



# Maximizing the Promise of Community Schools

Streamlining Wraparound Services for ESEA

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Theodora Chang April 2011



Center for American Progress



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# Introduction and summary

As Congress moves to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, it should authorize a program to provide comprehensive services that create the conditions for students to learn in the classroom. These “wraparound” support services range from primary health and dental care to family engagement strategies. For many students, especially those who attend school in high-poverty communities, wraparound services are a vital complement to direct classroom interventions.

Congress should build upon existing federal efforts and implement the following recommendations to address the need for wraparound services:

- Consolidate the Full-Service Community Schools program and the Promise Neighborhoods program to maximize efficiency and resources
- Ensure that a consolidated program encourages the coordination of services
- Ensure that a consolidated program requires a planning year for grantees undertaking new initiatives
- Continue to allow school improvement funds and 21st Century Community Learning Center program funds to support a community schools strategy

The unmet needs of students have recently come into sharper focus in a nation where 42 percent of children live in low-income families.<sup>1</sup> When used in conjunction with highly effective classroom interventions, wraparound services can be a powerful lever to help close the achievement gap and level the playing field for low-income students.

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## Leveraging a community approach to raise student achievement

The Harlem Children’s Zone, or HCZ, a 100-block community revitalization effort, was launched in 2001 under the premise that raising student achievement is impossible if more pressing health and socio-emotional needs are not being met. Today, the HCZ education initiative includes pre-kindergarten, parenting seminars,

expanded learning opportunities, and a pipeline of charter schools serving students from elementary to high school. HCZ health and wellness programs include an Asthma Initiative, Healthy Living Initiative, and foster care prevention and family strengthening programs. HCZ served over 10,000 children and over 7,400 adults in 2009.<sup>2</sup> President Barack Obama has called it “an all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck, anti-poverty effort that is literally saving a generation of children.”<sup>3</sup>

While there has been some debate about the effectiveness of HCZ charter schools relative to other charter schools in New York City, overall preliminary results for the initiative are promising.<sup>4</sup> Fifty-three percent of the program’s first cohort of 4-year-old children scored “delayed” or “very delayed” on the Bracken Basic Concept Scale for school readiness in 2001. By the end of that year, only 26 percent scored “delayed.”<sup>5</sup> In 2009, 100 percent of third graders enrolled in HCZ middle schools tested at or above grade level on the statewide math exam, outperforming their peers throughout the state.<sup>6</sup>

HCZ’s impressive gains in student achievement have galvanized the federal government toward enacting similar programs. There are two existing programs within the U.S. Department of Education, or ED, which aim to similarly integrate communities, children, and schools—the Full-Service Community Schools program and the Promise Neighborhoods program. Neither program is authorized under the current iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, but the upcoming reauthorization of the law provides a key opportunity to address this void. In the following pages, we lay out a brief history of each program and provide a rationale for Congress to authorize a streamlined wraparound services program that incorporates the strengths of both Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods.

# Importance of wraparound services

There is significant potential for wraparound services to address the unmet, non-academic needs that hinder students' ability to achieve in school, as the Harlem Children's Zone example shows. They "wrap around" traditional classroom learning by targeting the key academic, physical, mental, social, and emotional needs of children. Examples of wraparound services include health, mental, and dental care; English as a Second Language or adult literacy classes for parents; job training; and after-school programming. Students cannot learn if they are missing class due to an asthma attack that could have been managed with better chronic care, or if they cannot concentrate in class due to critical dental issues that could have been prevented.

Research shows that poverty adversely impacts the cognitive development and academic achievement of youth.<sup>7</sup> A study of students in Washington state found that health risks and academic risks affect each other, but health interventions can narrow achievement disparities.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, research suggests that parent involvement has a positive impact on student achievement, regardless of socioeconomic or race/ethnic background.<sup>9</sup> These and other studies highlight the interconnected nature of student achievement, physical well-being, and family and community support.

Federal support for wraparound services for students has historically been interwoven into several different programs, including 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Well-Rounded Education, and Successful, Safe, and Healthy Students.<sup>10</sup> Currently, the two main federal programs dedicated to wraparound services are the Full-Service Community Schools program and the Promise Neighborhoods program. The programs share similar structures and objectives, and serve similar communities. The overlap between the two indicates strong potential for removing them from their silos.

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## History and purpose of the Full-Service Community Schools program

The push for community schools that offered onsite social and health services at schools took flight in the late 1990s. The Coalition for Community Schools, an alliance of national, state, and local organizations that support a community schools strategy, built on previous movements to advocate for:

*“A community school, operating in a public school building... open to students, families, and the community before, during, and after school, seven days a week, all year long... operated jointly through a partnership between the school system and one or more community agencies...”<sup>11</sup>*

Community schools formally received government support in 2008 with the first Full-Service Community Schools program grants. ED defines a full-service community school as the following:

*“A full-service community school means a public elementary or secondary school that works with its local educational agency and community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other public or private entities to provide a coordinated and integrated set of comprehensive academic, social, and health services that respond to the needs of its students, students’ family members, and community members... [and] promotes family engagement by bringing together many partners in order to offer a range of supports and opportunities for students, students’ family members, and community members.”<sup>12</sup>*

The Full-Service Community Schools program provides funds for the implementation of programs that coordinate academic, social, and health services to improve academic achievement. Eligible applicants consist of “a consortium of a local education agency and one or more community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, or other public or private entities.”<sup>13</sup> This requirement ensures that public schools and local organizations partner to offer key services to students. Grantees must provide at least three services from a list of eligible services that includes: high-quality early learning programs, parental involvement and adult education programs, mentoring and other youth development programs, primary health and dental care, and more.

Eligible applicants include organizations currently utilizing a community schools strategy as well as those interested in developing a community school from scratch. The entire funding award covers both planning and implementation

of the proposed project, and a funded project period could last up to five years. Full-Service Community Schools requires grantees to not only secure resources, but also ensure that they are maximized to benefit students. Each proposed full-service community school must have a Full-Service Community Schools program coordinator who works full-time to align all participating partners and the provided resources by working closely with the school principal and key community stakeholders.

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## History and purpose of the Promise Neighborhoods program

Presidential candidate Barack Obama pledged to “...change the odds for neighborhoods all across America” and “combat urban poverty [by] replicat[ing] the Harlem Children’s Zone in 20 cities across the country,” in his 2007 campaign speech titled “Changing the Odds for Urban America.”<sup>14</sup> He incorporated this pledge into his official campaign policy proposals, and saw it come to fruition in April 2010 when ED opened the first Promise Neighborhoods competition.<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of Promise Neighborhoods is to provide a continuum of cradle-through-college-to-career solutions, defined as “a set of programs, policies, practices, services, systems, and supports, with strong schools at the center, designed to ensure that children in a Promise Neighborhood improve academic and developmental outcomes from cradle to college to career.”<sup>16</sup>

ED defined two types of eligible applicants: nonprofit organizations (including faith-based nonprofit organizations), and institutions of higher education. Eligible applicants were required to operate or at least partner with a school in the proposed geographic area, and be a current provider of services along the cradle-through-career continuum in the proposed geographic area. Partner schools had to fall under ED’s definition of “persistently lowest-achieving or low-performing” schools. Proposals also had to focus on a neighborhood in which there were “multiple signs of distress” and involve local residents in a governing or advisory board.

Selected grantees received one-year grants in September 2010 to develop a plan for implementing a Promise Neighborhood. ED also announced its intention to conduct future competitions for implementation grants that would allow applicants to carry out their plans.

Applications were evaluated based on their commitment and ability to significantly improve and transform the educational and developmental outcomes of all children in the most distressed communities by:

1. Supporting efforts to improve child outcomes
2. Identifying and increasing the capacity of eligible entities that are focused on achieving results and building a college-going culture in the neighborhood
3. Building a continuum of academic programs and family and community supports, from the cradle through college to career, with a strong school or schools at the center
4. Integrating programs and breaking down agency “silos” to implement solutions effectively and efficiently across agencies
5. Supporting the efforts of eligible entities to sustain and “scale up” proven, effective solutions
6. Learning about the overall impact of Promise Neighborhoods and about the relationship between particular strategies and student outcomes, including a rigorous evaluation of the program<sup>17</sup>

Grantees are required to collect data on a mandatory set of academic indicators created by ED, including student proficiency in core subjects and high school graduation rates. They must also collect data on a family and community support, but have the option of choosing from a sample list of indicators provided by ED or creating their own.

# Common ground

Promise Neighborhoods and Full-Service Community Schools have significant areas of overlap that indicate the two programs could be consolidated. As mentioned above, both programs share the explicit purpose of improving student achievement through providing coordinated wraparound services that address students' unmet needs. Both fundamentally recognize the interconnected nature of academic, social, emotional, and physical development of students and their communities. Other similarities further underscore that the two programs could be combined to maximize their effectiveness.

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## Organizational and funding structure

Promise Neighborhoods applicants must be single entities partnering with other entities, while Full-Service Community Schools applicants must be a consortium. However, both programs encourage partnerships between schools and “anchor institutions”—public or nonprofit entities such as higher-education institutions, hospitals, and/or community-based youth development organizations—to offer key services (i.e. health services, expanded learning opportunities, adult education).

Both were also created as discretionary grant programs within ED's Office of Innovation, and are currently funded through the Fund for the Improvement of Education program at similar levels. In fiscal year 2008 and fiscal year 2009, the Full-Service Community Schools program was funded at \$5 million. In fiscal year 2010, the program received \$10 million in appropriations, which was awarded to 10 new grantees and 10 grantees from the previous fiscal years. The average award was approximately \$500,000. In fiscal year 2010, the Promise Neighborhoods program received \$10 million in appropriations, which was awarded to 21 grantees. The average award was in the range of \$400,000 - \$500,000. Both programs require grantees to demonstrate likelihood of sustainability by securing matching funds or a similar in-kind commitment from outside donors.<sup>18</sup>

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## Applicant perception

Educators and advocates in the field have recognized the overlap between programs as well. Tony Smith, superintendent of Oakland Unified School District in California, applied for a Promise Neighborhoods planning grant to enact his vision for a “full-service community school district.”<sup>19</sup> Although Oakland’s application was ultimately not selected, Smith clearly saw alignment between the purpose of the Promise Neighborhoods grant and the full-service community schools strategy that he wanted to implement.<sup>20</sup>

Another organization, the nonprofit Youth Policy Institute, or YPI, in Los Angeles, California, applied for and received both a Promise Neighborhoods grant and a Full-Service Community Schools grant. The grants are applied to different programs in different cities, but fulfill similar aims of efficiently providing low-income families with services that help youth succeed in school.<sup>21</sup> In its Promise Neighborhoods proposal, YPI also noted that “The planning period will build upon specific experience [from] the planning program implemented for the Full-Service Community Schools program operated by YPI and partners in Los Angeles in 2008.”

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## Services and communities served

Both grantees provide many of the same services. All grantees from both programs incorporate elements of academic enrichment such as expanded learning time, summer programming, as well as family engagement strategies. Sixty-eight percent of grantees from both programs provided primary health and dental services, and 75 percent offered early childhood services.<sup>22</sup>

The two programs also aim to serve similar communities. A prime example is the Lawrence Public School District in Lawrence, Massachusetts, which is currently a partner organization for both a Promise Neighborhoods initiative and a Full-Service Community School program. The city of Lawrence has the lowest median family income in the state, as well as the state’s lowest four-year high school graduation rate.<sup>23</sup> Though the grant dollars will reach different schools within the district, the community as a whole will receive similar services from two separate grant programs.

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## Goals and objectives

In many ways, it is hard to distinguish Full-Service Community Schools from Promise Neighborhoods. In fact, ED Deputy Assistant Secretary Jim Shelton said the following regarding the two programs in a recent interview:<sup>24</sup>

*“Promise Neighborhood and Full Service Community Schools are much, much more similar than different. Both approaches focus on results, leverage other resources and partners, and take a comprehensive approach to supporting educational success. Perhaps the primary difference is the scope—Promise Neighborhoods anticipates a complete continuum of supports, with great schools at the center, from birth through college to career. Many community schools focus on a single school, or a network of schools within a community, to become a hub of supports and opportunities for children, youth, and families. That said, we do see some community school models taking a cradle to career approach as well, which is great!”*

Shelton’s comments suggest that full-service community schools can be building blocks for the broader Promise Neighborhoods, but the fundamental goals and objectives of the programs are the same.

## Federal support: Gaining momentum

Both the Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods programs enjoy strong support from key political players at the federal level.

Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-MD) recently introduced the Full-Service Community Schools Act of 2011 (H.R. 1090) in the 112th Congress. The bill would competitively award implementation grants to partnerships between local education agencies and public or private entities as well as to state collaboratives that support the development of community schools. It also includes dedicated funding for rural applicants. In the Senate, Sen. Ben Nelson (D-NE) has introduced a similar bill, S. 585, the Full-Service Community Schools Act of 2011. Members of Congress from both parties have expressed significant interest in community schools and have introduced a number of bills supporting wraparound services.

President Obama strongly supports Promise Neighborhoods, and he requested an increase of \$140 million for the program in his fiscal year 2012 budget request. The same budget request, however, does not include stand-alone funding for full-service community schools. Instead, it lists community schools as one of many items that could be supported with 21st Century Community Learning Centers program funds. The other items include after-school, summer enrichment, summer school, and expanded learning time programs. The Full-Service Community Schools program is more closely aligned with Promise Neighborhoods than with 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and its focus on wraparound services would be better preserved through program consolidation with Promise Neighborhoods.

# Federal policy recommendations

- **Recommendation No. 1:** Congress should consolidate the Full-Service Community Schools program and the Promise Neighborhoods program in order to maximize efficiency and resources.

The upcoming reauthorization of ESEA provides a perfect opportunity to authorize a consolidated wraparound services program. Such a program would incorporate the strengths of Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods by continuing to focus on meeting the academic, physical, mental, and social needs of children and their communities. Federal dollars from both programs could be leveraged into one streamlined wraparound services program supported by more funding than either currently has alone. Their shared purpose and mission to serve similar communities would allow entities interested in both programs to submit just one application. The programs' similar organizational structures and funding levels would ease the consolidation transition and lessen logistical hurdles.

- **Recommendation No. 2:** Congress should authorize a consolidated program that encourages the coordination of services.

A key strength of the Full-Service Community Schools program is that it encourages alignment of services by requiring that grantees hire a full-time program coordinator. An authorized wraparound services program should also provide a mechanism for coordinating services among community organizations.

- **Recommendation No. 3:** Congress should ensure that a consolidated program requires a planning year for grantees undertaking new initiatives.

One of the strengths of Promise Neighborhoods is that it awards one-year planning grants to encourage smart allocation of resources during the initial phase of the project. Planning is integral to the success and sustainability of wraparound

services, and a planning grant offers the additional benefit of allowing the government to confirm that grantees are well qualified before investing more money in their project's implementation.

A mandatory planning period for grantees undertaking new initiatives also provides grantees with time to accurately assess community needs, which is especially important because the ED rarely approves changes to the scope and objectives of an approved project.<sup>25</sup> To that extent, an authorized wraparound services program should provide Phase 1 planning grants to develop a plan targeting the specific needs of students and communities, as well as Phase 2 implementation grants to carry out the blueprints. Applicants seeking to expand an existing wraparound services initiative will not be required to apply for a Phase 1 planning grant and can apply directly for a Phase 2 implementation grant.

- **Recommendation No. 4:** Congress should continue to allow school improvement funds and 21st Century Community Learning Centers program funds to support a community schools strategy.

Several other federal programs currently support aspects of the community schools strategy. ED guidance for the Title I School Improvement Grants states that social-emotional and community-oriented services may be supported with SIG funds in a school implementing a turnaround model.<sup>26</sup> The 21st Century Community Learning Centers program provides opportunities for academic enrichment and additional services such as family literacy programming and youth development activities.<sup>27</sup> We believe that it will be most effective to combine Full-Service Community Schools with Promise Neighborhoods, but it is important to note that this should not prevent other programs from continuing to support a community schools strategy or aspects of that strategy.

# Conclusion

Creating and sustaining strong academic gains often requires addressing unmet student needs that are nonacademic. The Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods programs fill this void with similar goals and strategies to reach students outside the classroom but inside the school. In tight fiscal times, it makes sense for legislators to consolidate these similar programs to leverage current resources wisely and to authorize a comprehensive wraparound services program in the next version of ESEA.

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Theodora Chang is an Education Policy Analyst at American Progress. Her work focuses on issues related to community schools and human capital. Prior to joining American Progress, she worked for the U.S. Department of Education as a program specialist in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Innovation and Improvement. She also worked at the district level on a student incentives pilot program for DC Public Schools.

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