PART FOUR: CASE STUDIES OF SCALING UP COMMUNITY SCHOOLS INITIATIVES

Considerable practice knowledge has been developed by communities in rural, suburban and urban settings. Their collective work illustrates a coherent strategy to unite discrete programs and splintered community efforts into a powerful means to improve results for children and families, schools, neighborhoods. They have started from scratch and built systems of community schools and many are in their second or third iterations, always seeking to fine-tune and improve their overall strategy. Their stories show that communities begin their system-building efforts in many ways—sometimes by implementing only one or just a few sites—or by addressing only some of the conditions for learning. No place or story is exactly the same but each contributes to a better understanding of how places are organized to support students, families, and communities.

Wherever communities begin, we hope the stories that follow will encourage them to think strategically about large scale expansion from the get go.
CINCINNATI, OHIO: One Brick at a Time—How a Facilities Master Plan Enhanced Collaborative Decision Making

Cincinnati’s Community Learning Center Initiative (CLC)—a core feature of the Cincinnati Public Schools’ (CPS) 10-year, $1 billion Master Facilities Plan—is built on a shared philosophy among school and community partners: schools are a hub of the community, and their purpose is to revitalize learning and transform the community. According to Darlene Kamine, formerly a consultant to CPS and now head of the Community Learning Centers Institute, “Commitment to that philosophy has been laid one brick at a time” through ongoing community engagement and an infrastructure grounded in collaborative decision making.

The groundwork for the CLC began in the late 1990s when leaders of the CPS, the CPS Board of Education, and the community began developing their initial concepts about community schools—motivated by an Ohio Supreme Court decision that found conditions in Ohio schools so deplorable as to fail the constitutional requirement for an adequate public education. Jack Gilligan, former Ohio governor and member of the CPS Board of Education, visited Children’s Aid Society community schools in New York City and Local Investment Commission community schools in Kansas City, Missouri, to see how those jurisdictions were using school buildings as centers of the community. Seeing communities’ potential for organizing supports for students, Gilligan encouraged the district to adopt a community schools strategy. He said:

The park board, the recreation commission, the board of health, the library board—all of them are doing things in the neighborhood but not always in a coordinated fashion. To get them thinking in terms of not just doing their own thing their own way but coming into a community effort and joining a community effort—that will make the total impact greater than the sum of the parts.

Concurrently, then-CPS Superintendent Steven Adamowski was thinking about schools as joint-use facilities. He was inspired by then-U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley’s vision of schools as centers of community. Adamowski also understood that reconnecting the community was essential to the school district’s successful revitalization; he saw the rebuilding of physical facilities as a catalyst for engagement. The CPS, however, lacked the capacity to lead a neighborhood-by-neighborhood community engagement process in the district’s 52 neighborhoods. Therefore, Adamowski and the CPS Board of Education asked the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) in Cincinnati to manage the process. Eileen Cooper Reed, then executive director of the CDF in Cincinnati and now a CPS Board of Education member, secured funding from the Knowledge Works Foundation to ensure the independence and integrity of community engagement.

The broad vision laid out by Cincinnati’s leaders was refined through years of dialogue, debate, and decision making among residents, parents, and school leaders at community engagement sessions in each neighborhood. Ultimately, the system for effective and sustainable CLCs was born.
The CPS and community partners launched a plan to create state-of-the-art learning environments for all students in new or rebuilt schools. The CPS saw schools as public assets wherein community resources could be directed to student, family, community, and economic development. Kamine, a former juvenile court magistrate, developed the initial community engagement strategy while at the CDF and then became a consultant to the CPS. She led the effort to build and implement the CLC Initiative’s infrastructure.

In 2001, the CPS Board of Education, motivated by a desire to revitalize Cincinnati, adopted a vision for a district-wide redevelopment of all schools as centers of their respective neighborhoods. Each school would be the neighborhood hub, open to community agencies and community members for health care, recreation, social services, and cultural events during and after the school day.

Campaigning on the vision for schools as the centers of community, the CPS approved a $1 billion levy in 2002. The levy supported a 10-year Master Facilities Plan to construct new schools, renovate existing schools, and provide space for neighborhood activities in all schools.

The CLCs are a joint enterprise of the CPS and community-based public and private partners. Operationally, the CPS’s central administration provides core support, but decision making occurs at the site level under the authority of each CLC’s Local Schools Decision Making Committee (LSDMC). Each LSDMC and site-level governing body select partners, consistent with the unique vision developed through the community engagement process. To facilitate the equitable allocation of and access to partners and resources, leaders developed CLC Partnership Networks, networks of community partners that brokers and coordinates services to schools requesting a variety of services—health, mental health, the arts, and so forth. These collaborative leadership structures have enabled CPS to rely on community partners and local site teams to improve results for children.

For example, when Superintendent Mary Ronan wanted to create an additional month of learning for elementary school students—called the Fifth Quarter—community partners were already organized to support the CPS and its students through the CLCs. They immediately began working with selected schools and the CPS to plan expanded summer learning opportunities by using new and existing resources.

In 2005, Rockdale Elementary School—the first CLC school—opened its doors, reflecting the vision of the entire community in its curriculum, physical design, and enrichment activities offered through a variety of partners. Partnerships that emerged from the community engagement process led to a co-located comprehensive health clinic; daily extended-day programming; a full-time, on-site mental health provider; and year-round programming for students, families, and the neighborhood.

As part of the Master Facilities Plan to build or redesign all 52 CPS schools as CLCs, every school participates in a community engagement process wherein community members and school stakeholders identify their needs and assets and develop a strategy for rebuilding the school as a CLC. The result? Each school has or is developing a new or renovated facility with supports for students, families, and neighborhoods provided by the Cross Boundary Leadership Team (CBLT).

The CPS has come far in its efforts to make every school a CLC. The Louisville Courier-
Journal recently recognized the success of the Oyler Community Learning Center. In addition, Winton Hills Academy was a semifinalist in 2008 for the Richard Riley Award for outstanding schools as centers of community, and the Ethel Taylor Academy received the 2011 Coalition for Community Schools Award of Excellence.

Most significant, the CLC strategy has been integral to the CPS’s dramatic success. From a ranking of “academic emergency” and a 52 percent graduation rate in 2002, Cincinnati Public Schools was the only urban district to achieve an “effective” rating from the Ohio Department of Education in 2010. High school graduation rates have soared to over 80 percent and continue to rise.

Currently, 38 schools fund and coordinate after-school programs. Forty-seven have fully implemented mental health partnerships, and 10 operate school-based or linked health centers. Two have co-located full-day, year-round early childhood education centers funded and operated by a private partnership. Two hundred business partners are integrally and consistently involved through a business mentoring program that was an outgrowth of the CLCs. A new museum school, a neighborhood Montessori program, and two pre-kindergarten–12 schools are the product of Cincinnati’s direct engagement in the redesign of its schools as neighborhood hubs.

The ideal CLC has a resource coordinator; in fact, 22 schools have created that position, funded by the Greater Cincinnati Community Foundation, Greater Cincinnati United Way, CPS Title I funds, the Community Learning Center Institute, and private donors. Work is ongoing to secure financing for coordinators at all CLCs.

The CLC financing philosophy is unique. While the CPS guarantees the use of its facilities and covers maintenance and overhead costs, funding for partners does not depend on school budgets. That is, to ensure consistency and sustainability, partners are expected to reallocate existing resources and find their own sustainable business models through third-party billing, grants, or other revenue streams.

From the outset, teachers and the Cincinnati Federation of Teachers (CFT) have been strong CLC partners. Educators were important participants in each school’s community engagement process and helped set the direction for the schools’ transformation into CLCs. Julie Sellers, current CFT president, used to teach in a CLC and, as an enthusiastic supporter, recognizes that the CLC approach empowers teachers to contribute to schools’ overall strategy as they perform their most important job: instruction. Sellers describes the added value of CLCs:

...[O]ne great benefit of the CLCs is that they increase attendance because students are getting their health needs taken care of at the school instead of staying home... A lot of our families do not have transportation to go to the clinic, the doctor, the free store, or the food bank. This really is an easy way to provide needed services... As a teacher at a CLC, you see the parents in the building more often, so you can develop a better connection with the family. As parental involvement increases, students become more successful. The parents build relationships with the teachers through the CLC’s community activities. Then, when a teacher calls, they already have a relationship and
parents are less intimidated and more supportive of the school.

The CPS and the community are committed to the CLC vision. In 2010, the CPS Board of Education passed Policy 7500: Community Learning Centers, which strengthened the initial guiding principles formulated nearly a decade earlier. The policy states:

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.... The Board envisions each CLC as the neighborhood’s center of activity.

Policy 7500 has helped make the CLCs a sustainable component of Cincinnati’s strategy to improve its schools, its neighborhoods, and the city. Cincinnati continues to address the constant challenge of funding, especially for resource coordinators, who are essential to the successful administration of schools as CLCs. Efforts to help city leaders understand the inextricable link between school success and the success of the city through neighborhood learning centers will further maximize the investment in CLCs.

Cincinnati continues to grow and provide an example for new community schools initiatives. For example, representatives from Cleveland recently visited Cincinnati to learn about CLCs as the Cleveland Metropolitan School District works to develop its own community schools; in addition, Kamine has visited leaders at the state level and in other Ohio cities.
EVANSVILLE, INDIANA: From One School to an Entire District

The Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) (a school district in Evansville, Indiana) launched its community schools initiative in one school and has since expanded it to include all 34 schools under its jurisdiction. Demonstrating the community’s commitment to community schools, the school district has embraced the community schools strategy despite considerable turnover in superintendents. Superintendent Dr. Vince Bertram took the community schools strategy to a new level by engaging the community in listening sessions and responding to the community’s concerns. He made Family, School, and Community Partnerships a core element of the EVSC strategic plan. Even with Dr. Bertram’s recent announcement of his departure, the Board of School Trustees remains committed to finding a new leader who will continue to expand the community schools initiative.

Starting at Cedar Hall Elementary

In 1991, a group convened by the United Way of Southwestern Indiana reported that drug and alcohol abuse and support for families leaving welfare were major concerns in Evansville. When research indicated that after-school programming was a successful response to these problems, the group identified four high-risk, high-poverty EVSC elementary schools for enhanced after-school programming: Cedar Hall, Lincoln, Delaware, and Culver. In partnership with the United Way and with additional funding from the Lilly Endowment, each school began to develop after-school programs in partnership with youth-serving agencies.

In 1994, seeing the success of these collaborative efforts in the elementary schools, Cedar Hall Principal Cathlin Gray drew on the work of Joy Dryfoos to develop a vision of a full-service school infrastructure. Dryfoos advised the Evansville leadership team to visit communities across the country that had instituted full-service schools. Inspired by its visit, the team began to create the Cedar Hall Model. Soon, community collaborations at Cedar Hall offered GED classes, pre-school programs, counseling and in-house therapy, social work services, and community beautification programs as well as after-school programs in partnership with the YMCA, YWCA, 4-H, and Girl Scouts, just to name a few.

In 1995, Gray took a decisive step to take the Cedar Hall Model community-wide. She convened a meeting of community members and potential partners to form what became the district’s first school-based Site Council. Meeting weekly, the council used Kretzmann and McKnight’s Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets to conduct a comprehensive survey of the community’s assets and challenges. Formal partnerships took shape, focused around a central goal: to meet the needs of Cedar Hall students and families effectively and efficiently. Some early Site Council members included the United Way, the Southwest Indiana Mental Health Center, the local neighborhood association, the Salvation Army, juvenile court, St. Mary’s Hospital, the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, the Indiana Division of Family and Children, and Lampion, a family and child service agency.

Starting in 1996, Cedar Hall’s efforts began to spark interest throughout the school district. That year, the EVSC Board of School Trustees passed a formal resolution that designated Cedar Hall as the first full-service community
school. The resolution underscored Cedar Hall’s significant impact on the lives of children and families. The following year, Cedar Hall and the United Way co-sponsored a conference for stakeholders from across the state to help them learn about school and community collaboration as seen through the eyes of national experts.

Cedar Hall was starting something big and people around the state were watching. In 1999, the Indiana Department of Education supported an evaluation of the full-service strategy at Cedar Hall; the following year, Senator Evan Bayh recognized the school with a visit. Cedar Hall began to receive more national grants and national recognition based on its successful outcomes.

Expansion Begins
In 2000, a U.S. Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grant enabled five district schools, including Cedar Hall, to hire site coordinators to expand their after-hours activities into year-round enrichment programs, offering activities after school, on weekends, and during the summer. With the support of their site coordinators, the schools began to form their own site councils, mirroring the Cedar Hall approach. A special feature of the grant allowed the schools to institute social work services through St. Mary’s Healthcare Services. St. Mary’s created a Mobile Outreach Health Clinic and began delivering health services to underserved communities in the Evansville area.

The success of Cedar Hall’s full-service model was becoming increasingly evident. A state-funded program evaluation of Cedar Hall found that test scores increased by nearly 15 percent in the school year immediately following implementation of the full-service model.

Moving Forward with the Superintendent’s Leadership
Determined to find a better way to maximize community resources and seeing the success of Cedar Hall, school officials worked to expand the model. Then-Superintendent Dr. Phil Schoffstall envisioned a community-wide meeting place for organizations concerned with children and families. In 2000, he promoted Principal Gray to the central office as the Title I director and charged her with systematically expanding the full-service community schools model across all EVSC schools. In 2001, the district expanded the model to 10 schools through a second 21st CCLC grant. In 2004, EVSC received a Safe Schools Healthy Student grant that helped expand the strategy into all district schools.

The work was growing and showing great success. Community partners were joining Evansville’s community schools movement. Still, the work needed to be more intentional and required a higher level of coordination. In 2001, community partners and the EVSC formed the School Community Council (SCC). The SCC’s mission is “to establish school sites as places of community to enhance youth and family development.” Community agencies work together at the SCC level, much like site councils work at the school level, to integrate resources targeted to children and families. The SCC developed a detailed strategic plan that specified goals, objectives, and outcomes. Subcommittees, or Strategic Goal Teams, began addressing topics such as cultural diversity, access to services and programs, health and wellness, and evaluation. In the years since the SCC’s formation, the council has grown from 50 to more than 70 members.
The Welborn Baptist Foundation began supporting the SCC’s work in 2001, allocating funds to create the infrastructure needed to support the expansion of the community schools strategy throughout the district, with a focus on health and wellness. In 2002, Bart McCandless was appointed superintendent. In one of his earliest decisions, he elevated Evansville’s SCC initiatives to a new level by creating the position of assistant superintendent of federal projects, with Gray in that role. She assumed responsibility for all school-financed health and social services, after-school programs and related activities, and the coordination of federal, state, and other monies. This organizational shift bundled the funding and coordination of school-managed resources, allowing the school district to use its funds strategically to coordinate with community partners.

Today, EVSC blends a variety of federal funds to support its community schools, including 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 Grant; and Full-Service Community Schools grant. EVSC demonstrates that funding can support a district’s community schools strategy in lieu of creating programs to fit the available funding. In this way, EVSC is always moving toward its goal of creating more community schools.

In spring 2007, Dr. Vince Bertram was appointed EVSC superintendent. The SCC played an active role with the school board to ensure that the new superintendent would support the drive toward community schools. Bertram fulfilled the council’s expectations. He immediately engaged the community in over 250 listening sessions, even midnight sessions so that parents who worked two jobs could participate. Out of those sessions, the district developed a strategic plan that addressed five core areas: early childhood education, technology, professional development, innovative school models, and family, school, and community partnerships. Bertram also established the position of associate superintendent for family, school, and community partnerships, raising the status of community schools even higher in the district.

Evansville Today
Evansville has achieved its goal of systematic adoption of the partnership approach in all district schools. All EVSC schools are on the continuum of community schools development. Significantly, the community schools strategy has become fully integrated into the district from the central office down to the individual school. Associate Superintendent Cathy Gray said:

We want to change the way we do business as a corporation and change how we think about communities and schools working together. This is about a process, about collaboration. Each school has its own identity, so it’s important to create an infrastructure where we open the doors to community collaboration and see what comes up at each site.

Evansville’s community schools effort continues to enjoy vigorous support from its superintendent.
Speaking at a U.S. Department of Education briefing in February 2011, Bertram said, “Education is a complex enterprise. Meeting our children’s academic, social, emotional, and health needs is a shared responsibility. That is why family, school, and community partnerships are at the core of our district’s strategic plan, and we are dedicating substantial resources to support this work.”

As with most initiatives, EVSC is constantly evaluating and reassessing its work. In spring 2011, EVSC hired a director of full-service community schools, another position that will support the district’s strategy.

The school district and community partners are reassessing the composition and responsibilities of the SCC, with a focus on creating a robust steering committee that will set the agenda for the community schools strategy. By constantly assessing progress and deeply engaging the community, EVSC is revising its leadership plan and action steps to ensure that community schools continue to be the centerpiece in helping students succeed for years to come.
The story begins not with a grant, funder, educator, or elected official. The story begins with an individual who had an idea. Bert Berkley, a Kansas City–area business leader, believed that the Missouri Department of Social Services (DSS)—a major funder of human services—needed to do better for Kansas City’s children and families. Berkley had the opportunity to put his belief into practice when Gary Stangler, then DSS director, encouraged Berkley to devise a reasonable alternative to traditional service delivery. Berkley struck upon a simple, powerful idea: form a citizen board committed to system reform by means of community engagement, collaboration, and broad participation.

It was unclear what would result from Berkley’s idea. The citizen group, called the Local Investment Commission (LINC), had no state statutory authority, no clear charter, no logic model, no data system, no web site, and no email. LINC, as Berkley later wrote in Giving Back: Connecting You, Business and Community, had the remarkable opportunity “to find its own way.”

Initial organizational work began in 1992 with the hiring of Executive Director Gayle A. Hobbs, who set up shop in borrowed office space with a laptop computer, a card table, and lawn chairs. (She still leads the effort today.) The result is a neighborhood-based decision-making process that led to the restructuring of existing services targeted to low-income families. As Communications Director Brent Schondelmeyer states:

[LINC] was an outgrowth of community interest and not in response to a grant opportunity or anything like that. It was just people thinking or sitting around thinking, surely we can do better by our community.

The LINC commissioners—the board of directors—were recruited by Berkley based on nominations from the community. Out of concern that they would dominate discussions and the agenda, providers and elected officials could not sit on the board. LINC grew in spurts in response to a community need.

During the 1990s, LINC initially developed its organizational culture and community presence around welfare-to-work, which was the major federal domestic policy issue of the decade. LINC obtained federal waivers that it used to develop a community-based, community-designed welfare-to-work system. That effort, which drew significant national attention, unfolded before the 1996 adoption of landmark federal welfare reform and its promise to “end welfare as we know it.” LINC continues its work in this arena.

At the same time, LINC recognized that any meaningful effort to improve community welfare would need to involve a significant presence within schools and therefore a partnership with school districts. LINC discussed the establishment and support of “school-based or school-linked” services. Hobbs said:

In order to get better results, we had to be able to touch families close to where they work, deliver services in the appropriate time, to be convenient or accessible, and also that, the focus to be on children. To help children you had to help the families, to get healthier
families you had to have healthier neighborhoods.

The framework for LINC's work as a "community schools" model gradually began to emerge in the early 1990s through an ongoing association with Martin Blank of the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. Blank had helped LINC with its initial organizational development. As an intermediary, LINC carries out four critical functions: (1) engaging, convening, and supporting diverse groups and communities; (2) establishing quality standards and promoting accountability; (3) brokering and leveraging resources; and (4) promoting effective policy measures.

LINC worked with a handful of site coordinators who directed Caring Communities—LINC's name for its community schools initiative. The coordinators had some flexible funds to spend on supportive services and were expected to organize site councils consisting of families, neighbors, and other interested parties. Much of LINC's early work focused on providing school-based health services at selected high schools, with funding leveraged primarily from federal Medicaid dollars for administrative case management.

In 1999, LINC underwent a dramatic transformation. That year, the Kansas City School District, the region's major urban school district, settled a long-running, expensive school desegregation case. A central feature of the court-supervised desegregation effort was the establishment of magnet schools intended to attract students from neighboring school districts. The 1999 settlement of the federal case resulted in a substantial reduction in school district funding amid an enormous increase in the school transportation budget. At the same time, success in creating racially diverse schools was modest at best, and the existing system of before- and after-school child care faced imminent collapse. The future looked grim.

LINC, by this point, had built a reputation for bringing together diverse partners to design, develop, and manage large-scale systems. This reputation was founded on the success of LINC's early welfare-to-work efforts. Moving into school-age child care made perfect sense. And, given that a critical factor in a successful welfare-to-work system was the provision of safe, secure, accessible, and affordable child care, the prospect of delivering school-based care was an effective way to serve a large number of children, tap into new funding, and expand Kansas City's network of community schools.

LINC was selected by the state of Missouri to develop an out-of-school-time system for the Kansas City School District by tapping new funding sources. Drawing on its strong partnership with the Missouri DSS, LINC initially turned to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds and, later, a Child Care Development Block grant. LINC made a straightforward case for funding: continuing success of welfare-to-work depended on the availability of affordable child care for TANF participants. Under TANF rules, individual families could apply for child care subsidies and seek high-quality child care, which often was in short supply and inconveniently located. LINC proposed an alternative. It would apply on behalf of all eligible families—with eligibility determined on the basis of children's free or reduced-price lunch status—and use the subsidy to provide school-age child care at schools attended by the children.
Tying out-of-school time to TANF funding was a huge step. It provided LINC with core funding of about $4.8 million annually, allowing it to develop out-of-school-time programs in almost every elementary school and assign a full-time site coordinator to each affected school to manage and direct the effort. The resources were sufficient for LINC to operate a low-cost, affordable, and readily accessible program while meeting state licensing standards and staffing ratios.

The new effort transformed LINC—already recognized for its welfare-to-work initiative—into a major community institution. The number of LINC Caring Communities sites grew from 18 schools in four districts to more than 70 sites, the majority within the Kansas City School District.

In 2006, the arrival of a new school superintendent with little understanding of LINC’s long-standing partnership with the school district gave rise to a contract dispute between LINC and the district. The Kansas City School District, which once counted over 70,000 students, saw dramatic year-to-year declines in enrollment that leveled off at under 20,000 students—half the district’s size at the time that LINC began its efforts in the district. At the same time, LINC was able to transfer Missouri DSS funds to serve eligible families in school districts located in inner-ring, increasingly low-income suburbs. Therefore, LINC exited from the Kansas City School District and expanded into the adjoining school districts. LINC has now established new school district partnerships and expanded existing ones.

It is hard to see LINC as a whole because it bridges so many school districts and political boundaries. It has a significant presence in seven school districts and a recognized functional presence in a three-county area (Jackson, Clay, and Platte) as the state’s recognized “community partner” for eight state agencies. In 2009, a new Kansas City School Board and superintendent invited LINC to return to the school district. LINC has since re-established its presence there.

LINC operates one of the country’s most extensive community schools initiatives. Combined enrollment (2010 figures) at its Caring Communities sites totals approximately 30,000 students; if LINC were a unitary school district, it would be Missouri’s largest. Student demographics are 50 percent African American, 16 percent Hispanic, and 32 percent white. Of these students, 71.9 percent qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. At each school, LINC provides funding, support staff, data systems, and training in over 60 low-income neighborhood schools through partnerships with seven school districts. At each school, LINC organizes parents, neighbors, and businesses into site councils that are charged with directing neighborhood-level efforts.

LINC sees the wide-ranging network of community schools as an emerging “delivery system” that provides localized services and supports for children, families, and neighborhoods through, for example, parenting classes, computer and computer literacy classes, health education, adult literacy classes, and food and emergency assistance. LINC also uses school buildings to serve the immediate neighborhood by offering additional services in the schools. In one instance, LINC is locating an office in a school to help TANF recipients obtain training, jobs, and supportive services. That school has the region’s highest number of TANF recipients in a neighborhood where limited public transportation often constrains access to
social services. LINC’s 2010–2011 budget of $17.7 million is a significant increase from $6.1 million in 1998, the year just before LINC started to provide out-of-school-time care in the Kansas City School District.

LINC’s wide-ranging presence in terms of geographic coverage and scope of services is unmatched in the community. LINC increasingly sees itself as a “distribution network” for service delivery, information, opportunity, community organizing, and engagement.

Its community school presence enables LINC to address broad, significant community issues. Two notable examples are LINC’s work on foreclosure issues in the Kansas City area and its information campaign on the $1.2 billion sale of a non-profit health care system to HCA, the result of which was the creation of two health care foundations with assets of $650 million available to address community health care needs.
LEHIGH VALLEY, PENNSYLVANIA: Building Out Regionally—COMPASS Schools and the United Way Of Greater Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania

The United Way of Greater Lehigh Valley (UWGLV) finds itself on the cusp of a great challenge and opportunity. After working for six years to expand community schools in three school districts, UWGLV has received a request from one of those districts to scale up the community schools strategy in all of its schools while a fourth district wants to join the initiative. How did UWGLV get to this position, and how is it responding to these scale-up opportunities?

UWGLV serves the area between Philadelphia and New York City, including the urban hubs of Allentown, Bethlehem, and Easton as well as rural areas. It launched its community schools initiative in 2005. Known as COMPASS (Community Partners for Student Success), the initiative is a core component of the United Way’s region-wide strategic community impact plan. According to Vice-President for Community Impact and initial COMPASS Director Marci Ronald, COMPASS is “a marriage of shared community responsibility. It takes shared leadership and good chemistry.”

The COMPASS strategy grew out of community stakeholders’ concerns about outcomes for youth and families. In 1997, the United Way convened community leaders and partners across Lehigh and Northampton counties, including representatives from the departments of health and human services, school districts, institutions of higher education, and local businesses and corporations. The leaders formed a collaborative called the Lehigh Valley Council for Youth, which focused on best-practice models and strategies to boost support for students and schools in the region. Out of its deliberations, the council created Family Centers, wraparound services, positive behavior intervention and support programs, parent engagement, and other programs that promoted developmental assets in selected schools.

In 2004, the collaborative decided to think more comprehensively about its strategy and created a blue-ribbon panel that included Joy Dryfoos, a well-known community schools researcher, to evaluate its progress. Thanks to the generous $100,000 commitment of a local philanthropist, the Lehigh Valley Council for Youth held a small conference in 2005 with 40 education and community leaders from across the area to launch the community schools strategy. The event included presentations by representatives of the Coalition for Community Schools and the SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) Community Schools in Multnomah County, Oregon.

The council started crafting its community schools initiative by inviting four area school districts to participate. In wisely deciding to build on the success of its earlier work, it launched the first community schools in the Bethlehem Area School District in sites that had already adopted aspects of community schools strategies. At the same time, Lehigh and Northampton counties and the United Way planned to create one to two community schools in each of four focus districts as a way to start building the strategy from the ground up. They quickly expanded into the nearby Allentown and Bangor school districts. Bangor Superintendent John Reinhart explained why his district was interested in the community schools strategy, saying, “Our schools can’t offer all things to all people. We have to look to the community. I think community schools can offer real leveraging power...it’s a better way to handle the issues we face.” Allentown Superintendent Dr. Karen S. Angello added, “We have benevolence in the Lehigh Valley; benevolence of heart, benevolence of skills, benevolence of funding. So why are we doing this? Because we have the ingredients. Community schools are all about aligning
resources...to benefit our children and their families.”

The fourth district chose not to commit to the initiative. It was in the midst of internal transitions and wanted to consider how the community schools strategy would meld with its existing work. That district is preparing to introduce the components of community schools in the 2011–2012 school year.

Late in 2006, the Lehigh Valley Council for Youth decided to reorganize its partnership structure to align with the new focus on community schools. It expanded its membership to include the heads of the Lehigh and Northampton County Departments of Human Services, lead executives from community-based organizations, and program providers. Together, this new collaboration of community leaders formed the COMPASS Council, with the intention of building a community schools initiative. They discussed issues of membership, name and branding, purpose, structure of meetings, communication, and resource development. From these leadership deliberations, COMPASS was launched in January 2007.

The United Way is the intermediary organization that administers COMPASS; it champions the initiative and builds awareness and community participation. UWGLV also works closely with lead agencies selected to manage operations at each site, providing ongoing training, technical assistance, and oversight. In addition, it provides core funding and receives contributions from each county’s department of human services, from corporate foundations, and from school districts under Title I, Safe Schools/Healthy Schools, and, the state accountability block grant.

At the school site, the United Way and a lead partner share the cost of supporting a full-time community schools coordinator. The United Way has selected a unique array of lead partner agencies, including the Boys and Girls Clubs of Allentown, Communities in Schools of the Lehigh Valley, Northampton Community College, and Lehigh University, to participate as lead agencies. Early on, leaders decided to develop their own capacity to deliver training and technical assistance; in 2006, the United Way named a full-time director of training and technical assistance to support community schools through on-site training and technical assistance as well as implementation of the COMPASS model. COMPASS’s director is responsible for administration of the initiative, coordination of support for the schools, budget management, and resource development. A part-time administrative staff member assists the director.

COMPASS was awarded three VISTA volunteers who will join the initiative in July 2011. One volunteer will be placed in each of the three partnering school districts and will focus on building capacity for volunteer engagement at each school, alignment of program providers with each district’s academic vision and curriculum, and development of a consistent message and media presence within each district via a web site and newsletters.

The COMPASS Council continues to serve as the initiative’s community leadership group. It meets four times a year and is responsible for the initiative’s vision and strategy. In addition, the COMPASS Partnership, which comprises all members of the COMPASS Council and any other individual interested in learning about the COMPASS network, meets twice a year. Lead partners may attend the semiannual meeting, along with other program providers who want to learn how to connect to COMPASS. The purpose of the meeting is to showcase the COMPASS sites’ innovative programming and to motivate interested parties to explore ways to create lasting and meaningful impact.

The United Way’s regional focus, demonstrable improvements in several measures at COMPASS schools, and partnership efforts with state education leaders—amid a challenging
economic climate and a school population with wide-ranging needs—have set the stage for expansion. Marci Ronald describes COMPASS’s scale-up plan as “very organic.” She says, “As dollars—steady dollars—became available, the collaborative has thoughtfully considered how, when, and if to expand.” COMPASS’s receipt of significant dollars from the United Way’s pool of undesignated funding from the 2008–2011 investment cycle significantly contributed to the initiative’s growth. In addition, Lehigh and Northampton counties have provided their respective schools and districts with some funding. Consequently, the initiative has expanded into 12 schools across three districts.

In 2008, COMPASS reassessed its work once again and developed a strategic plan to respond to a shifting environment. It focused on clearly articulating the initiative’s priorities, vision, and mission. In a case of unfortunate timing, however, the COMPASS strategic plan was largely put on hold when the United Way launched its own strategic planning process. However, through the efforts of COMPASS leaders in dialogue with the United Way Board of Directors, COMPASS community schools became a focus of the United Way’s strategic plan.

COMPASS now operates in 12, and soon to be in 13, of 42 high-poverty schools with academic achievement concerns; it reaches 8,000 students in elementary, middle, and high school. “In just three years,” says Ronald, “we’ve had tremendous growth, success, and energy around what it takes to engage CBOs, schools, districts, and others to work together, for the long term, around a common mission for students in our community.” Nearby districts, both urban and rural, want a similar set of community schools services in their schools; the United Way and its partners are encouraged by the possibility of a sizeable expansion.

As of spring 2011, COMPASS continues to work with the Allentown School District to understand the reality of what scale-up could mean. In fact, in partnership with the Allentown School District, UWGLV/COMPASS has submitted a proposal to the Social Innovation Fund of the Corporation for National and Community Service, requesting $1 million for each of the next three years. United Way has committed $500,000 to the project and has agreed to raise an additional $2.5 million over the next three years. The funds are expected to leverage $10.3 million for use in transforming five current School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools in Allentown into COMPASS Community Schools. In addition, despite financial constraints and budget cuts, Allentown Superintendent Gerald Zahorchak has created a new administrative position within the district to oversee and coordinate all before- and after-school programs and other opportunities and services across the district. The COMPASS Community School model is seen as the vehicle for effective and efficient coordination.

The Bethlehem Area School District recently inquired about how it might identify all programs and services offered within its jurisdiction, along with the full range of unmet needs. Part of Superintendent Joseph Roy’s plan for maintaining or increasing growth and opportunity revolves around the question, How do we increase the number of community schools in the district?

The Bangor area continues to make steady progress in understanding the demands of a rural district. It is working on the details of a five-year plan to implement the community schools strategy more fully across all five of its schools. The Easton Area School District (EASD) continues to build the infrastructure to support COMPASS goals.
As a first step, the district has aligned itself with the important (and new in 2011) COMPASS-led Early Childhood Education effort, whereby COMPASS is working with a lead partner in Easton on the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten.

The United Way is using the partnership to educate and inform the Easton community about the COMPASS work on a larger scale. A local political figure representing parts of EASD has recently inquired about how the community schools model could be incorporated into state legislation promoting urban development. That inquiry holds promise for COMPASS’s further expansion.

Looking ahead, COMPASS Director Jill Perriera says, “We are keenly aware of the window of opportunity that is now wide open for COMPASS to look at a more comprehensive regional scale-up of community schools in the Lehigh Valley. Partnerships have been energized and strengthened by new leadership at all levels and are being guided by the power of leveraging resources and aligning efforts in the interest of student and family success and achievement.”
OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA: Lifting the Vision of Community Schools Across a District

In July 2010, Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) joined the ranks of school districts that have declared the full-service community school strategy as a core part of their school reform agenda. Community schools are becoming such an important focus to OUSD that visitors to the district’s website are greeted by the tagline, “Oakland Unified School District: Community Schools, Thriving Students.” OUSD reached this point through decades of community organizing efforts, strong nonprofit partners, assistance from a local community foundation, a committed group of local funders, careful planning in partnership with the community, and the vision of its new school leader, Superintendent Tony Smith.

In 2001, Tony Smith was working for the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) as Director of the Emeryville Citywide Initiative. The state of California took over Emeryville Unified School District (EUSD), a small district with less than 1,000 students that borders Oakland, Berkeley, and the San Francisco Bay, and is the home of PIXAR, for low performance in 2004. BayCES was charged with helping EUSD and Smith introduced the community school strategy as one element to turn around the district. It worked. EUSD got off the state receivership list faster than any other district had at that point and the school board hired Smith as its superintendent. Smith convinced the Emeryville Board of Education and the City Council to adopt the community schools approach as a means to disrupt the predictive power of race and demographics on student achievement.

After seven years at Emery, the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) hired Smith as the Deputy Superintendent for Innovation and Social Justice, where he continued to advocate for the community school strategy in a number of different ways. First, San Francisco included a network of community schools as part of its 2008-2012 Strategic Plan. Further, Smith helped write a successful New Day for Learning grant for the Mott Foundation which incorporated the community school strategy. After over five years of state receivership, nearby Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) hired Smith as their first post-receivership, locally selected superintendent in May 2009. (SFUSD Superintendent Carlos Garcia, continues the vision for community schools across the district by using federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) monies to fund 10 community school coordinators as part of the district’s strategic plan.)

Over this same period, Lisa Villarreal, Program Officer for The San Francisco Foundation (TSSF) and Vice-Chair of the Coalition for Community Schools, had been having regular discussions with Smith provided seed funding in each of his previous districts to support the community school strategy, and provided some of the earliest grants to support the full service community schools planning in Oakland. Smith first met Villarreal while attending a National Community Schools Forum during his tenure at Emeryville and wanted to learn more about community schools. The relationship between these two leaders led to years of discussion about the power of community schools to transform communities.

As he had done before in SFUSD, Smith brought his passion for community schools to his new role in Oakland. Oakland’s children, like those
in many urban areas, face numerous disparities. Smith, citing data from a 2008 Alameda County report often says that an African American child born in West Oakland, two miles away from Oakland Hills, a predominantly white area, is:

1.5 times more likely to be born premature, seven times more likely to be born into poverty, two and a half times more likely to not be vaccinated when they enter kindergarten, four times less likely to read at grade level by grade four, and six times more likely to be pushed out or to drop out of school before they graduate....That basically ends up with African Americans born in West Oakland having 15 years less life expectancy than white kids two miles away.

Oakland has a number of assets, including many different CBOs, on which to build a community school strategy. OUSD had already created the Department of Complementary Learning to better coordinate supports and partnerships in schools. As part of the Department’s efforts, they raised the number of children being served by summer school from 800 to 8,000 and the number of schools with after school programs from 32 to 90. They also increased the number of partners working with the schools and expanded the number of school-based health clinics through a $26 million school bond. The school board was attracted to Smith’s focus on the whole child which was aligned with these existing activities. He was a natural fit for the community.

As one of his first acts as superintendent, Smith spoke with community members to discover which strategies were improving the lives of children. According to Smith, people saw “a lack of coordination, no alignment of services, and we weren’t able to leverage the incredible resources that were available for all the kids.” He saw that there were a number of organizations that were using elements of the community school strategies and an array of other partnerships, but he characterized their efforts as “hit and miss, or in pockets.” Smith committed to taking these efforts to address children’s myriad needs to a new, more coordinated level. He said:

We all have to come together in terms of children and families, particularly for those kids who have been least well served by the system. We just think that being a full-service community district or a district of full-service community schools is the way to go.

Smith included the community school framework as a central part of the district’s strategic plan to improve schools and communities which he proposed to the Board of Education. Smith acknowledged the importance of having a Board that is committed to improving outcomes for children. The Board voted unanimously to adopt the plan to make Oakland a full-service school district and incorporated the framework into its five-year strategic plan. Gary Yee, President of the Oakland School Board explains, “When the child comes to school, he should be getting cues from the neighborhood that says ‘we all care and support you!’ That’s why I think this full service community school is so important.”

Smith’s vision and the Board of Education’s support paved the way for a scaled up system of community schools across the district. Smith stated:

That’s who we are [a full-service community school district], and what
we’re about now. With the passage [by the School Board] of this content, this work plan, it is now the sole work of the [Oakland] Unified School District. We are in the process of becoming a full-service community district that engages deeply with family and the communities we support.

Unique in Smith’s framing is the concept of creating a full community schools district complete with the policies and practices that support community schools on the ground.

One of OUSD’s first steps was to change its tagline to “Community Schools, Thriving Students.” This new tagline is displayed on their website, business cards, and official documents, communicating the district’s new strategy and message into the community.

The district has taken part in unprecedented steps to engage the community and plan thoughtfully. To design its community school initiative, OUSD organized a full service community schools task force comprised of 25-30 people from OUSD and the community. It included representatives from the Oakland Community After School Alliance, East Bay Asian Youth Center, the Oakland Unity Council, among others (a full list of the Task Force is presented on the website), and met weekly for over seven months. To engage the community, the Task Force visited existing FSCS sites to understand lessons learned, consulted with key stakeholders to capture their perspective on what a FSCS district should look like, and held numerous community gatherings to listen to people’s ideas about community schools. The Urban Strategies Council, a local highly respected community intermediary facilitated the development of the FSCS plan.

Community organizations and businesses support the district’s efforts. According to Joseph Haraburda, President, Oakland Chamber of Commerce, “The business community is completely behind the idea of full service schools and supports the district’s effort to accomplish that.” Nicole Taylor, President and CEO, East Bay Community Foundation adds, “Tony is really galvanizing a great cross-section of folks in the city. Not just folks within the school district, but business leaders, non-profit leaders, parents and families.” Taylor and the East Bay Community Foundation organized funders in Oakland to rally behind the community school strategy. Numerous funders now support the community schools work including Bechtel, Chevron, Kaiser Permanente, Rogers, and more every quarter.

OUSD also launched a website, www.thrivingstudents.org, dedicated to communicating how the district is working towards becoming a full-service community school district. The website a list of task forces, highlights work that is being done along the way, presents meeting times, documents, and summaries, and provides ways for visitors to contribute to the design of the initiative through email, Facebook, and Twitter.

OUSD is planning to merge the offices of Complementary Learning and Family and Community into the Department of Partnerships for Families, Schools, and Community, thereby institutionalizing FSCS within the district, buttressed by district staff and funding. It is aligning its departments to support the FSCS strategy. Human Resources; Leadership, Curriculum and Instruction (LCI); and, Facilities are examples of some departments that are exploring how they can support the FSCS vision. For example, LCI is
going to provide professional development to principals on how to share resources, develop trust, and lead in a FSCS. The Task Force is also working with Facilities to resolve issues around custodial staff working during the expanded hours required of FSCS.

The Full Service Community School's Task Force completed its work and timeline and the work of this and all the other task forces rolled up into a draft strategic plan which was unanimously approved by the Board of Education in June 2011, with implementation staring in fall 2011. Like many other developing initiatives, they will start in the schools that already have the culture of partnerships and integration in place and will work with other schools to prepare them for partnership, increased supports, and community involvement. The Oakland work represents one of the most complete plans for creating a scaled up strategy for community schools that has yet been developed. The challenges of implementation await. Go to www.thrivingstudents.org to see the task force working documents and videos about the Oakland FSCS initiative.

The Bay Area has become an area of incredible growth of the community school vision. Nine local school districts are watching what Oakland is doing and hope to develop similar plans for community schools to present to their boards of education.
PORTLAND/MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON: More Than a Promise—Where Learning Happens

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) represents one of the nation’s most powerful visions of a community schools system. Built by county and city leaders in partnership with six school superintendents, SUN has grown from 8 schools in 1999 to 60 schools in 2011, with an emerging plan to make every school in Multnomah County, Oregon, a SUN Community School.

In 1998, Multnomah County knew that it was facing an uphill battle against shrinking budgets, increased demand for services amid growing cultural and linguistic diversity, a widening achievement gap, and no clear sense of where and how resources supporting school-age youth and families were used. At the same time, leaders from both the city of Portland and Multnomah County recognized that responses to local conditions were emerging from several fronts: a county Community Building Initiative, a city After-School Cabinet, and school-based grass-roots efforts that forged partnerships with community organizations to meet students’ needs. City and county leaders merged these various efforts and led a joint planning process to design a model to meet the community's needs. Although family-oriented services were already available in the community, leaders realized that increased access to services through school-based centers would enhance service availability while providing a valuable platform for community engagement. Visibly co-locating services in schools would counteract the isolation of schools and help voters, the majority of whom did not have children in public school, appreciate the centrality of schools and their importance to the entire community. Leaders acknowledged:

We had several motivations for going this route. We wanted to meet families where they are—in the neighborhood—and provide services in a place that was familiar and non-stigmatizing—the neighborhood school. We knew that school personnel were likely to be able to identify students who could use extra support before these students were in crisis, so that resources could be spent on enrichment and prevention.

Drawing on national research and the opportunity to visit the Children’s Aid Society, a large service provider in New York City with over 20 years’ experience in implementing and supporting community schools initiatives, city and county leaders chose the full-service community schools model as the vehicle for partners to achieve their shared vision and individual missions. The partners’ vision for community schools was broad: comprehensive services to increase educational success and self-sufficiency for children, families, and community members provided through a system of community schools.

From their joint planning effort, leaders created the SUN Community Schools Initiative, with youth suggesting the name SUN. The initiative launched eight community schools in 1999, funded by the city and county. The initiative’s pivotal decision to fund non-profit partners as the lead agency responsible for organizing community schools in part reflected the fact that the county historically did not fund school systems. This decision has proven prescient as non-profit partners have generated additional resources to support SUN Community Schools.
At the leadership level, the Community Building Initiative Sponsor Group evolved into the SUN Sponsor Group, incorporating members of the After-School Cabinet to form the initiative’s governing body. The Sponsor Group comprises leaders from the city of Portland, Multnomah County, the city of Gresham, six school districts, the state of Oregon, businesses, and community organizations.

Local leaders, such as Lolenzo Poe, the then-director of the Multnomah County Department of Community and Family Services, also knew that the initiative “needed to do more than promise to do good and avoid evil.” Thus, the Sponsor Group agreed on a results-based vision that called for improved attendance, behavior, parent involvement, and achievement. Later, as the initiative evolved, the Sponsor Group developed outcome targets to help gauge success and ensure accountability.

The Sponsor Group selected the county as the initiative’s intermediary, or managing, partner, taking advantage of its capacity to convene partners, manage contracts and other administrative issues, and link to county-funded services, including anti-poverty, health, mental health, library, and juvenile justice services. In its first year as intermediary, the county convened separate monthly meetings of school principals, site managers (the term for local site-based community school coordinators), and lead agency supervisors (responsible for overseeing site managers) to provide technical assistance, encourage peer networking, and gather input on effective practices. In addition, joint meetings of these stakeholders from the eight initial sites took place several times a year. Over the last 12 years, the county has expanded the technical assistance and program development structures and resources available to stakeholders and has added a table for district liaisons from each of the six school districts to address systemic operational issues.

SUN Community Schools expanded rapidly as it gained visibility. It received significant financial support when it was added as a line item to the 2000 city and county budgets. Between 2000 and 2002, SUN relied on 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, Safe Schools grants, and the restructuring of an existing high school family resource center to add new community schools. By 2003, SUN had more than doubled in size and grown to 19 schools across five districts serving 9,721 children and 44,000 other people. When voters passed the Portland Children’s Levy in 2002, SUN added 4 sites during the 2003–2004 school year.

In 2004, SUN Community Schools grew significantly as a result of policy and system alignment efforts on the part of Multnomah County in partnership with the city of Portland. The county adopted a School-Age Policy Framework in 2003 that created a system for the delivery of social and support services that lead to educational success and self-sufficiency for children, families, and community members. The system, which is now known as the SUN Service System, built on SUN Community Schools and identified community schools as its cornerstone strategy. In implementing the system, the county redirected funds to increase the number of SUN Community School sites, and the city of Portland aligned 13 existing Parks and Recreation community schools that were not previously SUN Community Schools with the SUN model, resulting in 46 total sites.

The value of community schools and their effectiveness in engaging community became evident when county funding for SUN was threatened in 2006. Over 500 parents, students, and community members attended a county
budget hearing to testify on behalf of SUN Community Schools and to sustain the community schools strategy. The community won. SUN Community Schools continued to receive funding, and a new governance body for the initiative was formed—the SUN Service System Coordinating Council.

The council includes representatives from SUN partner organizations, including the director of the Multnomah County Department of Human Services, high-level school district administrators, the director of the Portland Children’s Levy, the director of Portland Parks and Recreation, and members of the Coalition of Communities of Color, community partners, and others.

From 2005 to 2010, more champions rose to support SUN Community Schools as school districts and public leaders identified the community schools initiative as a main strategy for achieving their respective core missions. The collaboration secured grants from federal and local sources and identified educational funding to increase the number of sites. As intermediary, the county supported the development and strengthening of collaborative leadership and its commitment to collective impact by, for example, staffing the SUN Service System Coordinating Council. The county also ensured communication across and between all levels of the initiative, convened partners, coordinated strategic planning, conducted an evaluation and specified accountability measures, provided technical assistance and training, and managed program development—all of which are critical to the ongoing collaboration.

By the start of the 2010-2011 school year, SUN Community Schools counted 60 schools and served close to 20,000 children and adults. Its scaled-up success is visible and sustained. Despite leadership transitions, the initiative has grown because of its broad political support. Since SUN’s creation, the system has seen the arrival of four county commissioners representing both political parties, along with the arrival of three mayors. SUN has critical financial and political support. According to Lolenzo Poe:

It has become a model that in the city of Portland and in Multnomah County, you cannot run for public office unless you embrace SUN as a model. You cannot run for school board unless you clearly articulate your support of SUN as a model and how it in fact supports the academic achievement of students. When you run for office, I can guarantee you that there's a number of organizations that ask every candidate the same series of questions, and it all centers around that.

This support will help ensure SUN’s impact well into the future. SUN is planning to scale up into every school in Multnomah County—over 150 schools—permitting it to extend its reach to the entire county and making it the nation’s first all-county community schools initiative.
SOUTH KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON: Doing the Work Better and Faster; Expanding in King County, Washington

For Deborah Salas, executive director of the Community Schools Collaboration (CSC) in South King County, Washington, scale-up has meant “learning to do the work better, faster and more efficiently.”

Unbeknownst to Salas, what would become her community schools journey began in 1998. At that time, representatives from Casey Family Programs met with representatives from the Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) to discuss ways to remedy an unacceptable drop-out rate and the high number of out-of-home placements. The participants decided to focus on the city of Tukwila—just outside Seattle—because of its small size (five schools), history of collaboration, rapid urbanization, and King County’s highest rate of children living out-of-home (one in nine). Casey hoped to learn from Tukwila and then expand its work in new communities. Tukwila is one of the nation’s most diverse school districts; among its 2,800 students, 1,500 refugee and immigrant youth speak over 70 languages.

Casey Family Programs and PSESD added the Tukwila School District, the city of Tukwila, and the Washington State Department of Children and Families to the CSC as founding partners. Together, they established the Tukwila Community Schools Collaboration (TCSC) as a public/private partnership. Leaders from the respective organizations devoted two years to conducting internal conversations to ensure that each partner had an equal voice, a share of funding responsibility, and no staffing issues. As part of the process, the partnership conducted 19 focus groups with families, students, educators, public agencies, and local government and secured additional funding from the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation. The partnership developed a strategic plan built on the following vision: “To establish Tukwila as a model community that maximizes resources to improve its schools, neighborhoods, and economic environment through a coordinated collaboration of local schools, government, businesses, citizens, and foundations.”

In 2001, the TCSC was formally introduced; a Collaborative Executive Leadership Team comprised of representatives from the founding partners governed the enterprise, with PSESD’s children’s foundation serving as the fiscal agent. That same year, site-level operations began in all five Tukwila schools: three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

The TCSC funded eight staff in each school (a full-time site manager, three part-time group leaders, and four part-time youth leaders). Deborah Salas was among the initial site managers, and she recalls that two of the youth leaders were high school students who themselves needed support and enrichment. Site managers at each school forged partnerships with groups such as Tukwila Parks and Recreation, the Tukwila Public Health Department, Washington Reading Corps/AmeriCorps, Smile Mobile dental services, and 4-H. Initial programming focused on after-school and summer academic and enrichment activities. Quarterly literacy events offered families opportunities to learn with their children, and an annual health fair with immunizations addressed student health concerns.
In short time, TCSC leaders and staff saw the need for more expertise and began looking for partners that could provide greater capacity in the schools. In an area with few community-based providers, the TCSC took a broad approach and looked for partners in arts, cultural, and faith-based organizations as well as through contracts with skilled individuals. It also recognized the need for ongoing training of both TCSC and school staff. As a result, the TCSC launched a Continual Quality Improvement (CQI) process and identified areas for professional development.

As its work grew, the TCSC expanded its vision and developed a multipronged strategy not just to support students but also to strengthen families and enhance school effectiveness. The TCSC realized that high school as well as elementary school students needed enrichment opportunities and social supports and that all students would benefit from special assistance at academic transition points.

Typical of growing systems, the TCSC recognized—after three years—that it needed to perform its work more effectively and efficiently. One challenge in particular underscored the need for improvement: the TCSC was experiencing difficulty in communicating to funders the collaborative’s unique partnership and leadership structure. The TCSC project coordinator worked for Casey, the school-site managers worked for PSESD, and other staff were on the city of Tukwila’s payroll. The arrangement was workable but did not lend itself to easy explanation. So, the Collaborative Executive Leadership Team decided to restructure the initiative by forming an independent not-for-profit 501(c)3 organization. A community board of directors oversaw the work of the reconstituted organization, which was now positioned to receive additional funding from local funders, such as the Stuart Foundation, the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, and others. The five founding partners served on the new governing board as the TCSC recruited additional members. In 2004, the new community board added to the original partners a parent from the community, a local business consultant, and the leaders of community-based organizations. It formulated a cohesive management vision, naming Salas the first TCSC executive director and developing a fund-raising strategy. Since then, the TCSC has expanded its partnerships, deepened its work, and continued to see success.

By 2007, the TCSC had improved graduation and attendance rates and saw a decrease in dropout and mobility rates. It received the Coalition for Community Schools National Award for Excellence and was gaining visibility in the region among funders and community leaders. At the same time, it drew the attention of John Welch, superintendent of the nearby Highline School District, and of the city of SeaTac. With the Stuart Foundation’s and Seattle Foundation’s support of community schools in the region, the Tukwila Community Schools Collaboration became the Community Schools Collaboration, reflecting its new regional focus. The TCSC’s first effort at expansion began with the Highline School District. Believing that community-based organizations command the strength to support efforts to improve student achievement, Highline’s leaders identified SeaTac and White Center as the communities with the greatest need for support. According to Superintendent John Welch, “We really need our communities to rally around our kids’ education and just support kids overall so they
can be successful in school and life and that is what community schools are all about.”

Regional scale-up has been intentional in all three communities, with clusters of schools organized around elementary, middle school, and high school feeder patterns. Within the clusters, schools work with and learn from each other, and students and families may progress through schools that employ a community schools approach. From 2008 to 2010, the CSC expanded into 16 campuses and 20 schools and began to address transitions across grade levels and the alignment of extended-day activities with student supports. Extended-day activities are organized around youth development assets and grade-level standards. In addition, teachers or CSC staff who have worked with an education coach coordinate many of the activities.

Salas notes that the CSC has expanded its family engagement “by developing partnerships with culturally based community agencies [e.g., Somali Community Services Coalition, Para Los Niños, and PACIFIKA], partnering with the parent-teacher organizations and reaching out to families in their own language.” The CSC has expanded health services to include physicals, immunization services, dental screenings, and vision care through partnerships with individual doctors, dentists, the Swedish Hospital, King County Public Health, HealthPoint Community Health Centers, Washington Smile Partners and the Smile Mobile, and LensCrafters.

The CSC has re-branded itself with a new logo and web site and is now developing a new strategic plan that makes community schools the centerpiece of education reform, building deeper alliances and sustainability strategies. It is working with a cradle-to-career network on benchmarks and transitions in a child’s developmental path and putting the community schools strategy out front.

The pace of change has been exhilarating as the initiative’s budget has grown from $600,000 to over $2 million in just a few years, and that figure does not count the more than $1 million in leveraged programs and services delivered in CSC community schools. The CSC is reaching out to nascent initiatives in Seattle, Tacoma, and Vancouver, Washington, to help them build and strengthen their own community school initiatives. Still, the challenges facing the CSC remain daunting, particularly as difficult economic times challenge families. With scale-up continuing into new communities with different demographic and political dynamics, leaders have learned about the importance of patience and flexibility. But, for Deborah Salas, the payoff lies in watching community schools become “not just a program but the life and breath of our schools.”

In 2010, after more than 10 years of hard work, the CSC reflected on its system-wide operations and took even greater steps in scaling up and improving its work. It co-founded the West Coast Collaborative of community schools initiatives, a group funded by the Stuart Foundation to share best practices with one another.
TULSA, OKLAHOMA: Learning from Other Initiatives and Planning for Sustainability

Community leaders in Tulsa, Oklahoma, recognized that the supports made available to preschool-age children failed to make a difference in children’s lives once the children entered grade school. The leaders therefore began searching for a way to connect the same types of student and family supports to the schools. After intentional research on best practices, they discovered the community schools strategy and began a journey around the country to learn from others as they planned for a sustainable strategy. Today, community schools are embedded in two Tulsa school districts (Tulsa Public Schools and Union Public Schools), and other Tulsa-area school districts have begun to inquire about community schools. Under the umbrella of the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative, community school leaders have built collective trust among school leaders and community partners; as a result, many more students in Tulsa are succeeding.

In 2005, the Metropolitan Human Services Commission (MHSC) decided to make educational improvements one of its priorities. The MHSC is a collaborative of leaders established and supported by the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa (CSC), city of Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) and Union Public Schools (UPS), Tulsa Area United Way, Tulsa Community College, Tulsa Health Department, Tulsa Technology Center, and Tulsa Metro Chamber of Commerce.

The MHSC had been involved in several activities to support children and families, especially in the areas of child abuse prevention, family support, and early childhood development. Members recognized that, despite these activities, the supports were not following children into the school system. In addition, too often, the gains made in the early years evaporated when children reached school age. Consequently, the MHSC sought to identify a positive school reform and revitalization strategy that would involve the whole child, from the prenatal period through post-secondary education and into the workforce.

The MHSC engaged the CSC to research and present options for developing new strategies to increase the likelihood of success for all children in the education pipeline. The CSC hired Jan Creveling, a respected former Junior League vice president who had worked on MHSC and CSC initiatives, to identify an education improvement strategy appropriate for Tulsa. Creveling began an 18-month process of gathering and analyzing research. She investigated the Beacons model, family resource centers, and other supportive strategies across the nation. After studying various approaches to education reform, Creveling and the CSC determined that community schools offered an overarching framework for all the other programs under consideration.

Creveling and the CSC set out to learn as much as possible about existing community schools. She and Phil Dessauer, the CSC’s executive director, attended the Coalition for Community Schools National Forum in Chicago in spring 2005. At the forum, Creveling and Dessauer were surprised and encouraged when they met the principal and assistant principal of Roy Clark
Elementary School, a Union Public School in Tulsa. They, too, were attending the forum to learn about community schools. Following the forum, Creveling visited Washington, DC, to meet with Coalition staff, who recommended that she accompany a team to the Coalition’s National Forum in Baltimore the following year. Upon her return from Washington, Creveling made a formal presentation about her research and recommended that the MHSC begin designing a community schools initiative. The MHSC supported the recommendation and directed Creveling to initiate the needed planning.

Creveling began her efforts by contacting other community school leaders around the country to learn from their experiences. She asked, What lessons did you learn? What should we avoid? What have been your successes? What do you wish you’d done differently? And, if you were starting today with what you know now, what would your initiative look like? Given that Creveling had been involved in other efforts that could not be sustained, she focused on sustainability from the beginning of the planning process.

Creveling assembled a team of 32 community representatives from a variety of sectors to attend the Coalition for Community Schools National Forum in Baltimore in spring 2006. With a plan to learn from others, each representative of the Tulsa delegation was encouraged to attend specific workshops and report back to others in Tulsa on what they learned. Upon their return from Baltimore, attendees began to formulate the vision, mission, core beliefs, governance structure, and core components of a Tulsa community schools initiative.

Given that the Tulsa and Union schools were not only MHSC members but also parties to the decision to investigate a new school reform strategy, UPS Superintendent Dr. Cathy Burden and TPS Superintendent Dr. David Sawyer started hosting listening sessions that enabled the Tulsa delegation to present its findings and proposals to others. Dr. Burden invited all UPS Title I elementary schools to the sessions with the aim that all UPS schools would become community schools; Dr. Sawyer invited everyone from the TPS elementary schools most interested and experienced in community partnerships (based on attendance at listening sessions and leadership experience in working with community resources) to establish the first TPS elementary community schools.

Concurrently, the CSC began to build the infrastructure needed to coordinate and manage the community schools initiative, which was soon called the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI). The CSC created the TACSI Resource Center, a “central clearinghouse” staffed by the CSC, to plan, implement, and administer the initiative. Creveling agreed to serve as senior planner in charge of the TACSI, and, in 2006, the CSC hired a school liaison to work with designated community schools.

Since 2006, TACSI has followed a uniform process at each new community school to initiate planning. The planning process is organized around a resource inventory that covers the seven core components of the community schools framework: early care and learning, health/health education, mental health/social services, family/community engagement, youth development/out-of-school time, neighborhood development, and life-long learning. Schools begin the process by identifying initiatives and partners already involved within their school community in order
to align strategies, avoid duplication of effort, and generate buy-in from the school and community organizations. Each community school must identify three priority needs to ensure that TACSI meets at least one of them each year and remains responsive to individual schools’ needs.

In 2007, TACSI created a Management Team of leaders from participating school districts and other key stakeholders to help implement and align the TACSI strategy with that of the school districts and the University of Oklahoma community schools system. The team also develops policy guidelines for community schools.

Through a large steering committee established in 2009, the broader community is now engaged in planning and guiding the TACSI; it meets monthly to help guide and support strong community relations. The committee comprises approximately 20 members, including funders, school board members, representatives overseeing each of the seven core components, and individuals with a history of supporting Tulsa-area education and planning initiatives.

CSC staff serve as the intermediary for TACSI and oversee the TACSI Resource Center. The CSC employs the community school coordinators in the TPS sites, whereas coordinators in the UPS sites are district employees. The CSC and school principals supervise TPS and UPS coordinators in an arrangement consistent with the desires of each district as specified from the outset of the initiative.

After learning about planning for sustainability at a Coalition for Community Schools National Forum, TACSI planned the community schools initiative in three-year increments in order to remain sensitive to changing environments. This approach has helped TACSI stay focused while planning for scale-up.

As part of its planning, TACSI outlined the structure, activities, and normative elements of its community schools initiative in what it describes as Community School DNA. The structural elements for each fully developed community school depend on the principal’s strong leadership as well as on a coordinator and site team to ensure the delivery of a set of holistic programs, services, and opportunities; family and community engagement; and community-based learning. The normative elements are democratic leadership, program coherence, parent responsibility, and professional capacity. Together, the aligned DNA elements create and support the conditions for learning.

In addition, TACSI characterizes its schools along a continuum of community schools development according to the following stages (in ascending order): inquiring, emerging, mentoring, and sustaining. In adapting these stages from the Children’s Aid Society community schools stages of development, TACSI has been able to map expectations for new and growing community schools as they scale up.

In 2007, after thoughtful deliberation and learning from experienced community schools initiatives around the country, TACSI launched 18 community schools in the Tulsa and Union school districts. It planned the phased-in implementation of the community schools strategy, starting with elementary schools and then moving to middle schools in later years, thereby providing a vertically aligned continuum of supports. TACSI assumes that it will have to adopt a different approach for the
post-elementary level. It plans to explore the relevance of some of its assumptions in a startup effort at the UPS’s grade 6 and 7 center during the 2011–2012 school year.

In the initial year of community schools implementation, principals relied on Resource Inventories to evaluate a school’s capacity and determine its suitability for designation as a community school. Based on the inventories, TACSI started with 2 “mentoring” schools, each with a full-time community school coordinator; by the end of the first year, 5 community schools were at the mentoring level and had a full-time coordinator. In the TACSI model, “mentoring” schools demonstrate the school climate and culture conducive to partnerships and thus are considered to be prepared for a coordinator. Thirteen other schools, referred to by TACSI as “emerging,” started to develop the climate and culture of community schools and, during the first year, began to move along the community schools continuum. All 18 schools learned from one another, participated in professional development activities, and received technical assistance over the next two years. In 2009, 7 more schools joined TACSI as “inquiring” schools” in the earliest stages of developing into community schools.

An essential component of TACSI’s scale-up and sustainability strategies is a rigorous evaluation of the implementation and impact of community schools. The TACSI partnered with the University of Oklahoma at Tulsa’s (OU-Tulsa) School of Education to begin evaluating the model. Assistant Professor Curt Adams first studied the governance structure of each community school and found that high-implementing community schools (“mentoring” schools) achieved the greatest success with students and families. For leaders of the initiative, this finding confirmed the effectiveness of the TACSI model. In a second study, Dr. Adams and his team examined cross-boundary leadership, another key ingredient of the strategy, and found that collective trust among leaders and school personnel was essential to success. A third study found that, on state achievement tests, grade 5 students in high-implementing TACSI community schools were outperforming by 30 points grade 5 students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch in non-community schools. Leaders were surprised and delighted to see that the initiative was making a noticeable difference in so little time. Each study has helped TACSI expand the initiative by using the best data available for decision making.

OU-Tulsa has been involved in developing TACSI from the initiative’s outset. Pam Pittman, head of the university’s Community Engagement Center, has served on the Management Team since its inception, and the OU-Tulsa clinics have always played an important role in providing supports in community schools. Using a university-assisted community schools model, OU-Tulsa provides supports to students starting in grade 9 and continuing through college. The university’s diagram of the P-20 Pipeline in Tulsa illustrates the relationship: TACSI provides support at the beginning of the pipeline, from early childhood education and elementary school through middle school, and OU-Tulsa supports students from high school through their experiences as life-long learners.

In 2009, TACSI was awarded a grant from the Institute for Educational Leadership, in collaboration with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, to participate in the Early Childhood and Community Schools Linkages project (Linkages). The project goals are (1) to ensure that all
children are prepared for success in school and life; (2) to enable all schools to be prepared for the youngest children; and (3) to demonstrate that community schools are effective vehicles for promoting access to and continuity of high-quality programming across early childhood education programs and the early grades. Tulsa, and indeed the state of Oklahoma, has a history of strong and broad early childhood education support. The Linkages grant enabled TACSI to deepen its connection to existing early childhood efforts in Tulsa and to create important linkages to elementary schools scaling up to become community schools.

As mentioned, TACSI’s plan for scale-up is well aligned with participating school districts’ objectives. To scale up effectively, the Management Team decided (1) that every community school must write the community school strategy into its site plans and (2) that districts must include the strategy in district strategic plans and vision. TACSI worked with both the UPS and TPS to ensure that community schools were aligned with the student achievement approach in each district’s strategic plan. The student achievement goal in the TPS 2010–2015 strategic plan sets forth the following objective:

Expand the concept of community schools to appropriate scales of growth within the District. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Community schools combine the best educational practices with a wide range of vital in-house health and social services to ensure that children are physically, emotionally and socially prepared to learn.

Encouraged by the strength of its strategy and the high level of community support, TACSI has most recently been working to expand the number of community schools. Every Title I elementary school in UPS is a community school. As the result of a recent school consolidation plan, the TPS is closing several schools, and Superintendent Keith Ballard is committed to transforming all remaining schools into community schools. Broken Arrow and Sand Springs, two nearby districts, have approached TACSI and are in the initial phases of developing their own community schools initiatives. TACSI has also been helping Metro Tech become a community school. Metro Tech is an alternative high school located in Oklahoma City, about 100 miles from Tulsa.

TACSI is reaching out to state political leaders, courting the support of Governor Mary Fallin and the new Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Janet Barresi. TACSI escorted Barresi on a site visit to Kendall-Whittier Elementary, a TACSI school, and a representative from the governor’s Tulsa office has visited the school.

TACSI continues to enjoy the support of school, community, and government leaders who view community schools as a central strategy to improving outcomes for children, families, and communities. Thanks to thoughtful planning and learning from others, TACSI is growing and providing an example for others.