PART TWO: A FRAMEWORK FOR SCALE-UP

In simple terms, “scale-up” means adapting an innovation—such as community schools—for widespread and supported application, with the goal of producing robust, meaningful, agreed-upon outcomes.xvi In the case of community schools, it requires much more than simply increasing the number of community schools. The critical challenge is to find ways to create many community schools across one or more school districts and to develop structures with sufficient capacity to sustain, expand, and continuously improve community schools networks.

Part Two presents some basic facts about how systems operate and emphasizes the importance of attending to both culture and structure in systems change efforts. It outlines the characteristics of a successfully scaled-up system, including shared ownership, spread, depth, and sustainability. Based on extensive field experience, we present a Collaborative Leadership Structure to show how leadership roles and responsibilities may be distributed to build a community schools culture and the functional capacity needed to create and sustain such a scaled-up system. A Systems Benchmark Chart defines what must be in place for a scaled-up community school initiative to succeed (see Appendix).

Systems Basics

A system is a collection of parts that interact and function as a whole. Systems consist of elements and interconnections; they have a purpose, and they exist within a political, social, and cultural context. Infrastructure refers to a system’s basic features. It forms the base or foundation of a system and consists of the structural elements that support the entire enterprise.

Systems exist everywhere. A system may be a hard-wired physical organization such as a computer, or it may be a social, relationship-based organization such as a community school. In either case, a central tenet in systems thinking is that all parts of a system are interdependent. They are composed of numerous feedback loops that interact at several levels rather than in a strictly linear arrangement. The relationships form a complex, layered web.

Given the nature of systems structures, actions affecting one part of the system often do not produce orderly, predictable results. Tugging on one part of the web is likely to cause unanticipated reactions elsewhere in the system. Effectively changing a system requires an awareness of how the various parts of the system work together and the leverage points most likely to produce desired change. Integrated action across several functional areas is needed to move and sustain complex organizations. These two insights are fundamental to systems understanding—whether change takes the form of a solution to a specific problem within a system or aims to scale up community schools.

Attempts at systems change fail when there is a misalignment between assumptions about systems operations and how systems work in practice. Change agents often focus on the most obvious elements of the system they want to change by, for example, latching on to a “silver bullet” that calls for reorganizing their governing board, enacting new policies, or spending more money. All of these modifications may be important, but change agents mistakenly assume that anyone of these
isolated adjustments will produce system-wide change. Many initiatives expect improvement to come from simply working harder, forgetting Einstein’s definition of insanity as “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.”

Still another insight derived from systems thinking suggests that the most important dimension of system operations is the one most frequently overlooked—a system’s operating culture. Culture includes the values, expectations, and tacit assumptions that drive behavior and practice throughout the system and shape the system’s ability to achieve its purpose. While this controlling paradigm is less obvious than the other dimensions, it is, in fact, often the most crucial determinant of system change. 

Part One stressed that the time-tested effectiveness of a community schools strategy is based on a culture that fosters collective trust and promotes a set of core principles built around high expectations for schools and students, the potential strengths of family and community, and the development of the whole child. Without question, the change required for permanently transforming traditional schools into a district-wide system of community schools will occur only if the principles of community schools are deeply embedded in collaborative leadership structures and a culture of collaboration.

The Characteristics of an Effective Community Schools System

No doubt about it—system building is complicated work. Before starting down that road (more in Part Three), you need to have a good idea of the system you want to create. Community schools focus on the well-being of children, families, and communities so that students succeed in school, graduate, and go on to satisfying roles as parents, workers, and citizens. What type of system can create these results on a large scale?

Research suggests that an effectively scaled-up system of community schools exhibits four characteristics: shared ownership, spread, depth, and sustainability.

- **Shared ownership.** Responsibility for a community schools initiative rests with school systems and their community partners—local government, community-based organizations, public and private agencies, institutions of higher education, parent and neighborhood groups, business and civic entities, and others with an interest in the development and well-being of children, families, schools, and communities. Together, these partners engage in collaborative decision making and take ownership of their efforts to help all students succeed. School and community partners share resources, information, and accountability for results with the intention of fundamentally transforming the current education system. Because they command different resources, expertise, and connections, they develop a balance of power and equal voice among partners, even though their resources may not all carry the same dollar value. Shared ownership evolves and shifts to a broader group as stakeholders negotiate a shared vision, develop an operating framework, distribute leadership, clarify their respective roles.

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and responsibilities, and do the hard work involved in scaling up a system of community schools.

- **Spread.** In effective scale-up, innovations *spread* into structures, processes, materials, beliefs, norms, and principles. The spread is vertical and horizontal—both *up and out*. Vertical spread requires a scaled-up system to instill community schools principles throughout a community’s educational pathways, from early childhood programs to higher education and career training, the district office, the school, and the classroom. Horizontal spread reaches out geographically to encompass more and more schools and neighborhoods across the jurisdiction. A rollout strategy identifies sites and links them in clusters or feeder patterns that make sense given community needs and readiness.

Spread also refers to systematic growth in the public’s favorable perception of community schools across various sectors of the community. Such spread occurs as initiatives release data showing measurable progress toward results and provide opportunities for the public to participate in discussions about the expansion of a community schools initiative.

- **Depth.** Effective scale-up requires *deep change* that alters attitudes, behaviors, assumptions, and expectations about teaching and learning and child and youth development practices—within classrooms, school buildings, and districts as well as among community partners. Top-down innovation is sometimes required, but the adoption of such innovation can often be mechanical, superficial, and fleeting. To create systems that support community schools and educate our most vulnerable children, people at all levels—from teachers and social workers to principals and agency managers and on to institutional leaders—need the opportunity to “dig deep” and explore the core principles of community schools. Participants need to change attitudes and assumptions, policies and practices that may conflict with or water down what community schools hope to accomplish.

Depth is achieved by efforts at the community and school-site levels to embed community school principles in the strategic planning of school districts and community partners. Professional development for school staff and partners helps translate these principles into everyday practice while technical assistance builds the capacity of initiatives at the community and school-site levels to promote alignment and stay focused on the long-term vision.

- **Sustainability.** Implementation is the beginning, not the end, of successful scale-up. Effective scale-up creates an enduring system of community schools that survives leadership changes and other “rough weather.” Durability grows out of an infrastructure that supports a collaborative system based on a long-term vision, continually
measures progress against a clear set of benchmarks, and develops the ability to finance the functions of community schools. Moreover, to ensure continuation and expansion, community schools must marshal the capacity to capture and retain the political support of key sectors of the community—parents and residents, voters, taxpayers, and policymakers.

The Structure and Functions of System Building
Communities across the country have shown that, to build a system with the characteristics of shared ownership, spread, depth, and sustainability, school and community leaders must develop collaborative leadership structures with the capacity to carry out key functions. This finding confirms a fundamental insight of systems thinking: Integrated action across important functional areas advances and sustains complex organizations.

Most initiatives have developed a collaborative leadership structure that helps them execute and integrate key functions system-wide. Typically, the structures connect community-wide and site-level leadership, often through an intermediary entity.

- **Community-wide leadership** (e.g., school districts, government, United Way chapters, businesses, community- and faith-based organizations) is responsible for overall vision, policy, and resource alignment. It creates the context and capacity for expansion. It serves as a networking vehicle for policy development and communication in which several leaders of community initiatives decide why and how to align their resources to build and sustain a system of community schools.

- **School-site leadership** (e.g., parents, residents, principals, teachers, community partners, and young people) is responsible for planning, implementation, and continuous improvement. Leaders ensure that implementation satisfies local needs, aligns with the school’s academic mission, and generates practice knowledge and data to inform improvements in community-wide policy and site practice.

- **An intermediary entity** (an organization or a working group composed of key leaders and managers from one or more partner agencies) provides planning, coordination, and management. Leadership powers the work by ensuring communication between community-wide and school-site leaders and by facilitating operational functions at all leadership levels and across school sites. It convenes school and community partners, provides strategic planning, and ensures that what happens at the community leadership level empowers students, families, and practitioners at school sites.

Figure 4, *A Collaborative Leadership Structure for Community Schools*, depicts how leadership is shared. It shows that, while each leadership group has its own key roles and responsibilities, they all work to build capacity in each functional area. A continuous flow of communication and efforts to align the work of both school-site and community-wide leaders is facilitated by

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intermediary leadership to keep the initiative on track.

Participants in the collaborative leadership structure generally focus on the following seven functions: results-based vision, data and evaluation, finance and resource development, alignment and integration, supportive policy and practice, professional development and technical assistance, and broad community engagement.

**Results-Based Vision**

A results-based vision fuels the initiative, providing the big-picture motivation for scale-up efforts. For community schools, the long-range vision calls for building out the conditions for learning into a “community where learning happens.” In an effective scale-up initiative, the system operating culture—assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and stakeholder values—are consistent with the driving vision.

A results-based framework, including indicators, is used to measure student, school, and community progress in key areas of learning and development. It is also used to track operational progress in creating a shift in ownership, depth, spread, and sustainability.

**Data and Evaluation**

This function focuses on the collection and analysis of information. It illuminates implementation by tracking the initiative’s indicators (e.g., attendance, partnership effectiveness, and achievement) and collects data on community assets and social and political context in order to identify areas of need, opportunity, and success. It also integrates different databases for improved decision making while ensuring the requisite confidentiality.

**Finance and Resource Development**

This function ensures that existing school and community resources are identified, coordinated, and used to leverage new dollars to achieve results, fund continuous improvements, and sustain expansion. For leverage to occur, leaders must be connected to a broad range of potential resources and agree on assumptions and expectations about collaborative responsibilities and outcomes.

Resource development also entails mobilizing a community’s human and social capital so that children and youth benefit from connections to caring adults and neighborhood, civic, and business groups and develop a clear sense of their importance in and responsibility to their community.

**Alignment and Integration**

This function spreads and deepens the commitment to community schools norms in the policies and practices of systems across the community as well as in individual school sites.

**Alignment** activities ensure that the initiative’s results-based framework, school district strategic planning, curriculum and instruction, and partners’ system rules and resources are in accord with and supported by the initiative’s overall vision and system norms. It involves working with other related initiatives to support shared goals and facilitate overall progress.

Integration requires school-site leaders to design explicit practice and policy connections among programs and activities that result in progress toward site-level results. It involves integration of the efforts of all practitioners working with students regardless of organizational affiliation.
Figure 4. A Collaborative Leadership Structure for Community Schools
Supportive Policy and Practice
This function ensures that school districts’ and partner agencies’ financial, administrative, operational, and strategic policies support community schools and that schools and partners advocate for and enact policy changes in response to site-level needs. It also requires local leaders to communicate regularly with state and federal leaders to advocate for policies that promote community schools.

Governance structures must support—and the system’s operating culture must expect—regular communication between community and site leaders. Community leaders must align partner rules and resources insofar as possible to meet site needs, and site leaders must communicate policy and practice needs based on data and evaluation. Data and evaluation techniques that gather practice knowledge or information on gaps between policies and practice must be sensitive to how system norms—attitudes, values, assumptions, and expectations—affect the implementation of policies and practices.

Professional Development and Technical Assistance (TA)
This function plays an essential role in embedding a community school’s culture within the larger community by transmitting values and attitudes, assumptions, and expectations consistent with a community schools vision. It promotes the creation of policies and practices that foster the conditions for learning and the principles of community schools. In addition, professional development and TA help schools and community partners build effective relationships.

Broad Community Engagement
This function focuses on building the political will to fund and sustain scale-up by developing a broad-based commitment to “communities where learning happens” as well as the social connections, both formal and informal, that translate into political and financial support. Community engagement activities ensure that the voices of youth, families, and residents are fully heard, that system practices and policies reflect community needs and preferences, and that the community increasingly adopts and spreads the initiative’s norms.

Summing Up
Figure 5 shows how the basic principles of community schools drive the development of a collaborative leadership structure that enables local leaders to carry out a set of key functions that leads to two results:

1. An effective, scaled-up system of community schools
2. Improvements in the lives of children, families, and communities.

Both sets of results are mutually reinforcing—a growing and more effective system serves more children, schools, and families and produces results; in turn, the results set the foundation for further expansion, sustainability, and even greater results over the long term.

Part Three presents a 6-stage process for use by communities in systematically achieving the benchmarks and building the capacity needed to scale up community schools.
Figure 5. Building a Scaled-Up System of Community Schools