# 30   School-Linked Comprehensive Services: Promising Beginnings, Lessons Learned, and Future Challenges

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As a growing number of children, youths, and families develop problems related to learning, development, health, and well-being, their concerns increasingly affect the various helping professions (for example, social work, education, health, and recreation and leisure) and work organizations (for example, child protective services, public schools, health education organizations, and recreation and leisure agencies) that serve children and families. This interdependence compels innovative strategies that depart from traditional ways of defining and solving problems.

Social workers are assuming leadership roles in innovations involving schools, social and health services agencies, and families (Denham, 1996; Franklin & Streeter, 1995; Hare, 1995). In these innovations, families and helping professionals are working together (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1992). If the dire needs of children, youths, families, neighborhoods, and communities are interdependent, then the helping professions and their work and other relevant organizations must become more interdependent.

Because the needs and challenges of children serve as an early-warning system for many other societal needs and challenges and because schools are children's only universal entitlement, schools are being redesigned to help address interdependent problems. Several states are allocating special resources to these initiatives (for example, New Jersey, Kentucky, California, Florida, and Missouri). A growing number of schools are colocating social and health services providers onsite and are establishing communication and organizational partnerships with others in the community. The label "school-linked services" has been applied to these collaborations and partnerships, although some prefer the term "full-service schools" (Dryfoos, 1994).

These initiatives vary considerably, from minimal parent involvement to redirected school missions for family support (Epstein, 1995; Hooper-Briar & Lawson, 1996). Some schools have chosen to concentrate on children and youths by establishing youth centers while restricting parent involvement to Parent–Teacher Associations. Others combine the two, seeking to involve parents and youths in service delivery and educational support. Still others are revitalizing the community-schools concept, many using the model of the settlement house

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(Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Lawson, Briar-Lawson, & Lawson, 1997; Tetleman, 1996). These schools offer day, week, and full-year programs for children, youths, parents, and other community members. Some also promote economic and community development.

Needs exist for across-site information sharing, learning, development, and evaluation. Drawing on site visits in 36 states, interview data, and a literature review (Hooper-Briar & Lawson, 1996; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997), this chapter identifies lessons learned from past and present work. We view innovations involving collaborative practices, organizational partnerships, and school-linked services as having different generations. We assess the first generation and offer a primer for a second generation of partnerships (Hooper-Briar & Lawson, 1996).

## FIRST-GENERATION PARTNERSHIPS

School-linked services are one of three changes under way in many schools (community schooling and parent involvement are the other two). It is helpful to frame these changes against a historical backdrop (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994; Tyack, 1992; Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

### Legacies of Jane Addams and John Dewey

Today's priorities for community-responsive and integrative practices are not new to social work or education. Schools have always had some kind of services even if these have not been provided by social workers (Tyack, 1992). Social work pioneer Jane Addams and her work at Hull House deeply influenced John Dewey and the thinking, writing, and practices that led to the promotion of community-based schooling. Hull House promoted family-centered education and supports along with occupational opportunities and cultural preservation activities (Harkavy & Puckett, 1994).

Unfortunately, Addams's holistic, family-supportive, and community-based strategies gradually declined as more specialized, categorical schools and service systems evolved. The expressed purposes of public schooling were to stop the exploitation of child labor and nurture children as future citizens in the democracy. A hidden purpose was to compensate for perceived problems in parents and families. Schools were expected to perform as local parents, reflected in the legal doctrine in loco parentis.

During this century, many schools and child-serving agencies became increasingly disconnected from families. In fact, both have alienated those whom they serve. For example, today's families may confront as many as 14 service providers, each with different conceptions of family needs and problems and with different language systems and intervention strategies. In addition to these providers, the most vulnerable families also must navigate a maze of organizations including but not limited to schools, social services agencies, health agencies, and recreational agencies. Unfortunately, even though they are involved in the lives of the same families, these organizations often do not communicate with each other, let alone coordinate or collaborate. No one benefits under these circumstances.

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## Lessons Learned

Today's school reform strategy—parent involvement—is an effort to reconnect with parents and families. Similarly, the school-linked service movement is a hybrid designed to help reconnect children and, in many cases, their families to schools and other recreational, social, and health services agencies.

*Key Concepts for Change.* The key words for change reveal leaders' thinking and action strategies. Four related concepts have been used nationally and internationally to identify, describe, and explain first-generation work. *Interprofessional collaboration* describes efforts to get specialized helping professionals to work together. *Service integration* refers to efforts to coordinate and blend the intervention and improvement strategies professionals offer to children, youths, and families. *Systems change* involves revisions in job descriptions, leadership structures, accountability requirements, resource allocation, work cultures, and policies needed to facilitate interprofessional collaboration and service integration. *School-linked comprehensive services* colocate and link educators with service providers—a strategy that connects the other three concepts.

These key concepts are derived from three assumptions. First, colocating professionals at schools and expanding communication will stop duplication of efforts, and families will make greater use of services, in part because the services will be more accessible. Accessibility of services and service providers is the main need; their quality is less of an issue. By coordinating conventional service strategies, outcomes for children, youths, and families will improve. Needy children will be helped, and the school's work will be facilitated. Second, school professionals, especially teachers, need not be directly involved in planning and decision making about services. Schools need not change appreciably, because the needs and problems reside in the children, youths, and families, and service providers have the responsibility to address these needs and problems. Third, social workers have access to a knowledge base that allows them to critically evaluate these assumptions.

*Understanding Alienation and Vulnerability.* Many service systems designed to promote improved functioning among children and families are failing them (Bruner, 1996). This failure has been attributed to a number of factors, including lack of cultural competence, lack of family-centered practice, excessive specialization, use of categorical approaches, and insufficient resources. Calabrese (1990) suggested that some school practices "generate high minority dropout rates and disproportionately high numbers of minority student suspensions and placements in mentally or emotionally retarded classes" (p. 148). He also found that parents of color felt more alienated from schools than white parents. The parents of color had greater feelings of isolation and powerlessness and felt that teachers were unfriendly, that they were not invited to the school as often as they should be, that school policies were arbitrary, and that they were seldom consulted when there was a policy change. Some had grave doubts about the welfare of their children while at school.

These findings and others challenge some of the assumptions of the first-generation partnerships. It is highly unlikely that people who feel alienated and who fear for the emotional and academic well-being of their children will use

many school-linked services. Both schools and social and health services agencies must reach out to alienated parents and youths. Similarly, few school-linked initiatives have involved classroom-based services, which are responsive to teachers' needs as well as students'. At best, most schools have had schoolwide or targeted services serving a special population, such as teenage mothers, child abuse victims, truant children, suspended students, or dropouts.

*Beyond Child-Centered Coordinated Services.* Many schools have framed their work as "coordinating services for children" (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996). While focusing attention on individual children, educators have hoped to improve their schools, so much so that their work is overly school centered. Beyond these initiatives, ecological thinking compels simultaneous change strategies that support and strengthen families, neighborhoods, and community organizations. In this perspective, although the characteristics of individual children and school performance are important priorities, they are not the only ones.

After families gain equal priority, all organizations and helping professions face the challenges of family-centered practice. Conventional service strategies are an important component of family-centered practice, but services alone will not address all the needs and problems. In this sense, "services" and "comprehensive services" are important but are insufficient to improve results. Families also need supports (for example, neighborhood networks, barter systems, occupational development) and resources (for example, transportation assistance, flexible dollars for child care). As families are enfranchised as joint designers of strategies intended to help them, school-linked service providers will face increasing demands for these social supports and resources in addition to services.

Moreover, once families and neighborhoods are targeted, school-linked service configurations alone are not likely to mobilize all needed stakeholders. New community-based and -led coalitions are required. Schools are key members, and so are the social, justice, and health services providers linked to them. However, even the best school-linked service configuration cannot do it all alone. School–family–community consortia need to be convened so that root causes such as evictions, poverty, marginalization, and racism can be addressed.

*Beyond Colocation.* Service systems that are ineffective in the community are not likely to become effective merely because they have been colocated at the school. First, the service must be adapted to the school setting. For example, one author found that renaming school-based child protection workers "family support workers" and assigning them new functions helped encourage families to seek help at the school. Second, leaders must integrate their services with others. For example, relationships with educators have not been firmly established on many sites. Third, accountability structures need to be more flexible. For example, changes in one worker's name, functions, and roles will not amount to much if the supervision of staff remains with the loaning agency.

Many of these challenges have not been well understood. For example, teachers, principals, counselors, and school nurses may wonder why service providers are not more responsive to their referrals, needs, and requests to serve on problem-solving teams. In addition, most service providers have eligibility requirements for their services, which often means that children must be in crisis

before providers can help them. Thus, children and families referred by teachers will not benefit from primary prevention and early intervention, a chief aim of relocating services at the school.

In addition, services need to be more flexible and responsive to the first indications of need in children and families as identified by referring teachers and other school personnel. For example, a high-risk child abuse referral made by a teacher may be deemed a low-risk referral by a child protection worker. If service providers fail to respond to teachers, the aims for school-linked services are not achieved. There should be agreed-on, integrated risk detection, assessment, referral, and follow-up systems that allow close collaboration between teachers and service providers. As these are developed, school-linked services will double as teacher and family support strategies.

*Shared Accountability for Outcomes.* Outcomes accountability is a reality in school communities. At the same time, a child's learning and academic achievement are inseparable from indicators of health status, family well-being, and characteristics of local neighborhoods. Ideally, this means that a teacher's success is also the success of a social worker or health professional. Unfortunately, real shared accountability for child and family outcomes is difficult to find.

A youth who has successfully used a school-linked substance abuse counseling program but continues to fail in school will be impeded both in his or her overall occupational goals and in potential long-term sobriety. A youth performing well in school but arrested for theft and drug dealing so he or she can put food on the table may not be able to move out of the conditions that led to stealing and drug dealing. Although teachers, social workers, health professionals, and law enforcement providers cannot be expected to forgo their formal roles and responsibilities, collaboration requires that all attend to the social, health, and familial impact of their work while service providers attend to the educational implications and success of their children and families.

In the future, shared accountability for outcomes may be a requirement. For example, new policies from the U.S. Children's Bureau require that child welfare services become accountable for more than child safety, especially in cases of abuse and neglect. In addition, school outcomes will be assessed as a measure of child protection and welfare (Williams, 1996). Moving toward "shared or collaborative accountability" will be a key challenge of the next generation of initiatives (Young, Gardner, Coley, Schorr, & Bruner, 1994). Without it, children, youths, and families may not improve and succeed.

Despite notable exceptions, such as California's Healthy Start and New Jersey's School-Based Youth Services Program (Tetleman, 1996; Wagner & Golan, 1996), comprehensive and integrative evaluations have not been undertaken. Although the majority of sites have data on the number of people they have served, most do not have evidence in support of improvements in the quality of services and supports offered. Some data are encouraging and merit follow-up evaluations. For example, reductions have been documented in out-of-home care, detention, juvenile justice involvement, teenage pregnancy, substance involvement, truancy, suspensions and dropouts, and behavioral disruptions (Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997; Tetleman, 1996). With minor exceptions (Wagner & Golan, 1996),

these improvements are not linked to improvements in academic achievement in school. Service provision has not been closely integrated with school reform (Gaston & Brown, 1995; Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997).

*Problems of Replication.* Even the most promising demonstration projects are difficult to replicate and institutionalize. "Going to scale" is a major challenge across the nation because the developmental progression of these initiatives is not well documented, technical assistance and capacity-building help are in short supply, and the human and fiscal resources needed to launch these projects are unavailable. Some social workers and educators estimate that more than 80 percent of their students and families are "at risk." There will never be enough service providers to meet the needs of every vulnerable child, youth, family, and community. Some well-intentioned initiatives have mobilized community service providers for work in schools yet have ignored the student support and services professionals (school social workers, nurses, counselors, psychologists) already working there (Adelman, 1996). In fact, some of the turf wars and boundary problems associated with school-linked services occur because of the exclusion of existing school professionals.

Social and health services professionals and pupil support professionals already onsite need to be redeployed (Adelman, 1996; Smith, 1995). Moreover, parent outreach and training can generate additional services and supports while creating occupational ladders for parents. Parents can play key roles as paraprofessional educators and service providers by working with at-risk children, youths, and families at school and helping with home visits and family supports in the community. In addition, children and youths can deliver services to each other. They can be effective in truancy outreach and in providing support groups as peer mediators and natural helpers for those who feel misunderstood at home and at school. Mobilizing these untapped resources helps to integrate separate change initiatives and recasts the role of school social workers in several ways: Social workers can help the highest risk families, a job for which they are uniquely prepared; can play lead roles as parent and youth mobilizers, trainers, coordinators, and supervisors (Alameda, 1996); and can become conveners and mobilizers of expanded resource networks and community consortia.

## SECOND-GENERATION PARTNERSHIPS

### Demonstration Projects

A second generation of partnerships can build on the promising beginnings and lessons learned from the first. Our thinking about these partnerships is informed by our demonstration projects, in which we have tried to integrate separate change strategies. Likewise, some authors (Alameda, 1996; Foree, 1996; Lipscomb, 1996) have reported that several parent groups in southern Florida and Cincinnati have had a positive impact on children's learning, attendance, and aspirations.

*RAINMAKERS.* In RAINMAKERS in Florida, low-income volunteers challenged by language barriers and even hostility from some of the helping institutions mobilized services, supports, and outreach. The group's school, along with social services and teacher supports, now regularly wins awards and ranks in

the top of Title I schools in the state. The group, which has achieved its own independent status as an agency within the school and the community so it can receive its own grants, opened a child care center, a source of jobs for other low-income parents.

*West End Philadelphia Improvement Corps.* University, school, and community advocates in the West End Philadelphia Improvement Corps developed a "wraparound" service and teaching strategy for youths and their families. Working with a group of 21 of the most challenged eighth graders who had repeated several previous grades and had failed eighth grade, the corps designed a special summer school involving parents, teachers, and service providers that focused on the strengths and aspirations of the youths. The need for more comprehensive, tailored supports was evident; for example, two youths were teenage mothers, and several others had cases pending in juvenile court. When the youths were asked about their greatest fear, many said they were afraid that they would be killed before they reached adulthood.

The 21 students had two teachers who had high expectations for them and balanced these expectations with individual attention and support. In addition, an on-site parent advocate and social services student intern acted as academic tutors on some days and on others spent their time redirecting disruptive behaviors and repairing the youths' fragile self-esteem. The parent advocate worked with the youths' parents and caregivers, enlisting contractual agreements from them in concert with their children.

The results surprised everyone. All 21 youths in the summer school project completed eighth-grade requirements in the summer term and were promoted to ninth grade. Most important, the support spilled into their personal lives. Having professionals invest time and energy in caring about their success was a foreign notion to many students. One young woman recalled her previous experience with schooling: "In eighth grade they just give us it [assignments] and tell us to do it, they ain't gonna care if we pass. . . . In summer school, they did [care], 'cause we all passed. . . . I won't say they made me do it [school work], but they pressured me to do it, they, like, kept on my back to make sure I did it." The teachers and social services staff provided enough support that these students overcame their negativity about school.

By the end of the term, all of the students expressed an interest in attending college. In looking back a year later on their summer school experience, the students were aware of their poor behavior and achievement. One student who described herself as she was during her eighth-grade year said, "[I was] gloomy and disruptive. I ain't listening. I ain't gonna do what I was told. I just did what I wanna do." The same student had much different views of schooling after the project: "I don't wanna be in school for the rest of my life. . . . I want to get an education. I would like to go to college and everything."

The interplay between teachers and service providers was key to the success of the project. When stressed or upset during class, instead of walking out and spending the day on the streets, the youths had the parent advocate and student intern with whom to discuss their learning barriers, levels of frustration, or worries over a court appearance or being a young parent. After the

discussions, the students were able to become motivated again to learn and succeed in school.

Two of the authors recently completed follow-up interviews with the youths after the ninth-grade year (Collier & Joseph, in press). The youths were again failing. The two authors provided intensive supports during summer school but could not during the students' high school years because their grant covered interventions only with middle school students. Although most of the youths continued to have some contact with the parent advocate and student intern, they did not have the immediate supports of the demonstration project that had penetrated their lives and classrooms. Even with on-site school counselors and social workers in their high schools, the students lacked the more intensive supports that seemed to be key to their success in summer school.

This experience compares with others' (Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997). Classroom-based services and supports that help teachers as well as children need to be built in across an entire school. A one-year, one-class intervention will not provide lasting supports for vulnerable children and youths.

### Responsive, Enfranchising Practices

More services may not include the right or enfranchising services children, youths, and families need to become more successful in their functioning and problem solving. Regardless of the numbers of service providers linked to a collaborative, families, youths, and children sometimes report that they do not feel well treated by the service providers or teachers (Alameda, 1996).

Effective collaborative practices must be enfranchising and empowering. For example, teachers will have a much greater likelihood of using school-linked services if they have helped design them. Parents will react differently if they are partners and not just clients or cases needing to be managed. If all stakeholders see the services as responsive and tailored to their needs, there is a greater likelihood of more timely and appropriate service use. Top-down, mandated change strategies are not likely to produce these necessary conditions.

Children, parents, families, and professionals often feel like they are under siege and blamed. Some children and parents claim they are being maltreated, and others feel they are discriminated against because they are poor or ethnically or racially different and because service providers are culturally insensitive or hurtful. Teachers and service providers may have encountered such negativity from some clients that they adopt a protective shield, carrying mace and separating themselves from those they serve with armored reception areas, locked school and classroom doors, and police-based hallway patrols.

Working agreements about blame-free problem-solving strategies, bills of rights written by parents about how they are to be treated, and codes of conduct or rights that students write with their teachers in their interactions with each other are examples of culture building that reinforces the service enhancements in the school. In parent groups delivering support services to one another, a first act is to seek more positive interactions with service providers and educators. Bills of rights and mediation skills are part of the work to improve the maltreatment syndromes that have developed over time.

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### Addressing School Failure as a Social Work Issue

Social workers need to show how dropout, teenage pregnancy, depression, substance abuse, and other problems can be averted if teachers empower students to learn and achieve in ways similar to the summer school demonstration project. This empowerment involves getting help into classrooms, recasting the work of teachers, and supporting them. Classroom-based social workers, parent paraprofessionals, volunteers from businesses, and university students can help reverse cycles of failure.

School policies, especially curricular tracking, can negatively affect the lives of children, youths, and families. There is a wealth of evidence that tracking alienates children, racially segregates classrooms, increases antisocial behavior, and leads to student dropout (Broussard & Joseph, 1996). Social workers are obligated by the *NASW Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1996) to challenge any policy that interferes with clients having access to opportunities and resources. Schools should be places where services and resources are available to everyone.

## BUILDING SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY CAPACITIES

Facilitating second-generation, advocacy-based work requires expanded roles and practices for school social workers. To advance these, social workers need to be freed from some current work responsibilities. Some social workers have found that this can be accomplished when they form partnerships with parents and youths. For example, as social workers build parent-run family resource and youth support centers, parents and youths themselves can address issues such as truancy with outreach efforts and can help others find the appropriate information and referral services. As social workers build new roles for challenged youths and parents, they simultaneously refocus their own job description on capacity building and resource mobilization. When school social workers move into roles of facilitators of family resource centers and collaboratives, they also maximize supports for teachers, parents, and others. A collaborative of service providers linked to classrooms can place school social workers in the role of advocating for the needs of the teachers, youths, and families rather than trying to meet all the needs themselves.

School social workers have pivotal roles to play in helping educators and other professionals understand poverty and develop culturally responsive, family-centered practice and root cause problem-solving strategies. For many schools, reform cannot be effectively achieved without school-linked services, parent empowerment, and community development, because the children and youths schools hope to better educate are often besieged by the challenges of poverty, family and community stress, trauma, and neglect. The crisis created by welfare reform will only aggravate these conditions. Social workers can help others develop cultural competence, empathy, high expectations, and strengths-based teaching and service strategies. In their facilitative role, school social workers can help all who serve children, youths, and families adopt shared codes of ethics and can help agencies and schools adopt enfranchising missions, policies, and practices. This work may require designing and implementing

cross-system training and ongoing staff development to ensure more cohesive practices across agencies and organizations.

School social workers can advocate for parent stipends and jobs linked to the school and community. It is expected that the welfare reform crisis will become a child welfare crisis because more children will be in foster care. School social workers can help protect some of the most challenged parents from losing their children to foster care because they are jobless and have no welfare grant. School social workers can help child protection workers relocate to the school to focus on placement prevention and occupational development for poor, jobless parents. For example, in one community, child protection workers located at a school developed an estimated diversion rate of 87 percent among families that would have been charged with neglect (Tanoury, Saunders, & Lusk, 1996).

Even when community professionals are recruited into the school, there will never be enough professionals to address unmet needs because most eligibility criteria require families to be in crisis before they can obtain help. To fill the prevention gap, school social workers can promote among agencies and the community the need to build prevention and early intervention occupational ladders into the school and other organizations. Microenterprise development also is needed; neighborhood child care and family resource centers can be promoted and financed though local and state investments in the poor. Community members can advocate for such change through a community–school consortium. School social workers can help convene such consortia and reframe what are now "student outcome" problems as "community development" issues. Moreover, the consortia may help the school address and change such practices as tracking and suspensions.

Rising poverty and inequality are predictably spawning educational and school improvement agendas among politicians across the nation. School social workers are in key positions to help others understand the relationship among poverty, marginalization, welfare terminations, racism, and educational outcomes. Because educational reform agendas are top concerns among many elected officials, the social work profession must inform policy reform debates with its longheld knowledge about poverty and its effects on children's life chances.

## CONCLUSION

School-linked services can be transformational tools, especially when tied to other local family and community development efforts. The challenges facing children, families, and school communities will not be addressed without schools and families shaping the community problem-solving agenda. Reminiscent of the work of Jane Addams and John Dewey, this is a way for school social workers and school-linked services to move forward to the future while looking back.

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