

**Remarks to TN Consortium for the Development of Full-Service Schools
September 15, 2000**

I have been asked to talk this morning about three issues: (1) What's the theoretical base for full-service schools—that is, what's the research-based argument for developing and implementing this approach to promoting children's learning and development? (2) What does a full-service school look like? And (3) What have we learned so far?

First of all, let me say that I am thrilled to be in a place that HAS a statewide consortium for the development of full-service schools. I have read your vision statement and a list of your accomplishments to date, and both are very impressive. It's an honor to be invited to speak to a group of fellow travelers—I very much share your vision and am thrilled to learn of your accomplishments.

While we are here in Knoxville this morning, a group of colleagues are meeting in New York City with Senator Lieberman and discussing full-service community schools. So there's a growing army of supporters for this idea—and idea whose time has definitely come.

I'd like to warm our collective circuits this morning with a quote. See if you can guess who said this:

What is the meaning of the popular demand...(for community schooling) just this period?...What forces are stirring that awaken such speedy and favorable response to the notion that the school, as a place of instruction for children, is not performing its full function—that it needs also to operate as a center of life for all ages and classes?

No, this was not Joy Dryfoos, author of the 1994 book entitled *Full-Service Schools*. And it wasn't Marty Blank, staff director of the Coalition for Community Schools. And it wasn't Bill White, head of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. It was John Dewey, in a 1902 publication entitled "The School as Social Centre." I love knowing the John Dewey, my number two hero, was greatly influenced by Jane Addams, my number one hero. His philosophy and theories about education were grounded in no small measure in her (then) radical ideas about community. So we are keepers of a proud tradition, when we read the call in Joy Dryfoos's book to establish "the settlement house in the school."

I invoke the names Dewey and Addams not to regress but to make the point that the idea of full-service schools is so strong, so powerful, that it will not die. It was a good idea in 1902, and it's a good idea 100 years later. There have been ebbs and flows to the actual implementation of this idea—and right now we are in a decided flow. I say let's go with the flow.

So to continue the water metaphor, let me dive into the three issues I've been asked to discuss: the theoretical basis for full-service schools; what a truly full-service school looks like; and what we (the field) have learned so far.

I. THE RESEARCH BASE UNDERLYING FULL-SERVICE SCHOOLS

First of all, don't take a lot of notes because I have prepared a handout on this, with references. It will be very useful in preparing funding proposals...

My meta-message here is that we stand on very firm ground as we make the case for full-service schools. Let's start with a definition, so we can make sure we are on the same page. Later I'll go into more detail but, for the moment, let's use the following working definition:

A community school is an educational institution that combines the best educational practices of a quality school with a wide range of vital in-house health and social services to ensure that children are physically, emotionally and socially prepared to learn.

Well, what's the rationale for putting these pieces together in one place? What do we know from research that would support such a notion?

- (a) The first part of the rationale has to do with child and adolescent development. An extensive body of research indicates that all young people need *ongoing guidance and support in all of the developmental domains* (cognitive, social, emotional, physical, moral and vocational) if they are to achieve productive adulthood—defined as having competencies that will allow them to participate in the labor economy, in responsible family life and in active citizenship.**
- (b) The second prong of the rationale has to do with parental involvement in children's education. Extensive research (for example, research by Joyce Epstein and colleagues at Johns Hopkins University and by Anne Henderson and colleagues at the Center for Law and Education) has documented the importance of *parental involvement in children's education* as a key factor in promoting academic achievement. Specifically, this body of research indicates that children do better in school when their parents regularly support, monitor and advocate for their education.**

- (c) **The third research cornerstone relates to children’s use of their non-school time. For example, Reginald Clark’s research has documented the importance of children’s participation in *constructive learning activities during the nonschool hours*. Dr. Clark found that economically disadvantaged children who participate from 20-35 hours per week in constructive learning activities during free time get better grades in school than their more passive peers. He’s talking about activities that give young people a chance to practice cognitive skills—reading for pleasure, playing strategy games.**
- (d) **What about organized programs that provide such experiences? Through several studies spanning more than a decade, University of Wisconsin researcher Deborah Vandell has documented a host of *positive benefits from children’s participation in high quality after-school programs*, including better grades, work habits, emotional adjustment and peer relations. This research relates to elementary-age children, but we have similar evidence about teens.**
- (e) **Stanford education professor Milbrey McLaughlin found that *adolescents who participate regularly in community-based youth development programs (including arts, sports and community service)* have better academic and social outcomes—as well as higher education and career aspirations—than other similar teens.**
- (f) **And the argument continues. Resilience theory indicates that children who have *consistent access to adult guidance and support* have better outcomes**

(such as higher education and career aspirations, lower incidence of at-risk behaviors).

- (g) As your Consortium’s literature points out, several studies have documented the fragmentation that characterizes much of the service delivery system for children and families in this country as well as how such *fragmentation limits effectiveness*.
- (h) But what do we know about the benefits of coherence? A 13-year study in ten different community contexts (Francis Ianni et al.) found that child and adolescent outcomes were enhanced in communities where *the key developmental influences (home, school, community resources) worked together* to provide consistent messages, opportunities and supports for young people.
- (i) Finally, we have the argument advanced by Joy Dryfoos. She synthesized a complex body of research on reducing risk and promoting resilience among children and adolescents and concluded that *the single most effective intervention* was the development and implementation of schools that integrate the delivery of quality education with whatever health and social services are required in a given community.

I don’t know about you, but where I come from, this is a pretty strong case. Let’s move onto the second topic that I’ve been asked to address: What does a community school look like? My suggestion for how to get into this topic is to quote sportscaster Warner Wolfe: “...Let’s go to the video.” (Show video.)

II. WHAT DOES A COMMUNITY SCHOOL LOOK LIKE?

In some ways, the answer to this question is “It depends...” This would be accurate, because schools differ. Even traditional public schools, while they have many things in common, DO look different, one from another. But, for purposes of this discussion, I’d like to focus on the common features of community schools—features that would make them look similar whether they are in Long Beach, NY or Long Beach, CA.

The video you just saw was, in fact, taped in Long Beach, California; it’s the Stevenson Elementary School, and it’s an adaptation site of the Children’s Aid Society model developed in New York City. I have visited this school and can testify that what you saw here is accurate. This is a school that has become the center of its community. There are parents in and out of the school all day long—they stay for the flag ceremony that starts the regular school day; they volunteer in classrooms; they participate in a variety of adult education classes, including aerobics, cake decorating and computer repair. It’s a school where the lead community agency, the YMCA, has integrated its after-school youth development program with the academic program that’s offered during the regular school day. And, yes, it’s a school that kids don’t want to leave...

When I visited my first community school—I think it was in 1993—I noticed two things: the students seemed happy; and there were a lot of adults around. This

visit happened to be to IS 218, a middle school in New York City that is run jointly by the New York City Board of Education and the Children’s Aid Society. I visited this school as a potential funder, and wondered aloud. “Why can’t all schools be like this one?” Joy Dryfoos was standing next to me on that visit, and quoted me in her book. And I still wonder about this...I think this idea is so powerful that I decided to leave the comforts of grantmaking to work full-time on trying to make this happen. In the book entitled *Built to Last*, author Jim Collins outlined the secrets of successful corporations, one of which is that they all had “big, hairy, audacious goals.” I like that idea and have adopted it. My big, hairy, audacious goal is—one that I think we are all working on—is this: (1) that all public schools are open in the non-school hours; and (2) that all public schools extend their services to children and families through long-term meaningful partnerships with community resources. That’s my simple definition of a community school, and what you’d see in a community school.

So, what a community school looks like is this:

- It’s open long hours;
- It welcomes parents in multiple ways;
- It’s a place where serious work goes on, but often that work could be described as “serious fun” (such as hands-on, engaged enrichment activities);
- It’s a place that displays student work throughout the building;

- It's a place that regularly hosts community-wide events (not just on Election Day—as is often true in traditional schools);
- It's a place with a wide range of activities;
- It might be hard to tell who the adults are—what role they play, whether they are paid staff, volunteers or parents; and if they are paid staff, it might not be initially apparent whom they work for;
- It's a place where everyone, from bus drivers and custodians to the principal and community school director, shares a common vision and sense of purpose.

That's what it might look like. What would it feel like? Here are some adjectives we might use to describe an effective community school: respectful; welcoming; safe; busy; energetic; under control; exciting; serious; fun.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

From our own nine years of experience as partners in community schools in New York City, and from the conversations with others in the field, here are some major lessons from the front lines:

- Community schools work best when they are initiated as *long-term partnerships* rather than as short-term projects. Our goal is to create a different kind of institution rather than to add a few programs and services to an existing one.

- **Community schools work best when there is *explicit agreement at all levels* about what is going to happen. For CAS, this meant getting a written agreement with the central New York City Board of Education as well as with the local school district. (Our school system is so large that it is divided into 32 local districts, where much of the power and resources reside.)**
- **Community schools work best when there is *joint, ongoing planning and assessment*—and this too must be at all levels.**
- **Community schools work best when you *pick your partners carefully*. Not every school or every community-based organization represents fertile ground for this kind of partnership. Of particular importance, in our experience, is a principal who wants his or her school to be a community school. Many kinds of principal leadership can be effective in a community school—but I have never seen one with an unwilling principal.**
- **Community schools work best when there is explicit attention to staffing—recruitment, orientation, retention, development and support.**
- **Community schools work best when the community partners add programs, resources, services and opportunities that *build on their core competencies*. For CAS, as a full-service child welfare organization, this has meant that we can offer youth development programs, family counseling, emergency social services, parent involvement, health, mental health and dental services. And we've brokered services with other agencies (such as legal services) when our needs assessments indicated that families needed such assistance. But we've been clear that there are some things that we're just not good at—for**

example, providing educational remediation. We think the board of ed is (or should be) better at that than we are.

- Community schools work best when all of the partners are *willing to change their practice*. For CAS as a social service agency, this has meant adapting to the school's culture (for example, writing down agreements rather than expecting them to be done verbally) and expanding our ideas about what constitutes good youth development programs. For example, we have expanded our vision of our role in promoting children's cognitive development as part of their overall growth. One specific way we have done this is by beefing up the literacy components of our after-school educational enrichment programs. We are explicitly supporting the school's academic agenda through enrichment and enhancement activities.
- Finally, community schools work best when everyone involved *keeps tending the relationships*. We have a couple of mantras at CAS about our community schools work—everything has to be negotiated; tending the relationships is part of the work; and, in order to make it all work, you have to have the word *yes* written in your heart.

Let me conclude by asking us all to reflect on this notion of having the word *yes* written in our hearts. What are we saying *yes* to? I think we are saying yes to new professional alliances; to new institutional arrangements; and to new relationships between institutions and citizens. But most important is that we are saying yes to more effective ways of promoting children's learning and development—our reason for being.