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# A Look at Current School-linked Service Efforts

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## Abstract

The authors of this article contend that there is no single model for school-linked services. Rather, they conclude that lessons from existing efforts indicate that such services must be shaped according to the needs of the community and of the students being served. Six current school-linked service efforts are described in terms of the goals of the effort, who is served, what services are offered, where services are located, and who is responsible for providing services. A fundamental concern to those involved in initiating school-linked services is that these services become part of a truly integrated system that produces more successful outcomes for children and families. The authors identify a number of integrating elements that are key to effecting the kind of systemic reform needed to make school-linked services more than a passing fad.

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**M**illions of America's children and families face a combination of circumstances that not only threaten their immediate well-being, but put them at risk of long-term disadvantage. Of the children entering school this year, one in five is living in poverty, many in households with an income far below the official poverty level. Half a million in the incoming class were born to teenage mothers, often at low birth weight, with attendant risks to physical and intellectual development. A significant number were exposed to drugs in utero or carry HIV infection. More than half of these new students are expected at some point during their childhood to live with only one parent, usually the mother, in households that are particularly prone to poverty and stress.

Traditionally, education has been viewed as the means of escape from poverty and disadvantage. Yet today, when a high school education is barely sufficient to secure work that can provide economic stability, one of every four youngsters entering ninth grade will not graduate. In urban areas and areas of concentrated poverty, the outlook is even more dismal.

Although poverty and the other cited conditions cannot always be equated with school failure—many of those “at risk” do succeed—

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research increasingly points to a demonstrable and fundamentally troubling correlation between low educational achievement and serious problems outside the classroom. For example, Hahn and Danzberger reported that students from poor families are three times more likely to drop out than those from more advantaged homes.<sup>1</sup> Wehlage and Rutter reported that four national longitudinal studies “confirm that a family background characterized by low socioeconomic status is strongly associated with dropping out.”<sup>2</sup> Forty percent of girls who drop out do so for reasons related to pregnancy,<sup>3</sup> placing themselves and their babies at especially high risk of poverty; over half of the mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children had their first child as a teen.

That these correlations have dramatic implications for the nation as a whole, as well as for the affected individuals, becomes clear when one understands the dimensions of the problem. Henry Levin of Stanford University estimated that almost one third of the nation’s schoolchildren are educationally disadvantaged, lacking “the home and community resources to fully benefit from conventional schooling practices,” and the proportion is steadily increasing.<sup>4</sup> With declining birthrates making it likely that every able-bodied adult will be needed in the future work force, the possibility that so many will lack the skills they need to be acceptable workers is a far-reaching concern.

## Systems Reform and Cross-Sector Linkages

Policymakers, administrators, and staff throughout the education and human services systems, who daily confront the grim reality represented by these statistics, are well aware of the gap between what is needed to address the problems and what the systems, as presently configured, can do to help. As a result, fundamental reform addressing philosophy, policy, and practice is under way in virtually all sectors.

A notable aspect of these movements to reform individual systems is their emphasis on the formation of partnerships with other institutions serving children and families. In part, this represents a growing awareness of the interrelated nature of the problems with which dif-

ferent systems and their clientele are struggling and a belief that coordination of services can, in Lisbeth Schorr’s term, “break the cycle of disadvantage” by providing comprehensive, flexible, and continuous support to prevent or alleviate problems.<sup>5</sup>

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But an even more important motivation for the creation of linkages is the recognition that, although each system is committing itself to successful outcomes for the people it serves, the resources

available to any individual system are insufficient to fulfill this commitment. The problems faced by children and families are simply too large and too complex to be taken on alone by any one system.

## Why School-linked Services?

Within the swirl of interest in better connections among the institutions serving children and families, the school is rapidly becoming a central focus. Fundamental to this focus is the continuing popular belief, challenged as it may be by the statistics cited previously, that education is an escape route from whatever problems a child or family may confront. In the domain of social policy, where broad-reaching consensus is rarely found, there is virtually undisputed agreement that education is a good thing, indeed an irreplaceable element in achieving success in the current and future marketplace. A not illogical leap leads to the conclusion that, if supportive services can help ensure educational success and self-sufficiency, then the institution responsible for education should have a part in the provision of those services.

This philosophical basis of interest in school-linked services is complemented by a number of practical reasons. The most important and obvious is that the school is where children can be found and, in fact, is the only institution with which virtually every child and family has contact. The school also offers a cadre of skilled staff that regularly comes into contact with children and families. The quality of these relationships and the extent to which these interactions are fully exploited as opportunities to identify and respond to need are potentially of great significance in constructing an effective system of support. Finally, the school building is an easily accessible physical plant—often one of the few reasonably maintained facilities in a hard-pressed community—that can be used as a center of positive community activity.

## A Cautionary Word About Models

The growing interest in cross-sector collaboration as a strategy to secure successful outcomes for children and families, and the specific interest in schools as a focal point in that collaboration, is manifesting

itself in a rich base of experimentation with school-linked services.

As more communities begin exploring the idea of a school-linked service strategy, they understandably are eager to extract from this experimentation “models” that can be replicated. Yet, from our perspective, a distillation and promotion of models seems premature. The very diversity of efforts in itself defies categorization into a limited number of structures and approaches. Moreover, because the movement is still so young, there is a lack of hard evidence that what is being tried is indeed effective. Drew Altman, president of the Henry Kaiser Family Foundation and creator of the New Jersey School-Based Youth Service Program when he was that state’s human services commissioner, has observed that he hopes “someday soon what we know will catch up with what we believe.” With a longer history and the structured evaluation of efforts that is now beginning, in time that should be the case. At this point, however, measures of effect on which to base a solid judgment of “best practice” and “model” are rarely to be found.

A final concern with respect to the idea of models is that, even when the experience and knowledge base is more mature, it is unlikely that there will ever be one or two models that could or should be reproduced “cookie-cutter” style throughout the country. To succeed, a community must develop an approach and tailor program design to capitalize on its particular strengths and opportunities and to respond to its citizens’ unique combination of needs and expectations.

## Some Current Efforts at School-linked Services

Nonetheless, communities clearly can learn a great deal from one another, and those who have yet to develop their own school-linked service strategy can benefit from the experience of early leaders on this agenda. In the following sections, we describe some promising and informative early efforts, with a particular eye to how they have addressed key elements that go into a school-linked service strategy, such as what the goals of the effort are, who is served, what services are offered, where services are located, and who is responsible for actual service provision.

### Reaching Youth at the School Site: The School-Based Youth Services Program—New Jersey

The idea of bringing nonacademic services to the school site is not a new one. The school-based health clinic movement, for example, began in 1970, when the first comprehensive health center offering a range of health and social services was opened on a Dallas campus. But today's widespread activity really dates from 1987, when the New Jersey School-Based Youth Services Program (SBYSP) was enacted. This was the first substantial effort by a state to link schools and social services to help ensure youngsters' success.

Seeking to assist New Jersey's youth in making the often difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood, the New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS) initiated this program to place comprehensive services in or very near high schools. There are 30 program sites, at least one in each county and most in low-income urban or rural areas. Managing agencies of local sites include schools, hospitals, social services agencies, and community-based organizations.<sup>6</sup>

The state does not impose a single statewide design, but requires each of the sites to offer at least a core set of services and to operate not only during school hours, but also after school, on weekends,

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and during vacations. Core services include mental health and family counseling, primary and preventive health services (on-site or by referral), substance-abuse counseling, employment counseling, summer and part-time job development, academic counseling, and referral to other health and social services not available on-site. Recreation is offered by the sites as a way to attract youngsters. Some sites also offer other services, such as day care, services for teen parents, special vocational programs, family planning, transportation, and hotlines.

Primary funding for SBYSP is through an annual \$6 million state appropriation.

Average site grants are \$200,000, an amount which is supplemented by a financial or in-kind contribution of 25% of site costs from the host community. In addition to financial support, DHS provides sites with technical assistance and helps them make use of existing service programs. For example, if health services are to be provided, the department will seek to certify the school-based program as a Medicaid provider so that it can claim reimbursement for services to Medicaid-eligible students.

SBYSP is one of the few school-linked service programs that is open to any student in a participating school. There are no limiting eligibility criteria, nor does a student have to have an identified problem. This open approach is intended to avoid stigma and encourage students to use the center before small concerns become big problems; the high volume of student participation in the centers suggests that this strategy is working. Parental consent is required for all SBYSP services and some family services are available, but generally speaking the target for services is the youngster, not the family.

### Preventing "Risk" From Becoming Reality: Project Pride—Illinois

The objective of Illinois's Project Pride was similar to that of New Jersey's SBYSP—to provide school-based support to high school students to keep them on a successful track. In Illinois, however, both the target population and services provided were narrower in scope. This program, which began in 1986 as a federal demonstration project, closed at the end of the 1990-91 school year because funding was

no longer available. Its reported results and its truly preventive orientation are notable enough, however, that the program merits continued attention.

Project Pride, located in Joliet West High School, sought to improve future prospects for girls whose families were receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Program participants had not necessarily manifested any problems, but research suggests that family circumstances such as theirs put them at risk for too-early childbearing and future welfare dependency. Many of the participants came from families who had been welfare recipients for several generations; Project Pride aimed to break the “cycle of dependence” by helping these girls gain the skills, knowledge, and personal confidence to achieve economic self-sufficiency as adults.

In its first year, with \$150,000 in federal funds and \$60,000 in state funds, Project Pride enrolled 59 students; additional students were added each year. After the federal demonstration period ended, funding was provided entirely by the Illinois Department of Public Aid and the school in which the program was housed.

The program focused on enhancing the participants’ employability, educational achievement, and personal relationships. Staff located in the school provided individualized case management, as needed. Tutoring, homework assistance, and advice on study skills and test taking helped participants maintain or improve their grades. Through group and individual counseling, Project Pride students learned to develop and sustain mutually supportive relationships with boyfriends,

family members, and friends. Volunteer mentors from the business community taught participants the qualities employers value and what is expected in the work world; coached them in interview techniques; and, in some instances, helped them find part-time jobs.

The program reported an 80% high school graduation rate among participants, a remarkable achievement among this high-risk population when compared with the overall national graduation rate of 70% in the same period. Further, the reported number of pregnancies among Project Pride participants has been about half that of Joliet’s city-wide average for adolescents since 1986.

#### **Making Connections for Families: Probstfield Elementary School—Moorhead, Minnesota**

At the middle school and high school levels, youngsters are old enough to seek and receive services themselves, although many would argue that the family continues to be important and should be a part of any intervention if at all possible. But at the elementary school level, the family’s role and responsibility is undeniably central, and service efforts for children at this age must actively engage the family. Serving the family also means that siblings of a child experiencing difficulties may be reached before they themselves begin to experience problems. The value of a family focus is clearly recognized by teachers

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and school administrators at Probstfield Elementary School, who are seeking to help their students by helping the families.

Among Probstfield’s students are youngsters from two nearby housing projects. School personnel were concerned that many of these children were performing poorly on schoolwork, that they and their families had needs that were not being met, and that there was little trust between the families and the school. School officials reasoned that trust could be built and the children’s achievement

improved if parents saw the school as a source of help in solving problems.

In contrast to the New Jersey and Illinois programs, Probstfield tackled this objective by developing an effective information and referral capacity in the school, rather than by bringing services to the school site itself. The school began by asking all the human services agencies in the community to contribute information about their services to a resource manual for teachers. A copy of the manual was given to each teacher—making it much easier to use than if there were a copy in the library only—and teachers received in-service training in how to identify problems and make referrals. With the help of the manual and training, teachers now are expected to explore family needs in parent-teacher conferences and to make referrals as appropriate.

To increase the likelihood that the referrals will result in a connection between the family and an agency that can help, agencies have representatives in the school building on the days parent-teacher conferences are held. Even though services beyond the initial conversation are provided off-site, through this arrangement a parent need only walk across the hall, rather than travel across town, to take the first step to act on the teacher's suggestion. Although no formal evaluation has been conducted, members of the school staff believe that many of the concerns that underlie this initiative are now being addressed and that the circumstances of the children who were of priority interest are improving.

#### **Keeping Children on Track Through Early Intervention: Youth At Risk Program—Cortland, New York**

Families are also an important element in the Youth At Risk Program of Cortland, New York. The program combines school- and community-based service components.

Realizing that existing efforts to help at-risk youth and their families did little more than react to crisis, in the fall of 1988, the Cortland City School District and county Department of Social Services (DSS) joined forces to shift the focus of Cortland's Youth At Risk Program to early intervention and prevention. As a first step, they formed a Community Advisory Council to help devise ways to identify at-risk youth as early as possible, make school and community services more ac-

cessible, and provide special support to at-risk youth.

As recommended by the Advisory Council, multidisciplinary Youth Intervention Teams (YITs) were formed in each of Cortland's schools to bring a range of professional expertise to bear on the problems of youth and their families. YITs meet weekly to consider referrals from teachers and counselors. Recommendations of the YITs are implemented by youth and family counselors—social workers hired by DSS but stationed in the schools—who serve as case managers to facilitate the provision of suggested services. In addition to weekly meetings at the school sites, YITs meet monthly with the deputy commissioner of social services and the school district's director of pupil personnel services to review complex cases.

The Great Kids Program is another part of Cortland's attempt to keep serious problems from developing. Designed to help children make a successful transition from elementary school to junior high, this intensive summer program targets students who are performing poorly in school, exhibit a lack of self-esteem, or display frequent behavior problems. Students strengthen their academic and social skills and learn practical skills such as budgeting money. The Great Kids Program also reaches out to parents. Youth and family counselors make home visits to obtain parental permission for student participation in the program and to learn more about the family situation. During the summer program itself, parents are asked to attend weekly meetings where they receive an update on their child's progress and are offered support in planning for their child's future. Students and families in need of ongoing services are referred to the YITs for follow-up, and school counselors meet with student participants throughout junior high to provide continued support and guidance.

The budget for Cortland's overall Youth At Risk Program is approximately \$440,000; first-year costs were \$144,000 for Youth Intervention Teams in the district's four schools and \$14,000 for the Great Kids Program, with 20 youngsters participating. Major funding sources include a state Youth At Risk grant, prevention money available to the Department of Social Services, and federal and state substance-abuse resources.

The changes in Cortland's Youth At Risk Program already appear to be making a difference. Whereas the statistically expected dropout rate among the city's seventh and eighth graders is over 10%, no Great Kids participant has left school, and improvements have been seen in completion of school assignments and overall attitude toward school. In a rare example of cross-sector accountability, Cortland is also measuring non-school-related outcomes attributable to school-linked services. Fewer children needing out-of-home placement are being placed in juvenile facilities and other institutions, and more of those who are placed are in community-based programs. DSS staff credits these positive trends to the availability of intensive case management and better-coordinated services.

### **Revitalizing a Community: The Walbridge Caring Communities Program—St. Louis**

The preceding examples distinguished between school-linked programs that target only students and those programs that reach beyond the school building to serve the students' families as well. The Walbridge Caring Communities Program (WCCP) goes even further, to address the needs of the community surrounding Walbridge School in St. Louis, where the program is based. Most community residents have low incomes, and the neighborhood is struggling with drug dealing, unemployment, and crime. WCCP is guided by an African proverb—"It takes a village to rear a child"—and seeks to re-create in this extremely challenged community a "village" that can nurture its children and help them succeed.

Caring Communities is a pilot project of four Missouri state agencies—the Departments of Elementary and Secondary Education, Mental Health, Health, and Social Services—and the Danforth Foundation. Its objectives are to keep high-risk children performing successfully in school; to help those children and their families avoid family dysfunction and separation; and to help the children stay out of trouble with the law.

WCCP is co-located with Walbridge School (preschool through grade 5) and a "community school" offering adult education and after-school programs for neighborhood youth. The school principal and the directors of the two co-located pro-

grams work as a team to operate a facility that is open more than 15 hours a day.

Referrals to WCCP come mostly from school personnel, although some families living in the community are referred by the courts and the Division of Family Services. WCCP services are both school- and home-based. They include case management, an intensive crisis-intervention program for families at risk of having children removed from their homes, a daytime in-school treatment program for troubled youth who need individual and group therapy, before- and after-school child care, substance-abuse counseling, school nursing services, pre-employment training and job placement for parents, academic tutoring, and a food bank. Classroom presentations using an Afrocentric curriculum reinforce students' self-esteem as a way to prevent drug abuse, and monthly parent meetings keep families posted on what their children are learning.

Community empowerment is as important a part of WCCP's mission as service delivery. The Substance Abuse Task Force, for example, is organizing anti-drug-dealing marches in which parents, students, and police participate. Empowering the community also means giving the residents a say in how best to use the resources of the participating state agencies in that community. Most of WCCP's \$570,000 budget comes from redirected state agency dollars that would have been spent serving children and families in the area. The Advisory Council—drawn in equal parts from parents, community representatives, agency representatives, and school personnel—guides WCCP in deciding how those funds should be used and the services the program should offer.

Outcome data are limited at this point, pending completion of a formal evaluation now under way, but there already is evidence of improved school attendance and achievement and a reduction in problem behavior.

### **Rethinking How a City Serves Its Youth: New Beginnings—San Diego**

Like WCCP, New Beginnings reaches well beyond the boundaries of a school building and its students. In fact, this initiative did not begin with a school focus; school-linked services are only one component in a multifaceted, citywide effort to ensure the well-being of children and families.

A partnership that spans jurisdictional as well as sector lines and includes both

political and professional leadership, New Beginnings involves top executives from the county Departments of Social Services and Health and Probation, the San Diego City Schools, the Community College District, and the city Housing Commission, Parks and Recreation Department, library system, and police force. The county's chief administrative officer and the city manager participate as well.

In mid 1988 these officials began a series of informal but penetrating conversations about the condition of and outlook for San Diego's children and families. As unmet needs and fragmentation of services became focal points of discussion among the executives, they turned to school-linked services as a key strategy in an overall effort to improve the way the city deals with concerns such as the growing number of children in poverty.

For New Beginnings, the concept of school-linked services has already taken multiple forms. A parent-school communication curriculum has been included in the training provided to San Diego welfare recipients participating in California's welfare-reform effort, Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN). Special procedures have been adopted so that school nurses and the Department of Social Services, working together, can expedite access to benefits and services for pregnant and parenting teens, to help them fulfill the dual roles of student and parent. The Department of Social Services was also an active participant with the school system in designing a new middle school, where the staff now includes a family advocate at the school site to counsel students and staff and coordinate with other agencies.

To explore the potential of using the school site as a locus of more comprehensive service delivery, New Beginnings recently opened a demonstration center at Hamilton Elementary School. Like Walbridge School, Hamilton is in an extremely challenged community. Families in the community and staff in the school and service agencies participated in determining the kind of services the center would provide. Initially, the center has been charged with serving Hamilton's 1,300 students, grades K-5, and their families; future plans include expansion to preschool-age children. In an innovative twist that helps introduce all families to the center and its resources, basic registration for school now takes place at the center

rather than in the school's administrative offices. The center offers parent education classes, adult education classes, and health care services such as immunizations and basic physicals. A team of family services advocates provides service planning, counseling, and some direct services. Complementing the school-based staff is an "extended team." Team members remain in their own agencies but are trained and ready to take referrals from the Hamilton center.

The center opened in the fall of 1991; as yet there are no outcome data available. However, because the New Beginnings leadership itself regards the center as an experiment from which they intend to draw lessons for wider implementation of school-linked services, this endeavor may well eventually provide some of the most useful data about the efficacy of this strategy.

### **Questions to Ask in Designing a School-linked Service Strategy**

In his article in this journal issue, Sid Gardner observes that successful planning and implementation of a school-linked service strategy depends on the willingness of planners to make clear and thoughtful choices about key design elements. The preceding section described various programs and initiatives that illustrate well what those elements are and how diverse the choices can be. To review, those who are planning a school-linked service strategy must answer a set of interrelated questions:

1. *What is the primary purpose or objective of the strategy?*

Traditionally, most program interventions have been intended to accomplish one or a combination of three purposes: (1) *remediation*, to alleviate or correct a problem; (2) *early intervention*, to respond

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to warning signs that a problem is emerging rather than waiting until it is fully developed; (3) and/or *prevention* of a problem by addressing those factors that are known or believed to be causes or contributors. The spectrum of possible purposes has been widened recently to focus on the strengths of families and children, rather than only their problems, and to provide general *support* (such as information and training) to enhance their abilities to cope with the normal questions and stresses of life. The earliest school-linked service efforts tended to be remedial in nature, directed in particular to

students on the verge of dropping out or to adolescent parents. Today, as the cited examples demonstrate, there is much more activity in the areas of early intervention and prevention. Support as a purpose of school-linked services, as of services in general, is still rare but of growing interest.

Absent any constraining factors, most would choose to act at an earlier rather than a later stage, to prevent—if not provide support—rather than wait until remediation is necessary. But other factors are rarely neutral and the choice of purpose must usually reflect what resources and consensus will allow. This often means responding to compelling problems that cry out for attention. Though this choice may be an uncomfortable one, if it is at least made consciously and in the context of the broader range of possible purposes, a vision can be set for future efforts, and short-term compromise need not become long-term complacency, with “Band-Aid” approaches. A clear and conscious choice of purpose is also key to setting outcome goals for which one can reasonably be held accountable and, if achieved, rewarded.

2. *Who is to be served?*

Related to the question of purpose is that of who will be served by the school-linked service effort. For example, will the effort target a particular subgroup of the population, such as those manifesting a problem of special concern, or will it be open to anyone? “Universal” coverage, like that in the New Jersey program, reduces the potential stigma attached to seeking services and facilitates intervention at early stages. Moreover, per-child or per-family program costs may be less in universal programs because earlier forms of intervention are less expensive than remediation, although this may be offset by a larger number of people seeking services. In addition, Heather Weiss cautions that high-risk families most in need may not avail themselves of universally available services without special outreach.<sup>7</sup> Other aspects of the “who” question illustrated by the cited examples include whether the effort will be primarily family-centered or child/youth-centered and whether it will focus on the children and families served by the school, as does San Diego’s New Beginnings effort, or whether it will focus on the whole community in which the school is located, as the Walbridge Caring Community project does for at least some of its services.

### 3. *What services will be offered?*

Answers to the why and who questions will set the basic parameters for deciding what is to be offered, although the choice may also be affected by the availability of resources and services. Generally speaking, with the growing recognition that many high-risk children and families need multiple, well-integrated, and readily accessible services, there is a strong desire to strive for comprehensiveness or the inclusion of as many of the services a youngster or family might need as can be accommodated. That is the objective of the New Jersey program and of the many proposals to set up “one-stop shopping” centers on school grounds. Often, though, resource limitations mean that planners must settle on a smaller selection of services, especially if the target is families or children whose circumstances will require intensive—and therefore expensive—intervention. Project Pride’s results show that a limited range of services can still lead to successful outcomes, if the services selected are well suited to the goals and are of sufficient scope to address at least the major factors affecting the outcome. An important rule of thumb, particularly when comprehensiveness is not possible, is to include the potential recipients of services and line-level staff in making choices about what will be offered, as Walbridge and New Beginnings have done.

### 4. *Where will services be located?*

The theme of this journal issue is school-linked rather than school-based services, an important distinction that allows for variation in where actual service delivery may take place. The idea of housing all services in a facility that is readily accessible to virtually all communities and that is set up to serve children is inherently attractive. But the question of location has both policy and pragmatic implications. Foremost is the issue of whether or not, in a given community, the school is viewed as a friendly institution to which families and children will readily turn for help and support. This can be a function both of how the school operates and of the parents’ own educational experience. In St. Louis, the Walbridge School was seen by the community as a positive force; in one of the New Jersey sites, the nearby Police Athletic League building was more inviting to the students and therefore became the locus of most program services. Robert Chaskin

### Questions to Ask in Designing a School-linked Service Strategy

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2. Who is to be served?
3. What services will be offered?
4. Where will services be located?
5. Who will be responsible for service delivery?

and Harold Richman’s article in this journal issue offers some cautions about using schools as a service base. Sometimes, of course, basing services in the school can be a way to change perceptions. For example, Missouri’s Parent and Child Education program puts adult literacy classes and early childhood activities in an elementary school so that the parents can become familiar and comfortable with the school their children will enter.

Even if the school is deemed to be a desirable center, the choice about service location may be affected by practical considerations, such as insufficient space or service agency inability to place staff at the school or to otherwise relocate services. When services are provided off-site, an effective “bridge” to span the distance, like that developed at the Probstfield Elementary School, is key. As discussed previously, at this school teachers received comprehensive information about services available for their students and families in the community. In addition, these community agencies have representatives at the school on parent-teacher conference days.

### 5. *Who will be responsible for service delivery?*

Most effective planners of school-linked services readily agree that, although instructional staff must have a role in developing the effort and in helping to connect students and their families to available services, they should not be expected to be service providers themselves. The lament of school personnel that schools cannot do everything is well-founded and, indeed, one of the attractions of today’s school-linked service movement is that it creates an explicit capacity to respond to nonacademic needs, rather than leaving that role de facto to an ill-equipped and overburdened school staff. Services may be provided by existing

agency staff members who are already performing the desired activities or who are reassigned to the new effort, or staff may be hired for a newly created program. As Gardner points out, a choice must also be made about governance—whether the school or an outside entity will be “in charge” of the service program or perhaps, as in San Diego, whether responsibility will be shared. It is extremely rare to find a school-linked service effort that is under the exclusive direction of school authorities, and many observers—such as Richman and Chaskin—question whether that would be desirable. At the same time, some linkage to school governance is probably necessary if the school-linked service effort is ever to be well integrated with the regular operations of the school itself.

### **Systemic Change to Improve Long-term Prospects for Children and Families**

Whatever the specific design choices, the issue of how school-linked services relate to basic operations gets at a matter of fundamental concern. Will school-linked service programs remain occasional and isolated appendages to regular school and service operations, with little effect on or connection to those operations? Or will school-linked services become part of a well-integrated system of more effective supports for children and families? How these questions are answered in the long term will likely decide whether this move-

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*Systemic change in and among large bureaucratic organizations does not happen overnight.*

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ment becomes one more fad that failed or a sustained innovation that truly contributes to more successful outcomes for children and families.

Thus far, although we have few data on “people outcomes,” the school-linked efforts described in this article and the hundreds of efforts throughout the country have made advances that hold promise for greater effectiveness. Many schools and human services agencies are adopting policies and practices that reach beyond their traditional activities and reflect a

more holistic vision of what children and adults need to succeed. Through approaches such as cross-training, better referral techniques, and more convenient location of services, ways are being found to ensure that people who need a service are aware of and have ready access to that service. New services are being developed to fill identified gaps, and a base of mutual understanding and trust among the various systems working with children and families is being built.

To move from these positive beginnings to true systemic reform, however, specific programmatic initiatives will have to be complemented by deep-reaching changes in the basic ways people-serving systems operate and interact with one another. Those who seek to re-create and support nurturing communities must turn to elements that can help weave together school-linked services, an array of other special efforts to help children and families, and the core systems themselves into a functioning whole. Among such integrating elements might be:

- Ongoing processes and structures for joint planning that create an interagency framework of shared goals, that ensure systematic identification of current and emerging needs of children and families, and that facilitate joint decision making in responding to those needs
- Budgets and funding streams structured so that people can be served in the most appropriate manner and place, without threatening any system’s financial stability and ability to carry out its basic mission
- Policies that, while respecting legitimate privacy rights, allow for joint data collection and the exchange of relevant information to support coordinated action
- Designated persons, with responsibility and authority that span systems, who can help individuals and families develop problem-solving skills and use multiple services effectively
- Pre-service and in-service training that help staff members understand the communities in which they are working and the full array of resources that are available to help children and families
- Job descriptions and reconfigured caseload and classroom assignments that encourage and allow staff members flexi-

bility in responding to those with whom they are working

■ Accountability and reward structures that emphasize the achievement of positive outcomes rather than dictate specific inputs

Systemic change in and among large bureaucratic organizations does not happen overnight. Yet, this change must occur if we are to use effectively the limited resources available, achieve comprehensiveness in spite of necessary specialization, address the crises that prevent learning, and ensure the learning that avoids dependency.

## Conclusions

Admittedly, the experience to date with school-linked services is limited in scope and in scale, but it is nonetheless rich and exciting, for it affirms that institutions can work together in creative and effective ways and it represents a first, important step toward these broader changes. It is the start of a foundation on which to build a system of systems, an integrated structure of support that can help ensure the well-being and success of children, families, and the communities in which they live.

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