

CASE STUDIES

Selected Results from Cincinnati CLCs

- ▶ Since adopting the CLC strategy, Cincinnati is the first urban district in Ohio to receive an “effective” rating and is the highest-performing urban district in Ohio.
- ▶ CLCs are demonstrating improvement. In 2007–08, only 30.8 percent of CLCs had a rating of continuous improvement or higher; in 2010–11, 73.1 percent of CLCs achieved that distinction.
- ▶ High school graduation rates climbed from 51 percent in 2000 to 83 percent in 2009.
- ▶ The achievement gap between African American students and white students narrowed from 14.5 percent in 2003 to 4.3 percent in 2009.



www.communityschools.org

Cincinnati, Ohio Community Learning Centers

Cincinnati’s community learning centers¹⁰ are revitalizing the city’s neighborhoods, bringing families back into public schools and instilling a new sense of hope in neighborhoods where students often gave up on their education. Many share the vision of an education system that serves children from the early years through their transition to post-secondary learning and careers.

Planning New Opportunities for Young Children

On a rainy afternoon in the library of the Oyler Community Learning Center’s (CLC) temporary location, early learning program providers and school partners from across Cincinnati gather to brainstorm about ways to attract families to the school’s new center for infants and toddlers.

One participant talks about getting information on newborns from local hospitals while another says that community partners are available to provide transportation to parents who need to apply for a child-care voucher. Someone recommends contacting a local organization that helps pregnant mothers, and a parent says that most parents in the neighborhood are too young to raise children and that they get help only when they enroll their children at Oyler.

Jami Harris, the school’s Resource Coordinator, provides the group with statistics on family educational levels in the neighborhood and average scores on the state’s Kindergarten Readiness Assessment in Literacy.

“Ultimately, what are the things we need to do to make sure the enrollment is there?” asks Darlene Kamine, executive director of Cincinnati’s Community Learning Center Institute and a passionate former juvenile court magistrate who has played a central role in the growth of the city’s full-service community school movement.

Oyler CLC is a K–12 school in the low-income, urban Appalachian neighborhood of Lower Price Hill; it is one of 31 schools across Cincinnati with a resource coordinator who organizes the work of community partners in the schools to support student success.

“The community learning center is what is going to impact the community. And it starts with my nine children going to kindergarten.”

—Linda Doyle

Director of the Early Childhood Center at Riverview Community Learning Center

¹⁰ Cincinnati chooses to call its community schools Community Learning Centers because in Ohio charter schools are called community schools

Oyler Community Learning Center

Oyler, a K–12 CLC, has graduated more neighborhood students from high school in the past 3 years than in the collective 85 previous years. Since 2006–07, the school has improved its Ohio Performance Index every year, up 21.7 points. All of this could not be possible without Oyler's many partners:

- The Community Learning Center Institute
- Adopt a Class
- Jobs for Cincinnati Graduates
- Cincy After-School
- YMCA of Greater Cincinnati
- Kemba Credit Union
- Northlich
- Christ Church Cathedral
- National Marketshare Group
- Freestore Food Bank
- KMK
- E.W. Scripps
- Price Hill/Western Hills Kiwanis
- Paycor
- Consolidated Metal Products
- Police Federal Credit Union
- Cincinnati Postal Employees Credit Union, Inc.

Oyler became a K–12 school after an intensive community engagement process, sponsored by the school district, focused on designing new schools in each CLC. Oyler parents expressed a strong desire for a K–12 school because their children were dropping out of school when they went on to the city's comprehensive high schools. Oyler already offers preschool classes and is an example of how CLCs that include early childhood education programs are bringing new life to diverse neighborhoods where many parents had lost faith in their local schools.

The vision for Oyler is the same as that at Riverview East Academy, a toddler-to-12th-grade CLC on the south side of Cincinnati, but it is a vision that is still in the process of being realized.

An eye-catching blue and yellow building with porthole-looking windows, the Riverview East structure was inspired by the design of a riverboat. Built on stilts, the school is intended as a refuge for resi-

dents when the Ohio River floods the neighborhood. The building is organized into three sections, one of which houses early childhood classrooms operated by Cincinnati Early Learning Centers—one of the city's highest-rated providers.

Like Oyler, the Riverview CLC brings early education "slots" to a historically low-income Appalachian community in which many students dropped out of school after eighth grade rather than leave the neighborhood to attend high school. In addition, as a CLC, the school offers a variety of other opportunities and supports, including after-school programs, tutoring, and mental health counseling.

But as nine preschoolers cluster around their teacher on the floor in one classroom, another classroom is empty because too few families have registered for Riverview's preschool program. "I am here now, but where are they?" asks Linda Doyle, director of the early childhood center at Riverview.

Doyle says that the lack of enrollment is attributable to the fact that, to qualify for a voucher, parents must be either employed or in school full-time. But some parents are able to find only part-time jobs in today's weak economy, and others need additional support and motivation. Often, children from other school catchment areas end up filling the available slots. That is why the early childhood and school partners who are meeting at Oyler are intent on filling the new classrooms with eligible families from the neighborhood. They are strategizing on how to identify parents with young children as early as when mothers are pregnant.

Doyle, however, is still encouraged that nine of her preschoolers will stay at Riverview for kindergarten—a step toward reaching the vision of providing a well-rounded, supportive learning experience from early childhood through high school.

She already meets regularly with kindergarten teacher Barbara James to discuss transition issues for certain children and to give the preschoolers a glimpse of their future classroom. The school's social worker helps Doyle connect her families to additional resources. Parents are invited to parent workshops at the CLC. Doyle meets almost daily with the CLC Resource Coordinator and participates in the school's Parent Teacher Association and its Local School Decision Making Committee. Riverview's early childhood center is an integral part of the CLC.

Riverview and Oylar are examples of a growing trend in Cincinnati: deeper connections between schools and their co-located early childhood programs, with shared resources and community support. “The CLC is what is going to impact the community,” Doyle says. “And it starts with my nine children going to kindergarten.”

Schools Rebuilt by the Community

In 1997, the Ohio Supreme Court declared the state’s reliance on property taxes to fund education unconstitutional, a decision that forced many districts, including Cincinnati, to begin replacing and renovating decaying old school buildings. Around the same time, Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS) board member Jack Gilligan—also a former governor—was becoming interested in the concept of schools as the center of the community. He visited the Children’s Aid Society in New York, which is often a national model of community school work, and then convened school and community leaders to discuss the concept.

Initially, voters rejected a bond issue to begin work on the 10-year Facilities Master Plan. A second attempt to pass the \$1 billion measure, however, specified that every school was to be rebuilt as a community learning center. The measure passed. “The master plan and community engagement—they are wedded to each other,” says Eve Bolton, president of the CPS Board of Education.

Allowing parents and community members to create schools that meet their needs has been part of what Kamine calls a “re-culturing” of the school district and an effort to rebuild trust in among all families in the school district, including those sending their children to suburban or private schools. “One of our goals was just to keep the city from becoming an empty shell,” says Kamine, who was hired by CPS as a consultant to undertake the work of involving community members in creating a vision for their neighborhood schools.

Bolton also sees early learning opportunities as a critical aspect of rebuilding the district. “Where we have those early childhood centers, people stay with CPS,” she says.

The Cincinnati Federation of Teachers (CFT), an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, is another active partner in pushing for the CLCs

What Is a Community Learning Center?

Community Learning Centers rest on the five following foundational elements:

- ▶ A commitment to comprehensive, sustained community engagement to ensure the development of partnerships responsive to the school—the community’s shared vision for the school as the center of the neighborhood.
- ▶ Site-based governance charged with establishing the unique vision for each community learning center, steering the selection of community partners, and evaluating the performance of those partners.
- ▶ Partnership networks comprised of providers in each area of need to provide district-wide capacity and equitable access to high-quality services, e.g., Growing Well (physical health), MindPeace (mental health), Adopt A Class Foundation (business mentors), College Access, Leave No Child Inside (Nature and Environmental), and Alliance for Leadership and Interconnection (green built environments and curriculum).
- ▶ Cross-Boundary Leadership that knits together the partnership network leaders as a collaborative team to coordinate and integrate interdisciplinary resources.
- ▶ On-Site Resource Coordinators who provide the critical infrastructure at the site level to develop, integrate, and manage the community partnerships. The Resource Coordinator (RC) is responsible for coordinating and managing partnerships that support students and families in alignment with the district’s overall CLC strategy. The RC is a key leader in the community engagement process and serves on and works with each site’s Local School Decision-Making Committee (LSDMC).

Adapted from <http://clcinstitute.org/about>.

and more resource coordinators. “It’s a support to the teachers,” Julie Sellers, CFT president, says about being in a CLC school with comprehensive supports. “I’ve worked with it and without it and I never want to work in a school without a [resource] coordinator.”

Sellers tells a story to illustrate the impact of CLCs. A young girl lost members of her family in a fire and was understandably having difficulty in school, forgetting her homework and being generally disengaged. When a community partner began offering ballroom and line-dancing classes for fourth and fifth graders at her school, the student participated. “The transformation of that child was so unbelievable,” Sellers says. “She saw success in ballroom dancing, and then she started having success in academics.” Sellers adds that fourth and fifth grades were targeted when the coordinator communicated with the teachers about which students were struggling. “We knew dancing was a need,” she says.

Cincinnati already stood as an example of collaboration between the teachers’ union and the school district. Now that relationship also encompasses the community, Bolton says. “All of a sudden there is another party at the table,” she says. “That is how we are going to become the number one urban district.”

Re-Engaging All Families

The birth of CLCs is not limited to low-income neighborhoods but is also a phenomenon in middle-class areas where parents may have the resources to send their children to private schools or move to the suburbs.

Montessori in Pleasant Ridge

The transformation of Pleasant Ridge Elementary School into Pleasant Ridge Montessori is another example of how a new model of early childhood education is drawing a diverse mix of middle-class families back into Cincinnati Public Schools. The neighborhood of “Pleasant Ridge was always very diverse, but [parents] wouldn’t send their kids to the school,” says Maureen Simon, a lead preschool teacher at the school and one of the founding parents of the Montessori program there. “To watch this grow has been incredible. It’s been life-changing for my family.”

The preschool is tuition-based, with a sliding scale for low-income families. Head Start pays tuition for 11 students.

Before Pleasant Ridge’s transformation in 2006, the school’s enrollment had fallen to 330. Now, it is close to 500, with a more socioeconomically balanced enrollment. The percentage of students on free or reduced-price lunch has fallen from 99 to under 70 percent. Some worried that low-income, minority children would be displaced from the school or that white parents would send their children to the preschool and then depart for private schools after kindergarten. But Simon and others say that the school’s growing racial diversity is evident through third grade, which is the current grade of the school’s first class of Montessori preschoolers. “Montessori brings in the preschoolers; the CLC keeps them here,” says Angie Okuda, the school’s CLC resource coordinator.

As a CLC, Pleasant Ridge works with a variety of partners that provide additional social services and learning opportunities, including a mental health therapist, the Blessings in a Backpack weekend meal program, and refurbished computers donated to families. It has also become a professional development site for Xavier University students majoring in Montessori education.

Hyde Park

After closing a school in the Hyde Park neighborhood several years ago because of nearly non-existent enrollment, the district is planning to re-open the school in response to parent advocacy. Parents gathered signatures from roughly 500 families not currently enrolled in CPS schools who said that they want to enroll their children in a CPS neighborhood community learning center. While these families also wanted a preschool to be part of the school, they dropped that request after realizing that the preschool would compete with many church-based preschools in the area. Still, Kamine says, “They did this all on their own.”

CLC Organization and Funding

Cincinnati Community Learning Centers are organized in a unique way that finances resource coordinators at more and more schools and ensures essential opportunities and the delivery of services at each school. The CPS CLC Coordinators, the Cincinnati Community Learning Centers Institute, the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team, and the policy and leadership of the Cincinnati Public Schools are the glue that holds the CLCs together.

Currently, CLC Resource Coordinators are funded by four major organizations in the city—the Cincinnati Public Schools, the United Way of Greater Cincinnati, Haile/U.S. Bank Foundation, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, and the Community Learning Centers Institute (CLCI), which raises funds from private donors. The funding streams and various lead agencies give each CLC “a different color,” Kamine says. Resource Coordinators are hired by and reflect lead agencies that include the YMCA, Project GRAD, and mental health partners such as Central Clinic. CLCI also serves as a lead agency in some schools. In the 2011–12 school year, 31 schools have Resource Coordinators.

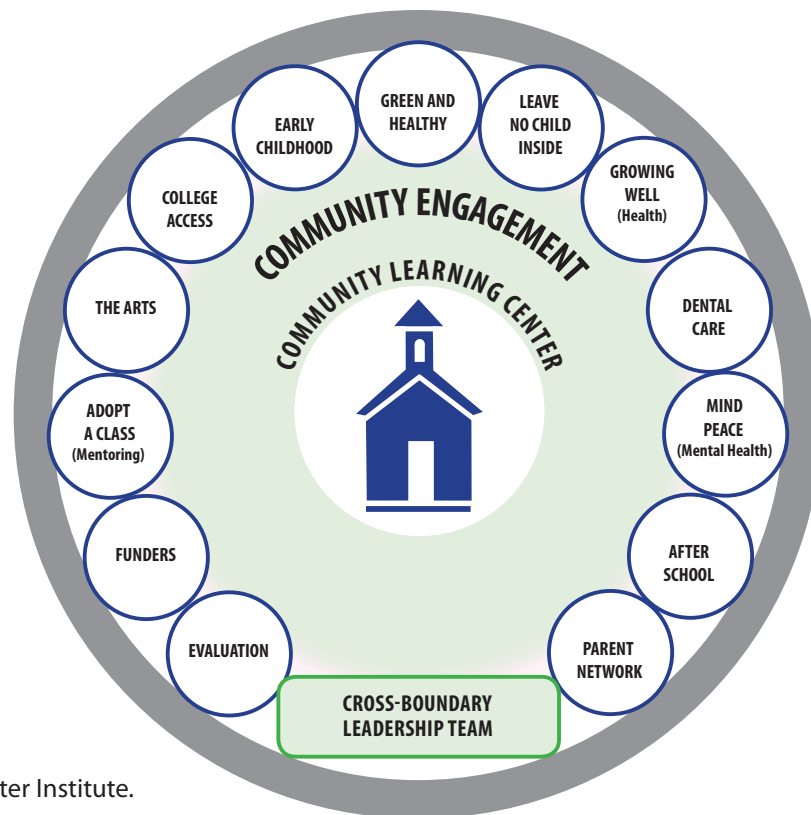
The agencies that provide services at CLCs are organized into what are known as “partnership networks” made up of agencies with similar missions in a variety of categories, e.g., health, mental health, college access, after-school programming, mentoring, tutoring, and early childhood education. The early childhood group is led by the Success by 6 collaborative, which advocates for high-quality early childhood programs and is supported by the United Way of the Greater Cincinnati.

When organizing services for their schools, Resource Coordinators “essentially go shopping” among the networks for programs that meet their needs, Kamine says. In effect, the CLCs operate by redirecting community resources into partnerships with schools.

Each network also has a leader who is a member of the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team (Figure 2), an organizational approach unique to Cincinnati that “takes on issues that are important to all of us” and sets priorities for the CLCs, says Susan Shelton, director of Mindpeace, the mental health partnership network. Mindpeace is one of the networks in Cincinnati that predates the CLC structure, but its work has been enhanced by its new relationship with the schools. “CLCs were a tipping point for the work that we were doing,” Shelton says. “Saying ‘We are the professionals and we know what you need’—that doesn’t drive change.”

As an essential part of their efforts to support community schools, the superintendent of schools, the president of the Board of Education, and the union president share leadership responsibility for making decisions about what happens in the district and the CLCs, which are subject to the policies of the Board

Figure 2: Cincinnati Community Learning Centers Cross-Boundary Leadership Team



SOURCE:
Graphic adapted by
and with permission from
Community Learning Center Institute.

of Education. CLCs are not a separate program but rather are fundamental to how the district and its schools operate. However, all decisions about the partnerships, including the selection of agencies and partner accountability, fall under the purview of the site-based governing boards—called Local School Decision-Making Committees—at each CLC.

Learning to Be a Resource Coordinator

Angie Okuda, a former private tutor with an effusive personality, was one of Cincinnati’s first nine Resource Coordinators. On her first day at work, she said that she expected someone to tell her what to do—but it didn’t happen. Instead, she found herself helping out on lunch duty and cleaning science kits. It was by building relationships with secretaries and science teachers, however, that she began to gather information on students’ needs. Now, she serves as a bridge between classroom teachers and the school’s mental health and after-school providers.

Resource Coordinators work with each school’s Local School Decision-Making Committee (LSDMC), an entity that has existed at each school since the 1970s to set goals, approve the school budget, and even recommend candidates for principal. The LSDMCs help create what is called a *OnePlan*—a school improvement plan that includes a look at the comprehensive needs of students and how the school and community will meet those needs. The committees’ role extends to approving agreements with partner agencies to provide services and programs to meet student needs as part of the CLC. While the extent to which coordinators interact with LSDMCs varies from school to school, their relationships with the principals are consistently strong, Kamine says.

The Difference a Coordinator Makes

Partners in Cincinnati say that they see a clear difference between working with schools with and without Resource Coordinators. Bill Burwinkel, a business owner and founder of the Adopt-a-Class mentoring program, says that schools can be “challenging” environments that do not always provide a “good reception” to members of the business community who want to donate their time to helping students. But “a really good resource coordinator,” he says, “understands their responsibility to those partners.”

Given that the schools adopted by Cincinnati businesses and other organizations offer prekindergarten classes, the mentoring program is another way that CLCs focus on young learners. “The value of taking corporate America and putting them [sic] in the schools accomplishes what we wouldn’t be able to do otherwise,” says Marilyn Crompton, director of Growing Well Cincinnati, the primary health care network of providers.

Patricia Gleason, president and CEO of Cincinnati Early Learning Centers, says that she also notices a difference between her program’s relationship with Riverview East and that at another school without a Resource Coordinator where she also operates early childhood classes. She attributes the difference to the partnership culture at Riverview. Doyle, the early childhood director at Riverview, talks about how the staff there “would do anything” for the children in her program—even rescheduling a school-wide fire drill to avoid interrupting naptime. But, at the school without a Resource Coordinator, Gleason says, “We wouldn’t think of calling up the principal and saying ‘We have a family who doesn’t have clothes.’ It’s different.”

The Growing Role of CPS

CPS has been taking on a larger role in setting goals for CLCs and working with the Resource Coordinators. In 2010, the CPS School Board passed Policy 7500, which states that “each school should also be a community learning center” and that each CLC should be the “neighborhood’s center of activity.” “I would wear that phrase on a t-shirt,” Kamine says, noting how well the policy communicates the vision and responsibilities associated with operating a CLC. “[The district] has embraced it. They are walking the walk” (see text box on Board Policy 7500, page 19).

While both the board and central office support CLCs, they recognize that the initiative can be neither a top-down effort nor a function solely of the school system. They see the strength of the CLCs in the genuine partnership with the community, thereby ensuring more sustainable funding and support and helping withstand the ups and downs of tax levies and changes in staffing at the central office. At the same time, CPS is providing increased support. “They are definitely here to say,” CPS Superintendent Mary Ronan says about CLCs. “We are definitely seeing success.”

Cincinnati School Board Policy 7500 COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

The Board of Education believes that each school should also be a community learning center in which a variety of partners shall offer academic programs, enrichment activities, and support to students, families, and community members before and after school as well as during the evenings and on weekends throughout the calendar year. Each school's Community Learning Center shall hereinafter be referred to as CLC. The Board envisions each CLC as the neighborhood's center of activity.

The Board further believes that in order to serve more fully the needs of students and to support the improvement of their academic and intellectual development, each District public school must engage its community if these worthy purposes are to be realized.

As the learning center in the community, each school and its partners must demonstrate strong collaboration, set high expectations for all students, embrace diversity, and share the accountability for results.

Each CLC should have a Resource Coordinator, who develops and coordinates services and programs that serve the students, their families, and the community. The Resource Coordinator shall be appointed in accordance with the Superintendent's administrative guidelines and shall work collaboratively with the principal and the LSDMC to provide the services and programs that meet the needs and priorities identified by the school's leadership.

Annually, as part of the OnePlan process, each school shall assess the needs of its student population. As a result of that process, each school's OnePlan shall describe the partnerships deemed necessary to enhance opportunities for student success and community and parental involvement. The LSDMC, ILT, parents, and the school community shall participate in the development of this comprehensive plan.

It shall be the responsibility of the Resource Coordinator to develop written agreements with the agencies and organizations that shall provide the services and programs. The agreements shall include a provision clarifying that the partnering agency or organization shall be responsible for reimbursing the District for actual costs for the services rendered by District custodial or operations employees that occur outside the employee's regular scheduled work hours, if applicable, in accordance with Board Policy 7510, Use of Facilities. These charges shall not apply to the District's capital partners that maintain exclusive control over and responsibility for the facilities in which their programs and services are provided.

In addition, the agreement shall include a provision that requires the agency/organization to provide evidence that each employee and/or volunteer has submitted to a criminal history records check in accordance with Board Policy 3121 and Policy 4121.

Once developed, the agreements shall then be submitted to the LSDMC through the principal for approval. Each agreement shall provide for an annual evaluation of the programs and/or services provided under said agreement. The agreement shall include a provision whereby the LSDMC retains the right to cancel said agreement for cause, either at the conclusion of the agreement or with sixty (60) days written notice served upon the agency.

The Superintendent shall be responsible for preparing administrative guidelines necessary to implement this policy.

*Available from <https://community.cps-k12.org/sites/boardpolicies>

In 2009, the district hired Julie Doppler as its CLC Coordinator. CPS wrote a job description and training manual for the coordinators, and Doppler meets with them twice a month to "maximize their impact," she says.

While she oversees federal grants that help fund community learning centers, Doppler also provides some professional development to the Resource Coordinators, in addition to the training they receive from their own agencies—a need that, according to Okuda at Pleasant Ridge Montessori, has increased. "We now know we are getting too big for ourselves," Okuda says. "We need the training to match the socioeconomic issues we are facing."

Mayerson Academy, a professional development center that serves CPS, is currently preparing a more formal training program for Resource Coordinators. The coordinators also attend conferences in order to share knowledge and learn from those in similar positions around the country.

Doppler was also instrumental in recruiting tutors as part of the Be the Change campaign, an effort to enlist 2,000 volunteers who could help children in the grades tested on the state assessment. The initiative, however, has left many with the impression that CPS is more interested in what CLCs can do to raise student achievement than in anything else. It is a perception that is not entirely wrong, Ronan says. "If your Resource Coordinator isn't helping you raise achievement, it's nice, but it's not helping you meet your target," Ronan says.

Bolton adds that the district's involvement in the campaign was also necessary to ensure the selection of high-quality tutors. "A lot of people make a lot of money off our kids. Everyone wants to tutor," she says, but adds that CLCs "keep alive the idea that you're teaching the whole child."

Balancing the district's priorities with "a broader view" of what children need to be healthy and successful is also a role for the Cross-Boundary Leadership Team, says Mindpeace's Shelton. "When it's just tutoring, tutoring, tutoring, we can say, 'Time out,'" she says.

Using Data: The Learning Partner Dashboard

Another major project for CPS and its community partners is the design of the Learning Partner Dashboard—a database that will link to the district's overall student data system and be aligned with each school's four goal areas: academics, parent involvement, community engagement, and wellness.

Initiated by CPS and its community partners, the Dashboard is to be updated nightly with academic, behavior, and absenteeism data while partners will enter information on the students they serve and how often—providing a picture of whether CLC services have a positive effect on achievement. The system is intended to highlight students in need of assistance—a need that Okuda at Pleasant Ridge recognized shortly after she became a Resource Coordinator.

"I was the only one who knew which kids were in what programs," she says. "The teachers needed to know, but they didn't know that I knew."

Previously, tutoring services and other programs operated on a first-come, first-served basis. The Learning Partner Dashboard is intended to make sure that students who most need help are receiving it.

For now, the Learning Partner Dashboard collects only academic data, but Doppler says that plans call for adding health and wellness data, particularly for children with asthma or for rates of obesity. "We started with academics because that's what we know best," she says. At this point, the Dashboard does not include information on preschoolers or children's early learning experiences before school entry, but Doppler reported interest in adding Ohio Kindergarten Readiness Assessment scores to the system.

The Strive Partnership in Cincinnati, with support from Proctor & Gamble and volunteer executives from Microsoft, is helping to implement the Dashboard. Strive is a four-year-old initiative dedicated to spurring improvement in educational outcomes from birth through the transition into a career. Strive is also helping to lead the Be the Change campaign, and one of Strive's priorities is "linking community supports to student achievement," which could be another way of describing community learning centers. "CLCs are a major priority because of the impact it [sic] has," says new STRIVE executive director Greg Landsman. He calls CLCs "the bridge" between what happens in school and out of school.

The United Way of Greater Cincinnati, which funds some CLC sites, is also interested in what the data can show about the effectiveness of schools as centers for social, health, recreation, and other support services. "What we liked about CLCs was that it was taking something to scale," says Patricia Waldsmith, director of community impact at the United Way. "They are a perfect incubator for seeing how partnerships work." She added, however, that "better clarity" is needed in determining whether "the right kids are getting the right services at the right time."

Summer Learning Supported by the Community

One of the most successful examples of partnership between CPS and the many providers involved in CLCs has been the 5th Quarter—a month of learning and enrichment activities for children in 16 of the city's elementary schools. The morning hours of the program, held for a third year in 2011, focus on academics while the afternoon is filled with activities such as art, music and dance, visits from Cincinnati Zoo animals and their keepers, and hands-on science experiments. While the program initially focused on children entering the "testing grades" of three through eight, most schools with Resource Coordinators or 21st Century Community Learning Center funds have added learning and enrichment activities for children in the primary grades as well.

The 5th Quarter is part of CPS's elementary initiative—an effort to improve academic achievement in 16 low-performing elementary schools. So far, test scores in these "turnaround schools" are heading in the desired direction. According to CPS, "Seven

of the schools have jumped one or two categories in the Ohio report card ranking system, and six of the schools have met all of their federal accountability targets for Adequate Yearly Progress.” While it is not possible to determine precisely to what extent the additional social services and enrichment programs provided through the CLCs have contributed to the gains, Kamine is convinced that “it would not work if you didn’t have the community engaged.”

Community Support in Action: Addressing Health Needs

Members of the community have been vocal about including health services as part of community learning centers’ offerings—services made available with the help of Cincinnati’s health care community. CPS and the city had been funding school nurses, but, when the city voted in 2011 to eliminate its portion of the funding, advocates protested, prompting city officials to restore some of the city’s contribution. The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati, part of the Growing Well health collaborative, stepped in to provide additional funds and to spearhead a planning and fundraising effort for school health. Even so, the number of schools with registered nurses has dropped from 39 to 26. Unlicensed school health assistants will be assigned to the other schools.

Nonetheless, full-service health centers operate in eight schools, with two more added in fall 2011. The district has also received \$500,000 from the Health Resources Services Administration for equipment and construction—part of the federal *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*. The funds will help support a new eye center at Oyler CLC.

Schools serving preschoolers have sometimes evidenced confusion over whether the health centers can serve the younger children, Dr. Crumpton says. “These invisible lines had been drawn,” she says, but adds that the health care partners are now beginning to take some responsibility for the younger children.

“From Cradle to Career”

Strive deserves credit, some say, for focusing attention on the early years as the beginning of learning.

“Strive has been instrumental in building a better picture of how education should be organized—from cradle to career,” says Stephanie Byrd, director of the

United Way of Greater Cincinnati’s Success by Six initiative, which is also the early childhood partnership network for the CLCs. She added that not everyone has recognized “that the early years are part of the education system.”

For a long time, even the United Way failed to recognize the importance of early childhood education despite the fact that early childhood development was one of its top priorities. Waldsmith points to efforts in K–12 education that were not integrated with early childhood development efforts. Other than examples such as Oyler and Riverview, many Resource Coordinators likely still do not see the need for integrated efforts, she says. Early learning “has not been on the radar for CLCs,” she says. “Those Resource Coordinators are not focused on kindergarten readiness.”

Yet, several CPS schools offer early childhood classes, primarily Head Start. Unlike many neighboring districts, CPS also pays for full-day kindergarten out of its general fund. But Head Start students often do not remain in the same school for kindergarten, discouraging “much engagement by families in a school and community that they are not going to be a part of,” Kamine says. Improving collaboration between Head Start—which operates under its own strict performance standards—and the public schools is a goal of the federal Office of Head Start. CPS is certainly not alone as a district where the federal program and local schools are disconnected. Waldsmith says CLCs could be the means of drawing the two together. “CLCs could play a role in helping early grade teachers understand the early years,” she says.

Deborah Bradshaw, CPS director of early childhood education, says that building those relationships often “depends on who is in the role” of Resource Coordinator or even principal. “There are some who have a broader vision,” she says. “There is room to start bridging that a little more.” Those bridges are growing as CLCs increasingly strengthen the connection with early childhood. As Riverview, Pleasant Ridge, and now Oyler demonstrate, when early learning opportunities are provided within the CLC, Resource Coordinators and community partners can build bridges and supports for students of all ages.

As with most school districts, CPS is limited by state funding in what it can offer parents with young children. Ohio has long paid for public preschool and began funding an Early Learning Initiative (ELI)

in 2005 with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families block grant. But spending on ELI was drastically cut in fiscal year 2010, leaving families to look for slots in other programs that often had other income or work eligibility requirements. In fiscal 2011, the program received no increases. “We pretty much got decimated,” Bradshaw says.

While it will not open new classrooms, the Winning Beginning fund-raising campaign of the United Way of Greater Cincinnati will at least focus on improving school readiness and preschool quality in the metropolitan area. Part of the effort, which aims to raise \$30 million over five years, aims to develop a system for measuring children’s progress from preschool into kindergarten.

Reaching the Same Goal

In the meantime, Oyler CLC is continuing its efforts to ensure that young children in the neighborhood have a high-quality early learning experience.

Since the earlier meeting, Harris, the Resource Coordinator, has invited local family child-care providers and early childhood staff from the Santa Maria Community Services agency to be part of what is happening at the school. They are working to identify and fill gaps in services for families. For example, Santa Maria can provide home visits and parent education classes while the health center at Oyler can provide immunizations, health screenings, and other medical services, Harris says. “We never want to step on anyone else’s toes or duplicate services,” Harris says. “This is what is great about CLCs. It’s a collaboration with others who are all trying to reach the same goal.”

Cincinnati Lessons

LESSON 1: Collaborative leadership structures at the school and community levels are poised to address new challenges and opportunities. Specifically, Cincinnati CLCs are well-positioned for developing strategies to support linkages between early childhood programs and the CPS. At the school-site, community partners were instrumental in the decision to bring an early childhood center to Oyler and helped provide services and connections to the early childhood community. The Cross-Boundary Leadership Team is organized to bring together leaders of collaboratives focused on major programs (e.g., after-school, mental health, tutoring) in order to assist CLCs with selecting appropriate providers.

LESSON 2: Deep connections between early childhood programs and schools require consistent and intentional effort. The connections are most readily developed when early childhood facilities are co-located in schools. It is far more challenging to build bridges between schools and community-based early childhood programs.

LESSON 3: Resource Coordinators must focus on building connections with early childhood programs. While Resource Coordinators have largely targeted students in elementary and high schools, they must now expand their focus to early childhood programs. Resource Coordinators are an essential element of the community learning center approach. Funding for coordinators should be protected and not linked to economic cycles.

LESSON 4: Distributed power through shared ownership at the community level sustains the CLC initiative and ensures that no one partner dominates outcomes or strategies. Cincinnati’s CLCs are jointly owned by the school district, the Board of Education, community partners, and funders. They all play a role in CLCs’ success and help make community and collaboration a part of CPS’s culture, rather than a separate set of programs.

LESSON 5: Data collected from stakeholders and shared via, for example, the Learning Partnership Dashboard help identify the need for supports for students and families and guide the selection of partners that best provide supports and achieve desired results.

LESSON 6: Community engagement that uncovers what a community wants for its schools and what resources are available has the power to transform neighborhoods and a city. Community engagement has led to the creation of several early learning opportunities housed in CLC buildings. ■

