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Community schools: A place-based approach to education and neighborhood change

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Executive Summary

The institutions of a neighborhood are vital to its health and economic strength, and public schools are one of the most important shared institutions. They function not only as centers for providing education but also as hubs for communities to organize a range of supports and opportunities for children and their families.

In the growing attention to "place-based" strategies for tackling health and social needs, community schools are commanding attention. Community schools are places where educators, families, nonprofits, businesses, faith-based institutions, and community members form teams and develop partnerships to create the conditions for children to learn and thrive. Such school-based partnerships provide social services and supports, enriching educational opportunities, healthcare, mental health services, adult education, and nutrition programs, with a strong emphasis on equity and making greatest use of the community's strengths.

Community schools have emerged from America's long history of exploring schools as community hubs. The number of such schools has grown significantly over the past 10 years, with an estimated 5,000 now in operation. The evidence indicates impacts on attendance, health, school climate, and achievement. But such school-hubs also face challenges that need to be addressed:

- Sustained and scalable funding is often lacking.
- Cooperating and sharing control with partners is not easy.
- "Place" falls on a continuum, requiring any school-hub to be seen as part of a wider network.
- The research is growing, but is limited, and data are difficult to collect.

As attention to this education and community change reform grows, we will continue to learn more about its impact on schools, families, and communities.

Public schools are one of the last great shared places in our communities. For many, schools are the places we put our hopes and expectations for greater opportunities for our children. Schools have served as centers of their communities, educating all the children in a neighborhood, whatever their circumstances or backgrounds. Over the past 15 years, the role of "place" has grown more important in education, as schools with high numbers of students from low-income families have increasingly become the location, the hub, where the country's neediest students and families seek not only a high-quality education, but also the supports and opportunities that create conditions for learning. Schools have a special role in the resurgent field of place-based approaches to education and neighborhood improvement because neighborhoods affect schools and because schools affect neighborhoods.

One place-based approach to transforming schools into neighborhood hubs is the community school. Community schools are hubs of the community where educators, families, nonprofits, community members, and others unite to create conditions where all children learn and thrive. Community schools offer enriching learning opportunities during the school day, after school, during the summer, and at other times. They provide social services and supports, such as health, mental health, adult education, and nutrition programs. With a strong emphasis on equity and using the community's strengths, they also engage families and community residents as full partners in planning and implementing their work. Community schools are an important example of a place-based education strategy

that brings together a team of professionals from different backgrounds to improve the educational and economic mobility prospects of children.

How do community schools accomplish so much in a given place? They rely on results-focused partnerships with families, businesses, faith-based institutions, community-based organizations, and others to provide services and enhance learning opportunities. A full-time coordinator works at the school site to identify the community's needs and assets. This person works hand-in-hand with the principal and a representative school site team that shares responsibility and accountability for results. At the systems level, this means leaders across institutions and sectors collaborate to bring together the funding, craft the policies, and develop the other supports needed to enhance the place-based strategy.

Community schools and other related place-based education efforts build on a legacy of efforts to transform places—to transform communities. These efforts share much in common but have gone by different names, "place-based initiatives" being one of the most recent. Other descriptors include: collective impact strategies, cradle-to-career, cross-sector collaboratives, and community change initiatives (CCIs). In each case, people come together to create change, to get results around a particular area (e.g., housing, jobs, and education) or a set of areas. Sometimes these efforts are locally driven (e.g., to solve a particular community problem), and other times they are externally influenced (e.g., by private funders or public grants). While these efforts have succeeded in some areas, such as safety and employment, historically they have failed to make significant and sustained changes in education and with schools. Community schools stand out as a strategy that is well positioned to help break that pattern, acting as a hub to bring together a range of necessary services and supports in a neighborhood to enable children to succeed.

For policymakers in education and other areas who are concerned with finding ways to collaborate across sectors to strengthen communities, this paper offers an introduction to the strategy of using place-based education efforts to improve the environment and range of services needed to foster learning. Using community schools as an example, the paper summarizes the rationale and history of such efforts, and describes the ways in which community schools function as a place-based strategy. It concludes by exploring the challenges and opportunities for community schools and related education-focused place-based strategies and policy steps to enhance their effectiveness.

The Evolution of Place-Based Education Strategies

There are many definitions for place-based strategies for education. We use the working definition that the U.S. Department of Education offered in its 2012 report, "Impact in Place: A Progress Report on the Department of Education's Place-Based Strategy":

> Place-based strategies focus on the whole set of issues a community faces and tackle those issues in tandem to improve a comprehensive and common results framework, taking advantage of the synergy achieved by addressing multiple issues at once. The focus on places—and therefore on groups of people connected by geography—instead of a focus on programs or separate individuals, is most effective in three scenarios: 1) when a program is designed to address a spatially concentrated problem; 2) when place is an efficient platform for service delivery; or 3) when the effects of a program have the potential to "spill over" to others in the community, even those who aren't participating.[1]

Understanding "place-based" in this way helps in reviewing the connections between the various strategies associated with community schools.

Schools as Community Hubs. Community schools and other place-based strategies are not a new idea cooked up by consultants or a response to the latest policy idea. Rather, these strategies share a long history, with many successes and experiences from which to learn. The root concepts of the community school trace back to education philosopher John Dewey and social activist Jane Adams. Dewey understood that the community in which one lived functioned as a "living classroom" in that the person learns from daily activities as a part of their community environment. He envisioned that the school should be a "social center" in a community, where

[1] U.S. Department of Education, "Impact in Place," 5.

citizens could gather for social activities, where adults could be trained for jobs in a changing economy, and where community members could learn more about one another.[2] So schools served as places where community members could hear lectures, debate about civic issues, and use the facility for recreation at night, on weekends, and during school breaks. The school would also serve as a place where leaders could reform communities by teaching such things as proper health.[3] Around the same time, Adams created "settlement houses" in neighborhoods. These delivered services and provided opportunities to those who needed support—an idea that was very influential in early community schools. According to Rogers, community schools went through a variety of phases over the 20th century. At times the focus was addressing poverty, providing access to health and other social services, using the community as text (also known as place-based learning), or as a center for learning and community engagement and empowerment.

More recently, community schools and other initiatives have begun to operate on a larger scale, such as at the city or county level. In partnership with multiple institutions, these place-based initiatives have taken many forms. Thus, while community schools are a place-based strategy focused on individual school sites, many community schools now operate as part of a larger initiative, with multiple school sites over a wide area. These larger community school initiatives are typically coordinated by an intermediary, which is an institution responsible for the day-to-day operations, planning, coordination, and management, and they rely on the support of many partners.[4] In these cases, the *place* grows from one school site and the surrounding neighborhood to a geographically much larger community.[5] These systems of community schools share some of the structural and programmatic features of other contemporary place-based initiatives, such as Promise Neighborhoods, Promise Zones, Choice Neighborhoods, and cradle-to-career approaches.

Community Change Initiatives. During the late 1980s and 1990s, philanthropies and governments funded Community Change Initiatives as pilots in communities. Some of the most high-profile initiatives of this time included New Futures (supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation), the Neighborhood and Family Initiative (Ford Foundation), Empowerment Zones (publicly funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), and Beacons (a type of community school with multiple public and private funders).[6] While some of these initiatives made education a key element of their place-based change strategy, others focused on other areas such as neighborhood change or employment, but few were able to create meaningful and sustained connections to schools.

The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change called these types of approaches community change initiatives, and it has conducted the most comprehensive review of such scaled-up place-based initiatives to date.[7] Aspen reviewed 48 CCIs that were created from the early 1990s up to 2010. Based on this review, Anne Kubisch[8] provides a useful summary of three CCI features: they are all place-based; are comprehensive, linking multiple systems, goals, and levels; and focus on community building.[9]

Challenges in the CCI-School Relationship. While sharing these features, CCIs vary from one community to the next. They differ by sponsor (e.g., various levels of government, foundations, and community-based organizations), locale, capacity, origin, and purpose. They also vary by the focus of their work, and they have had both successes and failures.

According to Aspen's Kubisch, CCIs have historically worked on the periphery of schools, often seeing the school more as the problem than as a solution. She writes that there are a variety of possible reasons for this. One is the concern about excessive control by the school central office and other bureaucratic challenges that occur when an initiative

[2] Dewey, "The School as Social Centre."
[3] Rogers, "Community Schools."
[4] Melaville et al., "Scaling Up School and Community Partnerships."
[5] For examples of these scaled-up community school initiatives, see ibid.
[6] For a chronological list of some of the better known CCIs, see Kubisch et al., *Voices from the Field III*, 185–193.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Kubisch, "Recent History of Community Change Efforts in the United States."
[9] Stagner and Duran, "Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Principles, Practice, and Lessons Learned."
Stagner and Duran also write that CCIs focus on community building and comprehensive services but don't specifically distinguish "place" as a feature.

seeks to work with schools and districts. School systems may create hurdles to accessing the school site, collaborating around data, and partnering with schools. In many cases there is also the issue of youth attending schools outside of the geographic "place," such as a district that offers open enrollment or charter schools that draw students from multiple neighborhoods, making it harder to base approaches on distinct communities. Another possible explanation is that over the past 15 years significant accountability demands have been placed on schools, requiring them to focus narrowly on academic achievement rather than broader issues; this has often created a culture that is unaccustomed to the kind of outside partnerships that are essential to the CCI approach.

Furthermore, educators typically expect partners and programs focused on non-instructional services to be faddish and not committed to the long haul—often based on years of experiencing bright ideas and funding that come and quickly go. Consequently, CCIs were typically organized *outside* of the school district with limited participation from school leaders. Indeed, Kubisch notes that many community change efforts have resorted to working around the edges of the school system rather than within it.[10] As a result, they tend to work in areas outside the traditional school domain, such as early childhood, afterschool services, and community organizing strategies, rather than with the schools directly.

***Renewed Interest in School-Based Approaches*.** Despite such challenges of schools and communities working effectively together, many place-based community-strengthening efforts are continuing to focus on education and its local institutions. Researchers from Teachers College, Columbia University broadly characterize these education-focused CCIs, or place-based education reform efforts, as "local cross-sector collaborations for education." In developing their framework for a study on the topic, they define these collaborations as "locally organized, large scale, cross-sector (involving at least two sectors of the government plus the civic sector), inclusive of the school district, focused on educational outcomes, and formal."[11] In their scan of such initiatives, they identify at least 182 education-focused place-based initiatives.[12] Their study is a recognition that place-based efforts are increasingly being used as an education reform strategy.

In addition to emphasizing place-based strategies in general and creating a White House Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative to apply the approach to neighborhoods in distress, President Barack Obama supported funding for a variety of place-based programs, such as Promise Neighborhoods, Promise Zones, Strong Cities Strong Communities, the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program, Choice Neighborhoods, Performance Pilot Partnerships, and full-service community schools. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education created a Place-Based Initiatives Pilot Team with responsibility for supporting local communities that comprise the federal place-based portfolio. The fact that this effort sits in the Department of Education suggests that schools are playing an increasingly significant role as the locus of place-based efforts of all types. Furthermore, the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) contains provisions requiring states and school districts to examine factors that lead to inequities and poor school performance; this will likely prompt more attention in the future to place-based approaches to coordinate services.

Community Schools as an Example of a Place-Based Strategy

Schools arguably are the key institution for any place-based approach that seeks to mobilize a range of services to create the best environment for learning and for long-term opportunity. This is especially true in high-poverty areas, where schools are one of the public institutions with responsibility for supporting the development of *all* children and function as a key community institution. While education happens across a community, including inside the home, schools remain the central place children engage in formal education. Additionally, schools typically are the institution with the widest support of the community and so serve as a practical location for identifying the broader needs of children and their families. Moreover, the local public school is often a true community institution, in that it is a focal point for many families. That is why today's place-based approaches that seek to improve educational, health, and other important outcomes for children

[10] Kubisch, "Structures, Strategies, Actions, and Results of Community Change Efforts," 20.

[11] Henig et al., "Putting Collective Impact into Context," 5.

[12] Henig et al., "Collective Impact and the New Generation."

typically require some participation from the school even if the school isn't the central place where opportunities and support are delivered.[13] Most often, these schools are traditional public schools, although in some cases they may also include those public charter schools that typically draw from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Community schools represent a sustainable and time-tested approach for an education-focused, place-based strategy within a school. Indeed, schools that are part of most place-based education strategies share common features with community schools, even when they don't self-designate with the term. Community schools are a results-oriented partnership strategy, not a standardized model. While sharing common features, which are described below, each school looks different depending on its location, the neighborhoods with which it works, and the needs and assets in its community. Community schools seek to improve the educational environment and the outcomes of their students through partnerships in the school place. But they also use the school as the place around which to engage the entire community and transform the surrounding neighborhoods.

The Coalition for Community Schools uses the following definition of a community school:

> Using schools as hubs, community schools bring educators, families, and community partners together to offer a range of opportunities, supports, and services to children, youth as well as their families and communities…. Every community school responds to unique local needs and includes the voices of students, families, and residents. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone—beyond school hours, including evenings and weekends.[14]

There are different models of such community schools, including those adapted to local communities (e.g., Communities in Schools, university-assisted community schools, and lead partner model) and those that are developed locally.

Local school and community leaders across sectors, including policymakers and funders, create community schools for a variety of reasons, including a desire to develop supportive partnerships for learning (after school as well as during the school day), respond to health and other needs, spur neighborhood development, and increase family engagement. Community schools have been started by community-based groups (e.g., United Ways and the Children's Aid Society of New York), institutions of higher education, and school districts. Increasingly, unions, as well social justice, community, and family organizing groups, have advocated for community schools. However they are launched, community schools seek to unite all the assets and sectors of a community, from health to housing, afterschool to mentoring, early childhood to adult education, in order to support children in schools.

Community schools have structural, normative, functional, and programmatic elements that distinguish them from typical schools with traditional partnerships. For example, in a community school:

- **Partners are aligned around a core set of results**. In community schools, as in most place-based approaches, there is wide recognition that the school alone should not and cannot be solely responsible for the sort of change high-poverty communities require. They need partners to supplement their work with students and families. Examples of partners include local United Ways, YMCAs, institutions of higher education, faith-based institutions, health organizations, community organizing groups, unions, and other community-based groups. Each of these partners has its own mission and activities, and community schools provide them access to students in a given place and a way to align strategies so that all partners are working in the same direction toward a set of shared goals. By participating in community schools, partners can coordinate and align the efficient delivery of services, opportunities, and support.

- **A full-time, school-based community school coordinator knows the school's and community's needs and assets and develops partnerships designed to meet school goals.** This person works hand-in-hand with the principal, other educators and school professionals, families, and partners.

[13] For more discussion about this idea of place-conscious strategies, see Turner et al., "Tackling Persistent Poverty."

[14] Coalition for Community Schools, "Frequently Asked Questions About Community Schools."

- **A site-based leadership team guides the work of the community school.** This group represents the families and communities that are part of the school and helps distinguish a community school from a school with services that are done *to* families, rather than *with* families. The principal, educators, school staff, and other key partners are also represented on this important team.

In addition to these elements, community schools also have supportive and engaged principals and other school staff, and they focus on a broad results framework that is developed based on a community needs and asset assessment. Results drive community school partnerships.

To be successful, a community school also requires the crucial normative elements of trust and results-focused collaboration. The principal needs to trust that the coordinator and partners who are working inside their school building will be responsive to the educational, social, health, emotional, and other needs of students and families. Principals are the gatekeepers and facilitators for any successful school-based intervention, and their trust and support of the strategy are essential. Partners in turn must be able to trust that school educators will integrate and support their work while providing access to students, appropriate data, and a seat at the collective table. This trust fosters effective collaboration, another important normative element. In a community school, partners, educators, families, and residents collaborate to achieve specific results that they have established to measure success.

What happens at a successful community school illustrates why they are an exemplar of schools as community hubs. In such schools, partners and providers deliver a wide range of services and supports at a central place—the school—and consequently the partners can serve many community members, not just students.

In short, they engage families and communities as assets in the lives of their children and youth.[15] And using the components of CCIs and place-based efforts described earlier, community schools share the characteristics of other place-based strategies in these ways:

- **Focus on a particular geographic area.** Community schools most often focus on serving students and families from the neighborhoods surrounding the school building. While there are examples of serving students who do not live in the neighborhood, especially when community schools are charter schools with a wide catchment area, consistent with other place-based approaches, the community school focuses on serving all the students and families who live or participate in a particular geographic area.[16]

- **Comprehensive.** Similar to the CCIs described earlier and consistent with the current definition of place-based strategies, community schools offer a comprehensive set of supports and opportunities. These typically include improved instruction, health and social supports adult education and job training, and family and community engagement.

- **Community development.** While the emphasis for community schools is on the school environment and educational outcomes, there is also an understanding that strong schools require strong neighborhoods. Thus, community schools provide services and supports for families and the entire community, not just for students within the schools. For that reason they are often referred to as examples of "community hubs."[17]

- **Partnerships.** Like other place-based initiatives, community schools do not depend on any single institution. Rather, schools partner with many local institutions, from churches to community-based organizations to institutions of higher education, in order to provide supports and opportunities to all who fall within a given "place," the school.

- **Identifying needs and securing assets and partners.** Community schools have a strategy and organizational structure to identify needs and to secure assets and partnerships. A

[15] Jacobson and Blank, "A Framework for More and Better Learning."

[16] Some charter schools draw students from across a city while others are designed to serve students in the surrounding neighborhood.

[17] Horn et al., "Schools as Community Hubs."

community school coordinator is at the center of this place-based approach and works hand-in-hand with the principal and partners toward common results.

Community schools thus are a place-based approach that shares many similarities with other place-based approaches, such as many community development financial institutions, housing-based initiatives, and some hospital-led strategies. But community schools also differ from some of these in that *systems* of community schools work across a geographic area that is typically larger than a single neighborhood. In such a system of community schools, the defined "place" is much larger than a local neighborhood and can be a city or even a county. In these cases, leaders work across many neighborhoods to provide a comprehensive set of supports that seek to lift up the larger place. As such, community schools are a school-specific place-based strategy, but can also be a cross-neighborhood, community-wide place-based strategy.

Place-based education reform efforts, including community school, have received a lot of attention, including from the Obama Administration. Still, these approaches are not tied to one philosophical perspective. In fact, they can be thought of combining conservative principles of local control and civic partnerships with progressive principles of creating equitable supports and services.

Growth and Impact. Community schools have grown significantly over the past 10 years. The Coalition for Community Schools estimates there are now 5,000 community schools.[18] Notable examples of community schools operating at scale include Oakland's district-wide community school strategy and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's effort to create 130 community schools. These examples are funded from a variety of local, state, and federal sources, both public and private. Community schools receive federal support from 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Title I, the Full Service Community Schools grant program (which is part of the U.S. Department of Education's place-based portfolio), and other sources. Notable advocates for community schools include major national educational groups such as the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, the School Superintendent's Association (AASA), community organizers, health advocates, and others.

Community schools have spawned a growing body of research that demonstrates their impact, based on indicators such as student achievement, attendance, health, and school climate. Individual studies of community schools point to improvement across a range of indicators, especially schools that are high implementers and that have used the strategy over time. A study of Tulsa's community schools, for instance, found that high-implementing community schools helped decrease the achievement gap.[19] Studies of community schools in Baltimore identified improved rates of chronic absence compared with noncommunity schools.[20] Other research demonstrates that community schools are also a good financial investment for policymakers: one study of New York City Children's Aid Society community schools found they produced a social return on investment—including a wide range of social, environmental, and health impacts—of between $10.30 and $14.80 per dollar of investment.[21] A review of the research in this area, which focused specifically on "integrated student services," by the respected research group Child Trends found that studies overall point in a positive direction for community school impact.[22] The evidence base supporting community schools is growing, although more research is needed to learn more about what constitute the most effective practices and to refine the model.

Challenges and Opportunities

Community schools and similar place-based educational approaches can have a significant effect beyond the school walls. But envisioning schools as community institutions that can improve neighborhoods as well as the environment for learning raises a number of challenges and opportunities. Policymakers, grantmakers, and government agencies need to consider a number of steps to address these so that the institutions can achieve their full potential.

[18] Blank and Villarreal, "Where It All Comes Together: How Partnerships Connect Communities and Schools."
[19] Adams, "Improving Conditions for Learning in High Poverty Elementary Schools."
[20] Durham and Connolly, "Baltimore Community Schools."
[21] Martinez and Hayes, 2013. For more on community schools research, visit www.communityschools.org/results
[22] ChildTrends, 2014.

***Sustained and Scalable Funding Is a Challenge*.** Funding continues to be a significant challenge for place-based education initiatives, in terms of both sustained support over time and the challenge of raising and coordinating funds for a variety of services. Some experienced place-based approaches have managed to navigate this terrain—for example, those operating community schools at scale over many years—and have become expert at aligning existing resources and braiding funding from different government agencies and budgets at multiple levels of government.[23] Indeed, learning how to use multiple funding streams to achieve their goals is a hallmark of successful place-based education initiatives. Yet few public funding sources are available to fund the core operations of such initiatives, or to function as an intermediary or "backbone support organization."

The federal government is attempting to align supports to better address local community priorities and increase the impact of federal funding. One example is the President's Promise Zone Initiative, which provides priority access to federal investments that further the zones' strategic plans, including federal staff on the ground to help them navigate federal resources. The Initiative also includes five full-time AmeriCorps VISTA members to recruit and manage volunteers and strengthen the capacity of the Promise Zone initiatives. In addition, ESSA, the new federal education reauthorization law, allows greater flexibility for state education agencies and districts to use funds for strategies they see as most beneficial—including partnership-based place-based approaches—to tackle broad factors that contribute to poor-performing schools.

What additional steps can local, state, and federal elected leaders and agencies take to support place-based education reform grants? First, these leaders can create grant programs that focus on place-based education approaches, such as community schools. Even better would be including these approaches in the authorization and guidance for larger formula funding streams. Resources to support these approaches will help increase the number of places that are working in a comprehensive way to provide students and families with a wide variety of resources aligned with local needs.[24]

Second, leaders can establish procedures that permit the alignment of different funding streams to support these approaches. Maryland's local management boards may be one possible model. These are county-level nonprofit or government bodies that can braid together different government funds and private resources to fund local initiatives and services. In addition, states and school districts could jointly plan with financial and health institutions required to invest in community needs under the requirements of the Community Reinvestment Act and the Affordable Care Act. In this way, government leaders could help combine resources from the private sector and various programs to strengthen community schools and other place-based initiatives.

***Resources Are Often Not Equitably Distributed*.** Existing school funding is highly inequitable and varies greatly based on zip code. Another challenge in local communities is how to equitably distribute available resources across a set of schools or within a particular geographic place, namely a school district, city, or county. When place-based education reforms are working at scale, they may trigger competition for resources, so leaders need to decide which schools, community-based organizations, and others are to be the focus of their efforts and receive targeted resources. Some places use an equity strategy for deciding which schools and communities are the focus of their place-based strategies. One example is Multnomah County, which selects their Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (a local community school approach) based on data about school and community demographics and need.

"Place" Falls on a Continuum. Margery Turner and her Urban Institute colleagues challenge us to think about place in a very broad way and to account for the changes within a given place. Describing "place conscious strategies," Turner looks beyond a neighborhood to a larger regional or city perspective.[25] She points out that a broader systemic approach is needed to account for changes, such as student and resident mobility, and that to work across sectors with different rules, regulations,

[23] For more about how community schools are funded, see Coalition for Community Schools, "Community School Results."

[24] For example, see the U.S. Department of Education's Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhood programs.

[25] Turner et al., "Tackling Persistent Poverty in Distressed Urban Neighborhoods."

and policies, multiple partners need to work together. In the preceding examples of community schools, a place may be as small as a school site or as large as a city or county. Place-based education strategies need to work across systems at all levels in order to deliver on the promise of creating meaningful change.

Community schools can be a critical element of other education-focused place-based strategies. If these strategies are to affect educational outcomes, they will need community school partnerships that affect the neighborhood "place" around the school, as well as the learning that happens in the school itself.

The Research Is Growing, but is Limited. As innovative and promising as place-based school approaches are, and specifically community schools, we still lack sufficient research to determine what works. The research on the implementation and impact of place-based education reforms and school-based services remains limited,[26] so we cannot say with sufficient confidence the degree to which they are successful or exactly why. This is not an easy issue to settle, and it is a common challenge when examining place-based approaches involving multiple partners, theories of action, and a potentially broad impact.[27] A complex, integrated strategy with many services involved is difficult to research and evaluate precisely because it has so many structural and programmatic moving parts. Moreover, there are different units of analysis for programs and a variety of services, supports, and opportunities in different locations to analyze. For example, one community school may focus on education outcomes and neighborhood change, such as safety, while another focuses on education and health outcomes. As Stagner and Duran write, "The complex goals, structures, and mechanisms of comprehensive initiatives present significant challenges to determining whether they are successful and which elements of programs were instrumental in their success or failure."[28] Further, researchers tend not to focus on studying issues of school and community partnership, a trend that is beginning to change as more researchers develop interests in researching this area of reform.

Despite these research challenges and gaps, there is a body of research that is encouraging for the use of community schools and other place-based approaches, but it is still limited and requires increased rigor.[29] To assess these approaches properly, research needs to evaluate the impact of initiatives across a range of measures within communities, not just academic achievement. That view of impact research is consistent with the evidence-based emphasis in ESSA. There is also a growing recognition that factors such as attendance, social-emotional learning, and discipline matter to improving outcomes for students and need to be included in research designs. Future research efforts thus should define and measure these place-based approaches in ways that use multiple methodologies to develop and analyze evidence on implementation practices and to evaluate broad impacts on students, families, school practices, and neighborhood and community outcomes.

***Data Are Difficult to Collect and Process*.** Closely related to the research challenge is the difficulty of securing data that cut across sectors, for practice as well as for evaluation. Each sector (e.g., education, health, and social services) has its own rules and procedures governing data, and federal statutes restrict the use and sharing of personal health and education information. Even when place-based education reforms succeed in getting practitioners to work with one another, sharing data remains a challenge—making it difficult to coordinate efforts to assist an individual student or a household. Privacy laws and practitioners' unwillingness to share their data—often due to worries they will violate the law—are the primary obstacles.

Despite this challenge, local communities are figuring out ways to collect and share data across sectors, including by obtaining training in the laws governing information sharing. The Data Quality Campaign and StriveTogether have developed tools to

[26] Child Trends, "Making The Grade."

[27] Butler et al. ""Using Schools and Clinics as Hubs to Create Healthy Communities"; and Knapp, "How Shall We Study Comprehensive, Collaborative Services for Children and Families?"

[28] Stagner and Duran, "Comprehensive Community Initiatives: Principles, Practice, and Lessons Learned," 138.

[29] For research on community schools, see Coalition for Community Schools, "Community School Results"; and Promise Neighborhoods Institute, "Site Results." A forthcoming study from Teacher's College uses a case-study approach to get a better understanding of the implementation and impact of cross-sector approaches.

help place-based efforts better understand data rules and challenges and to create shared, useful, and secure strategies for collecting data.[30]

But more needs to be done to address data issues. Philanthropy and government can help schools fund the acquisition of data and the analytical capacity to help the school team address the needs of students and their families. The federal government should also provide improved training procedures and guidance for using privacy-protected information, including making greater use of the Privacy Technical Assistance Center and providing standardized "safe harbor" partnership models that would allow school teams to avoid compliance problems and legal risk.

Cooperating and Sharing Control Is Not Easy. The data and funding challenges are representative of the larger challenge that looming over place-based education reforms: cross-sector collaboration. "Place-based" requires that leaders and practitioners from different sectors work together. They must share their power and authority as well as their political, financial, and organizational resources. In communities where multiple place-based initiatives exist, there are additional challenges involved in finding ways to work together for broader impact.[31]

Fortunately, the current wave of place-based education reforms demonstrates that cross-sector collaboration is possible, and in some places it has created the trust and cultural norms that can lead to sustainable change. Community schools operating at scale in Multnomah County, Oregon; Oakland, California; and Baltimore, Maryland, are examples of communities that have created the structures and practices to share ownership for collective action and impact. The experiences and lessons of such examples need to be made widely available to other places seeking to build school-based multisector teams.

Moving Forward

If community schools continue to grow as a place-based strategy as recent trends suggest, they will need to continue working with other place-based strategies, demonstrate their evidence-based impact on learning as well as other outcomes, and continue to enhance their sustainability by developing leaders across boundaries. Growing community schools at scale will also require new funding from a diverse set of sources and building support across political parties and stakeholder groups for this localized partnership-based approach.

We have arrived at a renewed point of reflection in the education reform space. Now freed from many of the constraints of the No Child Left Behind education law, education leaders, communities, health institutions, families, and others are looking for new ways at the community level to collaborate to improve a range of education, health, and other measures. The growth of community schools, collective impact approaches, Promise Neighborhoods, and other place-based strategies has created fertile ground for success in these efforts by recognizing that public schools can be the hub for many effective approaches.

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[30] To learn about this data resource, see StriveTogether, "Data Drives School-Community Collaboration."

[31] For a discussion of how multiple place-based efforts working in the same communities can operate, see Potapchuk, "The Role of Community Schools in Place-Based Initiatives."

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