

School-Community Partnerships: A Typology for Guiding Systemic Educational Reform

Linda Valli, Amanda Stefanski, & Reuben Jacobson

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Dissatisfaction with U.S. schools has brought about a wide range of school reform efforts in recent years. As evidenced by the recent White House announcement of five “Promise Zones”, one of the most current, compelling ideas centers on school-community partnerships. In these reform initiatives, especially those undertaken in poor urban or rural areas, schools expand the traditional educational mission of the school to include health and social services for children and families. Partnerships seek to improve students’ overall wellbeing and life prospects, strengthen families, and sometimes even transform the broader community. To do that, they try to make the scope and organization of school services more integrated and comprehensive.

But, as has been noted in previous studies (e.g., Mawhinney 1994), a close look at these partnerships indicates a variety of models, strategies, and purposes that require different commitments and resources. In this paper, we discuss the underlying assumptions and history of school-community partnerships, describe our typology of partnerships, summarize the key findings on the benefits and challenges of these partnerships, and make recommendations for continued progress in this area of reform.¹

Our review of this literature convinced us that a typology of school-community partnerships is a necessary and useful tool in guiding systemic educational reform, research, and evaluation. Thinking about “types” of partnerships can enable practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to determine more systematically the conditions needed to support a particular partnership as well as the obstacles that need to be overcome to accomplish often ambitious goals. A clear, comprehensive typology can illuminate the possibilities and constraints of the varying approaches that are easy to lose sight of if partnerships are not differentiated by purpose, implementation requirements, theory of action, or other key analytic dimension.

¹ For a full report, see Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2013 or contact the first author at LRV@umd.edu.

Assumptions and History

The basic theory of action that motivates school-community partnerships is that students' educational and life prospects will improve if schools can attend to a broad array of needs. This generally means forging a closer working relationship with community and social service organizations to address the needs of students, their families, and sometimes the entire neighborhood. A theory of action for school-community partnerships thus posits that schools serve students' academic needs better if they can quickly and efficiently respond to the overall health and well-being of children and their families. Consistent with this perspective, Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at Johns Hopkins University's National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) have developed a theory for partnership programs that they call "overlapping spheres of influence." The authors lay out the argument that because "schools, homes, and communities are the main contexts for children's education...greater collaboration by the people in these environments benefits children's learning and development" (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011, p. 466).

Although current, this partnership ideal is far from new. During the Progressive Era, educators saw the school as the community's central institution, a place where citizens could gather for social activities, where adults could be trained for jobs, and where community members could learn more about one another (Dewey, 1902). Schools served as the sites where community members could hear lectures, debate about civic issues, and use the facility for recreation. Social reformers who advocated for a larger role of government in helping poor families, sought new services such as vocational guidance, counseling, school lunches, playgrounds, health programs, and vacation schools (Cohen, 2005; Sedlak & Schlossman, 1985; Tyack, 1992). Community groups, government institutions, faith-based organizations, and others worked directly within school buildings, sometimes in

partnership with educators, at other times, simply using school facilities to aid needy communities.

In the early 1990s a contemporary community school movement started with Joy Dryfoos's 1994 influential book, *Full-Service Schools: A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*. Through her work in the public health sector, Dryfoos concluded that schools cannot meet the challenges students bring to school on their own and that education and social service systems must work together to address children's many needs. She argued that events in society encouraged schools to incorporate health and social services into school operations and that the phenomenon of full-service schools are the "wave of the future." As Harris and Hoover (2003) have written, Dryfoos's work "became a rallying point for those struggling to define this movement" (p. 206). Today, community schools and similar collaborative initiatives rely on numerous types of partners to support their efforts.

Current Models of School-Community Partnerships

But, as noted above, reformers do not always mean the same thing when they talk about community schools, full-service schools, and school-community partnerships. These reform ideas are not always the same in structure and intent. As Dryfoos herself (2002, 2005) has wondered: Should these partnerships be thought of as reform strategies, collaborative programs, or new institutions? As we reviewed the literature, we quickly realized that authors use different terminology to describe the same phenomenon—or the same terminology to describe different phenomena. To untangle the messy array of school-community partnerships, we developed the following typology based on overall goals and implications for organizational change. Arranged from the least to the most comprehensive in purpose and design, the four categories within this typology are: *Family and*

School Based Partnerships			Placed Based
Family/Interagency Collaboration	Full-Service Schools	Full-Service Community Schools	Community Development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate service delivery • Promote student learning & development • Set specific and limited goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver school-based service • Provide academic, health, and social services • Wrap social, family, and health services around educational goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver coordinated, school-based set of services with community input • Promote community & parent engagement • Engage families as key players, partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the school as a social center • Provide a broad array of services • Seek to strengthen community infrastructure

Interagency Collaboration, Full-Service Schools, Full-Service Community Schools, and the Community Development model. We describe and offer examples of these partnership types below.

We do not claim that each example is a perfect fit within that category, but rather that the *written accounts* of the partnerships illustrate particular characteristics of that reform model. Because articles are written for different purposes, authors often attend only to those dimensions of the partnership that are relevant to their purpose (e.g., evaluation of after-school programs vs. description of decision-making structures). Therefore, we are unlikely to get a full picture of any partnership from the written materials available to us. In addition, national organizations, such as Communities in Schools (CIS), can include hundreds of affiliate members that, collectively, are unlikely to fall into only one category. Individually, partnerships are quite likely to change over time—taking on the characteristics of more complex or simpler models.

Family/Interagency Collaboration: We name this first, and simplest, model *Family and Interagency Collaboration* because its primary purpose is to increase family and community involvement in promoting student learning and development. Partners in this model are motivated by the belief that coordinating the delivery of educational, health, and social

services is key to strengthening families and meeting the learning and developmental needs of students. This collaborative model requires the organizational commitment of each partner.

A common strategy employed in this type of school-community partnership is after-school programs that “encourage students to be actively engaged in learning activities and promote strong and positive development” (Krenichyn, Clark, & Benitez 2008, p. 23). Services offered almost always go beyond academic to include health and social service needs of both students and families. While these collaborations are “intentional efforts to create and sustain relationships among a K-12 school or school district and a variety of both formal and informal organizations and institutions in the community” (Melaville, 1998), their scope is less ambitious than that of a *Full-Service School*. Unlike that model these partnerships do not attempt to offer a comprehensive range of family and student services at the school site.

Full-Service Schools: Similar to the collaborative model described above, *Full-Service Schools* seek fruitful partnerships with community agencies to serve the needs of the whole child and his or her family. Like many of those interagency partnerships, this model focuses more on serving families than on engaging families in the life of the school. But unlike the model above, which tends to identify specific

and limited goals for partners to accomplish, a *Full-Service School* attempts to integrate a full-range of academic, health, and social services and is, thus, often referred to as a “wrap-around” school. By expanding the school day and setting aside space within the school, a *Full-Service School* literally wraps social, family, and health services around the educational time and space dimensions of the school. Pointing to the necessity for organizational change, Dryfoos (1995) writes of the responsibility of school systems to partner with community agencies to produce a new, “seamless” type of institution that allows maximum responsiveness and accessibility to service. This focus on organizational change makes *Full-Service Schools* a more difficult model to create than *Family and Interagency Collaborations*, but potentially more efficacious. As an example of the *Full-Service School* model, the Comer School Development Program (SDP), in place in some Maryland schools, is designed around the belief that student learning and development are impeded, not because of individual flaws or deficits, but because of gaps in the support network (Comer, 1984).

Full-Service Community Schools: Pushing beyond the goal of strengthening networks in the model above, the theory of action behind *Full-Service Community Schools* promotes equal voice among the partners who form the network. Advocates of this model argue that in addition to a coordinated, school-based set of services, students’ learning and development are best served with cultural as well as organizational change—when democratic decision-making occurs through community input. In this model, community and parental engagement replace more traditional ideas of service provision, which typify the previous models. Schools do not merely draw community resources into the school, but “open themselves to the community” (Schutz, 2006, p. 704). This change shifts power away from providers and regards families not just as recipients of services

but as key players whose leadership is to be cultivated (Oppenheim, 1999). No longer are families simply clients to be served, but essential, vocal partners. Some consider this to be a “new paradigm” for school-community partnerships, replacing a deficit perspective on parents and communities (needing service) with an asset perspective that values and builds on what “parents and community members contribute to school change and to children’s learning” (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002, p. 10).

Community Development: The most comprehensive model described in our typology is that of *Community Development*. As evident in our choice of title, this model goes well beyond the other three in its goals and vision. Evoking Dewey’s (1902) century-old conception of the school as a social center, schools become not only places of continuous intellectual growth for both children *and* adults, not only sites for extended agencies and social services, but also points of contact for community members to deal with pressing political, economic, and cultural matters. Because schools are still seen as “one of the most important social institutions in impoverished neighborhoods” (Schutz, 2006, p. 723), they are a primary base for reform. According to the Coalition for Community Schools, community development means that participants work together to strengthen social networks, the physical infrastructure, and the community’s economic viability (Samberg & Sheeran, 2000). Advocates of this model envision bidirectional change. Rather than focusing solely on student and family development as a way to effect broader community change, they theorize that strengthening the community infrastructure (reducing poverty, increasing job possibilities, improving housing, etc.) is essential to child/family development and school improvement.

In this regard, the *Community Development* model is more broadly place-based than school-

based. Wrap-around services can be provided at other convenient, community-based locations as long as the school remains centrally involved in integrating them. Consistent with social capital theory, “tipping point” is a term that has been used to capture the vision behind this place-based reform strategy. The idea is that children do better if those around them are doing better. If a critical mass of families believe and behave in ways that enhance their life chances “then participation would come to seem normal, and so would the values that went with it: a sense of responsibility, a belief that there was a point to self-improvement, a hopefulness about the future” (Tough, 2009, p. 4). So community developers invest in a broad array of services in part to halt the flow of middle-class families from these neighborhoods and, thus, improve the life prospects of the poorest neighborhood residents (Proscio, 2004). The Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) is probably the most well-known example. In addition to its Promise Academies, HCZ has created more than 20 programs, including Community Pride, Baby College, Harlem Gems Head Start, Harlem Peacemaker, TRUCE Fitness and Nutrition Center, a Community Center, and a “Single Stop” walk-in service that provides free financial, tax, family, and legal counseling and referrals (www.hcz.org).

Research on Model Effects

Typologizing school-community partnerships is an important first step in assessing their success. Each type of partnership we identified has a distinct purpose that necessitates certain types of organizational change or commitment. All four, however, aim to address the needs of the whole child—academic, social, health, emotional—as well as attending to family needs. Because comparative studies examine differences between schools with and without community partners, not different types of partnerships, the relative success of the partnership models is impossible to determine.

We did, however, find examples of success across all four models.

Student/Family Outcomes: Perhaps not surprisingly, the most studied outcome—and the one with the most consistent record of success across all four models—was academic achievement, especially in mathematics (e.g., Adams, 2010; CIS, 2010; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Fox et al., 1999). There is also evidence showing literacy improvement (e.g., Dobbie & Fryer, 2011) as well as improved attendance, classroom behaviors, and attitudes toward school (e.g., Impact of City Connects, 2010, 2012; Krenichyn et al., 2008). Some studies also indicate that extended programs are particularly helpful to English language learners (e.g., Castrechini & London, 2012; Impact of City Connects, 2010).

One set of studies, carried out in our local context was of one of the first schools to implement the now long-standing *Linkages to Learning* program, a district-led *Full Service School* initiative. Conducted by University of Maryland researchers, the studies were based on a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design, with a control school, four years of data (1995-99), psychometrically-validated instruments, observations and interviews, and a high rate of participant response. In addition to traditional academic improvements, the researchers found a range of positive outcomes, including a decrease in students’ emotional stress levels, decreased parental depression over time, an increased sense of family cohesion, greater consistency in parenting practices, more consensus within couples about those practices, and less reliance on physical punishment than parents in the control school. Participating parents mentioned parenting workshops, English language classes, and greater access to social service agencies as being the most helpful to their own development and well being (Fox et al., 1999; Leone & Bartolotta, 2010; Leone, Lane, Arlen, & Peter, 1996).

Extending the school day and having a resource person on site were two important strategies used across the four models to meet the academic and social needs of students and families. But these two factors, in themselves, did not fully explain positive outcomes. The most rigorous study designs were random assigned experimental and quasi-experimental with carefully conceptualized, multiple measures (such as test scores, observations, interviews, surveys) used over time and with well-matched comparative schools. These studies help shed light on related or mediating variables. For example, among the important factors across a number of studies were adherence to the model of integrated student support (fidelity of implementation), the continuity of the service provision over time, length of student participation, and leadership support from both the school and partnership network (CIS, 2010; Krenichyn et al., 2008; Impact of City Connects, 2010; Millsap et al., 2000). Studies of the *Full-Service Community School* model also indicate that important intervening variables for academic achievement were models that were fully implementation and sustained over time, trust in the schools, and family engagement (Adams, 2010; Castrechini, 2011). Without family engagement and trust across students, parents and educators, improved outcomes of extended services virtually disappeared.

A study of Comer's School Development Program (SDP) also raises a cautionary note about the relation among desirable outcomes. Although researchers found general satisfaction with enhanced services and improved school climate, they also found schools in which "mathematics achievement seemed to change for the worse in schools with higher implementation scores" (Cook et al., 1999, p. 574). This suggests that school conditions that promote achievement are not necessarily the conditions that improve student social outcomes. Without a strong academic climate in

the school, academic improvement seems unlikely, despite an improved social climate and satisfaction with the provision of a comprehensive set of social services.

Capacity/Infrastructure Outcomes: In addition to these common goals of extending the school day and social services to address a wide range of student and family needs, school-community partnerships beyond the *Family and Interagency Collaboration* model strive to have a number of additional outcomes. Was there evidence of success for these additional, and loftier, goals? Were *Full-Service Schools* able to establish comprehensive wrap-around services, essentially turning the local schoolhouse into a new type of institution? Did *Full-Service Community School* advocates achieve democratic decision-making and full-inclusion of parents and community groups as equal partners and group leaders? And were *Community Development* models able to transform whole neighborhoods, with evidence that partnerships simultaneously improved schools, transportation, housing, and job opportunities and avoided a "tipping point" of community decline?

Here there are also positive findings, but the evidence is weaker. Fewer studies examine these more complex goals and they tend to rely on self-reports of participants. Claims (e.g., health, housing, employment, and safety) are often based on quite limited, descriptive, and selective data. This is consistent with what others have found. In a broad review of the literature on school-community engagement, Schutz (2006) discusses community development efforts and concludes that although school engagement in community development is promising, there was little evidence of impact beyond the creation of full-service schools or the encouragement of service learning projects. Quane and Wilson (2011) drew a similar conclusion about studies of the Harlem Children's Zone.

The studies of organizational and infrastructure change that do exist indicate how difficult it is to create new types of institutions and transform whole neighborhoods. Implementation and sustainability problems fell into four broad areas: organization, communication, resources, and leadership. Surveys and interviews with participants unearthed a host of problems including lack of central decision making, ad hoc role specifications, redundancy of data requests, absence of Memoranda of Understanding, high turnover of key staff, disconnect between teachers and full-service staff, and inadequate funding and fiscal autonomy (Leone et al., 1996; LFA 2005a, 2005b, 2006; OMG Center, 2011). But some of these ambitious partnerships were successful, increasing the school's capacity, improving its climate, attending to health and adult education needs, and developing collaborative leadership styles. Wrap-around programs have included bi-lingual services, health clinics, counseling, mentors, and advocates (Adams, 2010; Keith, 1999; Impact of City Connects, 2010; Proscio, 2004; Whalen, 2002; Williams, 2010). There is also some promise of sustained improvements in housing, health, employment, and transportation in the *Community Development* model (Proscio, 2004).

Recommendations

Based on our review of the school-community partnership literature, we make the following recommendations for community activists, researchers and policymakers and encourage close collaboration among them in acting upon all three.

Strengthen and sustain partnerships: Perhaps the most important recommendation for community activists that comes from the literature is the need for ongoing work in strengthening and sustaining partnerships. This holds true even for *Family and Interagency Collaborations*, which, of the four partnership models, require the least amount of

organizational change. Without institutional resolve, partnerships easily unravel when resources are tight or when key educators, family members, or community organizers move on to other sites or projects. School-community advocates have learned a great deal about the mechanisms needed to put and keep these partnerships in place. But acting upon that knowledge requires both capacity and commitment.² Although studies generally provide evidence of partnership success, no individual partnership is guaranteed success, which does not occur without quality and fidelity of implementation. And while implementation is often seen as the responsibility of the grass-roots users, reformers themselves can help with implementation efforts. As external evaluators of the Comer SDP schools have argued, a “practical theory of school reform has to be specific enough that schools can follow the substantive theory and implement its details with ‘reasonable’ fidelity” (Cook et al., 1999, p. 581).

Conduct on-going, detailed evaluations: For researchers, the need for on-going and detailed evaluation on both partnership processes and outcomes cannot be emphasized enough. As indicated in the findings section above, the vast majority of studies, focused on student achievement test scores. Given the school's central mission to facilitate student learning, examining academic indicators is to be expected. What was disappointing was that the broader goals of school-community partnerships, such as improving student and family health and living conditions, viewed as critical to student learning within their theories of action, often went unexamined. The lack of outcome data in these areas is particularly ironic given the subtitle of Dryfoos's (1994) early book on the Full-Service School model: *A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*. Few partnerships seem to have

² See www.communityschools.org for valuable resources on developing and evaluating partnerships.

created the type of integrated databases that enable comprehensive, systematic, and rigorous evaluation such as the School-Based Youth Services Program developed in Iowa almost two decades ago (Walker & Hackmann, 1999). Some current evaluation models worth emulating are from Impact of City Connects (2010) and Community in Schools (2010). Both of these partnerships have developed a comprehensive set of data collection instruments and constructed integrated data management systems that can be a model for others.³

Develop integrated, comprehensive databases:

Our final recommendation is for policymakers: to help provide resources for community organizations, schools, and researchers to develop comprehensive databases so they can adequately track and study the multiple goals of these partnerships over time. As is apparent in the studies we reviewed, it is only when researchers have large comparative samples and are able to apply rigorous analytic tools over time, (e.g., structural equation and multi-level modeling vs. descriptive statistics and simple correlations), that the effects can be meaningfully untangled and interpreted. Once studies move beyond reports of satisfaction or simple correlations to mapping complex relationships among variables, researchers are confronted with a series of questions that their studies can begin to answer. In addition to the issues raised about the Comer schools, another key problem area is disentangling the effects of the implementation's various components. Although this is a common methodological problem in studying interventions, it is particularly acute in the *Community Development* model because of its multi-dimensional scope. On the one hand, advocates could argue that partnership models are holistic, that all principles and components are necessary; on the other hand, with resources

always in short supply, reformers will want to be as efficient and judicious in their efforts as possible.

Taken as a whole, the sources we reviewed build a strong theoretical framework with a coherent and tested theory of change. They provide evidence that school-community partnership efforts around the country are based on sound empirical evidence on the importance of parent and community involvement, building trust, attending to the whole child, and having the resources to respond to specific academic and social needs. But compared to studying traditional school processes and improvement efforts, studying school-community partnerships is an incredibly complex effort, itself requiring strong and sustained networks of support.

³ The federally funded Promise Neighborhoods, Choice Neighborhoods, and newest Promise Zones all hold potential for advancing this agenda.

Examples of School-Community Partnerships, by Model, in Maryland

Family/Interagency Collaboration Examples

In 1995, the *National Network of Partnership Schools* (NNPS) at Johns Hopkins University began providing technical assistance to schools and school districts to support research-based family and community involvement. The founder, Joyce Epstein, also directs JHU's *Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, whose mission is to "conduct and disseminate research, programs, and policy analyses that produce new and useful knowledge and practices that help parents, educators, and members of communities work together to improve schools, strengthen families, and enhance student learning and development" (www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm).

For almost 20 years, the *Suitland Technology Education Engagement Resource Center* in Prince George's County has partnered with local schools and non-profits to serve the needs of children and families and to build neighborhood capacity. A number of collaborative initiatives are currently in place at Drew Freeman Middle School, including a multi-disciplinary Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics hub that focuses on nutrition, agriculture, and the environment. Students from the UMD College of Education work with the middle schoolers in their Summer STEM Academy. The Center has also received funding from the National Science Foundation and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for an innovative Climate, Ocean, and Weather Institute to help middle school students become the next generation of environmental scientists, stewards, and leaders. The Center is behind the Suitland Urban Farm project, co-sponsored with *growingSOUL*, District 7 Councilwoman Karen Toles and others. Housed at Drew Freeman, the farm teaches middle school students environmental science while producing locally grown vegetables for neighborhood distribution, encouraging healthier eating options, and supporting job creation in the community.

CASA de Maryland, the largest Latino and immigrant organization in our state, is working with the three elementary schools in Langley Park (Prince George's County) on a parent engagement initiative: *Learning Together*. With funding from a USDE Investing in Innovation Development Grant, CASA has partnered with Prince George's County Public Schools and the Family School Working Group from the UMD College of Education to support the community's 1,760 families with children under 18 years-of-age, over 80% of whom speak a language other than English at home. Key elements of the *Learning Together* initiative are neighborhood-based education promoters; parents-as-teachers classes; an event series to build bridges between schools and families; and professional development for teachers to promote parent engagement and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Full-Service School Example

Linkages to Learning is a collaboration between the Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) system and community-based service providers. As described on the program website, *Linkages to Learning* “provides accessible services to at-risk children and their families to improve adjustment to and performance in school, home, and community. Prevention and early intervention services include health, mental health, social services and educational support (including academic tutoring for students, mentoring and adult education classes, such as ESOL and literacy) to improve the well-being of children and their families through a collaborative delivery of school-based services that address the social, economic, health, and emotional issues that interfere with the academic success of a child.” MCPS elementary and middle schools with high rates of poverty qualify as *Linkage to Learning* sites. Principles underlying the program include interdisciplinary teams and an integrated, seamless service delivery that seeks to minimize redundancies and efficiencies. Although *Linkage to Learning* programs are sponsored and directed by the school district, they operate at the school level. Each participating school has a site-based coordinator and resource team that work closely with an advisory group that comprises the various stakeholders. The specific services offered vary according to school and community needs.

Full-Service Community School Example

The *Baltimore City Community Schools Initiative* is a partnership of the city, the school district, and the Family League of Baltimore that coordinates school and community resources to promote student achievement and family and community well-being. Started in 2005, each community school has a full-time site coordinator responsible for managing programs and advocating for neighborhood students and families. The network has an integrated approach to academics, enrichment, health and social supports, youth and community development and family engagement in order to promote student success, strong families and healthy communities. Partnerships allow schools to become resources to the community and offer programs and opportunities that are open to all. The Family League works closely with this group of 20 schools on out-of-school programs that provide children and youth the opportunity to enjoy a safe, nurturing environment outside of school hours. Children and youth receive additional academic support, are afforded the opportunity to learn new skills, develop interests in athletics and the arts, and receive needed nutritional snacks and suppers. The UMD School of Social Work is coordinating work at eight community schools and university dental students provide free on-site dental care at the schools (<http://www.baltimorecommunityschools.org>).

Community Development Examples

In 1991, with a grant from the Enterprise Foundation's *Neighborhood Transformation Initiative* and in partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools and neighborhood organizations, the City of Baltimore targeted the Sandtown-Winchester area for community revitalization. According to an Annie E. Casey report, this was one of the first attempts at a comprehensive, integrated approach to community transformation. Notable achievements were 1,000+ affordable housing units, significant academic improvements in the neighborhood's elementary schools. Part of the legacy of this initiative was Baltimore's Community Schools Initiative, described above, which coordinates services with partners such as the Family League to "remove barriers to student and family success and deepen the experience of all its community members".

More recently (2011), Prince George's County launched a *Transforming Neighborhoods Initiative* that targets six communities facing economic, health, safety, and education challenges. Langley Park and Suitland (in examples described above) are two of those communities. Although the initiative grew out of a crime-prevention endeavor, the county determined that taking a holistic approach would likely make a greater positive impact in these communities. Interdisciplinary teams, led by a Deputy Chief Administrative Officer, inventory neighborhood needs, devise an action plan, and meet regularly to assess progress made on a wide range of quality of life indicators. The importance of those indicators varies across the communities, but include violent and property crime rates, school absenteeism, student achievement scores in reading and mathematics, housing foreclosures and property values, pedestrian injuries or deaths, income levels, and the number of residents on public assistance. The goal is to leverage the community's assets to support its revitalization while attending to its negative conditions.

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The Maryland Equity Project seeks to improve education through research that supports an informed public policy debate on the quality and distribution of educational opportunities. It conducts, synthesizes, and distributes research on key educational issues in Maryland and facilitates collaboration between researchers and policymakers. The Maryland Equity Project is a program in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at The University of Maryland.

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Maryland Equity Project
College of Education
University of Maryland
2110 Benjamin Building
College Park, MD 20740

Phone: 301-932-1934
Email: mdequity@umd.edu
Website: www.mdequity.org
Twitter @mdequity

About the Authors

Linda Valli, Ph.D., is the Jeffrey and David Mullan Professor in Teacher Education and Professional Development, Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership, College of Education at the University of Maryland.

Amanda Stefanski is a doctoral student in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership, College of Education at the University of Maryland.

Reuben Jacobson is Senior Associate for Research and Advocacy with the Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership and a doctoral student in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership, College of Education at the University of Maryland.