

## SIG Grants: Perspectives from Community School Leaders in Indiana, California and Michigan

The Coalition for Community Schools recently conducted interviews to learn more about how community school initiatives are using their SIG funds. Here are the places we spoke with as well as a brief characterization of how they are using SIG funds:

**The Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC)**, in Indiana, uses the community school strategy district-wide. The Glenwood Leadership Academy is one of Evansville's most robust community schools and it uses SIG funding to help bring about practices and supports that pave the way for stronger student achievement and a more positive school climate. At Glenwood Leadership Academy, SIG helps pay for the community school coordinator, the start up costs at the school's health clinic, equipment and supplies for the school's community garden, evening computer and leadership classes for adults, a digital marquis that advertises school and community news, reading tutorials, and a restorative practices program.

**The San Francisco Unified School District** has nine SIG-funded community schools that belong to a larger group of schools (called the Superintendent's Zone) that receive additional funding and special attention from the district superintendent. The nine community schools, which are located in neighborhoods that experience extreme poverty, use SIG funding to pay for community school coordinators and additional staff who provide social and emotional supports to students. Many of the schools also use SIG funding to pay for efforts to ramp up family engagement and efforts to improve and align teaching and learning practices during the school day with teaching and learning practices after school. One of San Francisco's most successful SIG-funded community schools is Paul Revere Elementary.

**Godfrey- Lee Public Schools**, located in the Grand Rapids area of Michigan, has two SIG-funded community schools: Godfrey-Lee High School and Godfrey-Lee Middle School. The school district has a high percentage of students who are from low-income families, students who are from households with undocumented immigrants, and students who are learning English. The middle and high school use SIG funding to pay for a community school coordinator. Non SIG funding pays for other student and family support staff at the school, including the school nurse, the mental health clinician, and social service workers.

## What Community School Leaders are Saying about SIG Grants

Interviews with community school coordinators, district personnel, community school intermediary leaders, and a superintendent in these places revealed the following themes:

### SIG Funding and the Community School Strategy Complement One Other:

"I'd say that SIG funding and community school work goes hand and hand. Many of the challenges that students face are best addressed through the community school approach. In a community school you are working to overcome the many barriers to learning-- from health issues to trauma to poverty... For example, the community school coordinator at our community schools offers support to families during times of stress or crisis; she may help families find the nearest clinic where they can bring their sick child or she may help families find a legal aid group."

- Carol Paine McGovern, Community School Director, Grand Rapids, Michigan



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## COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS COMMUNITY SCHOOL PERSPECTIVES ON SIG GRANTS

“Because of the community school model... everyone knows what is needed and how to get there and we all feel equally responsible for that goal. The community school model helps make the SIG funding work at our school because you can put this money in and hire all these people and... you have the entire community behind it.”

- *Lorraine Orlandi, Community School Coordinator, Paul Revere Elementary, San Francisco Unified Public School District*

### **Community School Coordinator, Funded by SIG, is Key to Student Success:**

“It’s my job as community school coordinator to see the big picture and bring everyone together around those big picture goals. I sit on the school’s instructional leadership team and the culture and climate team and the administrative team. I am able to be a part of the highest level of conversations.”

- *Lorraine Orlandi, Community School Coordinator, Paul Revere Elementary, San Francisco Unified Public Schools*

“The community school coordinator is at the nexus of conversations about a student’s academic life and their social-emotional life. She has conversations with staff working throughout the school about why children are not succeeding and which different supports can help.”

- *Carol Paine McGovern, Community School Leader, Grand Rapids, Michigan*

“You can have this great reading program for students but if you have a child who is worried about their parents, or a child who is sick and has no doctor to go to, that child is not going to read. With the community school coordinator, we can now connect that child and that family to the resources that they need.”

- *Dave Britten, Superintendent, Godfrey-Lee Public Schools, Michigan*

### **SIG Funding Shows That Additional Resources, Delivered Through the Community School Strategy, Bring Positive Results:**

“We needed the SIG funding to turnaround the school and we are doing that. We are now showing what we can do if we have the right level of resources. But this is a deep cultural change and we are only just beginning: the success is still fragile. Now that we know what we are doing, we need more time and more funding to deepen the work and let it take hold.”

- *Lorraine Orlandi, Community School Coordinator, Paul Revere Elementary, San Francisco*

“SIG shows that if you attend to the teacher and the learner, and to family and student needs, you get results.”

- *Hayin Kim, Director of Community Schools, San Francisco Unified School District*

“Glenwood Leadership Academy saw double digit growth in math and language arts last year, so we are going in the right direction. Glenwood is recognized locally as a success.”

- *Carrie Hillyard, Director of School Transformation, Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation*

“Our students have more confidence in themselves. We had students literally walk into a staff meeting and ask for higher level classes. And so we now offer precalculus, statistics, and anatomy and physiology and all of these classes are now packed with students.”

- *Dave Britten, Superintendent, Godfrey Lee Public Schools, Michigan*



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### **Community Schools Are Looking for Ways to Sustain Funding When SIG Ends**

“We are trying to come up with creative financing solutions... For example, the University of Southern Indiana will fund the school’s health clinic the year after SIG funding ends.”

- *Carrie Hillyard, Director of School Transformation, Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation*

“We will fund our community school coordinator through our general operating budget, but we’ll have to make cuts to other areas to do that.”

- *Dave Britten, Superintendent, Godfrey Lee Public Schools, Michigan*

“We are talking with the Department of Public Health and the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families for possibilities to fund the community school coordinators.”

- *Hayin Kim, Director of Community Schools, San Francisco Unified School District*

### **Case Study: Glenwood Leadership Academy – Evansville, Indiana**

Well before Glenwood Leadership Academy received SIG funding, the school was part of a robust community revitalization project. As part of this revitalization project, the school received a multi-million dollar renovation and the school became the crown jewel of the neighborhood. Even more important, because of this revitalization process, school staff began working intensively with neighborhood leaders and community groups and everyone involved began to feel responsible for the school and its future success.

And so when Glenwood Leadership Academy received SIG funding in 2010, the school already had in place a strong network of community partners. It also had a vision that everyone believed in: Glenwood would help young people become strong students and strong leaders.

The SIG funding helped the school start moving the needle on student achievement, by providing students with supports and services that respond to their physical, social and mental health needs. Carrie Hillyard, the school district's Director of School Transformation, says:

SIG has been one of the few grants that has allowed us to invest and do so with more flexibility than I would have anticipated.

Glenwood hired a full time community school coordinator: a staff person who finds community resources and supports which match the needs of the school's students, and who brings those resources into the school. Significantly, Glenwood's community school coordinator, who is a former teacher, also makes sure that after school programs and activities complement the academic work students do during the school day.

SIG funding is helping transform the school in other ways: it pays for some of the start-up costs of Glenwood's new health clinic and it pays for a digital marquis which advertises school and community news. It also pays for a reading tutorial program, a restorative practices program, and evening computer classes for adults.

The results of this financial and social investment are impressive: Glenwood Leadership Academy saw double digit growth in math and language arts last year on the state's standardized test.

Even more important, the community's confidence in the school is restored. A local church, for example, recently told district leaders, that it is now an ally and partner to the school. Says Hillyard, "The church has told us that whatever we need, they will step up and make it happen, and I know they will."

Hillyard says, with SIG funding ending soon, Glenwood Leadership Academy will now rely more heavily on community partners, such as the local church. Some partners have already stepped up: for example, the University of Southern Indiana will help keep the school's health clinic funded for one year after the SIG grant ends.

### **Case Study: San Francisco Unified School District – San Francisco, CA**

San Francisco is using school improvement dollars together with a comprehensive community school strategy to resuscitate nine schools that have been struggling for years with poor academic performance, high teacher turnover, and high suspension rates. Seven of the schools are located in the city’s Mission District, a hub for immigrants (some of whom do not yet speak English) and first and second-generation families with strong ties to Latin America. Parts of the Mission District experience intense concentrations of poverty. The other two schools are located in Bayview-Hunters Point, a part of town that lost thousands of jobs when the shipyard there closed in the 1970s, and which now sees high rates of poverty, unemployment, child asthma, and crime.

Each of San Francisco’s nine community schools use school improvement dollars to pay for a community school coordinator-- the person who helps bring in (and strategically integrate) the kinds of outside supports and opportunities that are most needed by students and their families. Many of the schools also use SIG dollars to pay for additional staff who either engage families, respond to students’ mental health needs, or align teaching and learning during the school day with teaching and learning after school.

Many of the nine community schools receiving SIG grants have seen noticeable gains on recent standardized tests. Paul Revere Elementary School deserves particularly close attention, having made the second largest gain in the district on the Academic Performance Index. Lorraine Orlandi, Revere Elementary’s community school coordinator, says the community school strategy, together with SIG dollars, ushered in this success: “When everyone in the school is working closely together, we all know what is needed and how to get there, and we all feel equally responsible for that goal.” Orlandi meets on a regular basis with the school’s instructional team, administrative team, and school climate team, to make sure the three efforts are aligned.

School improvement dollars pay for Orlandi’s position as community school coordinator, and they also pay for a behavioral support coach and mental health providers who work with children and their families. SIG dollars also pay to expand the hours of a small team of educational coaching staff whose main goals are to improve teaching practice through intensive professional development and to align all teaching and learning efforts at the school. For example, this team helps after school instructors weave language arts lessons from the school day into after school activities. Additionally, school improvement money pays for a more robust family engagement program that targets families who’ve been the least likely to be in contact with the school. The SIG funding ends soon. Orlandi says,

We needed the SIG funding to turnaround the school and we are doing that. The community school model helped make this success happen because we had the entire community behind us. We are now showing what we can do if we have the right level of resources. But this is a deep cultural change and we are only just beginning: the success is still fragile. Now that we know what we are doing, we need more time and more funding to deepen the work and let it take hold. We don’t need the same amount as SIG to keep this effort going, but we do need more funding to sustain the work.

Hayin Kim, the Director of Community Schools for the district, agrees that the SIG funding shows “that if you attend to the teacher and the learner, and to family and student needs, you get the results: “SIG does show that resources matter when they are strategically coordinated and intentionally aligned.” Kim reports that since the nine schools are starting to make gains, the district does not want to see funding drop at these schools. She says the district is working with city health and social services agencies, to see if they can partner in the effort to sustain reform practices at the nine SIG-funded community schools.

### **Case Study: Godfrey Lee Public Schools, Grand Rapids, Michigan**

Godfrey Lee Public Schools, near Grand Rapids, Michigan has the highest percentage of students in poverty in the surrounding county. It has the highest percentage of limited English proficient students in the state. Several students come to the school directly from Mexico and do not speak any English. Many students live in households with many undocumented immigrants, and some children face the tremendous stress of living under threat of deportation. Several of the district's children have gone to school in the morning and returned home in the afternoon to find that their parents have been picked up by immigration authorities.

The school district is using SIG funds and the community school strategy to help make sure that students, facing tremendous hardship at home, have the supports and opportunities they need to succeed at school. The effort is showing positive results: the high school recently moved up to sixty third percentile from ninth percentile on the state of Michigan's school achievement report card. More importantly, students are showing confidence in their academic abilities and in their future prospects. Dave Britten, the school district superintendent, says that in recent years students stopped talking dismissively about their future, and started demanding higher level academic classes: "We had students literally walk into a staff meeting and ask for these classes. And so we now offer precalculus, statistics, and anatomy and physiology and all of these classes are now packed with students."

Britten attributes the dramatic and positive changes at the school to the powerful combination of SIG dollars and the community school strategy:

The grant and the community school strategy helped us pull together a lot of different pieces into one comprehensive approach. And one critical piece of this approach is support for students. You can have this great reading program for students but if you have a child who is worried about their parents, or a child who is sick and has no doctor to go to, that child is not going to read. With the community school coordinator, we can now connect that child and that family to the resources that they need.

SIG funding pays the full salary of the community school coordinator, who is based at the high school-middle school campus. Her job is to connect students and families to resources, and to do so in a way that families can access help in the easiest, most convenient way. Britten says when families can access help at the school, they are less likely to pull children out of class during the day:

We have school attendance challenges because many of our families are hesitant to go to appointments without the entire family there, and so a lot of our students get pulled from school when the family goes to appointments. When the community coordinator brings resources to the school campus, then we have fewer children missing school.

Non-SIG revenue streams help pay for other community school practices at Godfrey-Lee Middle and High School. The mental health clinician is funded through a school health grant. The social services staff at the school campus are funded by a state agency. These staff will remain in place even after SIG funding ends next year. Britten says that the school will also keep the school coordinator position even after SIG funding ends, although the position will come at the expense of other areas in the school's operating budget. Britten says the community school coordinator is the heart of the community school strategy.

Reflecting on what the SIG grant meant for the school district Britten says, “What the SIG grant did was allow us to move fully forward with the community school approach and to hire a coordinator. It allows us to see and experience the success of this program and move up the practice as a higher priority.”

Britten adds that the school district will work to sustain the successful reform practices even after SIG funding ends, but he says the district will be doing so in one of the most punitive funding climates in recent years. He says,

SIG funding dries up at the same time we are seeing other funding cutbacks, from state and local sources. Overall, we are going backwards, financially. All the while, we are working with a population that is high needs. We have students who come to us, in high school, with the equivalent of a fourth grade education. And yet, the day they walk in our door we have to prepare them to be college and career ready.