

## Convening Summary

### Achieving Ambitious Educational Outcomes through School and Community Partnerships

Lisa J. Walker, S. Kwesi Rollins, Martin J. Blank, and Reuben Jacobson

---

*We've disproved the notion that schools alone can do it. Notwithstanding our best investment in doing standards-based reform properly, notwithstanding our best efforts at utilizing charter schools and other forms of competition to drive improvement in the system, it has only taken us so far. When we started education reforms in Massachusetts in the early nineties, we said we are going to eliminate the correlation between zip code and education achievement and we failed to do that.*

*We know that the things that we've done are necessary but not sufficient.*

*We are going to need robust partners to reconceptualize what we do in the field of education and child development so that we actually develop a genuine 21st century learning system that enables us to deliver on the promise of education reform. In a sense, I am here with you to underline the notion that partnerships are the 'sine qua non' for 21st century education reform.*

**Paul Reville, former Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

In June 2013, the Institute for Educational Leadership and Chapin Hall convened a group of people to reflect on the role of partnerships in advancing educational opportunities for children and youth in this country. This convening occurred in Washington, DC. Participants were from a variety of organizations—policy and advocacy groups, government agencies, foundations, youth development organizations, health and human services agencies, think tanks, and universities.<sup>1</sup> These thought leaders came together to discuss the proposition that partnerships are essential to ensure educational equity and excellence for low-income students.

The convening occurred at a time of growing concern that education policy is not sufficiently informed by and attentive to the life experiences of children and youth in public schools in the United States. Education policy tends to focus on improving K-12 institutions. It demands educational excellence from schools and teachers while expecting research on education to answer questions about school-related factors that affect academic outcomes. Meanwhile, social science researchers have established that educational outcomes depend not only on K-12 school experiences, but also on early childhood education and time spent learning after school and during the summer. Researchers have delved deeply into the ways families affect educational outcomes. They have also shown that community and health factors affect these outcomes.

---

<sup>1</sup> A list of participants appears at the end of this convening summary and participant voices are highlighted throughout.

School and community partnerships illustrate how policy efforts to improve educational outcomes can be made more consistent with research findings. These partnerships reflect both a broad notion of what it means to educate a child and an awareness of the obstacles faced by many children when engaging with school.

Partnerships between individual schools and community organizations have become more common over the years, and various policy initiatives support this thrust. However, a sustainable system of partnerships requires broad collaboration and coordination across and between school districts, public agencies, institutions of higher education, and communities. The convening explored the work of a number of communities that have developed strategies to implement and sustain partnerships of this kind. These examples can inform the development a supportive policy framework for partnerships. This summary aims to share ideas from the convening with policymakers, leaders in education, and community leaders who are interested in partnerships as a strategy for improving children’s long-term outcomes.

---

## Keynote by Policymaker Paul Reville

Paul Reville, a longtime leader in standards-based education reform and a recent secretary of education in Massachusetts, opened the convening. His keynote speech highlighted the concern that standards-based reform will be insufficient to raise student achievement to the proficiency levels set across the nation. Reville’s message is that we as a nation must not only improve instruction in schools, but also figure out how to narrow gaps between health, well-being, and enrichment for low-income children and youth. This is the lesson from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The state began investing twenty years ago in the capacity to implement standards-based reform and now leads states on academic indicators. However, its efforts have not reduced the achievement gap. The result is that low-income children and youth in Massachusetts are still not on track to succeed in school and life.

Using the metaphor of an engine for education, Reville explained that education reformers have focused on *optimizing* an engine designed 100 years ago to prepare young people for an industrial economy. This goal for education is long outdated. It is time to focus on *building* an engine that can prepare young people to work and live in the 21st century. This can only be done in partnership and the engine itself will be powered by partnerships. He said,

*We need horizontal partners and vertical partners. We need all the elements in the education system to come together so kids don’t fall between the cracks, starting at birth and going through graduate education. We need our health and human services, our criminal justice, our housing and economic development partners to come together with us in education. We just can’t do it within the silos anymore. And we need partners in other sectors of government, in the nonprofit sector, in business, in philanthropy, in the media if we are to get this done.*

---

## Intentional Cross-Sector Collaborations for Children and Youth

At the convening, representatives from five existing partnerships presented their work. These intentional cross-sector collaborations, which are described in this section, offer fresh ideas to policymakers concerned about educational outcomes. They embrace multiple goals: to offer challenging and relevant academic learning experiences to all children, to respond to the myriad obstacles that prevent children’s full engagement in school, to provide a rich set of informal learning experiences to low-income families, and to help youth envision and work toward a positive future for themselves. The partnerships are structured to create a change in how systems—defined as various combinations of educational entities, community-based organizations, and other agencies and organizations—work together to advance the learning and development of children. In order to support individual schools, they forge connections across institutional and organizational

boundaries, braid together resources and the diverse capacities of community partners, and use data to guide collective work.

Say Yes to Education offers a model for bringing together a city's diverse sectors and agencies to support the attainment of a college education by the city's youth. It builds on the recognition that scholarships alone do not lead to a college degree. Rather, success in school starts much earlier in a child's life. Completing postsecondary education requires investing in opportunities and supports for children and their families as well as coordinating and aligning all partners around this goal. Say Yes to Education has organized a governance structure at the city level for this work. The structure includes the school district, teachers union, city and county governments, institutions of higher education, and other groups. Within this structure, and with the assistance of Say Yes to Education, partners analyze the current use of public funds, reallocate them where they are most needed, and support the development and use of a common data platform. Cities like Buffalo and Syracuse in New York work

*The engine behind city transformation is about funding, finance, and building civic infrastructure with experts who can do the analytics.*

Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey, President, Say Yes to Education

with Say Yes to Education in the expectation that improving educational success rates will reduce demands on other publicly funded city services, such as housing and healthcare.

Another cross-sector collaboration involves Cincinnati Public Schools. CPS has a mature system of community learning centers in which community partners work with individual schools to provide a wide range of services for students. The system is undergirded by policies of the school board, coordinated by a skilled intermediary organization, and actively supported by the teachers union. A cross-sector, citywide leadership team provides support to

*Three things must happen to build community learning centers—full public engagement, local autonomy, and supportive board policy. When all those are in place, community learning centers become self-sustaining.*

Eve Bolton, President, Cincinnati School Board

service providers in areas such as early childhood development, college and career readiness, business partnerships, mentoring, health, and mental health. Notably, the Cincinnati public health system is a strong partner in this endeavor, and CPS now has 26 school-based health centers. Accountability for both schools and community partners is supported by a data system that helps identify individual student needs and tracks services. At the school level, a site-based governing board has decision-making authority over services and who provides them. In addition, a resource coordinator works with the principal to align services with the goals of the school. Service costs are covered entirely by community partners while schools provide space for services. Resource coordinators are funded through multiple sources including district Title I funds; the United Way; and community, health, and family foundations.

The Los Angeles Education Partnership (LAEP) helps partners explore the potential for improving student outcomes by forging connections between instructional services, student support services, and community participation. The Los Angeles school board's public school choice policy made it possible for teachers to design and operate schools. At the same time, local community organizing groups successfully advocated for the construction of new schools. Teachers proposed combining an ambitious inquiry-based instructional program and a framework of student support services in five small high schools in a new facility. Community organizers mobilized support for the effort around a vision of young people being fully prepared for college and careers. LAEP serves as an intermediary supporting the partners' work on six priorities: high-quality instruction, teacher collaboration, youth empowerment,

parents as partners, college and career readiness, and educational equity. LAEP guides partnerships to make them: (1) strategic, so that the focus is on what will help kids be successful, not packaged programs; (2) aligned, so that all partners work toward shared outcomes and are clear about their roles; and (3) authentic, so that partners not only listen to community priorities, but act on community ideas. Teachers assess and discuss youth development outcomes with community partners to learn more about their students' needs and progress.

*The idea of community schools is shifting. It is not only about the school being the hub of the community but also about the child being the hub of the community. This is critical for parent engagement because it will create more opportunities for parents to engage with their children's learning.*

Ellen Pais, President, Los Angeles Education Partnership

The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) is committed to turning all of its schools into full-service community schools by forming partnerships with other public agencies and developing supportive district policies. OUSD leaders believe that young people need to be healthy, emotionally secure, and confident if they are to do their best in school. They have made outcomes for African American male students, who are furthest from achieving success, their priority. The OUSD board has developed master agreements for partnerships with the local housing authority, county health

*We recognize our public school system is necessary but insufficient. Oakland's effort to build a full-service community school district aims to end the institutional isolation of the public schools and create more permeable boundaries with partners.*

Curtiss Sarikey, Associate Superintendent, Oakland Unified School District

services, and the probation department. These partnerships address critical problems such as chronic absenteeism in the early elementary grades and the transition from the juvenile justice system back to school. OUSD now has 15 school-based health centers. The district has created standards for community schools that address, among other factors, the important role of school leadership in partnerships. In embracing the value of partnerships, Oakland finds itself focused on shared purposes rather than bureaucratic exigencies. It also invests in aligning and integrating its separate internal operations for instruction and youth services.

Communities in Schools (CIS) is a national intermediary with local affiliates. The affiliates work with schools to assess the health and enrichment needs of students. They then identify service partners in the community to address those needs. Service partners agree to be accountable for boosting outcome measures in

*We assist principals in meeting high accountability expectations and at the same time make sure kids feel they belong in school.*

Harold Fitrer, President, Communities in Schools of Richmond

areas such as attendance, discipline, and grades. CIS has learned that the work of partnerships requires face-to-face time to build trust and working relationships, as well as to develop common understandings and shared language for success in schools. Everyone must also come to the table with their own money. In Richmond, Virginia, where the rate of child poverty has reached 38%, CIS has developed relationships with 160 organizations throughout the area to benefit 35 schools.

---

## A Different Conversation

The conversation that dominates education policy today holds schools and teachers responsible for student outcomes. At the convening, outcomes were discussed as a collective responsibility,



which leads to a different conversation. The group addressed several big questions about partnerships: What is their purpose? Who participates and in what ways? Where do their resources come from?

### **Purpose**

Partnerships are a means to better outcomes for children. The organizations and institutions that join partnerships are ultimately concerned about improving children’s learning and development. They share a commitment to extending to the vast majority of children the kinds of learning experiences, supports, and opportunities that people of privilege are able to provide their own children.

*Vulnerable children and families—those served by our child welfare system, homeless organizations, the juvenile justice system and other public agencies—can be better served only through partnerships.*

Lisa Walker, Chapin Hall

Partnerships tend to take a “whole child” approach. They recognize that gaining math, science, and language skills and knowledge are related to a child’s health and sense of well-being. They know exposure to enrichment experiences during and after school is critical as well. Many partnerships are designed to address gaps in these areas. Communities in Schools and the work in Cincinnati to develop community learning centers are examples. A “whole child” approach can also imply a commitment to education as a means to develop multiple capacities in children, including academic, social, emotional, and civic capacities. The Los Angeles partnership illustrates this approach. Finally, a “whole child” approach can mean viewing children as inseparable from families and communities and intervening in these areas of children’s lives if needed. Say Yes to Education and the Oakland Unified School District embrace this perspective.

*We need to focus on the collective responsibility that enables individual opportunity. Wrap-around services are critical in this and there are at least three very different models in the room, but they all recognize that we need to focus on instruction, the social and emotional, and health.*

Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers

Partnerships insist on talking about the impact of noninstructional influences on educational achievement, as informed by a deepening research base on the subject. Paul Reville summarized a large body of data in his statement that overcoming poverty through the schooling-alone intervention “is just on average not going to work out.” Partnerships reject the notion that in talking about noninstructional factors they are making excuses. They focus on how to respond to these influences so that the almost 25% of children who live in poverty in this country can learn and have a better shot to succeed in life.

*It’s not a matter of a student being poor but a matter of a child not coming to school because of health-related issues.*

Harold Barber, Principal, Baltimore City Public Schools

### **Partners**

*We cannot take care of everything that happens in students’ lives, but if it affects learning, the issue becomes how we form community partnerships. We are optimists in education, but we’ve always had a concern with how we institutionalize and sustain these partnerships.*

Carlos Azcoitia, Chicago Public Schools Board of Education

Partnerships are interested in how to work together to create opportunities for children and remove barriers to successful lives. Broadly speaking, they develop interorganizational arrangements that operate across multiple levels: the service level, where children and families participate in programs; the community level, where youth, parents, and other community members organize around a vision for the future; and the systems level, where supportive policy is made and put into effect. Partnership arrangements vary by locality. They are primarily shaped by the local leadership that emerges to mobilize their potential. They are also shaped by the circumstances of city government, county government, and public school governance, including the flow of public money, where

*We should stop thinking about just services, about doing something to—rather than with—students, parents, and community members. The new engine is about doing school differently. How are we going to honor community and get all the stakeholders involved in creating the new engine?*

Karen Mapp, Harvard Graduate School of Education

authority over agencies and services resides, and opportunities and constraints related to jurisdictional boundaries. The common feature of partnerships is the intent to build collective trust for collective action around schools and to deliver on the familiar rallying cry for educational improvement that *all* children can learn.

*Partnerships bring together school and non-school personnel and professionals with non-professionals. They involve tensions of class and race. Partnerships look different from different perspectives and may not be seen or experienced as benign. How can partnerships address these tensions?*

Charles Payne, University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration

## Resources

*The unit of change matters. We've found the city is the right unit of change while still focusing on the success of every child. A large portion of county funding goes to the city, giving the county a strong interest in total dollars spent and how they're invested.*

Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey

Resources to support student learning and development are not only found in public schools. They also exist in a variety of public agencies as well as in community institutions. How to bring these resources together is a collective problem that can be addressed by partnerships. Partnerships are most effective when they respond to service needs and when there is a focus on coordinating and aligning resources for greater efficiency and better outcomes for children.

Communities in Schools and Cincinnati's community learning centers are examples of partners coming together to combine their resources. Leadership is critical in this process. In Cincinnati, the president of the teachers union played an active role in the cross-sector leadership group, supporting use of Title I funds for resource coordination. Funding organizations such as the United Way also supported partnership strategies. Partnerships can tap significant financial resources in other service sectors. The Cincinnati school system's embrace of school-based health clinics allows students to benefit from changes in community health activities stimulated by the Affordable Care Act.

In some cases, resources are not available. This is particularly true in rural areas where critical services are many miles from those who need them. Accessing key resources is often a challenge for inner-city children and families as well; needed services often do not exist in the neighborhoods in which they live. Partnerships are a way to assess needs and organize available community resources to more effectively target collective purposes. It remains the case that current resources may be

insufficient to address all gaps in health, well-being, and enrichment.

*You can create streams of revenue so that the only thing the public school system actually has to pay for is using some Title I money to create the coordination. Then the conversation becomes about management and can the county, city, and school system come together to get this done.*

Randi Weingarten

*Once I started asking, people started offering different resources and the help was there. But if no one asked and no one said, look we need help and this is an area of concern for us, it was just like it doesn't exist. Something as simple as a child has asthma and they're not coming to school. You link them with someone who can actually help them. All of a sudden that child is coming to school on a regular basis and achievement goes up.*

Harold Barber

---

## Next Steps for Policymakers, Administrators, and Practitioners

*Right now it's as though we have made a collective implicit decision that we need to build the 21st century engine to drive education and that it's different than the engine of the early 20th century, but we've decided to build it without any overall architectural plans or design.*

**Paul Reville**

The convening ended with a discussion of next steps that highlighted four key ideas.

**Leadership.** Intentionally creating partnerships to improve outcomes for young people requires strong leadership at policy and administrative levels in multiple institutions and organizations. Partnering to improve youth outcomes is not a

new idea. Current policies support it and school districts and schools already have many partners. However, leadership to develop and sustain partnerships as a strategy to achieve ambitious educational outcomes is still relatively uncommon.

**Policy Support.** Policy at federal, state, and local levels must encourage new governance and partnership arrangements, as well as provide funding for the coordination of partners' work. This paper has presented examples of partnerships to encourage discussion of the ways policy can support their development and sustainability.

**Accountability.** The partnerships featured in the convening support the idea that they should be accountable to school-related outcomes. At the same time, convening participants agreed that a broader accountability framework is crucial to the development of partnerships. Such a framework would be supported by sound theory and research about factors that contribute to educational achievement. The framework would consider inputs as well as outputs. It would include measures for student health and development as well as for academic achievement. Finally, it would define outcomes at the organization and community level, not just at the student level. At its core, the framework would uphold ambitious learning as the means for students to: (1) hold high-skill, high-knowledge jobs as adults, (2) be active citizens and leaders in our democracy, and (3) develop the values and character traits we associate with personal and career success. The framework would serve to align the work of diverse partners around shared purposes.

**Implementation.** Another strategic target for catalyzing the work of partnerships was captured in the advice of Milbrey McLaughlin of Stanford University to “bring in the middle”—the people between high-level decision makers and children. The “middle” needs to be “articulate and demanding” about the shared purposes of partnerships. These professionals and community members require training and support for their roles and responsibilities in partnerships. Throughout the convening, participants offered examples, such as cultivating entrepreneurship among teachers and principals to change how

schools relate to children and their families and developing a culture of data use within and across organizations.

*When you look at all the work in Philadelphia where parents are struggling against the school closings—and the same in Chicago—what do they say they want? They want what we’re talking about. They want their schools to be more connected to their neighborhoods. In disinvested neighborhoods, the last man standing is the public school. Even when it’s not working right, people have this sense of connection and relationship. We must build on that. All of us have kids. Kids live in families and families live in neighborhoods. They live in real places.*

Martin Blank, President, Institute for Educational Leadership

---

## Conclusion

Educating students requires engaging and working with families, community services and resources, businesses, higher education, diverse public agencies, and researchers. This in turn requires intentional and sustained partnerships among multiple institutions and organizations committed to better outcomes for young people. Partnerships respond to students’ academic, social, emotional, and physical needs. They also engage children and youth in meaningful learning experiences from early in their lives to young adulthood, both during and after school hours. The engine of education in the 21st century will need to be powered by sustainable partnerships because schools cannot accomplish their job alone and education does not occur only within the four walls of K-12 schools. We encourage use of this summary in further discussions of why and how to grow and sustain partnerships in communities across the country.



# School and Community Partnerships Convening Participant List

Carlos Azcoitia  
Chicago Public Schools

Phyllis Balcerzak  
Washington University

Harold Barber  
Samuel Coleridge-Taylor  
Elementary School

Barnett Berry  
Center for Teaching Quality

Janet Brown  
Institute for Educational  
Leadership

Joseph Bishop  
Schott Foundation

Annie Blackledge  
U.S. Department of Education

Martin Blank  
Institute for Educational  
Leadership

Eve Bolton  
Cincinnati School Board

Betsy Brand  
American Youth Policy Forum

Dan Cardinali  
Communities in Schools

Cindy Cisneros  
Committee for  
Economic Development

Virginia Edwards  
Education Week

Harold Fitrer  
Communities in  
Schools of Richmond

Ellen Galinsky  
Families and Work Institute

Jodi Grant  
Afterschool Alliance

Madlene Hamilton  
Stanford University

Dawn Hucklebridge  
Young Elected Officials  
Network

Penni Hudis  
ConnectEd: California  
Center for College & Career

Gary Huggins  
National Summer  
Learning Association

Reuben Jacobson  
Institute for Educational  
Leadership

John Jackson  
Schott Foundation

Tara James  
National Human Services  
Assembly

Clark Lienemann  
Mary Rigg Neighborhood  
Center

Rob Mahaffey  
Rural School and Community  
Trust

Karen Mapp  
Harvard Graduate School  
of Education

Shirley Marcus Allen  
Venture Philanthropy Partners

Vicki May  
Washington University

Michael McAfee  
PolicyLink

Milbrey McLaughlin  
Stanford University

Charmaine Mercer  
Alliance for Excellent  
Education

Jacob Mishook  
Annenberg Institute

Heather Naviasky  
Institute for Educational  
Leadership

Ellen Pais  
Los Angeles Education  
Partnership

Charles Payne  
University of Chicago

Dianne Piche  
The Leadership Conference

Andrea Prejean  
National Education  
Association

# School and Community Partnerships Convening Participant List

Jane Quinn  
National Center  
for Community Schools

Bill Raabe  
National Education  
Association

Paul Reville  
Harvard Graduate  
School of Education

Rema Reynolds  
University of California, Los  
Angeles

Hilary Rhodes  
The Wallace Foundation

Lauren Rich  
Chapin Hall at the University  
of Chicago

Kwesi Rollins  
Institute for Educational  
Leadership

Mary Ronan  
Cincinnati Public Schools

Jorge Ruiz de Velasco  
Warren Institute

Curtiss Sarikey  
Oakland Public Schools

Mary Anne Schmitt  
Say Yes to Education

Bela Shah Spooner  
National League of Cities

Shital Shah  
American Federation of  
Teachers

Paula Silver  
Widener University

Cheryl Smithgall  
Chapin Hall at the University  
of Chicago

Nina Sonenberg  
The Wallace Foundation

Colette Tipper  
Institute for Educational  
Leadership

Doua Thor  
Southeast Asia Resource  
Action Center

Lisa Villareal  
The San Francisco Foundation

Lisa Walker  
Chapin Hall at the University  
of Chicago

Tracy Wareing  
American Public  
Human Services Association

JoAnn Weeks  
Netter Center for  
Community Partnerships

Elaine Weiss  
Economic Policy Institute

Randi Weingarten  
American Federation of  
Teachers

Jenna Weinstein  
Institute for Educational  
Leadership

Cheryl Williams  
Learning First Alliance

Sarah Zeller-Berkman  
Youth Development Institute

## About the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)

The mission of the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is to equip leaders to work together across boundaries to build effective systems that prepare children and youth for postsecondary education, careers, and citizenship. For 50 years, IEL has maintained its commitment to preparing leaders and educators, providing them with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to help children and youth succeed. By bringing together stakeholders to create social capital, find common ground, build trust and share strategies that work, IEL has helped instill the idea that education is a shared responsibility among school systems, families, communities, businesses, and governments, and has helped forge strategic partnerships to transform that vision into measurable results for young people, regardless of background or disability. IEL champions the need for leaders at all levels to shake off institutional constraints and work across boundaries to address the needs of young people and their families.



## About the Coalition for Community Schools

The Coalition for Community Schools, staffed by the Institute for Educational Leadership, is an alliance of national, state and local organizations in education (cradle to career), youth development, community planning and development, higher education, family support, health and human services, government, and philanthropy as well as national, state, and local community school networks. The Coalition advocates for community schools as a strategy to leverage local resources and programs, changing the look and feel of the traditional school structure to best meet the needs of children and families in the 21st century.



# ChapinHall at the University of Chicago

Established in 1985, Chapin Hall is an independent policy research center whose mission is to build knowledge that improves policies and programs for children and youth, families, and their communities.

---

## Recommended Citation

**Walker, L. J., Rollins, S.K., Blank, M.J., & Jacobson, R. (2013).**

Achieving Ambitious Educational Outcomes through School and Community Partnerships. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

## Related Publications

**Baker, S., Rich, L., Wojnarowski, M., & Meehan, P. (2013).**

Implementing successful school-based health centers: Lessons from the Chicago Elev8 Initiative. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

**Walker, L., Smithgall, C., & Cusick, G.R. (2012).**

Making *Community* an Authentic Part of School and Community Partnerships. Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

## Contact

**Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago**

1313 East 60th Street  
Chicago, IL 60637

T: 773.753.5900

F: 773.753.5940

**[www.ChapinHall.org](http://www.ChapinHall.org)**