom	80 sf
Storage	50 sf
Counselor's Office	100 sf
Hotel Office	100 sf
<i>Food and Nutrition</i>	
Demonstration Kitchen	850 sf
Food Preparation	200 sf
Garbage	50 sf
Custodian's Closet	50 sf
<i>School Support</i>	
Site Coordinator Office	100 sf
Storage	50 sf
Parent's Resource Room	300 sf
Childcare Room	200 sf
Child's Restrooms	80 sf
<i>Total Net Area</i>	<i>5,280 sf</i>
Grossing Factor for Circulation, Unassigned Space, Structure =	.75
<i>Total Gross Area</i>	<i>7,040 sf</i>

**Figure 1:**  
**Community Wing Prototype Floor Plan**





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**Bridging the Education Pipeline:  
Strategies Linking Higher Education Through  
An Office of Community Engagement**

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## Introduction

Institutions of higher education are in the precarious position of satisfying multiple interests in the fulfillment of their university mission (Maurrasse, 2001). Fiscal constraints and accountability demands are affecting many university colleges across the country and, in response to constrained financial environments, calls for accountability, especially from state legislatures, requiring university faculty to be more productive in research and scholarship, undertake activities that will produce additional funding to support the institution, engage more with the public and provide measurable learning outcomes for students (Gappa & Trice, 2005). Emphasizing the importance of ethics and moral leadership addresses the role higher education plays in society, its responsibility to the public good, and its status as tax exempt with a lay board of governors responsible to a host of stakeholders (Kezar, 2005).

The community partnership movement suggests that higher education must, as a part of its mission, take ownership of its broader environment; the institution must see itself as a citizen with a responsibility to its neighbors (Maurrasse, 2001). Moral responsibility is reflected through higher education institutions' obligations to society and inherent ethical responsibility to ensure quality teaching and to act in ways that reflect integrity to their mission public charter and stakeholders' concerns (Kezar, 2005).

There is no standard recipe or package that can be recommended for an appropriate role or mechanism for universities in their specific and individual regional innovation systems, the central message being that the university role needs to evolve and co-evolve with the regional community innovation system itself (Charles, 2006). A key challenge is to enhance the role which universities, and their staff and students, play in the development of networks of civic engagement, and hence in wider cultural leadership of their localities, through formal and informal engagement of universities in local processes (Charles, 2006). However, shared agreements don't simply happen; they must be built, often incrementally, across months and years (Fisher & Frey, 2007).

This paper will explore how institutions of higher education can strategically utilize an established office of community engagement, and provide an overview of related to perceptions of university and community collaborations, organizational institutionalization, knowledge management, with service learning and research forthcoming.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### *Challenges on Both Sides – Contributing Factors*

Distinguished scholar Ernest Boyer, who served as U.S. Commissioner of Education, chancellor of the State University of New York, and president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, noted that the intense research focus had led higher education away from its mission to prepare citizen capable of acting for the common good, pointing out that there is a growing public suspicion that “higher education is, in fact, part of the problem and not part of the solution” (Dipadova-Stocks, 2005). He went on to say, “Increasingly the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem to be particularly relevant to the nation's most pressing civic, social, economic and moral problems” (Dipadova-Stocks, 2005).

Based on systems theory, in order to successfully prepare for solicitation and collaboration it is important to know what is happening in the external environment, which provides an understanding of the college's threats and opportunities (Hall, 2002). Threats to the community that hosts the college are threats to the college itself and, if the economy, the environment, the K-12 schools or any other basic community system weakens, the college will suffer (Hall, 2002). University and community can appear divided in ways that may or may not parallel the racial, ethnic, and class differences, and communications are often notable for their contested agendas, competing factions and organizations, and varying political allegiances to internal as well as external political leaders (Ferman & Hill, 2004). Worse, in many communities, higher education-community relations are tenuous as best, suffering from long histories of bitter land struggles, neglect, lack of access to university resources, and the experience of being used as a laboratory (Ferman & Hill, 2004).

Students who participate in collaborative learning and educational activities outside the classroom and who interact more with faculty members get better grades, are more satisfied with their education and are more likely to remain in college (Wasley, 2006). The gains from those practices are even greater for students from underrepresented racial and ethnic background, or who come to college less prepared than their peers (Wasley, 2006).

A 2004 research study through Temple University reported an assessment of community leaders regarding the benefits and challenges of engaging in partnerships with higher education institutions, sharing advice and exploring the larger institutional and structural issues of

these partnerships (Ferman & Hill, 2004). On the community side, there appear to be four principled incentives for partnering with higher education researchers: obtaining project-related resources, leveraging further resources, gaining access to networks and increasing legitimacy (Ferman & Hill, 2004). However, the study also reported tensions stemming from conflicting incentives and agendas, issues of respect regarding the fact that expertise comes in many forms, one of which is knowledge of the community, distrust from community leaders towards academics in large part because of the persistent experience of having their reality reinterpreted, devalued, ignored, or otherwise disrespected (Ferman & Hill, 2004). Community leaders expressed frustrations with researchers and students who leave when the semester ends as well as the need for more active project management with both parties. Similarly, academic researchers need to understand that community organizations survive on their ability to obtain grant money and build political support, that they are often understaffed and poorly resourced, and that research, particularly of the more academic kind, is almost a luxury (Ferman & Hill, 2004).

Community groups must understand that faculty are often under severe pressures to publish their research in peer-reviewed venues, to secure external funding for research that often is not of an applied nature, and do not typically receive awards for community service activities (Ferman & Hill, 2004). Multiple constituency groups hold a stake in the institution, and understanding their priorities only improves how the institution interacts with them; and openness to their questions, concerns and interest only strengthens the institution (Maurrasse, 2001). Coleman has previously suggested the need for public policy that creates more institutions that foster “attention, personal interest and intensity of involvement, and...intimacy” in order to increase student achievement (Goddard, 2003).

The fact that so many partnerships exist and that they seem to be increasing in number is indeed a hopeful sign that resolutions can be reached (Ferman & Hill, 2004). Community leaders reinforce this optimism with their confidence about the usefulness and potential of higher education-community research partnerships, despite the hurdles of conflicting incentives, inadequate capacity and lack of institutional space (Ferman & Hill, 2004). Development of a participatory democratic movement, particularly if it succeeded fully, would powerfully support the core proposition of Dewey’s general theory of societal progress and the advancement of knowledge and learning (Benson et al 2007).

The Kellogg Commission (1999) stated that devel-

oping better partnerships between the campus and the community is at the heart of renewing community engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). This call for civic engagement has awakened renewed interest in promoting institutional citizenship, building new campus-community initiatives, and promoting a broad sense of civic responsibility in higher education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Thus, universities that wish to enhance their own competitiveness in international research rankings are forming alliances with regional actors to obtain additional resources through cluster-type strategies (Charles, 2006).

No one group can see itself getting the lion’s share of its community resources to achieve all its objectives, but each can quickly recognize the advantages of involvement and collaboration (Conwill, 2003). How do we identify and grow authentic relationships that will build these trusting collaborations? Social capital theory was founded on the premise that a network provides value to its members by allowing them access to the social resources that are embedded within the network (Florin, 2003). Boundary spanners must know the threats and opportunities that society presents for the college and interpret them to other college leaders (Hall, 2002). What entity within the university can be utilized as a resource with mindful boundary spanners that identify and “span” across multiple disciplines while simultaneously engaged with the evolving community sectors?

### **Bridging: University Office Of Community Engagement**

Campus-community partnerships are complex due to the cultural differences that exist between higher education and the community in terms of how each generates and solves problems (Bringle & Hatcher 2002). Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett (2000) note that the expert model, which is frequently used by faculty members, one in which the relationships are elitist, hierarchical, and unidimensional rather than collegial, participatory, cooperative and democratic (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). The institution is less accessible and more isolated from the public sphere and perpetuates cultural differences that become significant challenges for effective communication, respect and coordinated action toward mutual goals and shared vision (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

Establishing and institutionalizing an accessible central hub office within a university to specifically serve both the mission of the institution of higher education that connects resources to the surrounding community could strategically and incrementally strengthen the bridges between intertwined education and economic

stakeholders. Human resources have long been viewed as being essential to the community's ability to survive and grow, with superior human resources reducing outside stakeholder uncertainty and enhancing dynamic capabilities (Florin, 2003). Developing trusting and respectful relationships requires that both parties understand the incentives of the other (Ferman & Hill, 2004). The community stakeholders in the education pipeline, in addition to students and their families, are comprised of early childhood education/K-12 schools, non-profit, foundation and corporate sectors and lifelong learning initiatives that benefit from the university assuming a major role in relationship and trust development that influences collaborations and projects, for the greater good.

When community social capital strengthens, opportunity increases for the college (Hall, 2002).

Because network knowledge is highly dependent on interpersonal relations, emphasizing more institutional questions in understanding the role of learning in regional development with human infrastructure and the institutional mechanisms that foster interactive learning are the central part of this infrastructure and should be universities (Charles, 2006). Today it is commonplace for colleges and universities to have an office of community engagement, service-learning or a service learning director on campus; just less than a decade ago, such positions were rare in academia (Dipadadova-Stocks, 2005).

Contributing to the community partners' lack of capacity to absorb what the higher education partner has to offer is the higher education partners' difficulty in communicating and packaging its services, leaving many community respondents frustrated about the organizational impediments undermining access to resources as well as finding the time to learn how to navigate the higher education bureaucracy (Ferman & Hill, 2004). An institutional central community engagement office begins to address these impediments to community partnership that impact a seamless education pipeline.

From the perspective of the universities, they have sought to combine resources and programs at the different scales to construct integrated innovation support infrastructures, often left to the individual staff of university departments but increasing, universities are building specialized units to manage the configuration of these external relations (Charles, 2006). New emphasis on more systematic and comprehensive campus engagement in local communities have been facilitated by a number of factors (e.g. HUD Community Outreach Partnership Centers and Federal Work-Study Guidelines including America Reads, Corporation for National and Community Service, National Endowment for the

Arts Challenge America Initiative) which have provided campuses with funds and technical assistance to create strategic campus-community programs, as shifts in faculty work emphasize broader definitions of scholarship, including scholarship of engagement that incorporates research, teaching, and service to the benefit of communities (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

Higher education and local communities serve the same population but have different operating styles, priorities, practices, levels of professional training, theoretical bases, and even vocabulary, where each partner must understand and appreciate the perspectives, needs and significant contributions all partners as co-educators (Rubin, 2001). In order to self-disclose effectively during the early phases of a campus-community partnership, a clear sense of identity and purpose, procedures, and resources need to exist and be effectively communicated to the other party (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Through a centralized office that establishes and sustains community relationships, facilitation with knowledge of both parties would provide initial project collaboration steps. The quality of the campus-community relationships that are cultivated in the process of project design, implementation and growth as at least as important as the number of partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

Implications for practice include identifying service learning faculty and staff in centralized campus offices who facilitate civic engagement which include a clear mission, campus clearinghouse, compatibility, effective communication and skilled staff (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). If faculty members are forced to use service learning and are neither intrinsically motivated to use not confident in the method, the only discernible outcomes may be personal frustration with the process, poor-quality student projects, high levels of student anxiety and unrest, low levels of learning, and damaged partnerships with community organizations (Kenworthy-U'ren & Peterson, 2005). Responsibility for community outreach efforts and service learning programs can link faculty to community contacts who have a previous service relationship with the university (O'Bryne, 2001), thus actively reinforcing fulfillment of university missions that emphasizes community engagement through service learning.

Further, campuses may need to hire professional staff skilled in understanding communities and acting as liaisons among diverse constituencies, providing the university with a better understanding of the communities including information on community assets rather than community needs (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). When conflicts need to be resolved, these individuals can act

as a mediator to facilitate communication and problem solving (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). This provides a framework within which integration can take place between different forms of knowledge transfer, commodified knowledge, human capital and social capital where there are clear synergies between the needs of a region and the needs of a university (Charles, 2006).

Both the institution of higher education and the community will benefit from having a clear idea about what types of partnerships are mutually beneficial and what types of partnerships are unsuitable (e.g. inconsistent with mission and values, insufficient resources) so that these limitations and their rationale can be communicated when it is appropriate to say “no” or “not now” to a potential relationship (Bringle & Hatcher, 2006).

### Organizational View of Institutionalization

It is legitimate for any educational institution to show the activities of a college relate to the educational mission of the school (Bishop, 1995). According to many involved in higher education community partnerships, concepts of engagement can be extended into community development—the development of people inside and outside of the institution (Maurrasse, 2001).

Institutionalization is reflected by a high level of institutional commitment to service learning (Young, 2007) whereas an office of community engagement is the central catalyst. Active habits involve thought, invention and initiative in applying capacities to new aims, as opposed to routine which marks an arrest of growth (Iannone, 1995) revealing barriers of ineffective tradition that stall progress and innovation.

Levels of commitment range from service learning not mentioned or loosely defined in the institution’s mission to full integration, where service learning plays a central role and is a definite characteristic of the institution’s mission (Young, 2007). Associated with each of the 4 levels of commitment are key organizational factors that characterize institutional choices and behaviors regarding service, including institutional mission: promotion, tenure and hiring tied to community engagement and community research, organizational structure – primarily whether or not there exists a campus-wide center, interdisciplinary student and faculty involvement with community partners, community involvement and campus publications (Young, 2007) recognizing, documenting, disseminating knowledge of these activities.

In a 2007 research study published in the *Journal of Experiential Education*, a data analysis was collected from 12 directors of service learning centers and provides a description of common practices associated with imple-

menting and sustaining initiatives at the institutional level, focusing on organizational tactics associated with funding, administration, faculty recruitment and support and student involvement and assessment (Young, 2007). The study emphasized that institutionalizing service learning made this practice an integral part of a university’s mission and vision and contributed to the long term viability and success of the service learning initiatives (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002) in Young, 2007). Among respondents, the most commonly used tactic for initiating a program, was the push of one key person or “champion” or group of champions, as such people become vehicles for disseminating commitment to service across the institution (Young, 2007).

Organizational strategies included categorizing levels of commitment to service, organizational factors evidencing relevance to institutional mission, documentation of program demographics, coding program identifiers, description of course components involving service learning, faculty project recognition and rewards (Young, 2007). Other tactics for institutionalizing these centers on a campus of higher education included the administrative location as one of the most powerful, the majority of directors stating quite strongly that the center that service learning be an academic and not a student life program in order to achieve academic legitimacy (Young, 2007). One of the directors stated that his university’s involvement with Campus Compact “was the instigating force in encouraging us to become involved in service learning”...and split from the community service program, critical to get faculty buy-in (Young, 2007). Bringle and Hatcher research studies recommend placing a centralized office under the chief academic officer because it is advantageous to institutionalizing, with data supporting the office reporting to a vice-president level within the institution, lending viability to effectiveness for funding (Young, 2007). Also noted was “having a centralized office that provides technical assistance, logistical support, monetary incentives and recognition... can assist in the recruitment of...faculty to service learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

Additional implications for practice based on analysis of developing and maintaining relationships, a centralized campus office who facilitate civic engagement should be monitoring (using effective means of gaining regular feedback from community partners and students about their perceptions of the partnership such as equity, satisfaction and common goals) and communicate feedback on a regular basis to constituencies; incorporating university-community advisory groups that incorporate multiple perspectives to monitor partnerships and guard

against inappropriate dependency, power differences in decision making and exploitation; and interdependency that includes serving on boards and committees in the community, grant writing, shared staff positions; transformation of appraisals of outcomes and affirmation, where campus staff and faculty identify effective means for affirming the value of the partnership, public representations of the partnership, celebrations of the mutual and individual benefits, successes and outcomes of the partnership (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

In addition to the growing number of universities that are creating centers to coordinate university-community projects, Bentley College has created a center that encourages, facilitates and supports service learning pedagogy among its major stakeholders: faculty, students and corporate and community partners (Salimbene, Buona, Lafarge, 2005). Exemplary contributions from Bentley College demonstrate a campus culture that has changed dramatically to where every discipline is involved and there is a university-wide commitment to service learning (Kenworthy-U'ren & Peterson, 2005).

Through this established and staffed center, with internal operating budget and external funding committed to sustain the work, with the center emphasizing the professional attributes that are at the heart of management learning and education, from understanding organizations as complex systems and developing the ability to diagnose organizational problems and general feasible solutions, to enhancing interpersonal competence, improving communication skills, and developing a stronger basis for ethical decision making (Salimbene et al 2005). Annual workshops and faculty awards, granted each year to Bentley faculty who demonstrate an exceptional commitment to service learning, while also awarding curriculum development grants that sustain a project within a faculty course.

### **Community Engagement: Knowledge Management**

Educational capital is the reservoir of knowledge and skills that is our nation's greatest asset, with early childhood education and k-12 schools being pivotal in contributing to the long-term educational capital of our society. During the last half-century, college level learning has become increasingly important to the economic prospects of states and nations, as well as to the life opportunities of the individuals who reside there. Connecting together these ideas of knowledge as a commodity, human capital and social capital, we can see the potential for universities to occupy a key and integrating role in regional innovation systems (Charles, 2006).

These systems require all forms of knowledge in

combinations that are both coherent and mutually reinforcing (Charles, 2006). Logically, the university office of community engagement should be utilized as an updated repository for knowledge management practices, housing documents of project charter development with university-community partners which neutralizes the voices of project stakeholders, provides collaborative periodic benchmark project reviews, and develops relationships through a non-territorial process.

The Department for Education and Skills in the White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* encourages higher education institutions to take strong partnerships between higher education institutions in each region and the regional development agencies and other bodies charged with promoting economic development, setting up of a network of knowledge exchanges to promote knowledge and technology transfer including skills development within local communities of practices as well as making stronger alliances facilitated by cross sectors of the community and relevant departments in higher education institutions to develop and market courses and the delivery of learning (Roodhouse, 2004).

The Project Management Institute (PMI) defines a project as a temporary endeavor undertaken to produce a unique product, service or result, and includes definite starting and ending points (time), a budget (cost), a clearly defined scope of work to be done and specific performance requirements that must be met (Lewis, 2007). The Standish study, conducted in 1994, stated we spend about 140 billion on canceled and over-budget projects each year with similar reports citing 30 percent of projects are rework due to inadequate project planning, increasing risk of failure and no buy-in from the team (Lewis, 2007). Network knowledge refers not only to the skills of individuals but the transfer of knowledge from one group to another to form learning (Charles, 2006). The findings in a 2004 service learning research project at Johnson County Community College in Overland, Kansas, stated that although students and faculty indicated that service learning provides numerous benefits, including practical application on theory/course content, the students suggested improvement of offering a wider variety of projects and wanted to exchange information with other students from other classes (Weglarz, 2004).

Universities, as knowledge infrastructures, occupy a key role as resource endowments within the region but also as active participants in the construction of regional competitive advantage (Charles, 2006). Universities are increasingly recognized as having a key role to play in the regional development process and are likely to further increase given the development of a 'knowledge inten-

sive' economy and society, both in term of the expansion of the knowledge sector itself and in terms of the growing focus on information and knowledge in all sectors and activities (Charles, 2006).

Community leaders have cited the importance of active management of relationships and the projects, recommending top-level commitment, designation of a point person or connector to work with the partners, initial interviews, careful project definition, clear written agreements that specify responsibility, ownership of data, timelines, etc., regular monitoring of progress and definite end points (Ferman & Hill, 2004). Through California State University's Center for Community-Service Learning, the service-learning course development of a 7 step model for faculty involves the community collaboration component in step 3, where the professor needs to identify appropriate sites, utilizing the campus resources that have a database of local agencies that effectively work with students (Rubin, 2001).

External pressures also include the new educational technologies that are changing the ways in which faculty work, the rapid expansion of knowledge and emergence of new areas of specialization are challenging the traditional disciplines, and the faculty as well as student body continue to diversify in terms of age, race, ethnicity, educational background (Gappa & Trice, 2005). University engagement is taking place in the context of a wider set of changes with which universities must contend with changing funding regimes as states seek to control the education budget and increase the efficiency of universities, changes in the uses of technologies in education and research, changes in the regime of knowledge production and an increasing awareness of universities as having a major economic role as an employer, as a source of technological know-how and as a source of human capital development in promoting a flexible and adaptable workforce (Charles, 2006).

Project management can be relatively simple and straightforward for the majority of projects; the complexity is not in the process but in the people and organizational relationships surrounding the planning and execution of projects and is required in all industries, businesses, and organizational disciplines (McGee & McAliney, 2007). Communication is the tool for building relationships; it helps parties in a relationship understand and predict each other's behavior (Hall, 2004) and bringing fundamental project stakeholders to the table as a group during project management planning provides this opportunity.

Information communications technology provides a low-cost medium by which potential returns from

diverse collaboration can be considered in two groups: benefits from human interactions and benefits of sharing, seen as complementary and mutually reinforcing (Rich & Bednarz, 2000). The social capital trust, incorporating a democratic process for stakeholders to engage in decision making with the entire project team, can be underlined with this process.

Regardless of whether projects are loosely constructed with little oversight or highly prescribed and closely monitored, a systemic approach to organization, management and evaluation is important (Long, Larsen, Hussey & Travis, 2001).

## Conclusion

University resources can be utilized through the establishment and institutionalization of an office of community engagement. Bridging and bonding higher education with the community and exploring avenues to collaborate through mutually beneficial partnerships will address the current shortages in funding by planning smarter, developing university-community partnerships, establishing project management fundamentals to bring conceptualization of projects to successful closure, ensuring meaningful and ongoing relationships that continue after project closure and dissemination of knowledge, can be encouraged and reinforced through social capital processes building university-community collaborations. Institutionalizing a center to identify, promote and strengthen these ties will increase trust and longevity with the community stakeholders. Project management that includes the voice of all education stakeholders, should be explored as a technical assistance as well as democratic movement to support community engagement representing multiple factors. Responsibility of institutions of higher education seeking to provide meaningful service learning and research experiences can explore fundamental methods that support Dewey's Dream of a democratic process regarding educational initiatives.

Forthcoming, service learning theory, advantages and opportunities that bridge and bond institutions of higher education in a region with their school districts, supported by scholarly research agendas that evaluate university-assisted community schools will sustain these initiatives.

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# Understanding the Value of University-Public School Partnerships in Providing Recreation Services to Students with Disabilities

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## Introduction

University-public school partnerships are an important facet of community engagement. The 21st century university in order to fulfill its mission must be an agent of transformation, working in partnership with other community institutions to broker knowledge and solve pressing problems. Providing therapeutic recreation services to students with disabilities within public school settings is one example of how universities and local school districts can combine resources to better serve school aged children with disabilities. The University of Tennessee, Knoxville's Project Therapeutic Recreation in Public Schools (Project TRiPS) serves as a model for the development of effective university-school partnerships. This partnership developed between the University of Tennessee's Recreation and Leisure Studies program and Knox County (TN) schools embodies what a practical partnership can do to serve students with disabilities in a public school setting. The paper examines the impacts and outcomes of Project TRiPS and outlines some of the changes and challenges the program has faced since its inception.

## Understanding the Value of University-Public School Partnerships in Providing Recreation Services to Students with Disabilities

In the 21st century most contemporary universities have a "tripartite mission" of teaching, research, and public service (Spanier, 1999; Anyon & Fernandez, 2007). This is especially true of major land grant universities like the University of Tennessee (UT). Many universities are redefining their commitment to service to address key issues within society as a whole, reach out and partner with communities, and apply key knowledge where it is needed most (Spanier, 1999). This rejuvenated land-grant mission, includes community engagement—the process by which universities become partners and stakeholders with the community to share knowledge and engage in problem solving (Warner, 2008, p.1). Community engagement inspires the 21st-century university to transform itself to impact its surrounding society as never before (Warner, 2008). The foundational purpose is to use our educational resources to inform and improve the quality of life. An essential question for our times is how to harness the wealth of expertise within the land-grant university to be more useful to a society under increasing stress. A second critical question for modern universities is how can they collaborate with institutions in the community (e.g. school districts) to enhance the quality of life for all persons regardless of age or ability/disability.

As we progress into the second decade of this cen-

tury, land-grant universities have unprecedented opportunities to respond to profound social, economic, and technological changes taking place in society and in so doing, to revitalize their special role in promoting progress and strengthen the public partnership necessary for their continued vitality. Making a difference in communities where universities are located matters. The Recreation and Leisure Studies program at the UT responds to this charge in an innovative way, through Project Therapeutic Recreation in Public Schools (Project TRiPS), a university-school partnership. Project TRiPS serves as a model for the development of effective university-school partnerships in therapeutic recreation. The collaborative partnership developed between the University of Tennessee's Recreation and Leisure Studies program and Knox County (TN) schools embodies what a practical partnership can do to serve students with disabilities in a public school setting.

The purpose of this case study is to examine how an academic program housed at The University of Tennessee provides recreation services for students with disabilities in public schools. The case study method is used to present the narrative and data related to Project TRiPS. Henderson (2006) posits that, "cases studies show how behavior might be related to an individual, group, organization, or community" (p. 33). Furthermore, cases studies are valuable in that they allow for the use of quantitative and qualitative data and are effective in explaining a given phenomenon (Henderson, 2006; Mertens, 2009). This case study is important because it highlights the collaborative work that a university and school district can do to improve the quality of life of students with disabilities through participation in recreational pursuits in a school setting. Secondly, there is a dearth in the scholarly literature across the disciplines of higher education administration, recreation and leisure studies, and community engagement that focuses on serving disabled students using recreation as a mediating tool.

## The Value of Recreation and Leisure Opportunities for Children With Disabilities

Participation in challenging and intrinsically motivating recreation and leisure activities is considered to be a vital part of the development of children and youth (Larson, 2000). This is also the case for children and youth with disabilities. For example, King, Lawm, King, Rosenbaum, Kertoy, and Young (2003) argued that children and youth that have intrinsic biological or acquired conditions such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, or traumatic brain injury can benefit greatly from participating in adapted recreational activities. Hughes (2010)

suggests that play, leisure and recreation are vital to the social and cognitive development of children and youth with physical, visual, language, hearing and intellectual impairments (pp. 184-190). Participation in activities is the context in which people with disabilities, like all people, develop skills and competencies, form friendships and relationships, achieve mental and physical health, express creativity, develop a self-identity, and determine meaning and purpose in life (Brown, Brown, & Bayer, 1994; Hughes, 2010; Parmenter, Cummins, Shaddock, & Stancliffe, 1994). Community participation and meaningful, rewarding activity are major goals in models of rehabilitation service delivery for children and adults (Davis, 2002; Lieberman & Cowart, 1996).

Schools are often an optimal location for the delivery of recreation and leisure services to children with disabilities. Simeonsson, Carlson, Huntington, McMillen, and Brent (2001) conducted a nationwide survey of the participation of students with disabilities in school-based activities. Their significant findings included: (1) despite the range of structural barriers found in older schools, students participated in both in-school and after-school programs; (2) children and youth regularly participated in organized games, sports, and contests as well as social events; and (3) students with attention or learning problems participated more frequently, compared to students with physical and neurological problems (pp. 54-56). Schools that provide support services (e.g. speech/language pathology; occupational therapy; school psychology; physical therapy; assistive technology) and work in tandem with recreation therapists can greatly enhance the quality of life for students with disabilities through participation in recreation programs.

Overall, schools provide a safe and familiar space for providing recreation services for students with special needs. Appropriately selected school-based interventions such as recreation therapy can have a significant effect on students' self-concept. When linked to academic activities, these interventions can lead to modest but significant gains in self-concept while promoting students' social and academic achievement (Elbaum & Vaughn, 2001).

### **Benefits of University-School Partnerships**

Combining forces in the form of collaborations epitomizes the method of operation that universities employ to address issues in their community. Collaboration is a planning approach where two or more parties form a relationship for the purpose of gathering resources to implement a program, activity, or action plan (Wiewel & Lieber, 1998). Partnerships are a form of collabora-

tion, which are "built on overlapping interests" (Baum, 2000, p. 235). For planning and budgetary reasons universities and partnering entities are typically required to justify the development of new partnerships. LeGates and Robinson (1998) in response to this notion state, "If universities can partner with schools and community organizations to solve community problems, then "university-school partnerships are justified" (p. 313).

In viable university-school partnerships positive benefits accrue to both partners. For example, Kirschenbaum and Reagan (2001) in their analysis of partnerships involving 57 universities and urban school districts concluded that despite the diverse nature of collaborative programs and projects that are operated between a universities and city school districts, the vast majority of these programs were closely tied to the educational mission of both the university and the schools. Additionally, university faculty, staff, and students, and school district personnel exhibited high levels of commitment to collaboratively sponsored programs (pp. 500-501). The authors further suggested that "most program directors felt quite positive about their programs' accomplishments, expressed the desire to continue to be involved, and expected the programs to continue operating in the future even if they were no longer involved themselves" (p.500).

Sanders (2003) in studying community involvement in public schools identified four primary benefits derived from university-school partnerships. These benefits include: (1) professional development and training; (2) increased service learning opportunities for students; (3) increased resources--expertise, funding, and facilities; and (4) heightened credibility on the part of both the university and the participating school or school district (pp. 167-168). Moreover, Sanders (2003) urges universities and school districts to be cautious in selecting partners to protect their credibility and increase the opportunity to achieve their desired programmatic outcomes.

King, Law, Hurley, Petrenchik, and Schwellnus (2010) conducted a developmental comparison of the out-of-school recreation and leisure activity among boys and girls with and without physical disabilities. The study involved two samples of children: 427 children (229 boys and 198 girls) with physical functional limitations in three age cohorts (six to eight years, nine to 11 years, and 12-14 years), and 354 children (147 boys and 207 girls) without disabilities in corresponding age cohorts. Three key benefits of providing therapeutic recreation programs for children and youth with disabilities were identified. First, therapeutic recreation in schools provided an opportunity for disabled students to participate in physical and social activities that are closer to home. Sec-

ond, students with disabilities participating in recreation programs did so with family members and other students regardless if they too had a disability or not. Participation in recreation activities was generally facilitated by an adult (pp. 86-94). The findings of this study underscore the importance of recreational therapy services and of creating participation opportunities that meet youths' needs for increasing social interaction. Furthermore, King et al. (2010) posit that "it is most important for parents and service providers to ascertain whether preadolescents are enjoying their social activities and whether they feel they have sufficient opportunities to engage in the activities they desire" (p. 104).

Finally, one of the principal benefits of school-based recreation for students with disabilities is that participation in recreation programs helps to thwart negative attitudes about disabled students. Milson (2006) notes that faculty, students, and support staff sometimes exhibit negative attitudes toward students with disabilities. Subsequently, there is a reluctance to participate in inclusive recreational activities. Milson also suggested that positive attitudes about students with disabilities catalyze the promotion of social interactions between students with and without disabilities (p. 70).

As noted by the results of the studies cited in the previous paragraphs, there are a number of benefits that are accrued by the university, target schools and students with disabilities and their families. Project TRiPS represents a synthesis of university and public school-based intellectual capital, and a shared commitment to delivering needed recreation services to school children with disabilities.

## **Background**

In June of 1997, Gene A. Hayes, professor of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Tennessee received a grant from the U.S. Office of Education and developed Project TRiPS to offer graduate and undergraduate students an opportunity to gain hands on experience working with youth with disabilities in a public school setting. Two years after Project TRiPS' inception the Tennessee Department of Education took over the grant funding for this program and remains as its funding source eight years later. The primary goal of TRiPS is to teach youth with disabilities the necessary skills to function independently in society through therapeutic activities. Project TRiPS focuses on enhancing the youth's social, recreational, and behavior skills, which will assist them in community transition. The project also places a heavy emphasis on aiding youth with physical limitations through activities that target the use of fine

and gross motor skills.

Each semester Project TRiPS dispatches approximately 10-20 university students into nine child development center (CDC) classrooms throughout Knox County to spend an hour doing therapeutic recreation activities with the UT students. Through this program the UT students learn about recreation therapy, setting goals and objectives, documentation, as well as how to program and implement therapeutic activities for children with disabilities. The UT Students also gain applied experience practicing therapeutic recreation, something that is very rare for the therapeutic recreation student until their practicum and internship experiences that occur in their junior and senior years.

As part of Project TRiPS, a three credit academic course has been created that offers approximately twenty graduate and undergraduate students the opportunity to gain hands on experience through working with youth with disabilities in a public school setting. The course is taught by graduate assistants, who also serve as the TRiPS staff, and is overseen by Gene Hayes. During this course, University of Tennessee students learn about different types of disabilities, proper documentation techniques, and appropriate ways to work with special populations. Throughout the semester, UT students are required to visit the CDC classrooms once a week for 15 weeks. The TRiPS staff and UT students attend each CDC classroom for a minimum of 10 times per semester.

Each week the university students implement therapeutic activities in the special education classrooms for one hour at each school. In addition to the school visits the UT students are required to write lesson plans, update student progress notes, conduct a case study, and fill out a standardized assessment on a youth. The two available standardized assessment tools that are utilized are the General Recreation Screening Tool (GRST) (Burlingame & Blaschko, 2002) and the Functional Assessment of Characteristics for Therapeutic Recreation, Revised (FACTR-R-R) (Peterson, Dunn, Carruthers, & Burlingame, 2002).

Project TRiPS' target population is youth who participate in child development centered (CDC) classrooms in Knox and surrounding county public schools. The classrooms range from 6-12 CDC students and on average six UT students. Most CDC classrooms consist of one teacher and two to three teacher aides. On average, 75 CDC students are involved in the TRiPS program each semester. The scope of disabilities of the CDC students includes but is not limited to: intellectual disabilities, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down's syndrome, functional delays, learning disabilities, language, speech,

visual and hearing impairments.

At the beginning of each semester the CDC teachers prepare a list of their students' goals and objectives to be worked on by the UT students during the TRiPS program. Upon their initial visit to the CDC classroom, the university students observe the CDC students while the teacher gives the goals for each CDC student to the TRiPS staff for them to work on throughout the semester. These goals generally mirror the Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals set for the children. Once the goals are received the university students begin learning appropriate documentation skills and facilitation skills so that activities may be successfully implemented at the schools. Activities are selected based on specific goals for the classroom and students.

The central tenets of Project TRiPS illustrate linkages to the research of Janet Sable. Sable's research shows the importance of integration of individuals with various disabilities and its capabilities to produce significant outcomes based on trust and cohesion (Sable, 1995). This type of integration can be achieved through the use of the LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) classroom that provides the most integrated or normalized setting possible within a public school setting. However, Taylor (1988) found through his analysis of the LRE, that the majority of LRE settings are still segregated situations.

The concept of inclusion may be viewed as a progression or continuum with varying levels of acceptance (Schleien, Green, & Stone, 2003). Physical inclusion assures the individual's right to access a program such as a fitness class. In functional or instructional inclusion reasonable accommodations are provided so individuals of varying abilities benefit from the program (Schleien et al., 2003; Sherrill, 1998). The highest level, social inclusion, refers to individuals' abilities to gain acceptance and have positive interactions with peers. Full inclusion in recreation results when programs are welcoming, accommodating, and conducive to sharing experiences (Schleien et al., 2003).

While inclusion is promoted as fundamental to quality of life, studies reveal that individuals with developmental disabilities remain limited in their social contacts (Boyd, 1997; Wilhite & Keller, 1996). Additionally, interviews with individuals with disabilities suggest that those who participate more regularly in recreation activities are significantly more satisfied with their lives and include integration and independence, key elements of inclusion, in their definitions of quality of life (Modell & Megginson, 2001; Wilhite & Keller, 1996). In rural communities, inclusion practices were less of an issue because of the small number of disabled students in the

population and the use of collaborative strategies to effectively serve the participants (Modell & Megginson, 2001).

The aspiration of many disabled children and youth is to evolve into adults who function effectively in adult roles and are independent toward the end of improving their quality of life. The staunch reality is that many individuals with disabilities need supportive services to ensure they have the skills necessary to fill adult roles and responsibilities in the community. It has been established through research that individuals with disabilities benefit from being involved in integrated programs (Sable, 1995).

### **The Confluence of Project TRiPS**

Project TRiPS remains successful in creating a critical linkage between the university community, public schools and students by providing therapeutic recreation services to children with disabilities in CDC classrooms. Although many of the special education children experience multiple disabilities at one time, they continue to benefit from the TRiPS program. Specific benefits which the CDC students experience are documented through initial reports, progress notes, and final reports which are completed on each student during the duration of the TRiPS program. These benefits are also reported at the midterm and final semester points through teacher evaluations. Positive results of project TRiPS have been noted from the program overall. One teacher reported,

We know that every experience is of value to the students. When students are successful they will begin to take on more difficult challenges face to face. This program offers success to the child, thusly creating the opportunities for growth and development within that fosters positive well-being throughout life. Thanks for allowing us to grow and learn by being a part of your program.

Furthermore, specific changes in the functioning levels of the CDC students have been reported. These changes have been illustrated in the final evaluations. Another teacher stated,

(The UT students) were able to get and maintain the students' attention. Each of the children in my class have their own IEP and they (UT students) were able to touch base with several of their goals. Some students would not stay on task and in their seats, but this was not a problem when your students (UT) started their projects. Eye contact between students and UT students improved.

A different teacher remarked on specific functional changes in her students.

I have seen improvement in many of the CDC students' communication skills. They have become more spontaneous in responding to and initiating greetings. They are learning to follow directions from other adults. I have also seen improvement in some of the students' fine motor skills (cutting with scissors, coloring, and drawing).

In addition to the functional improvements seen in the CDC students, the teachers also report experiencing benefits from project TRiPS. An example of this can be seen in the following comment from one teacher. "the students enjoy every visit and looked forward to each Wednesday. Teachers have mandates that may become too routine and this infusion of recreation is always helpful in remembering the value of educating the total child."

A major focus of project TRiPS is inclusion and the TRiPS staff have been touted for their ability to adapt and implement programs that meet all students' needs and limitations. This is recognized by the teachers and is considered advantageous to the CDC students. A response in one teacher's final report states,

This entire program was wonderful for our class. The students did a great job of planning activities and adapting to each child's ability level. They also did well with having a variety of activities that kept the kids' interest throughout the hour. We hate to see them go and wish the semester hadn't ended. We welcome them back anytime!

Another teacher provided a similar comment in this regard indicating that "every group brings something new and creative to the classroom. They actually do an excellent job addressing a wide range of learning styles and each has a value to the child and their life goals."

As previously noted the Tennessee Department of Education currently provides funding for the TRiPS project and therefore assesses the programs progress and outcomes. On a yearly basis the TRiPS program is evaluated by the Tennessee Department of Education to ensure that the goals of the program are being met and that project TRiPS is fulfilling its intended purpose to provide opportunities for social, recreation and leisure growth experiences for youth with multiple disabilities in the public schools setting.

### Measurable Outcomes of Project TRiPS

For the 2007-2008 school years, TRiPS serviced eight schools from Knox and Sevier County located in southeastern Tennessee (see Table 1 for full details) with the youths' ages ranging from 6 to 23 years old. In the fall semester of 2007, 74 special education children from Knox and Sevier County and 21 UT students were involved in the TRiPS program. This translates into 3,566 direct contact hours (# of UT students x # of CDC students x 1 hour), 863.5 indirect contact hours (time for writing lesson plans, progress notes and travel time to and from schools) for a total of 4,429.5 contact hours. Similarly, for the spring semester 2008, there were 68 special education children from Knox and Sevier County and 20 UT students were involved in the TRiPS program. With 3,261 direct contact hours, 564.5 indirect contact hours and an overall total of 3,825.5 contact hours.

**Table 1:**  
**Number of CDC Students at Each TRiPS School**

School	Fall Students	Spring Students
Fulton High	5	6
Seymour High	18	14
South Doyle Middle	9	7
Holston Middle	8	6
West Hills Elementary	9	10
Pond Gap	9	10
Rocky Hill Elementary	9	9
Seymour Primary	7	6

Measurable behavioral and functional changes have been derived as positive outcomes of the TRiPS program. These outcomes are revealed through the two aforementioned standardized assessment tools, the General Recreation Screening Tool (GRST) and the Functional Assessment of Characteristics for Therapeutic Recreation, Revised (FACTR-R). At the beginning of each semester every UT student selects, for a case study, a youth of their choice. It is then their responsibility to complete one of the two assessment tools on two separate occasions; initially at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of the semester. The GRST is a general recreation screening tool that is used to measure distinct developmental areas (physical, cognitive and affective) for youth between the ages of zero to ten years; whereas, the FACTR-R measures basic functioning and behaviors in the cognitive, physical and emotional or social area for those youth over ten years of age.

**Table 2:  
GRST Results**

<b>Child 1</b>	<b>GRST 1</b>	<b>GRST 2</b>	<b>Child 2</b>	<b>GRST 1</b>	<b>GRST 2</b>
<i>Physical</i>			<i>Physical</i>		
Gross Motor	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.	Gross Motor	7-10 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
Fine Motor	1-3 yrs.	1-3 yrs.	Fine Motor	3-6 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
Eye Hand	1-3 yrs.	1 yr.	Eye Hand	1-3 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
<i>Cognitive</i>			<i>Cognitive</i>		
Play Behavior	2 yrs.	5 yrs.	Play Behavior	3-6 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
Play Structure	1 yr.	4 yrs.	Play Structure	3-6 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
Language Use	0-6 mos.	0-6 mos.	Language Use	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
Language Compr.	---	---	Language Compr.	3-6 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
Numbers	---	---	Numbers	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
Object Use	6-12 mos.	6-12 mos.	Object Use	1-3 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
Follow Directions	6 mos.	1 yr.	Follow Directions	3-6 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
Problem Solving	6 mos.	2 yr.	Problem Solving	1-3 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
Attending Behavior	6-12 mos.	6-12 mos.	Attending Behavior	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
<i>Affective</i>			<i>Affective</i>		
Possessions	6 mos.	3 yrs.	Possessions	3-6 yrs.	7-10 yrs.
Emotional Control	6 mos.	6 mos.	Emotional Control	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
Imitation Play	4-6 mos.	6-12 mos.	Imitation Play	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
People Skills	4-6 mos.	1 yr.	People Skills	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
Music	6 mos.	6 mos.	Music	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.
Stories/Drama	6 mos.	6 mos.	Stories/Drama	3-6 yrs.	3-6 yrs.

**Table 3:  
FACTR-R Results**

	<b>Physical</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Social/ Emotional</b>		<b>Physical</b>	<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Social/ Emotional</b>
<i>Child 1</i>				<i>Child 4</i>			
FACTR-R 1	63	45	100	FACTR-R 1	64	36	0
FACTR-R 2	72	27	90	FACTR-R 2	82	55	73
<i>Child 2</i>				<i>Child 5</i>			
FACTR-R 1	45	45	0	FACTR-R 1	55	55	18
FACTR-R 2	45	54	45	FACTR-R 2	27	82	27
<i>Child 3</i>							
FACTR-R 1	100	64	9				
FACTR-R 2	100	91	91				

Although positive outcomes are noticeable in the youth involved in the TRiPS program, not all areas of development are affected equally. As illustrated in Tables 2 and 3, the results from the assessments vary by the individual child, their type of disabilities and the magnitude of those disabilities. In some cases, due to the specifics of certain disabilities, some areas of development are unable to be measured and are indicated by dashes in each of the corresponding tables. In Table 2, the results of the GRST, the child's level of functioning is indicated by developmental years each has reached based on the assessment guidelines. In Table 3, the results of the FACTR-R provide a score out of 100; the higher the score the higher the functioning level in that developmental area. Through the examination of the results from both assessment tools, the specific measurable outcomes become apparent.

### Challenges for the TRiPS Program

Over the span of a decade the TRiPS program has endured its share of changes and challenges. One of the initial challenges for the program was acquiring permission to provide services in the public schools. Representatives from the University of Tennessee met with the director of the special education program for the state of Tennessee to explain the intentions and expected benefits of the program. One positive outcome that emanated from the meeting was that when new schools are added to the program, the TRiPS coordinators contact the CDC teachers at the school to set up a meeting with them and the principle.

Each semester new students and volunteers are involved in project TRiPS meaning that the TRiPS staff face the daunting task of coordinating CDC classroom schedules with the UT students schedule, while taking into account class and work agendas as well as travel time to and from each school. This dilemma can potentially create problems for university students who are overly involved with other activities. This process is very time consuming and has on occasion resulted in a student being unavailable to participate in the TRiPS program. Furthermore, at least 20 students or volunteers are needed in order for the TRiPS program to take place in its entirety each semester. Since the TRiPS project cannot be sustained solely through recreation and leisure studies majors, the corresponding TRiPS course is offered to those students in the early childhood development, child and family studies, speech pathology, and special education departments.

Another challenge faced by TRiPS is the administrative burden that stems from producing the required

documentation for the program. Each TRiPS staff leader is mandated to generate documentation for each of the CDC student when schools are visited. The staff leader must also keep the school specific notebook, which contains all of the documentation, in order for review during the Tennessee Department of Education's yearly visit. These notebooks contain between 50 to 170 progress notes for one school for one semester. Additionally, teaching the university students about quality documentation is also challenging yet crucial. It is the quality and the detailed documentation that catalyzes the renewal of the program grant each year.

### Recommendations for Future Research

In light of the success and impact of the TRiPS program several pathways for future research emerge. First, the motivations for volunteering to participate in TRiPS should be examined. Several studies (Liao-Troth and Dunn, 1999; Andrews, 2000) have focused on the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive students to volunteer in campus and community-based initiatives. In light of the wide range of students that volunteer with TRiPS and their varying academic and experiential backgrounds, understanding their motivations to participate can contribute to the continued success of the initiative.

Second, evaluating the "fit" and progress of university-community partnerships is crucial to their success (Johnston, 1997). There is a growing recognition of the importance of understanding partnerships as they relate to program delivery. Moreover, it appears that the term partnership is commonly used by administrators to describe virtually all interactions with organizations with which they are involved, regardless of the strength or pattern of the relationships. Over the course of time partnerships evolve and change. Cousens et al. (2006) argue that on a regular basis during the 'life' of partnerships there is a need: (1) to examine the strength of ties (e.g., exchanges, partnerships, strategic alliances, joint ventures) between partners; (2) to explore the patterns of linkages that bind partners; (3) to uncover the amount and types of resources (e.g., money, equipment, facilities, personnel) that connect partners; and (4) to uncover the values and beliefs that underpin the formation and enduring nature of linkages (p. 32). In light of the changing political, fiscal, and academic climates that confront the University of Tennessee, Knox County Public Schools, and related stakeholders, evaluating the capabilities of each collaborating partner to sustain Project TRiPS is of paramount importance.

Additionally, evaluating the program utilizing a formal, structured program evaluation model may produce data that can be used to add additional credence to the already sterling results Project TRiPS has produced for more than a decade. Rimmer et al. (2004) and Mactavish and Schleien (2004) attest to the value of recreation in and outside of school for children with disabilities, but also encourage the evaluation of these critical programs. Closely examining the efficiency, effectiveness, and efficacy of Project TRiPS can produce asset-based data that can lead to policy decisions that may stabilize funding and potentially lead to expansion of the effort into more schools. Withstanding the long-standing relationship between UT and the target schools involved in Project TRiPS, the use of an action research (AR) methodology to create a greater sense of ownership, track programmatic shifts, assess the impact of the program on the partnering institutions and participants may be a logical next step in program design (Greenwood & Lewin, 1998; Mertler, 2006). Engaging in reflective practice as a part of the AR model (Mertler, 2006; Sanders, 2003)--reflecting on planning, what worked, what did not, changes for next time, and benefits that were accrued to the partnering entities and the students with disabilities---will aid in strengthening institutional relations and the overall value of Project TRiPS in the community.

Finally, institutionalizing community engagement efforts such as Project TRiPS is important to the prominence of universities where service lies at the core of their mission (Warner, 2008). Documenting lessons learned and successes is an important facet of meaningful community engagement. Driscoll (2008) notes that institutions "...with strong and deep commitments to community engagement develop and institutionalize their tracking and assessment systems to better engage with their communities in authentic reciprocal relationships) (p. 41).

## Conclusions

Research on participation in school activities and the role of participation in academic and social outcomes has been an area of growing interest. For children and youth with disabilities, higher levels of participation in school-based recreation programs may invariably lead to a number of positive outcomes (Simeonsson et al., 2001). Project TRiPS provides a unique opportunity for the University of Tennessee, specifically the Recreation and Leisure Studies program to answer the call of research, teaching and service in an innovative way. This applied learning milieu enhances UT students' integration of theory and practice as well as providing hands on experience in working with youth with disabilities that is often not accessible at other universities. It is critical for university-community partnerships to be reciprocal in their benefits as is evident with Project TRiPS. Not only are the UT students reaping benefits from their involvement in Project TRiPS but it is evident that the CDC students experience positive behavioral and functional changes as well.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the TRiPS staff Chelsea Keith, Evan Kessler, Rachel Smith, Ginny Thomas, Angie N. Pihera, and Sandra Rangel in providing information for this manuscript.

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*A Publication of the University of Pennsylvania*

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