

CASE STUDIES

Selected Results from EVSC Community Schools

- ▶ By applying the community schools strategy throughout the school district, EVSC has achieved several outcomes:
 - Met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2010 and 2011
 - In 2009–10, 79.1 percent of graduates pursued college, a rate higher than the state average
 - In 2009–10, expulsions dropped from 235 (2007–08) to 9; suspensions dropped from 5,287 (2007–08) to 5,000*
- ▶ A focus on early childhood development contributed to a 27.3 percent increase in the number of students meeting early literacy benchmarks. In fall 2011, 49.4 percent of kindergarten students met Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) benchmark instructional recommendations upon entry into school compared to 38.8 percent in fall 2006.†
- ▶ Students from the Culver Family Learning Center and Daniel Wertz Head Start (a Head Start/EVSC partnership) have higher DIBELS scores entering kindergarten than students of similar backgrounds who did not attend early childhood programs.‡
- ▶ In 2011, 1,633 students who participated regularly (30 or more days) in after-school and summer programs across 13 21st Century Community Learning Center (CCLC) sites had higher grade point averages and fewer daily absences, compared to students who did not attend the programs at all. Teacher surveys suggest that behavioral improvements were observed for the majority of both elementary and middle school students attending the programs for 30 or more days; these include satisfactory homework completion, behavior, participation, and academic performance.‡

Evansville, Indiana: Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation

Community schools in Evansville, Indiana, are extending the impact of community partners' and agencies' work in enriching the lives of students and their families. Additional resources are helping refine the responsibilities of community school coordinators, including their role in facilitating services for young children and their parents. Community schools are a part of the district's culture, and early childhood education is central to the district's strategic plan.

Providing Academic Support in the Early Years

The boy with close-cropped hair and a purple polo shirt finally gets a chance to hold the microphone and describe to his classmates what happens next in "The Cow that Went Oink." "Now the horse is coming to the pigs," he says enthusiastically, using clues from the illustrations and speaking in a big voice even though his mouth is right on the microphone.

The discussion is a typical pre-literacy and classroom orientation activity in the summer transition program for incoming kindergartners at Lincoln School, a community school in Evansville. It is also part of the school's effort to ensure that children are well prepared for the early grades and evidence of the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation's (EVSC) dedication to improving early childhood as part of its district-wide community school initiative. "We have an awesome group of Ks." brags Lincoln School's Principal Kim Johnson.

Lincoln School is part of the Early Childhood Development Coalition, a citywide initiative launched by the United Way of Southwestern Indiana in 2006 that includes not only school district representatives but also several partners from the early childhood community.

"We're totally committed to early childhood, family, school, community partnerships . . . quite frankly, we can't solve or resolve [school] issues in isolation. It takes a community effort."

—David Smith

Superintendent, Evansville
Vanderburgh School
Corporation

* Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) State of the Schools, 2012 (<http://www.evschools.com>)

† Diehl Evaluation and Consulting Services (2011a). Preliminary Evaluation of the EVSC Early Childhood Program. Contact: Cathlin.Gray@evsc.k12.in.us

Diehl Evaluation and Consulting Services (2011b). Preliminary Evaluation of the EVSC Early Childhood Program. Contact: Cathlin.Gray@evsc.k12.in.us

The coalition’s goal is to improve the quality of early childhood settings in Evansville and create stronger connections between the schools and the children who will attend them—whether or not the children have attended preschool. Evansville community schools are important partners in the coalition.

To Jonathan Rucker, Lincoln’s community school coordinator, the nine-day transition program is also a chance to plug children and families into all the services available at Lincoln even sooner than the first day of school—programs such as monthly “coffee chats” for parents on child development and education topics, a senior citizen volunteer tutoring program in reading, access to a social worker, on-site screening for lead poisoning, and summer swimming lessons offered by the Evansville Parks and Recreation Department.

“The more support you can put in place at an early age, the less you have to worry about the kid later on,” says Rucker, who cultivates relationships with community partners, such as the high school junior he brought in to run a three-day summer sports camp for children in grades one through three.

Lincoln is also one of EVSC’s new K–8 (in one case, prekindergarten–8) schools, a recent configuration change that has been challenging in some respects but is expected to provide further ongoing support for students as they progress toward high school. “Eighth graders still knowing their kindergarten teachers—there’s a lot of power in that,” says Jacqueline Kuhn, principal of Cedar Hall Community School, one of the former elementary schools that merged with a middle school. It is also where EVSC’s work with community partners began.

History and Growth of Evansville’s Community Schools

While all 35 EVSC schools are considered community schools, some, such as Cedar Hall, have been able to develop full partnerships with community agencies. Cedar Hall has an ingrained culture of collaboration that defines the way the school interacts with local agencies and businesses in this southern Indiana city.

Cedar Hall began to evolve into a community school in the 1990s when the United Way’s efforts to create a one-stop shop for human services merged with Cedar Hall’s successful after-school programs, remembers United Way Executive Director Carol Braden-Clarke. The participation of the local neighborhood association also lifted the initiative to a level beyond the school. “It didn’t have a name. We didn’t really know precisely what we were doing,” says Cathlin S. Gray, former Cedar Hall principal and now EVSC’s associate superintendent for family, school, and community partnerships. But Gray’s research into the full-service school work of Joy Dryfoos, one of the founders of the Coalition for Community Schools, and the creation of a formal school council at Cedar Hall, which includes community partners, gave the initiative a structure and direction that would expand across the district.

Meanwhile, Southwestern Healthcare, Inc., which coordinates mental health services in Evansville, discovered that it achieved greater success with children facing emotional and behavior problems by addressing children’s needs in a school setting instead of pulling them out of school for therapy sessions—appointments that often meant children would miss an entire day of school. “There’s a realization that no one can do this alone,” says John Browning, president of Southwestern. “We can’t be effective if behavior isn’t reinforced at home and at school.” Browning also made case workers available to help teachers at Cedar Hall learn strategies for assisting students in the classroom.

Other partners, such as St. Mary’s Hospital, the Boys and Girls Club, and Lampion, a family and child service agency, began seeing the same benefits by working closely with the schools.

When the 23,000-student EVSC received its first 21st CCLC grant in 2000, the community school strategy began to spread to more schools, with extended learning opportunities and social services delivered by community organizations. EVSC’s

EVSC Strategic Plan Focus Areas

- ▶ Professional development
- ▶ Early childhood education
- ▶ Innovative school models
- ▶ State-of-the-art technology
- ▶ Family, school, and community partnerships

partner agencies gathered for the first time in 2000 in what is known as the “big table”—every-other-month gatherings that allow partners to present their work and discover new ways to collaborate. In 2001, the School-Community Council (SCC), often still fondly referred to as the “big table,” was formally created to oversee the expanding initiative.

When former Superintendent Vince Bertram—who served from 2007 through 2011—arrived in Evansville, he engaged the community in a process to identify strategic focus areas for the school district. Together, the school district and community identified family, school, and community partnerships as one of five core focus areas in the district’s strategic plan (see text box “EVSC Strategic Plan Focus Areas”). Formalizing partnerships as a key district strategy was the primary goal of the SCC’s Steering Committee, made up of community partners and people working with Gray, whom Bartram tapped as associate superintendent for family, school, and community partnerships.

Today, Superintendent David Smith is committed to sustaining and intensifying the district’s efforts to enhance the operation of community schools and provide early childhood opportunities. When Smith was asked just one day after he was hired whether he would change strategies, he responded, “The change is going to be we’re *not* going to change. We’re totally

committed to early childhood, family, school, community partnerships...quite frankly, we can’t solve or resolve [school] issues in isolation. It takes a community effort.”

Once the new strategic plan was written, the SCC Steering Committee was recast as the Leadership Advisory Committee, a 16-member group of selected partners, staff from the district’s academic team, and representatives from the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships. The committee is now setting new goals and will focus primarily on advising schools and “big table” members on programs that better meet student needs.

Additional grants followed the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant, including a Safe Schools Healthy Students grant in 2004, allowing for growth of community school components to all schools. The Welborn Baptist Foundation, another early partner, provides a coordinated school health program and places wellness coordinators in 24 schools, further reinforcing the school as a place that meets both academic and non-academic needs. Other funding sources, such as Title I and the Carol M. White Physical Education Program grant and additional local, state, and philanthropic funds, help support the community school structure, services, and philosophy (see text box “EVSC Community School Funding Sources”).

Grabbing a piece of paper off her desk, Gray offers an example as she talks about the district’s recent receipt of a \$75,000 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant. Because the grant application was aligned with Evansville’s efforts to eliminate homelessness, the district is disbursing the funds to a variety of partners to focus on tutoring homeless youth. In addition, Aurora, a non-profit agency, will provide school staff with professional development to help them recognize homeless youth; the Lampion Center counseling agency will provide case management services; and Youth First, another nonprofit, will deliver tutoring to youth in homeless shelters. Finally, 4C of Southern Indiana, Inc., the local child care resource and referral agency, is helping to create “play spaces”—areas with books, toys, games, and art supplies—in the city’s transitional housing and emergency shelters.

Carrie Hillyard, EVSC’s assistant director of Title I, works with principals to find as much flexibility as possible in the various grants received by the district in order to align funding that supports the district’s

EVSC Community School Funding Sources

- Title I
- Title I School Improvement Grants
- 1003 G—School Improvement
- Special Education
- Title II—Professional Development
- Title III—English Language Learner
- Title IV—Safe and Drug Free
- Even Start and Head Start
- Centers for Disease Control
- 21st Century Community Learning Centers
- Carol M. White Physical Education Grant
- Grant to Reduce Alcohol Abuse
- Safe School/Healthy Students
- McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grant
- Full-Service Community Schools Grant

strategies while meeting grant requirements. “It’s a good thing I took creative writing in school,” she says. “There is a lot of creative writing that goes into getting schools what they need.”

As community schools expand in Evansville, the efforts to work with partners to improve access to preschool programs and link them to schools are likewise expanding. As noted earlier, early childhood education is one of the district’s core focus areas and figures prominently in the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships.

Moving into the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships

In 2009, the division headed by Gray moved into a former branch of the Old National Bank, which leases the building to the district for \$1 a year. Now separate from the district’s central office, the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships is designed to be a welcoming place for families, as evidenced by its inviting play area for young children. One of the district’s partners—Hospitality and Outreach for Latin Americans (HOLA)—is housed in the center, increasing the district’s ability to reach out to Evansville’s growing Hispanic community and enhancing the nonprofit’s efforts to serve more children through its after-school programs. “It’s easier to promote our programs,” says Executive Director Monica Landaeta.

Even though the center’s office is separate from the district’s central office, Gray meets weekly with senior district officials and routinely steers them toward addressing issues in collaboration with members of the “big table.” “I’m now working with partners almost as much as Cathy,” says David Dimmet, EVSC’s chief academic officer.¹¹ Dimmet recently became a Big Brother so he could set a good example. He has noticed that making decisions at the district level, without giving schools and partners a chance to weigh in is ill-advised amid a climate of collaboration. “That would have been tolerated before,” he says, referring to a recent situation in which district leaders deliberated over how to continue funding instructional coaches once federal stimulus funds dried up. “Now if we don’t get input, we get resistance.”

¹¹ David Dimmett left EVSC in summer 2011 just after he was interviewed for this study.

Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships Services

- ▶ After-school and summer enrichment program
- ▶ Early childhood education
- ▶ Extended daycare center program
- ▶ Family support services
- ▶ Health, wellness, and coordinated school health
- ▶ School-community council (community schools)
- ▶ Southwest Indiana College Access Network (SICAN)
- ▶ Student support services (e.g., mentoring, counseling, school-linked services)

Learning To Do Community Schools Better

In 2010, the district received a Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, which formalizes and supports much of what Evansville’s schools have been doing with other funding streams. The grant focuses on five schools and the development of policies, procedures, and job descriptions for each school’s community outreach coordinator, says the director of the FSCS program for EVSC, Patricia Weinzapfel, a former local television news reporter who brings communication and leadership skills to her job. “Every school is a community school,” she says, but there is variation in implementation across the schools. “This allows us to do it better and grow the work in a more intentional way.” The grant also provides funds for professional development and for each school’s site council. A sixth school will have the same resources and a coordinator, though under a 1003(g) School Improvement Grant using a “turn-around model”—one of four options available to low-achieving schools under No Child Left Behind.

The six schools represent a variety of grade configurations from the early childhood years through high school, which, Weinzapfel says, will serve as “a model for all levels.” (See text box “Making the New Cedar Hall Even Better” for an example of growth at the school level).

Meeting around the Big Table

Today, the School Community Council counts more than 70 members, and partners joke about the need for a bigger table. The SCC also includes several committees, or teams, made up of both EVSC staff and community representatives who focus on specific areas such as health and wellness, communications, and evaluation.

Janet Raisor, executive director of case management, community outreach, and rehabilitation services at St. Mary's Hospital—which makes case workers available to EVSC, offers exercise programs, and sends a mobile dental van to schools—says she clearly sees the difference community schools make for Evansville families. The rich mix of services and extensive involvement of partners does not exist in neighboring counties or districts. “People are jealous of what we have here,” she says, describing surrounding counties as “about 10 years behind.”

Partners talk as much about how their organizations benefit from participation at the big table as they do their own work in the schools. For example, when Jo Gilreath, interim director of Mental Health America in Evansville, was re-examining the non-profit's core mission, she was reassured that another partner would provide the services she could no longer provide. “I was able to let go of some things with cutbacks because I knew what else was going on,” she says.

The big table has also changed some partners' thinking about applying for grants. Amy Walker, executive director of the Public Education Foundation in Evansville, said she used to think that agencies were all competing for the same slice of the pie. But now, she says, she has learned that one partner's success can often have positive ripple effects. “Being on the big table gives me access to resource knowledge that I wouldn't know otherwise,” she says.

Other members say that they have learned that some funders look for organizations that are already working together to address a problem. Anita Hays, secretary for the SCC, describes an event four years ago, called Healthier Evansville, that brought together staff from the city's two hospitals—St. Mary's and Deaconess. Instead of wearing t-shirts promoting their respective organizations, they wore Healthier Evansville t-shirts. “They are very competitive,” she says. “But that disappears at the big table.” The real sharing of information and resources often takes place

after the official meetings, Hays says. “While I'm cleaning up, I love to hear the clicking that's going on,” she says.

In a recent meeting, for example, Helen Peck, coordinator of the University of Evansville's 21st Century Scholars Program, which funds college tuition for Indiana students, sat at the end of the table with Melissa Davis, programs and partnerships manager for the Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library. When Peck learned that the library had mobile laptop carts available for computer classes, she began asking how she could work with Davis to make those available to high school students in the Scholars program.

David Schutte, EVSC coordinator of community outreach, plays an important role in building cohesion among partners. He started out implementing 21st Century Community Learning Center programs for the district but now takes on any task related to working with community partners, functioning as something of a site coordinator for the district. Wearing a polo shirt instead of suit to work so he can relate to a wide variety of community members, Schutte tries to attend every site council meeting at every school in order to update partners on what is happening district-wide. He also makes certain that all participants feel appreciated for the work they do. “It's about being sure we value both sides,” he says. “People are people. Feelings get hurt.”

Many Coordinators

EVSC faces a considerable challenge as it continues to implement its district-wide community school initiative. For example, that several coordinators work with various community partners could potentially give rise to confusion over roles and responsibilities. In particular, the FSCS grant and School Improvement Grant brought an additional staff person to six schools to form community partnerships, improve services for children, and strengthen relationships with parents. Those six individuals joined schools whose 21st Century coordinators often led site council meetings and developed partnerships. Lincoln School, for example, now accounts for four coordinator positions—21st Century, Title I, FSCS, and the Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP). In many other schools two or three coordinators are on staff. In addition, high schools have student support advisors. While the Culver Family Learning Center does not

Making the New Cedar Hall Even Better

Many of the lessons EVSC has learned about running community schools are the result of Cedar Hall's experience. Nonetheless, the Cedar Hall staff is still intent on engaging new partners and strengthening relationships with existing partners.

For example, Cedar Hall's prekindergarten program is funded under Title I—a decision that, Principal Jacqueline Kuhn says, has resulted in higher scores for her students on the DIBELS early literacy assessment as compared to schools with comparable levels of poverty. Another Title I prekindergarten program was set to open at Evans Elementary in fall 2011.

"Our K kids come in about 18 months behind so pre-K is one of our greatest interventions," Kuhn says, but adds that she would like to partner with Head Start to strengthen the early childhood program, diversify funding streams, and serve more children.

Kuhn and others convinced the local neighborhood association, which had always been part of Cedar Hall, to begin meeting in the school's "family-community outreach office." "Getting them into the building consistently has been huge," she says.

Built on the site of its former structure, Cedar Hall is now a colorful, new, environmentally friendly building with a rooftop garden and a façade that looks like a series of rowhouses.

On a recent summer morning, students had just finished the academic portion of their summer school program and were waiting in the small gymnasium for buses that would transport them to another school where the city's Department of Parks and Recreation runs afternoon activities.

Business majors from the University of Southern Indiana are designing business plans for the school's clothing closet, which helps families in need of school uniforms and other items.

Kuhn emphasizes that partnerships have to run in both directions. "We don't always come with our hand out," she says, adding that she regularly goes to the neighborhood association meetings and provides volunteers for community events.

The EVSC's plans to create K–8 schools never included Cedar Hall. In fact, the school was scheduled to be closed—until Bertram got an earful from parents and local residents who did not want to lose their school. "They were sizzling," Kuhn describes the crowd. "I had never seen him so shaken."

When Cedar Hall ultimately merged with one of the district's middle schools in 2010, prekindergarten parents expressed typical concerns about their children riding on buses with eighth graders, and the eighth graders were not too eager to return to an elementary school now that they were the "big shots," Kuhn says. But she notes that her oldest students have interacted positively with the school's youngest pupils. Students in the eighth grade "cadet teaching" elective class, for example, read with students in prekindergarten through first grade—even learning best practices from a Title I reading specialist.

have all these positions, Jonathan Walker, the center's family community outreach coordinator, still must determine how his job differs from that of Head Start's two parent advocates.

Receipt of the FSCS grant therefore added to the potential for confusion over roles and responsibilities. Weinzapfel and many others, however, say that the new position has allowed the existing coordinators to return to focusing on what they were originally intended to do; that is, the 21st Century coordinators oversee after-school programming, and the PEP coordinators work to improve physical education programs. Tequia Barrett, program director for the 21st Century grant, says that more than one coordinator at several schools has been beneficial. "I have yet to be in a school where you have the capacity to meet all the needs," she says.

Barbie Sandifer, who had already been volunteering as a leader in Cedar Hall's PTA, was hired as the school's family and community outreach coordinator after the principal noticed her strong connections in both the school and community. Sandifer, who was also recruited for her natural people skills, says she views her role as social worker and troubleshooter. She routinely stays after school or attends youth baseball games so she can meet parents, many of whom do not have telephones or e-mail accounts.

Julie Mullen, community outreach coordinator at McGary Middle School, said she has relied on Ashley Blondin, her 21st Century site coordinator, to introduce her to partners while going door to door to local businesses

to build new relationships. Each day, she called 10 homes of incoming sixth graders to try to establish rapport with new families and let them know that she is willing and able to line them up with services, such as the dental van, parent education, even bus tokens—a process sometimes met with skepticism. “So many of these families have been offered things and it hasn’t been followed through,” she says. As the new member of the team, she said she feels responsibility for taking some of the burden off the others. “People come to me for everything,” she says. “I’m up at two in the morning researching grants for somebody because I don’t want to say no.”

Donna Newman, director of children’s services for the Community Action Program of Evansville (CAPE), the Head Start grantee, added that it is also important “not to confuse parents” with the variety of coordinator positions. She added, however, that she thinks the roles and responsibilities are getting worked out and that “it will be a good thing for the families and the community.”

An Early Learning Leader

Early childhood education is another one of EVSC’s five core focus areas, although the district has been a leader in focusing on the early years for a long time. Roughly 20 years ago, Evansville began offering full-day kindergarten, using its own funds to supplement what the state spends for half-day kindergarten.

Indiana is one of 10 states provides no public funding for preschool. In the absence of such funding, Evansville has offered preschool education through partnerships with Head Start or under Title I. In addition, kindergartners are eligible to participate in after-school programs covered by the 21st Century Community Learning Center grant—something not usually offered at the elementary level. In other states and communities, kindergartners are sometimes considered too young—and too tired by 3:00 p.m.—to benefit from after-school programs. Moreover, schools often struggle to identify the appropriate staff needed to engage and supervise both older and younger students.

In Evansville, the district runs buses at 4:00 p.m. to take the kindergartners home while older students stay later, according to Schutte. Parents in Evansville also have the option of using the fee-based extended-daycare program that operates in all elementary schools. Community partners support after-school

activities for young children; for example, Home Depot staff gave students a birdhouse building lesson, and the Boy Scouts taught boys how to tie a necktie. “We don’t try to be classroom teachers, but we still want them to learn,” says Leia Darden, who oversees the after-school program.

Creating a New Model for Early Childhood

In 2010, EVSC created a new model for serving young children from birth to age 5—the Culver Family Learning Center. The center brought Head Start classrooms, the Even Start family literacy program, some developmental preschool classes and early childhood special education classrooms under a single roof in one of the district’s most at-risk neighborhoods. With only one year behind them, the staff is still envisioning ways to make the most of the facility, a former elementary school.

“This room has been sitting, waiting for some energy and some money,” Emma Couture, project director for the center, said in spring 2011 as she walked through the school’s former library. Leather couches sat in front of bookcases stacked with papers and brochures. Boxes sat on top of tables, but Couture envisioned the room as a venue for parent meetings and casual gatherings. Now, through a partnership with 4C, the former library will see the energy Couture envisioned. 4C is moving its parenting classes into the Culver center, along with its highly regarded resource library, which includes toys, curriculum materials, and books. The space will now be called the “family room,” says Erin Ramsey, EVSC’s new director of early childhood, adding that the center ideally will serve as a hub not only for families but also for preschool and childcare providers in the area. “I think there has been a shift in our city,” Ramsey says, adding that the telephones “ring off the hook” with calls from parents looking for preschool slots. “People want their young children to go to school. That wasn’t always the case.”

Touring through the building, Gray learned that EVSC was using some of the classrooms for storing science kits and other materials. “We can get rid of that. I don’t want this to be a catch-all,” she tells Couture. “We need more room for kids.” Since then, the science kits have been removed and replaced by 4C’s parenting education programs. In the spirit of collaboration, 4C leases the space from EVSC for just \$1.

Considered a community school, just like the rest of the district's schools, Culver has a site council, a community outreach coordinator under the FSCS grant, and partners involved in delivering services to the children and families. For example, the play space for families facing possible homelessness will be located at Culver.

CAPE (the Head Start grantee) provides wrap-around services at Culver while the district hires the lead teachers. The arrangement allows CAPE to provide health and family advocacy services for non-Head Start–eligible children who also attend classes—something otherwise unavailable to those children, explains Newman, CAPE's director of children's services. "I think the comprehensiveness of a community school is very good," Newman says. "The services that are combined between Head Start and the [local education agency] are worth the partnership."

In partnership with St. Mary's Hospital, Culver is in the process of designing its developmental preschool classes for children from low-literacy households. Given that Culver is located in Evansville's arts district, leaders also want to establish connections with the arts community.

Another initiative involving St. Mary's will blend funding sources to serve preschoolers diagnosed on the autism spectrum in a full-inclusion class and follow the children closely so both the medical and education professionals can learn about effective interventions. "The message is that the medical community and the education community need to come together and figure this out," Ramsey says. "We can't work in isolation when kids are young."

Walker, the outreach coordinator, has spent much of his time overseeing the work of establishing a new "hoop house"—a garden enclosed in a structure that Walker describes as a "Quonset hut." Parents who participate in adult education classes at Culver tend the crops—tomatoes, strawberries, and celery—during their breaks. "Gardens are one of those pieces that can make parents feel very engaged," Walker says.

Building Relationships with Other Providers

In addition to forming bonds with families, Gray would like to see Culver staff members move away from identifying teachers based on their program affiliation.

"We need to use collaborative language and collaborative terminology," she says. "We're not there yet."

While Newman noted the benefits of the partnership with CAPE for classes at both Culver and Daniel Wertz Elementary School, both she and Gray noted some challenges with the relationship. "The philosophies don't always merge between Head Start and schools," Gray says. Competition for children and teachers is also an issue when school districts begin offering prekindergarten classes, and Evansville has been no different.

Given that EVSC teachers earn more than Head Start teachers, Gray says that Head Start was naturally worried that it would lose teachers. At the same time, private providers in the community were concerned that EVSC would serve families that otherwise would seek their services, even though families served by the district cannot afford privately provided services. "We're talking about kids who don't have access," Gray says. Many of the worries about competition have faded. Instead, for the most part, Melissa Schmidt of the United Way says that the "profile of early childhood education has been raised in the community."

EVSC's early childhood department is housed in the Center for Family, School, and Community Partnerships rather than in Academic Affairs for the express purpose of keeping the focus on comprehensive services—not just on education. "We don't want [early childhood] to look like K," Gray says. In Evansville, however, the district is organized to break down administrative divisions in order to maximize opportunities for students. Gray works with the Office of Academic Affairs to strengthen early childhood education in addition to ensuring the delivery of comprehensive services. A spirit of collaboration pervades the district and its community partners.

EVSC's early childhood efforts, specifically under Bertram, have drawn the attention of outside observers. An editorial in the local *Courier Press* talked about the former superintendent's contributions.

"We would presume as well that children attending one of the school corporation's new preschool centers will benefit almost immediately, especially considering that some may otherwise have had no formal learning experiences prior to attending kindergarten," the editorial stated. "Experts in brain development say these are critically important years for children to learn, hence the new emphasis on early childhood education."

The Early Childhood Development Coalition's Work To Improve Early Learning

Early childhood learning is a growing priority not just for the district but also for other partners around the big table, including Mayor Jonathan Weinzapfel and the United Way. With a grant from the Indiana Association of United Ways and the Lilly Endowment, the city formed the Early Childhood Development Coalition. Now including over 60 partners, the coalition is working with the Mayor's Education Roundtable to organize an early childhood education summit to spur interest in early learning programs among leaders outside the education field, Schmidt says.

The city also piloted the state's Paths to Quality child care rating and improvement system, funded by the Welborn Baptist Foundation; the system provides incentives to programs for reaching higher standards.

The coalition has done more than just talk about the importance of learning in the early years. It is implementing early learning activities by, for example, organizing literacy nights for families with young children and publishing a series of children's books featuring the character Napoleon Peacock. Roughly 4,200 families participate in Napoleon's book club; in exchange, they receive books and additional parent education materials. Coalition members also created a Kindergarten Readiness Checklist to be filled out by formal childcare or preschool providers and given to kindergarten teachers when children enroll in school.

While the process of getting preschool and kindergarten teachers to agree on the skills that children should demonstrate upon school entry was described by Gray as "pulling teeth" and by Couture as "blood, sweat and tears," Schmidt said that kindergarten teachers now collect checklists from roughly 30 percent of EVSC's entering kindergartners, with plans to reach more children. A scaled-down version of the checklist in a colorful brochure format offers parents a way to share some information about their child during the kindergarten transition process.

The issue of transitioning children into kindergarten is another area where Head Start providers and coalition leaders find little common ground. Newman says that CAPE agreed to use the coalition's checklist even though Head Start had already developed its own checklist. She thinks that EVSC kindergarten teachers do not have much trust in the assessment tools used

in Head Start. "I don't think that we are where we need to be on the usage of the [assessment] information and starting children out at the skill level where they need to be," Newman says, adding that more opportunities are needed for early childhood teachers and kindergarten teachers to work together. "I still think [transition] is not taken very seriously," she adds. "There needs to be more meetings, more collaboration between early childhood and kindergarten."

A Priority for All Partners

Other community partners are talking about the importance of providing services and support for young children. The Welborn Baptist Foundation, which funds the Napoleon books, runs Little HEROES, a wellness and exercise program for childcare centers that is an early childhood version of its initiative for school-age children. The Children's Museum of Evansville worked with the city's early childhood community to plan a special school transition event called "Kindergarten. . .Here I Come!" The exhibit was designed to give children a chance to sit on a real school bus, meet crossing guards, put their belongings in a "cubby," and hear a story.

The Southwest Indiana College Access Consortium (SICAN), which obviously focuses on readiness for post-secondary education, is recasting its model to reach younger children. SICAN had been placing a student advisor in every high school and middle school in the district to help create a "college-going culture," says Jacque Barnette, SICAN coordinator. The model is now shifting, assigning advisors to an entire feeder pattern—from kindergarten through 12th grade. While they will continue to provide one-on-one advising in high schools, the advisors will plan more programs at the elementary and middle school levels. "We recognize the need for early intervention," Barnette says, especially when children have parents that didn't attend college. [Our advisors] are going to walk into a school and sell college—K to eight."

Gathering and Understanding Data

One of Weinzapfel's goals for FSCS grantee schools—and eventually for all EVSC schools—is to help principals, coordinators, site council members, and others develop an accurate picture of which programs are in place at which schools and what partners can provide what services. To that end, she unrolls a long spread

sheet on a conference room table. The spread sheet, which features color-coded areas for certain services, including early childhood programs, has helped Weinzapfel track what is happening at grantee schools.

Laura Lockyear, a high school data coach who works in EVSC's research and evaluation department, is developing an online program that will permit schools to choose from a menu of community providers as they develop their school improvement plans. Schools would then mail their requests for programs to the district office because Weinzapfel doesn't want "30 schools calling one partner." Ultimately, Lockyear says, the system could specify how many children received services from a particular provider and whether there was any impact on their academic performance. Lockyear's project is related to a larger effort within the district to build a new data warehouse—a project that includes community partners.

At the beginning of the three-year warehouse-building process, an "indicator summit" brought together partners to specify the information they need—such as teen pregnancy rates, body mass index measurements, and parents' education level—in order to apply for grants and improve services. (See text box "Selected Results from EVSC Community Schools"). While the partners do not have access to the warehouse, they can request data and collect information for input into the warehouse, such as attendance in summer school or after-school programs. Now deputy superintendent of academics and accountability, Susan McDowell Riley earlier served as director of psychological services for the district and was a member of the big table. Riley says that the third year of the "build" will include more information pertaining to community schools and partnerships, such as survey data, children's early learning experiences, or whether children are served by SICAN.

District leaders also work with schools to help teachers and administrators better understand the data they already have. One result of "performance management" sessions has been the recognition that students need more support during transitions between schools, including at the point of kindergarten entry. Officials plan to hold a performance management session on early childhood classrooms. The session will provide Gray with another opportunity to reinforce the role of community agencies in responding to children's needs in support of achieving each child's learning goals. "Cathy always asks ques-

tions about 'how are you working with your partners?'" Riley says. "[Principals] know they are going to be questioned about it."

Facing Early Childhood Challenges

EVSC is facing some shifts in its funding for early childhood programs. For 13 years, the district has been recipient of the Even Start family literacy grants. The program, serving 50 to 60 children a year, was originally housed at Cedar Hall but moved to the Culver Center when it opened in 2010. Even Start provided not only early childhood classrooms but also adult education and GED and English-as-a-second language programs. In early 2011, however, Congress eliminated funding for Even Start, which has faced longstanding doubts about its effectiveness.

During summer 2011, Gray and Couture were deliberating over how to continue providing services for Even Start families. The 3- to 5-year-olds, Gray said, would likely be absorbed by the other Head Start and prekindergarten programs, but there was some uncertainty over how to "piece together" funding to continue the infant and toddler classes. Ultimately, the district is continuing the Even Start model with funding from the FSCS grant. Couture will focus on building stronger partnerships between the various programs at Culver.

EVSC would like to serve young children's health needs through school-based health centers in its community schools and has initiated efforts to scale up health services as resources become available.

Both Lincoln and Cedar Hall, for example, were built with space for a clinic, complete with examination rooms and a reception desk that can be accessed by a separate outside entrance for visiting patients.

"It's designed to grow," Johnson at Lincoln says, standing in the dark, empty clinic space that serves as the school nurse's office during the school year. "We could serve families—not just kids—if the funding gets worked out."

Under a recent grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration, funding is assured at three sites in Evansville for the next five years. The \$1.2 million grant was awarded to the University of Southern Indiana's College of Nursing and Health Professions to operate school-community health centers at the K–8 Glenwood Leadership Academy,

Culver Family Learning Center, and Juan Diego Hispanic Center, which provides education and social services to Evansville's Hispanic community. Along with the school district, other partners involved in the grant are St. Mary's Medical Center, Southwest Behavioral Health Care, and the county health department. The center at Glenwood was expected to open in January 2012, with the two other sites opening the following year. The centers' staff will include a clinic manager, nurse practitioner, and medical assistant, with hours of operation increasing over time. "We're hopeful that if we are able to do this good and do this right, we can eventually branch out," says Diana Butler, EVSC's director of health services.

Raisor of St. Mary's Hospital says that creating sustainable school-based health services is "more complicated than just building a clinic," particularly in urban areas where low-income families often use the hospital emergency room as their regular doctor's office and where other clinics already exist. "I think we will get there, and it will probably be a better model," she adds. "We need the stakeholders to develop it."

Reaching Parents

With all the strong partnerships in Evansville, many in the district say more work needs to be done to improve relationships with some of the most important stakeholders—parents. Several coordinators and others talked about the desire to see parents become more active on school site councils and at school and community events. This is another area where the district could learn from Head Start, Newman says. "It takes awhile to learn that culture, to become passionate about that," she says. "We have a history of it and they don't."

A new family engagement initiative recently launched by the district is focusing on improved ways to connect with parents. Staff members from each school—a total of 112—were identified to work on reaching out to parents and trained in issues such as cultural sensitivity and effective practices. Staff were then expected to choose parents to serve as liaisons for the initiative. "We are asking, wanting, needing parental input," says Kate Scates, a school social worker leading the effort who also works at the district level on an alcohol abuse prevention program and other social-emotional learning issues. She says that the Culver Family Learning Center—and early childhood

classes in general—can help provide other schools with examples of how to form bonds with parents.

"If you can get families engaged, or if they can establish a relationship with just one person in that school," she says, "they are more likely to be involved." Strengthening bonds with parents is just one of the ways that Evansville is improving school, family, and community connections. The school district and community are organized through the community schools initiative to take on these and new opportunities as part of their mission to improve outcomes for children.

Lessons

LESSON 1: Purposefully integrating community schools and early childhood concerns into the district's leadership structure and strategic plan creates greater ownership among staff in local schools and across the district. It also makes the child, community partnerships, and early childhood transitions a seamless part of how the district conducts business.

LESSON 2: Community schools help community partners reach their unique goals. Putting competition aside can lead to widespread success.

LESSON 3: Building trust between public schools and Head Start or other community-based early childhood programs can take time. If it is clear that the goal is to serve children not currently receiving any preschool services, then the walls will begin to fall as a wide range of providers shares strategies and resources.

LESSON 4: Development of a data system that can answer the questions posed by both schools and community partners takes time and must ensure that all parties involved in the community schools initiative will be able to target their services and resources effectively and respond to funder expectations.

LESSON 5: Working together, the community school leadership structure and the local Early Childhood Development Coalition help move forward a system of care and learning for young children in and outside the school system.

LESSON 6: When the district sees the community schools initiative and early childhood opportunities as part of its core mission, it is able to blend the several public and private funding streams to achieve its goals. ■