Reducing Barriers to Education Around the World:

A Systematic Approach Using the Community School Model as a Framework

Isabella Bejarano Bernal

Department of Education, Ouachita Baptist University

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This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Kathy Collins,

who taught me to love first,

because students will not care how much you know

until they know how much you care.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Educators, parents, advocates, and policymakers around the world are dedicated to enhancing education, recognizing its pivotal role in reducing inequality, expanding opportunities for vulnerable populations, breaking cycles of poverty, and fostering sustainable development. After the hard hits that education took during and after the coronavirus pandemic, global organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank have partnered under the rallying cry to "build back better," taking the opportunity to examine the successes and failures of previous models and frameworks and improve them, creating new and better systems. Harnessing the opportunities that come from hardships, "countries have an opportunity to accelerate learning and make schools more efficient, equitable, and resilient by building on investments made and lessons learned during the crisis" (UNESCO et al., 2021). A crucial lesson drawn from the pandemic's effects on education is the significant role of empowered communities as agents of change for vulnerable and disenfranchised individuals.

This transformative power of communities aligns seamlessly with the broader discourse on the value of investing in education. As Concern Worldwide US states: "Education can help end poverty" by opening doors to jobs, resources, and skills that can push people to move beyond living in survival mode to becoming a thriving member of a community (2023). Transitioning from a surviving to a thriving and contributing member of a community will have a chain reaction that will affect whole regions and even continents. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and Global Education Monitoring (GEM), if all adults completed secondary education, global poverty could be reduced by 55%, the impact rising to 66% -in sub-Saharan African and South Asia (UIS, 2017). Because education is a catalyst for global development, investing in education contributes directly to achieving the 2030 Sustainable

Development goals, the environmental, economic, and social targets that United Nations member states have agreed upon and are currently working towards.

No matter how much society advances in areas such as technological innovations and scientific discoveries, if the barriers that limit access to education are not effectively reduced, the field of education will remain stagnant, and the effects of this stagnation will reverberate to all areas of society. Because barriers to education are often multifaceted, complex, and systemic, this makes them resistant to quick fixes and simple solutions. Initiating a meaningful conversation about education requires addressing these barriers which ultimately affect community and global development.

The Carnegie Task Force on Education determined that "Efforts to expand the use of instructional technology, develop new curriculum standards, make teachers more accountable, and improve teacher preparation and licensing all have merit, but they are insufficient for addressing the many everyday barriers to learning and teaching that interfere with effective student engagement in classroom instruction" (Adelman & Taylor, 2017). This is a reminder that it is important to begin the conversation on educational reform by addressing barriers to education.

Understanding the intricacies of educational barriers is vital because they intersect with fundamental human needs. As outlined in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, people are looking to meet the lower level physiological survival needs before pursuing higher-level goals related to self-esteem and self-actualization, where education falls. This categorization sheds light on why education may seem less important to certain individuals, particularly those focused on meeting their lower-level needs (McLeod, 2023). Understanding that reducing educational barriers

requires attention on the whole child gives stakeholders in education a broader perspective which would ideally lead to more effective and comprehensive solutions.

Many educators share the experience of moments of realization about the complex lives their students lead, and different efforts to mitigate the situations that are impeding their access to the full learning experience. Joy Dryfoos, one of the leading voices of the community schools initiative, shared that as she taught, she slowly realized that not all children have lives filled with the basic supports and opportunities that they need to survive and thrive in school; "Far too many kids exist in a world without stimulation. Many live in a constant state of chaos and are isolated from everything beyond their own neighborhood. They don't go to parks and museums and libraries, they don't eat in restaurants, and they don't make regular visits to doctors and dentists" (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2019). Because of this lack of support and connections, these students are not being set up to succeed.

Furthermore, this concept of social capital comes into play when considering how communities can collectively address the needs of individuals in order to push individuals from meeting lower-level needs to pursuing higher-level goal setting. Social capital, the wealth of connections that provides people with opportunities, can be maximized in an interconnected community which integrated the marginalized (Bourdieu, 1986). If done well, this can lead to meeting basic needs better, and having those physiological and safety needs met creates the foundation to pursue higher-level goals like education.

Regardless of ethnicity, location, or socioeconomic status, a community has assets they can employ to maximize the potential of the people within it. Everyone has a role to play in transforming schools to be the most effective in serving the students who will become the future of said community. Systemic change happens when communities unite, emphasizing the pivotal

role each individual plays in employing their unique human resources for positive change. Transformation can happen when communities focus on education because schools are helping shape the future. Every community is different, so a great start to understanding the challenges that may be affecting education in one community is by exploring different communities. Community development is all about empowering citizens and communities to contribute to their empowerment by investing their talents and human resources for the betterment of the community. Understanding the barriers to this transformational development through the research that has been done about some of the barriers can provide a framework for finding possible solutions that can create significant and lasting change.

Consequently, to make this lasting change, it is essential to observe how schools can evaluate their effectiveness at reducing educational barriers and determine areas of measurable growth. For this reason, this thesis includes a case study from a school in Arkansas with a couple years of experience in the Community Schools Coalition. This school has been implementing the pillars of community schools as a framework and is beginning to see some of the results of their work. Additionally, to prove that the community schools framework is comprehensive and flexible, the other case study was conducted on a rural, private boarding school for orphans in East Africa. This seeks to prove how a school in a different culture, context, and socioeconomic status can be assessed through the same framework that will be discussed. Looking at the same question within a larger context broadens perspective and tests the reliability of the selected markers. Thus, generalizing this study could be a helpful tool for educators, parents, advocates and policy makers around the world to systematically assess and improve schools.

Barriers Around the World

It is imperative to implement a comprehensive framework to systematically address the diverse and intricate barriers to education. These barriers may manifest themselves differently in different cultures and contexts around the world, so an adequate framework must be flexible enough to contextualize to these complexities, and yet be specific enough to direct the changes that should be implemented.

Because of the wide spectrum of barriers that exist across nations and socioeconomic status, categorizing them helps address them thoroughly and methodically. Barriers to education can be broadly classified as external or internal, with sub-divisions encountered within school or extending outside of it. In-school external barriers may involve language disparities, inadequate curriculum, insufficient materials, or administrative shortages. Meanwhile, some external barriers exist separate from the school environment, such as family and community violence, distance from school, or access to the required technology.

Solutions to these multifaceted challenges begin with self-examination. This should lead to evidence-based decision-making. One example of such decision-making could be integrating insights from neuroscience to prioritize utilizing proven curricula and implementing trauma-informed teaching practices. One such insight includes the impact of stress on memory formation, which teachers could use to better understand why a student may be underperforming on assessments (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016, p.24). Another example of a trauma-informed teaching practice would be remaining mindful of tone of voice and posture when giving instructions and especially when administering discipline, to avoid triggering fight, flight, or freeze responses in students who have experienced or witnessed violence. Recognizing the societal impact that they

can make, teachers and educational institutions have a responsibility to navigate beyond their traditional roles to address those challenges that are directly affecting their students' learning.

As Adelman and Taylor point out from the Carnegie Task Force on Education, "While school systems are not responsible for meeting every need of their students, when the need directly affects learning, the school must meet the challenge" (Adelman & Taylor, 2017). This statement acknowledges that although schools are not obligated to meet all the needs of the students that they serve, they are impacted by the internal and external barriers that affect the students they serve, and they have a strategic role in mitigating how those barriers affect readiness to learn.

External Barriers

Awareness can begin by addressing external barriers to education, which are problems that take place outside of a student's control, though they may become a part of the personal experiences that prevent students from getting access to a high-quality educational experience. External barriers operate within a sphere of influence that extends from the outside in, encompassing tangible and often more measurable challenges than internal barriers. For instance, a lack of appropriate technology to complete assignments is more concrete and measurable than the internal barrier of low self-esteem, which is more abstract. Even so, internal barriers are just as important and can have the same amount of impact as external barriers.

Like internal barriers, external barriers may also be intangible and pervasive, such as systems of poverty and racism. Though these may not begin with the student, or even in their home, they definitely affect the way they see the world. These learning adversities may occur in the school environment or outside of it. Some examples of in-school external barriers include bullying, mediocre teachers, inadequate curriculum, or a lack of accommodations for exceptionalities. On the other hand, out-of-school external barriers may include challenges like domestic violence, food insecurity, and deficient transportation. Addressing external barriers can be challenging, as they are often systemic and embedded in the community or society.

Because of the systemic and widespread nature of many external barriers, it truly requires teamwork and collaboration from a community to reduce the existence and effects of the toxic stress that they can cause. Furthermore, coping strategies for the inevitable challenges that students could face are also a part of reducing the barriers associated with these situations.

Internal Barriers

Internal barriers are harder to define because they are often less visible than external barriers, though the former is often caused by the latter. Often, it is difficult to identify the precise cause of internal barriers because they may be caused by the combination and interaction of external circumstances. These factors manifest themselves from the inside out, taking place inside of the student, such as the thoughts and attitudes that prepare them for learning and participation in the community. Examples of these barriers may include a lack of self-regulation, an insufficient attention span, and a lack of motivation to do work (Adelman & Taylor, p. 5-6, 2017). The effects of these barriers may include truancy, bad grades, or misbehavior in the classroom. Other mental and physical barriers such as learning differences or illness may prevent students from learning as much as they could in ideal circumstances. Internal barriers are not constrained to a certain place, so they will often carry over from home to school, and vice versa, which affects in-school and out-of-school learning. Furthermore, when these internal barriers involve difficulties accessing social services and learning resources, they can become external resources. In other words, the relationship between internal and external barriers is complex and interconnected.

Internal barriers are true impediments to learning that can occur in the brain, and that especially affect children. An example of such a barrier is that of childhood adversity. Traumatic experiences shape the brain, which is more vulnerable during childhood because it has a lower threshold for stimuli to affect it (Campbell, p. 2, 2022). It affects structures in the brain as well as inflammation in the body. For example, "chronic peer victimization during adolescence has a detrimental effect on striatal structures such as the left caudate nucleus and the putamen, which have been shown to decrease in volume as a result, this being associated with generalized

anxiety" (Campbell, p.5, 2022). Trauma, which simply entails situations beyond what someone is able to process, and their effects on the body, is one of the most significant internal barriers. As trauma is certainly stored in the body, it will continue to affect people when it remains unprocessed and unaddressed. Those changes that occur in the brain can affect sensory intake, processing and decision-making skills, social-emotional development, social skills and interpersonal problem-solving, self-esteem and self-perception of learning.

As with external barriers, addressing internal barriers includes teaching healthy coping strategies as well as addressing patterns and systemic issues that lead to learning obstacles. Identifying internal barriers and providing the skills to build resilience in adversity should also be a team effort that the community partakes in.

Frameworks of Understanding

Having clear and understandable frameworks helps assess existing educational systems and identify areas of growth to methodically improve practices in classrooms, schools, and districts. Using research about Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the evidence-based strategies that can be used to address their effects as a starting point for examining the needs of individuals within their environment and community is logical. This perspective takes into consideration the internal barriers of toxic stress and trauma, as well as the pervasive adversities that constitute a community's external barriers. Thus, using the six pillars of the Community School Model as a checklist to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a school can help determine the areas that a school could focus on to be more effective in meeting the needs of the community where they are located. Because of these important ties to the community, the ACE Study and the Community School Model can work complementarily to improve schools and maximize their impact on the individuals and communities they serve.

Additionally, examining the case studies of two vastly different schools through this combination of ideas as a comprehensive outline can support the versatility and applicability of this framework to other schools around the United States and even around the world. This could be helpful for providing nations with practical ways to move towards reaching the Sustainable Development Goals and assessing their areas of improvement.

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study

Research on trauma has shown how it is a common and pervasive issue in communities, as it does not just affect individuals, but can transfer across generations and extend outwards towards people who may not have been originally impacted by firsthand trauma. The issue of trauma is of particular interest in the realm of education because trauma has long-lasting effects on neurodevelopment and future health outcomes. Childhood trauma has been identified as "America's hidden health crisis," which has brought increased attention to youth trauma and renewed insights about the "importance of preventing childhood trauma and also recognizing and addressing the needs of youth exposed to adverse events prior to their journey into adulthood" (Thomas, 424). Recognizing schools as natural hubs for family and community life, the educational system is evidently a strategic location for trauma prevention and intervention.

Trauma is a widespread and common public health crisis, but it is not impossible to address. Crucial to understanding trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is identifying the linking mechanisms between toxic stress in childhood and disadvantageous coping mechanisms that result in poor health outcomes. Often, the lines between chronic stress and trauma becomes blurred, as experiences that are beyond an individual's processing capability lead to prolonged stress if they remain unaddressed(Thomason & Marusak, p.11, 2017). These traumatic experiences can be so much harder on children, who are mostly unequipped to deal with the difficult situations that they may be present in or subjected to. Felitti and Anda's list of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) includes physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect, witnessing domestic violence, parental incarceration, and more. Researchers have found that ACEs "are common, and they have strong long-term associations with adult health risk behaviors, health status, and diseases." (Felitti et al., p. 783,

1998). In other words, childhood trauma links toxic stress and health outcomes because it increases the likelihood of engaging in risk behaviors such as alcohol or drug abuse, overeating, and unregulated sexual behaviors as coping mechanisms for negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and shame that stem from exposure to adverse childhood experiences (Felitti et al., p. 783, 1998). This speaks to the impact of ACEs on people's long-term health, as developing these unhealthy coping mechanisms does not just affect the individual trying to cope, but also their families and the community around them. The choice to begin smoking or to engage in unregulated sex can often lead to consequences like addiction, disease, incarceration, and more. These risk behaviors that link ACEs to future health consequences are preventable, and research-based interventions can provide strategies to build resilience.

In their original study, Felitti and Anda proposed that to comprehensively address ACEs, communities must implement primary, secondary, and tertiary strategies. By implementing all three levels of strategies, ACEs can be prevented, and their effects can be avoided and possibly mitigated. Though this can be challenging, the school as a hub and the community surrounding it can be an ideal place for these strategies to be carried out.

Primary strategies prevent the occurrence of ACEs, which "will require societal changes that improve the quality of family and household environments during childhood" (Felitti et al., p. 784, 1998). The goal of primary intervention strategies is to avoid ACEs before they ever happen by making the home and the family unit a safe and healthy place for children. Thus, some examples of primary intervention strategies may include services ranging from home visits that support parents in appropriate bonding with their children to programs that address food insecurity and anything in-between.

Secondary strategies focus on "preventing the adoption of health risk behaviors during childhood and adolescence," which requires an "increased recognition of their occurrence and second, an effective understanding of the behavioral coping devices that commonly are adopted to reduce the emotional impact of these experiences" (Felitti et al., p. 784, 1998). These strategies begin with assessment and guidance during childhood and adolescence in order to identify circumstances where minors are engaging in health risk behaviors. Then, they implement strategic communication among those who may have a way of assisting in minimizing the occurrence of those behaviors, which may include professionals in fields such as family practice, internal medicine, nursing, social work, pediatrics, emergency medicine, and preventative medicine and public health (Felitti et al., p. 784, 1998). This communication seeks collaboration to form comprehensive strategies to effectively prevent and intervene in vulnerable situations. By doing so, the expected result would be a reduction of the long-term effects of childhood adversity.

Finally, tertiary strategies are the most challenging because they represent lack of effective prevention and intervention during youth which has led to long-term consequences that began with habitual health risk behaviors and resulted in a disease burden. They involve treatment for diseases that may have been brought on by unprocessed trauma and the cost of the negative habits created to cope with it. Tertiary strategies could begin with screening for ACEs, but at the moment, treatment is more about dealing with the symptoms of the diseases caused by the trauma rather than directly addressing the trauma. Though it is never too late to heal from trauma and learn healthy coping strategies, the long-term consequences brought on by trauma may not be reversible. This serves to highlight the importance of primary and secondary strategies as the most effective ways of dealing with ACEs.

Taking into consideration that the most effective strategies to deal with ACEs are primary and secondary strategies, it is logical to put schools at the center of initiatives to prevent them and minimize their effects. Schools are the perfect place to confront the effects of ACEs in communities because they can implement primary and secondary prevention strategies with an evidence-based, systematic, and centralized strategy.

The strategies that schools implement must be created specifically for the community that they serve. Thomas states that implementing successful trauma-informed approaches requires contextualization to the complexities of school contexts, which represent diverse communities (Thomas et al., p. 423, 2019). He continues to explain that "the literature places greater importance on creating and maintaining a school environment where everyone is treated with compassion and understanding and is empowered in who they are as students and educators" (Thomas et al., p. 428, 2019). An example of the impact that trauma-informed practices have on education is shifting the guiding question in the treatment of internal barriers to education from "What is wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?". The latter is more comprehensive and requires examining the surrounding systems and environments as causal agents of behaviors and barriers to students benefiting from a quality education.

The Community School Model

Community learning is not a new idea. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, thinkers and reformers like John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Dorothy Day saw services to increase the social and cultural capital of the disenfranchised and marginalized. Dewey believed in connecting education to community life as a tenet of cultivating citizenry, recognizing schools as the social center for local communities (Morton & Saltmarsh, p. 138, 1997). This was important for justice and equity, and not just for charity. In more recent years, integrating services into the school system has become more common. Legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in the United States, and international resolutions such as Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) seeks universal, high-quality education that prepares students for satisfying and productive lives in the 21st century.

The Community School model developed in response to these targets, specifically emerging as a response to underperforming high-poverty schools, realizing that community partnerships broaden the educational and experiential scope of learning (National Education Association, p. 7, 2017). Implementing Community School strategies resulted in turnaround and improvement in metrics ranging from attendance to behavior and academic performance. Community Schools, also known as Full-Service Community Schools, have existed since the late 20th century, if not before, but their practices have not become centralized and documented until more recent years.

The United States Department of Education defines Full-Service Community Schools as academic institutions that "provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, students' family members, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children" (National Education Association, 2017). The National

Education Association (NEA) is a union that has experience organizing people and can serve as a mobilizer for a community to survey and assess their needs and build back better systems by coordinating their assets.

Centralizing and organizing community assets will address the complexities and bureaucracy related to receiving multiple services. As Adelman and Taylor recognize, "the marginalization and fragmentation of student and learning supports has resulted in poor cost-effectiveness" (Adelman & Taylor, p. 6-2, 2017). The Community School model addresses the multifaceted nature of barriers that are keeping students from making the most of their education. In other words, "the realities are that the problems are complex and overlap, and the complexity requires a comprehensive approach" (Adelman & Taylor, p. 2-13, 2017). Ultimately, weaving together services into a school's regular operations creates more fertile soil for high-quality education all students can benefit from.

Nevertheless, integrating services and contextualizing them to meet a community's needs and maximize their assets requires being positioned on a solid framework. To begin understanding how Community Schools do this, one must begin by identifying the six pillars that underlie the model. Pillars reinforce each other, like a rope that becomes stronger as more strands are added. More specifically, having strong pillars of inclusive leadership, positive behavior practices, and family and community practices creates an environment for strong and proven curriculum, high-quality teaching, and integrated services to flourish. Then, these pillars continue pouring into the students and the community, contributing to a culture that values collaboration with the school.

Pillar #1: Strong and Proven Curriculum

The first pillar of community schools is a strong and proven curriculum that prioritizes both foundational and advanced knowledge and skills for all students. This requires having high expectations and clear learning goals for the skills and understanding that children are expected to attain. To do this, schools must have challenging and culturally relevant materials that address the different content areas, leading students to acquire proficiency in literacy and numeracy, but also the arts, languages, and physical education, and "21st century skills" such as leadership, global awareness, and oral and written communication, among others (National Education Association, 2017, p. 20). These skills include a social-emotional curriculum and can be part of the implicit curriculum which is taught daily.

For curriculum to be strong and proven, it must be rigorous and backed by research. In the United States, this means aligning to the Science of Reading and the Common Core State Standards, which have been adapted for specificity by the different states. In other nations and cultures, being rigorous and backed by research may include utilizing resources that have been developed by credible sources, which may mean creating and distributing materials to countries with no infrastructure for producing their own (UNESCO et al., 2021). It also means requiring qualified teachers to facilitate that learning.

One thing that differentiates the Community School Model is extending learning times and opportunities to provide engaging learning experiences that do not necessarily take place in the classroom or during school time. This may mean something like a visit to a museum, or a nature walk around the school property. These opportunities help expand students' schema and contextualize their learning and may take place with the help of community stakeholders such as university students providing after-school tutoring, community STEM or arts programs during

vacation times, and more (National Education Association, 2017, p.29). Having these sorts of extracurricular activities as an essential part of the learning experience makes school more appealing and desirable to students, but it also allows them to have a wider foundation to connect their learning to.

Pillar #2: High-Quality Teaching

A well-rounded and rigorous curriculum requires effective implementation from high-quality teachers. Skilled and efficient teachers are arguably the biggest agents of change within their classrooms; they have the power to help students learn at high-levels and advocate for their students by speaking on their behalf during collaboration with the teaching and administration team as well as the community stakeholders (National Education Association, 2017 p. 32). Fully licensed, skilled, and knowledgeable teachers focus on learning rather than testing, using assessment as a tool to further instruction. They set clear learning goals and design the pacing of a school year in a way that meets those learning targets. Collaboration is woven throughout the fabric of Community School culture, from experienced teachers working with novice teachers as mentors and coaches, to grade-level teams planning instruction and intervention, and school-level teams ensuring aligned instruction and strategizing supports from community service partners (National Education Association, 2017, p. 32). This collaboration can contribute to high-quality teaching because when done well, it allows the strengths of multiple people with different experiences and expertise to shine.

High-quality teaching is differentiated, and trauma-informed. In the Community School Framework, a teacher is an instructor as well as a facilitator or advisor, allowing students to participate in decision-making and providing timely feedback that prepares students to engage in metacognition, analyzing the areas where they are excelling and where they need more help. Furthermore, excellent teachers recognize that families and communities have intrinsic educational assets that they can contribute to students' learning progressions, and they partner strategically to coordinate these opportunities (National Education Association, 2017, p. 34). This may look like inviting parents to volunteer in the classroom, preparing student-led parent-

teacher conferences, making instructional connections to local institutions such as the public library, the courthouse, and more.

Apart from these measures of high-quality teaching, retention and professional development can also point to consistently effective teaching and a positive work environment. Firstly, having a pleasant work environment keeps great teachers staying at the schools where they decide to settle. Even when they stay somewhere for a long time, to remain excellent, teachers must stay current and updated on the newest research, legislation, technology, and techniques. For example, Arkansas IDEAS provides accessible, certified professional development for teachers to complete flexibly through their online platform. A lack of resources for teachers to develop professionally would certainly be a hindrance to creating and maintaining high-quality teachers.

Pillar #3: Inclusive Leadership

The NEA defines inclusive leadership as "a collaborative relationship among highly effective teachers and administrators characterized by shared decision-making and accountability" (2017, p. 46). This leadership is responsible for fundraising and organizing resources and incorporates the voices and resources of families, community partners, school staff, youth, and other stakeholders from the school's various constituencies (National Education Association, 2017, p. 46). By involving different voices in the decision-making process, the community school model increases ownership and self-determination for all the shareholders who participate in shaping the practices and operations of the school. Inclusive leadership requires identifying a variety of important voices and stakeholders in the community and giving them a voice and decision-making responsibilities in a shared environment.

In practice, this requires establishing participation norms and expectations, being consistent in meeting, and planning the kinds of decisions that different stakeholders may participate in. Understanding their role in the school environment and having a protected and respected voice can help shareholders feel ownership for their school.

A school culture where participants feel empowered and excited to take part in the leadership and governance which filters down to the observable results must begin by creating and maintaining an environment of safety and positive behavior practices which emphasizes high expectations for students as well as administrators and other decision-makers who value collaboration and are guided by principles of equity (National Education Association, 2017, p. 50). Valuing inclusive leadership as a pillar for schools will result in creating motivation and rapport, encouraging professional satisfaction, and maximizing the human resources that a community possesses.

Pillar #4: Positive Behavior Practices

Positive behavior practices begin with preventing misbehaviors. Teachers who explicitly state and model the behaviors they are expecting, and who emphasize building relationships and interactions while still acknowledging and firmly addressing negative behaviors experience the most disciplinary success in their classroom management. These behavior practices emphasize keeping students in the classroom, rather than utilizing detentions, suspensions, and expulsions as regular consequences to misbehavior. In the community school model, discipline occurs as accountability as a part of the community (National Education Association, 2017, p. 58). This means that discipline emphasizes how their behavior should seek the best for their community and their resources.

Restorative discipline, which focuses on repairing relationships and learning from mistakes, seeks to reduce behaviors that lead to conflict, improve attendance, and build social capital (National Education Association, 2017, p. 59). By implementing strategies such as increasing predictability in classroom routines, clearly communicating appropriate and consistent expectations and consequences, and mediating conflict between "victims" and "victimizers," community schools aim to reduce the school to prison pipeline which disproportionately affects marginalized students, such as "students with learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect" (National Education Association, 2017, p. 59). Emphasizing these students' role as valuable members of the community and seeking restoration rather than punishment can help build a school climate of safety and inclusion.

Pillar #5: Family and Community Partnerships

Family and community partnerships are some of the most visible and distinguishing aspects of a community school. Though other kinds of schools may also incorporate services such as integrated healthcare services or home visits, family and community engagement in community schools extends beyond volunteerism into decision-making, governance, and advocacy. Participants get to have a voice, expressing what they can offer and how they can align with the goals of the learning community. This strategy is especially helpful for students who may already be receiving services from community sources outside the school because it reduces the time and mental capacity required to seek services from different places.

Having wraparound, centralized services under one roof decreases bureaucracy and confusion and places resources in a logical and accessible location for students and members of the community. This will often draw in parents and other family members, creating a caring environment that they feel welcomed by, though it is important to note that it is not a panacea to eliminate external barriers. This parent and family engagement is essential in improving outcomes for students at-risk. Involving community partnerships with social service agencies, faith-based organizations, local leaders, small businesses, and other collaborators builds ownership and gives the school a more well-rounded view of the issues that affect the community, leading to developing shared core values and a strategy to address needs (National Education Association, 2017, p. 71). These conversations can begin through parent groups and advisory boards that lead to proficient management through needs assessments that use tools like multiple communication paths and surveys of families, students, and community members. Ultimately, these connections to the community support at-school and at-home learning.

Pillar #6: Community Support Services

Integrated support services play a fundamental role in establishing the school as a hub for community life; a hub which can be strategically transformed to maximize the positive influence local partnerships can provide and minimize the barriers that impede at-risk students from realizing their educational and social impact potential. Centralizing support services by bringing together academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement under one roof leads to improved learning, stronger families, and healthier communities (National Education Association, p. 88, 2017). Some examples of these support services could include breakfast and lunch programs, integrated healthcare, job placement supports for parents, and many more.

Weaving community support services into the fabric of the school supports trauma-informed teaching and takes into consideration a whole child approach. This approach recognizes that students will not be able to engage in the learning process if their physical and developmental needs are not met first. Giving importance to both physical and mental health will impact long-term well-being. Nevertheless, being a community hub whose impact extends beyond the students it serves involves expanding services to the family. Services may look different at each school as leadership partners with different local agencies. Some examples of these partnerships and programs may include health and nutrition counseling, education and career resources, parenting classes, and more. If there are no direct partnerships that have already been established, the school may have connections or resources that students and family members to what they need. Many of the other pillars create the foundation for this to occur, like pieces of the loom where the community support services, high-quality teaching and curriculum are woven into the fabric of school culture by partnership, leadership, and behavior practices.

Implications of Combining Frameworks

Considering the ACE study as a foundational part of the philosophy of trauma-informed services and applying its recommendations within the Community School guidelines forms a framework for improving schools in all kinds of communities. The ACE study suggests addressing trauma and its effects through primary, secondary, and tertiary strategies which recognize what happens during different stages of development. The Community School Framework puts it all together, creating a foundation centered around the school as a nucleus for the community, both preventing and reacting to traumatic situations and environments with evidence-based interventions. This strategy can help all sorts of communities, including those in poverty and with vulnerable populations.

Despite being evidence-based and standardized to a certain degree, "the diverse designs of full-service community schools are responsive to the growing list of barriers confronting children and families" (Dryfoos & Maguire, p. xvi, 2019). Because of that, observing and analyzing one community school is simply observing one. Nevertheless, case studies can help communities visualize this initiative in practice and functioning within the context of its community, inspiring similar interventions.

Because of their collaborative nature, community schools allow for services to be centralized, maximizing the usage of funds to provide the most beneficial interventions. Dryfoos, one of the pioneering voices in community school research, states that it is essential to understand "that the full services do not come from educational budgets. All kinds of categorical funds—for example, money for prevention of drug abuse, pregnancy, and violence—can be redirected toward more comprehensive programs" (Dryfoos & Maguire, p. 2019). Though everyone may have an idea about how to provide services or reduce barriers to education, the

Community School Model is well-founded on research and applicable in a variety of settings. It is certainly a starting framework that can be applied to any school to help it measurably improve.

Dryfoos also stated that "in many communities, children face significant barriers to learning—barriers that schools acting alone cannot possibly overcome. But I believe that full-service community schools can dramatically reduce many of these barriers" (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2019). Recognizing that fully taking on the responsibility of addressing the internal and external barriers that students face is too much. However, tapping into the resources and leadership that a community provides spreads out the burden and brings in unexpected assets.

Community schools rise to the challenge of meeting "the demands of our complex 21st century society" (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2019). Adelman and Taylor cite the work of Hargreaves and Fink, stating that: "Ultimately, only three things matter about educational reform. Does it have depth: does it improve important rather than superficial aspects of students' learning and development? Does it have length: can it be sustained over long periods of time instead of fizzling out after the first flush of innovation? Does it have breadth: can the reform be extended beyond a few schools, networks or showcase initiatives to transform education across systems and even nations?" These questions can help guide our assessment of school improvement strategies with a broad approach that can fit a variety of different schools in diverse contexts.

The community school model truly has this depth, length, and breadth. It can help any educational institution, from a rural school district in Northeast Arkansas, to a seaside village in Watamu, Kenya. From a school that has implemented the community school pillars for a couple years, to a school who had never heard about Community Schools, this framework provides an accessible analysis to systematically approach educational improvement. In the following case studies, it is clear that the framework is applicable across cultures and nations, providing

applicable changes that create the foundation to address barriers and improve learning outcomes. Though this is a beneficial and effective framework, it is important to state that it is not a miracle solution for all schools to become perfect. It will take time to comprehensively assess a community and its needs and determine the best methods of action to reduce educational barriers. Even more so, it will take time to implement those changes with fidelity and create meaningful and lasting change.

Despite these challenges, it is important to seek excellence in education, seeking to do what is best for students. Making these comprehensive changes will not just affect them but will ripple out to their families and the surrounding community. It will also extend through time, benefiting future generations.

Case Study #1: Batesville School District

Batesville, Arkansas, United States of America

Introduction

Laura Howard is the District Coordinator in the Batesville School District, which is affiliated with the Coalition for Community Schools. This is the first school district in Arkansas to implement the Community School model. For the past three years, they have served the Batesville population through this initiative which was started by the Chamber of Commerce through ForwARd Arkansas. The district has 7 campuses and serves 3,158 students across their different campuses. They are considered a high-poverty school district, as fifty-eight percent of their students are in the Free and Reduced Lunch program. Sixteen percent of students are English Language Learners, and thirteen percent of students are eligible for Special Education services. Howard is responsible for the implementation of the Community School Model for all of these students.

As District Coordinator, Howard meets with all the site coordinators weekly to discuss the data they have gathered throughout the week. Most of the data they track is related to attendance and behavior. Before being District Coordinator, she was an elementary teacher, academic coach, and high school career coach. As she began making connections in the community, she realized that it was an essential component in the health and success of a school, and she began an internship and apprenticeship project, paid for through Title I funds. As she began research and investigating further, she found the National Education Association (NEA) and the Community School Coalition, two organizations who also provide funding for initiatives like the one she had started. The school district received an initial five thousand dollars for

engagement opportunities, and Howard wrote more grants which fund site coordinators. Now, through a DHS Community Schools Initiative grant, they are creating a parent center called The Hub, where they hope to centralize many of their services aimed at helping and connecting the family.

Howard explained that it is essential for community schools to track data, as it is important to remain evidence-based and demonstrate how they are improving the community. The Batesville school district is currently developing a measurement tool to track progress in attendance and monitor how specific interventions are causing improvements by logging and analyzing changes in behavior and grades, and not just test scores. She mentioned how because it is still a burgeoning program, there is observable growth but not full proficiency in the first years of a program.

Pillar #1: Strong and Proven Curriculum

The Batesville school district aligns with the most recent Arkansas literacy legislation, where all teachers must either complete Science of Reading trainings through a proficiency or awareness pathway, depending on the content and grade level that they teach. This ensures that literacy curriculum is taught with fidelity. Their literacy curriculum is CKLA Core Knowledge (K-5) from the publisher Amplify, and the same publisher provides their middle school literacy program (6-8) which they adopted July of 2021.These are well-known, standards-based curriculums that are used by a variety of districts and even states. CKLA is approved as a Core Program, implemented face-to-face (Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). CKLA, published in 2017, partially meets the requirements for phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension in K-2nd grade; it fully meets the requirements for fluency (Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). In 3rd-5th grade, CKLA partially met the requirements for phonics and fully met all other requirements. This curriculum also provides professional development for teachers who use it, and it contains digital resources (Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2019). Utilizing state-approved curriculum can provide helpful insight on its reliability and effectiveness, as they are prioritizing finding resources that are based on explicit, systematic, cumulative, and diagnostic instruction. As the district continues to implement this curriculum with fidelity, they can determine whether they are seeing positive results and whether or not they should continue to use this specific curriculum or change to another approved resource.

Pillar #2: High-Quality Teaching

The school district boasts that 42% of teachers have a master's degree and 16 of their teachers have a National Board certification. 100% of BSD teachers are considered Arkansas Qualified Teachers (AQT). This means that they are currently licensed in the state of Arkansas. Consequently, all AQTs have already completed the state requirements for licensure and are not currently pursuing alternative licensure or holding licensure from another state. Some districts can afford to be more selective with their teachers, only employing AQTs as the Batesville school district has done. Though it is not necessarily a bad thing to employ paraprofessionals and teachers who are currently pursuing their license, having 100% of their teachers already licensed gives BSD credibility.

Another element of high-quality teaching involves class sizes since it allows teachers to give more individualized attention to each student. The Batesville School District has a 14:1 student to teacher ratio, which helps most students receive adequate one-on-one time and increases differentiated learning. This is a pretty decent student to teacher ration, and though it may not mean that every class has a small size, it does mean that students have a good chance of having more personal relationships with their teachers, and that their teachers are likely to have more capacity to invest in relationships with their students.

Pillar #3: Inclusive Leadership

The Batesville school district collaborates by having campus site teams for each school in the district. These teams are composed of teachers, staff, community members, and administrators. An important part of this collaboration is strategic data analysis, which takes time. The model that they use to analyze their process and progress is through the SWOT model, which stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. They conduct this SWOT Analysis to create goals and take action (Howard, 2023). Utilizing a specific model consistently and in norm-based, structured meetings can help observe change over time. Including the voices of different stakeholders, from parents, to teachers, administrators, and community partners can help broaden perspectives and apply findings to different areas.

One of the ways this school district collects some of the data that the leadership takes into consideration to create a climate that invites collaboration from parents is a needs assessment survey which asks parents how the school district can respond to their needs. They also ask parents about topics that they would be interested in learning more about, which has led to parent conferences about mental health from organizations in Batesville (Howard, 2023). Responding to the needs and interests of parents shows that the school district cares about them and creates a more open environment for them to participate in other areas such as volunteering and decision making.

For inclusive leadership to be successful, communication must be clear, open, and frequent. The school maintains communication with parents and community stakeholders through multiple means, from sending notifications and messages through the district Remind, posting on social media and their website, and providing a form to request information.

Pillar #4: Positive Behavior Practices

Positive behavior practices focus on the student as an agent in their community, and they view infractions as a disruption of the balance of the group. Consequences for actions are logical repercussions and seek restoration and reparation. Church speaks on the school-to-prison pipeline, stating that: "Current school disciplinary procedures contribute to disequilibrium between children, families, and their communities and are a principal component of the school-to-prison pipeline (p. 268, 2014)."

Howard stated that discipline is handled according to their handbook policies, and that as they have improved as other measures have improved, although this has not been one of their first focus areas. One of the areas that they have seen improvement in is truancy. In the community school framework, making the school environment a safer and more welcoming place to be aids attendance. At one of their elementary schools, teachers have an application where they can add points to their students' accounts by scanning their IDs. At the end of the week, they can redeem those points by having different school activities or prizes, such as the student with the most points getting to sit in the principal's chair for the day (Howard, 2023). Prizes like this one also help to build respect and rapport between students and their authority figures, which is essential for effective discipline and behavior management. Although a token economy is not necessarily a PBIS practice, the ways that they are seeking to build relationships through their behavior management system, and moving away from physical items shows a focus on building intrinsic motivation.

Pillar #5: Family and Community Partnerships

As has been stated before, involvement improves ownership. This school district has prioritized creating an environment where students, parents, and community stakeholders feel this ownership. This has fostered student-led initiatives that have partnered with the community. One of the initiatives Howard mentioned was the Reading on the River event, where students and their families celebrated reading and partnered with community partners such as some local businesses and vendors to provide fun activities for the public (2023). Activities like this one celebrate academics and promote excellence, inviting all kinds of people to participate in investing in students. They connect local businesses and other community partners with the school district's mission and vision, giving everyone a role to play in education.

Additionally, family and community partnerships have the advantage of utilizing gifts that parents bring to the table, such as benefitting from parent-led conferences. Though there are limitations to parent-led conferences because of scheduling issues or the education level and motivation of certain parents, this is not the only way that parents can become involved with the school. In some cases, parents may need to benefit from the services that the school offers, such as parenting classes, home visits and connection to social supports before they can contribute to the schools through volunteering and advocacy. Other parents may be busy or disconnected because they have busy lives and jobs. In this case, one thing that can help flexibility is using technology to host meetings remotely and still permit participation. Nevertheless, this is not a perfect solution. Whether or not parents are highly involved, communication is a priority to keep the family and community involved, and having multiple means of communication is essential to building effective collaborative relationships where they feel ownership towards the school.

Pillar #6: Community Support Services

Community Support Services are designed to remove barriers to help students be ready to learn. This is no different in the Batesville school district, and this was an area where they especially flourish and stand out from other surrounding school districts. They support students' physical and mental health through their Telehealth center, which directly connects to insurance and allows students to see a physician without leaving the school building (Howard, 2023). This prevents students from having to miss school or check out of school early when they have a medical or dentist appointment, and it provides them with access to accessible quality healthcare. Teachers can refer students if they notice something that should be checked out, and they can also receive the benefits of accessible healthcare and avoid missing school.

Apart from that, the Batesville school district has partnered with initiatives that have created innovative ways to bring education to students in non-traditional but applicable ways. They have internship and apprenticeship programs for high school, where students can get real life job experience as a part of their curriculum. They also have transition camps for the summers leading up to kindergarten, transitioning from elementary to middle school, and going from middle school to high school. This program is great for kids, but it also eases family nerves during key times of change.

The Batesville school district's greatest endeavor to make social services centralized and accessible to students and their families is "The Hub." Here, home visitors will be able to have a central place to make their calls and archive their documentation. The school district employs 14 full-time home visitors who call and visit families, gather data, and connect students and caretakers to social services when needed.

In The Hub, there will be rooms for meetings between families and school representatives. Resources will be available in both English and Spanish, and hopefully able to be translated into any language that families may need. The Hub is not in any of the schools but is within a short distance of all of them, located in an unused part of the post office building downtown. Howard hopes that in The Hub, families will be able to get connected to and receive the necessary supports for their success in a "one-stop-shop (Howard, 2023)." Making community support services as accessible as possible will hopefully reduce the barriers that many students and their families face in pursuing education.

Finally, the Batesville school district communicates student and family needs through the Coordinated Care Network, where teachers or anyone can submit a report when they see a student or family need. Through this network, the school has been able to get a mother a car when she was unable to transport her child to school and then get to work, they have been able to help families receive food boxes, and much more (Howard, 2023). Centralizing the way that concerns are addressed helps streamline the process of requesting and facilitating supports, but it is essential to have a specific person running this for maximum efficiency and effectiveness. This is why being a part of the Community Schools Coalition is very helpful for this district, because they receive funds specifically allocated to pay the salary for their Community School Coordinator, who organizes all initiatives related to support services.

Case Study #2: Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy

Watamu, Kenya

Introduction

Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy in Watamu, Kenya is a private, nonprofit school that serves three hundred and fifty primary students (ages 3-12) and thirty junior secondary (12-14) students. This school mainly serves orphans and underprivileged students in the Watamu and Malindi communities, and it is a boarding school for the students who require living at school to receive their education here. The purpose of including this school as a part of the study is observing how a school in a different culture, context, and socioeconomic status can be assessed through the frameworks that have been discussed throughout this thesis. Evaluating this school through the pillars of community schools to provide recommendations for the improvement of their educational services would demonstrate that it is an applicable strategy to address the external and internal barriers that may be affecting students' learning.

I received the Carl Goodson Honors Travel Grant to spend a couple of weeks at this school. To prepare for this, I created a survey that touched on each of the pillars of community schools. This survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and sent out to William Fondo Gona, the school director, in anticipation for the trip. While in Kenya, I gathered more data from asking other teachers and administrators questions from the survey. Furthermore, I got to participate in the school environment firsthand by teaching several classes and providing a guidance and counseling workshop. This was one of the school's greatest needs, as they hope that students will be encouraged to finish their education and continue pursuing higher education to escape cycles of poverty.

According to local sources, barriers to education in Kenya include but are not limited to gender disparities, high poverty, teacher supply and quality, and HIV/AIDS (Wanjohi, 2013). Nevertheless, the culture that surrounds education in Kenya is very positive. Teachers are regarded highly, and students are trained to be very respectful. School culture is prioritized, and people generally have a very high opinion of education. These unique factors played a role in my observations and evaluation of Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy.

Pillar #1: Strong and Proven Curriculum

Kenya recently shifted their curriculum from the highly theoretical 8-4-4 system to the more skills-based Competency-Based Curriculum. In this new curriculum, materials are more contextualized to the environment and daily life of students. Some of the elementary lessons included walking around campus to identify harmful and helpful plants, practicing a craft such as weaving, and collaborating with peers to come up with solutions to math problems. Despite being more student-oriented, the CBC curriculum has its critics. Teachers have not received professional development to implement this curriculum with fidelity, which causes frustration and confusion. Schools may not have the facilities to implement this curriculum, because it requires more application-based instructional activities, such as a laboratory. Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy was currently in the process of demolishing some of its lesser used classrooms to create a laboratory, which was a significant endeavor and financial commitment. Lastly, a nationwide change in curriculum creates a disparity throughout the different grade levels, as older students finish their education within the 8-4-4 model and younger students begin with the new CBC curriculum. These differences will be tried and tested when the first generation of graduates enter higher education and the workforce.

Nevertheless, despite the differences and difficulties that a change in curriculum brings about, CBC seeks to improve differentiation and increase accessibility for students who may not have had the same access to applicable education before. This curriculum commits to teaching 21st century skills such as global citizenship, community-service learning, and sustainable development (Wanjohi, 2013). The CBC curriculum seeks to have well-rounded, educated citizens, whether they become farmers, mothers, doctors, or diplomats.

Outside of the academic curriculum, Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy has extracurricular opportunities for learning. They implement social-emotional learning curriculum through their guidance and counseling classes, where students learn about virtues. Some of these include patience, excellence, perseverance, and hard work. They are based on the school's faith-based background, as well as the values that students are expected to have by their community. Being a student is an honor, and getting to wear their uniform is a privilege. Aligning to that means taking school seriously, as they are reminded of the opportunities that they will receive as educated citizens.

They have sports and arts activities, and access to materials such as computers and a library. Though the library does not have every amenity that one in a more affluent region, they had a variety of materials for different grade levels and relating to culturally relevant stories and topics of interest. Unlike most schools in the United States, the library at this school has no access to online resources, and there is less technology in the classroom overall. Most, if not all materials are secondhand, and many of these are outdated. They have a variety of genres, ranging from encyclopedias to fiction and poetry, but the quantity and quality is poor, at best (See Appendix B). There are books with weather damage, or missing pages. Nevertheless, they are stewarded carefully by the librarian, who instills a high value of books in the students that come by the library by establishing rules and expectations when entering the library.

Apart from these opportunities and materials, students have the opportunity to receive remedial classes after school hours and on Saturdays. An estimated 60% of students participate in one or more of the extended learning times or opportunities offered at the school. Of the 40% who do not, some of the barriers that may affect them include home responsibilities they have to take care of, long walks home, or others. Despite these barriers, Director Fondo states that their

community is impressed with the results of their curriculum, and this improves their reputation, promoting them to new students (Fondo Gona, 2023). Seeing the results of their curriculum and their access to materials, even though it may be lacking in comparison to more developed nations, is an encouragement for parents and caretakers to enroll their children at this school.

Pillar #2: High-Quality Teaching

To teach in Kenya, teachers must have a license from the Teachers Service Commission (TSC). The TSC has rigorous requirements for teachers, putting them through a vetting process and stating requirements which include being college-educated and having a letter of recommendation that states good moral standing, among other requirements. At Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy, many of the teachers have been teaching for many years, and they have strong relationships with each other, the students, and the community. Some of the teachers are also parents of children who attend the school. This increases how invested they are in school life. Warm relationships are one of the strongest features of high-quality teaching at this school, because teachers know the students well, even across grade-levels.

Nevertheless, one of the difficulties that teachers faced as a barrier was class size. Classes were big, most of the older classes having between 25 and 30 students. This reduces the personal attention teachers can give to students and makes differentiation more difficult. Nevertheless, it is still a small campus, where students can form personal relationships with other faculty and staff, such as the cooks, janitors, and office staff. With it being a boarding school, students have the opportunity of creating bonds with their dorm parents, as well as the congregation who comes to church on campus on Sundays. Moreover, in comparison with schools around the nation and continent, a class of 30 students is comparably smaller (Fondo Gona, 2023). This would certainly be an attractive feature for parents and caretakers looking to enroll their students at this school.

Pillar #3: Inclusive Leadership

Teachers and administrators work closely at Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy, but there are no community stakeholders who are invited to be a part of the school. Nevertheless, the director is also a pastor in the community, which increases his knowledge of the ongoing issues and strengthens his trust and relationships with parents and guardians. He is very involved in the community, which creates effective alliances in a small town such as Watamu.

Teachers and administrators have multiple roles, directing different programs and collaborating routinely. This shows that they really care about the school and about their students, and they are truly a dedicated staff. However, it may also mean that they are doing too much, which could lead to burnout. Since many of the children they serve are orphans, parents and relatives who are the caretakers of these students are less likely to be involved.

In their self-rating, the director stated that the highest authority and involvement in decision-making was the principal, followed by the teachers, with no participation from students, parents, or community members. This model of governance, while not inherently bad, certainly affects other areas of implementation of community services. This kind of governance can avoid burdening parents, and it is culturally relevant in terms of the honor and respect that comes with seniority, but it may have some blind spots that inclusive leadership could bring.

Pillar #4: Positive Behavior Practices

Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy prioritizes keeping students in the classroom. Discipline often emphasizes the privilege they have of attending school. Nevertheless, they utilize measured corporal punishment, which is not a trauma-informed practice. This is embedded in the culture of schools around Kenya, so it would be hard to eradicate this practice that contributes to the culture of respect that keeps students in line.

Though corporal punishment is only administered for more major or repeated offences, such as repeated disrespect or hurting peers, it is a relatively constant threat. Teachers will stand around holding switches as they monitor students, and even crack it down to get their attention when they are getting off track. As students have likely experienced this punishment firsthand or secondhand, the threat of the sound is often enough to get them to do what they are supposed to be doing. Parents do not have to give explicit written consent, and because this is a fairly standardized practice in schools, it is a kind of expectation.

Depending on the circumstance and offense, students may receive other consequences such as getting talked to, especially by the principal or school director. In such an honor-shame based culture, this is a terrible feeling for them. The principal and school director use language that brings the student awareness of the gravity of their actions and possible future consequences if they continue down a certain path. At the same time, teachers, staff, and administrators show care to their students in many different ways, looking to build relationships but still maintain the distance of required respect.

Pillar #5: Family and Community Partnerships

Because Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy has a high demographic of orphans, involving the family becomes complicated. In Kenya, many orphans still have a living relative, but that living relative just wants to get the student out of their hands. Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy seeks to serve these children and even seek sponsorships to help them succeed. Even taking that into consideration, family and community partnerships have a different dynamic at a boarding school. Furthermore, the international partnerships that the school seeks on behalf of their most destitute students, brings up the issue about whether a community is the local group, or if it can extend to benefactors who want to contribute to the mission of the school.

These partnerships help provide a variety of services, from aid for school uniforms and materials, to maintenance costs for boarding. Additionally, they carry with them potential obligations to donors such as reporting on student success and current projects. Being a non-profit could also affect the transience of volunteers who may come for a season, build some relationships with students who have fragile attachments, and then leave. However, a lot of the staff is local and passionate about the mission and vision of the school, and they are looking to stay and pour into the lives of students and their families from start to finish.

In the survey, Director Fondo stated that parents come to the school monthly for services related to their own or their family's wellbeing. These services may relate to requesting connections for social services or aid with paying school fees. However, it seems like they are more likely to seek help at the school than participate in its activities, as he also indicated that parents or caregivers come to the school to volunteer once a year or less. Not all of this may be related to culture, as there are few opportunities for participation like parent committees about

school issues, volunteering in classrooms, or mentorship. Some examples of non-cultural barriers that affect volunteerism include timing, transportation, and finances.

Fondo also stated that he estimates that parents are 50% committed with their student's education at home, helping students by checking homework, reading together, or attending school events. All in all, family and community partnerships do not seem to be a big part of this school's culture and practices. Seeing this as an area of improvement can direct initiatives to connect with families and local agencies with the goal of reducing the barriers that are causing the lacking participation.

Pillar #6: Community Support Services

Finally, Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy provides their students with a variety of community support services. All students are fed breakfast and lunch, and all students are allowed to stay at school for boarding if they require it. Students, many of them orphans, who have long distances to school, or do not receive any educational support at home will likely live at the school during the semester and go to a relative's home over vacation periods. Nevertheless, because boarding is expensive, if students can live at home that is preferred.

Another barrier that students face is cost-prohibitive materials such as uniforms and notebooks. International sponsors may help with some of these costs, but because the school is privately funded, students may still struggle with these expenses. When students have no access to these resources, they may have to skip a semester or school year, which will put them behind their peers when they try to catch up (Fondo Gona, 2023). This can cause students to pursue higher education at a later age, or to enter the workforce later in life, if they choose to continue their education.

The school also provides early childhood development programs, starting with kids that are 3 years old in what is called PP1 (Pre-Primary 1). They have a nurse who provides physical health services, and they will find someone to take a student for further medical treatment at the hospital if needed. Lastly, the after school and weekend remedial programs that help students by reinforcing curriculum, which helps families by removing the barrier to provide academic help at home if they do not have the ability to do so.

Director Fondo explained that one of the greatest strengths that they have sought to cultivate through their services is a feeling of safety and being taken care of. Students and their

caretakers can know that they are in a safe place, learning and being nurtured holistically.

However, the strain of providing all of these services without collaboration and partnership with

the immediate community is a consistent hardship that the school faces.

Implementing a Community School Framework for Transformational Community Development

Community Schools are a proven turnaround strategy for struggling schools, and the pillars that they are built on create a systematic framework for methodically assessing and improving schools (NEA). Before starting the process of implementing the community school framework, a community must conduct an assessment to determine the assets local organizations can provide. School-based asset and needs assessment. Asset and Needs Assessment (NEA Source). When schools are informed on their strengths and existing resources as well as having specific areas of improvement, they can move towards purposeful, efficient change.

Of course, because this begins with awareness and analysis, it is extremely important to gather information from a variety of sources and analyze it intentionally. Being a data-based school informs decision-making, allowing for changes that affect a variety of spheres. The Learning Policy Institute states that outcomes of data-based changes "are likely to span multiple domains—achievement, attendance, behavior, relationships, and attitudes—and are likely to take time to be fully realized. Certain outcomes, such as attendance, are likely to be achieved before other outcomes, such as achievement" (National Education Association, 2017). Just because all areas of necessary improvement may not see immediate growth does not mean that thorough and systematic change is not occurring. Nevertheless, seeing positive change in areas such as attendance can prove that the institutional changes are headed in a constructive direction that will continue to affect the other areas of the institution.

It is important to document these improvements because they are an encouragement to everyone involved in the process. Community schools can start with anyone; from parents, to teachers, to administrators, community partners, or even students themselves. The NEA and

Coalition for Community Schools have created resources to make the process of implementing Community School pillars accessible to anyone; furthermore, they also provide grants to make it easier for schools and districts to try this strategy without a financial burden. The State of Arkansas has stated that Community Schools are an evidence-based strategy for school improvement ((Institute for Educational Leadership, 2017). This can encourage different groups of people to come together and initiate this process. Whether it takes place throughout the United States, or around the world, the pillars of community school can be contextualized to a variety of situations and can provide an effective starting point for school improvement. Parents, teachers, students, policy makers, and community partners can all play a role in assessing, planning, and carrying out school improvement.

Parents

Parents benefit from the Community School strategy because it increases their connections and social capital, bridging gaps to resources they may not have had access to or awareness about. At the same time, centralizing these resources will allow the process of accessing these resources to be much simpler for them. Furthermore, it builds stronger connections with the school, which is proven to improve student outcomes (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2019). The strategy also gives them a voice in decision-making, allowing them to advocate for their children more powerfully.

Teachers

Teachers can often feel a lack of support from parents, administration, or the community. They may feel like they have to do it all on their own, and many times, they do. They make it their own expense to supply student materials or to address a lot of material and even curricular needs in their classrooms every day. Though the Community School strategy is a learning process and requires time and commitment, it can spread out the burden that teachers often bear by themselves. A positive culture from a Professional Learning Community (PLC) could easily come together to initiate this organizational change.

Students

Though students are not often empowered to participate in the governance of their school apart from groups such as student council, community schools seek to empower students in leadership, recognizing that local engagement can increase motivation and self-efficacy. When students view themselves as active members of their surrounding community who can have an active role in the decision-making that affects their daily lives, this can impact their behavior and performance in the classroom, too. Equally as important, giving students real life experiences and responsibilities prepares them for life as functioning, responsible citizens outside of school, which is their ultimate goal.

Administrators

Administrators are often the ones in charge of organizational changes, assessing data and making

decisions for the benefit of the school. For this reason, many community schools have begun

because of the efforts of principals. As an evidence-based improvement strategy, it makes sense

for administrators to implement this strategy. Furthermore, spreading out governance and

increasing the network of people who can spearhead certain initiatives or projects can lighten the

load administrators carry.

Community Partners

Lastly, Community Partners such as local nonprofits, banks, community centers, and others can also take the lead on transitioning to a Community School model. For the Batesville School District, ForwARd Arkansas was the initiator in moving towards the Community School model. Knowing that the community is committed to education and to schools is so encouraging to educators, administrators, and even parents. Increasing connections with the school can bring more people to interact and build relationships with these establishments, creating a stronger client base. Apart from the benefits that community partners can experience when collaborating to pioneer a Community School, these organizations can also contribute some of the most significant changes to schools. The resources they can provide are invaluable and become multiplied in social revenue.

Limitations

Despite the practical advantages that can be gained from implementing the Community School strategy, institutional change will always be difficult. Coordinating large amounts of people with a common goal is challenging, and centralized communication and organized procedures can seem impossible. People interested in bringing change through this strategy must know that like anything else, it is not infallible. For example, it may be daunting to communicate and transfer the vision of a community school to all other stakeholders.

Additionally, as was stated at the beginning of the thesis, extenuating circumstances and unprecedent worldwide events such as the coronavirus pandemic are not off the table. An event like that, which led to intentional isolation, would be a significant concern for a strategy that requires so much communication and collaboration. Similarly, communities that are very small, spread out, and rural may have a more challenging time implementing the community school strategy, though that does not mean it is impossible. Acknowledging that base differences in communities—such as demographics and socioeconomic status—are contextual and create key differences in the barriers and the possible solutions to reduce them.

Lastly, safety and security are a consideration for community schools. Security concerns such as school shootings are already a dilemma, and making school a place where so many different stakeholders can participate may raise questions. Similarly, issues with documentation and who has access to files must continue to be governed by legislature like FERPA and HIPAA, ensuring that privacy is maintained.

Overall, despite the limitations of this study and proposed framework, it is still helpful as a starting point to evaluate and improve schools. Empowering communities to conduct these

evaluations and move towards evidence-based improvements can be an effective starting point to reducing educational barriers. This can be seen in the different case studies; although they are very different, they represent different stages of the assessment process and show that strategies for improvement can be designed based on initial and regular evaluation.

As nations continue to prioritize mitigating educational barriers and strengthening communities by focusing on improving schools, the Community School model can be a helpful tool to strategize positive, evidence-based changes.

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Appendix A: COPY OF ASSESSMENT SURVEY (IRB Approved)

Community Schools Research Survey

School Profile

1. Full Name (Optional)

2. Contact Information (phone number, e-mail). (Optional: will be used to send you a copy of the research if you request)

3. What is your role at the school?

4. Name of the School

5. How many students are served?

6. Location of the School (please include name of town/city, county/district, and state/country

7. How would you describe your school culture?

8. Insert any files related to School Profile: academic achievement, attendance, behavior, completion, discipline, etc. (Up to 10 files accepted.)

Integrated Student Supports

Integrated student supports address out-of-school barriers for students and families by providing or connecting to services that meet needs physically, mentally, socially, and more.

1. What sort of integrated services does your school offer?

    a. School Breakfast (Reduced price or free)

    b. School Lunches (Reduced price or free)

    c. Additional nutritional assistance (supper or snack)

    d. Food backpacks/baskets to take home on weekends or holidays

e. Food pantry

f. Hygiene supports (Ex: closet with hygiene products students may take)

g. Physical health services/Health Center

h. Dental health services

i. Mental health services

j. On-site childcare

k. Early childhood development programs

l. Job training and placement (for parents/caregivers or high school students)

m. Transportation

n. Housing assistance

o. Programs that support social-emotional learning (SEL)

p. None of the above

q. Other: _____

2. Is there a person-team dedicated to the role of coordinating services?

a. Yes

b. No

c. Unsure

d. Other: _____

3. If yes, how does this person/team assess and coordinate services?

(Long answer text response)

4. If there is no person/team, how are services coordinated?

(Long answer text response)

5. How are wraparound services or integrated supports relevant to your school setting?

(Long answer text response)

6. How have wraparound services or integrated supports impacted your school setting (students, teachers, administration, and the community)?

    (Long answer text response)

Expanded and Enriched Learning Times and Opportunities

Expanded learning time and opportunities provide students with more time for learning and opportunities to develop academically, socially, emotionally, and physically. They are intended to expand students' academic interests and increase their success, contributing to positive youth development.

1. What kinds of extended learning time is offered at the school?

    a. After school hours

    b. Weekend programs

    c. Summer or winter break programs

    d. None of these

    e. Other: _____

2. What kinds of enriched learning opportunities does the school offer?

    a. Tutoring services

    b. Mentoring opportunities

    c. Foreign language learning services

    d. Extracurricular sports activities (sports teams, sports interest clubs)

    e. Extracurricular arts activities (music, dance, instruments, visual/studio art)

    f. Extracurricular academic activities (science, technology, engineering, and math, chess club, etc.)

g. Field trips and other enrichment activities

h. Access to computer labs

i. Access to a library

j. Apprenticeships

k. Other: _____

3. What percentage of students (can be an estimation) participate in one or more of the extended learning times or opportunities offered at the school?

(Ranking from 0-10 by percentages)

4. How have extended learning times and opportunities impacted your school setting (students, teachers, administration, and the community)?

(Long answer text response)

Family and Community Engagement

The broad array of interactions among parents, students, educators, and community members that fall along a spectrum in which families and community members exercise varying degrees of power within schools.

1. How often do most parents/caregivers come to the school to access services related to their own or their family's wellbeing?

a. Daily

b. Weekly

c. Every two weeks

d. Monthly

e. Every two months

    f.   Once a semester

    g.   Once a year

2. What kind of services for parents/caregivers and families are provided?

    a.   Workshops

    b.   Home visits

    c.   Medical services (health care and/or dental care)

    d.   Medical services (health care and/or dental care)

    e.   Social services

    f.   Translation services

    g.   Job training and placement

    h.   Classes (financial, parenting, etc.)

    i.   Support groups

    j.   Other: _____

3. How often do most parents/caregivers come to the school to volunteer (helping out in classrooms or on the school grounds, as well as supporting events, such as field trips, talent shows and fundraisers, attending parent-teacher councils or committees)?

    a.   Daily

    b.   Weekly

    c.   Every two weeks

    d.   Monthly

    e.   Every two months

    f.   Once a semester

    g.   Once a year

4. What opportunities for family and community engagement are there at your school?

   a. Parent-teacher conferences

   b. Parent committees about school issues

   c. Parents involved in decision-making with the school and community

   d. Parents volunteering in the classrooms

   e. Parents volunteering on school grounds

   f. Parents mentoring students (not just their children)

   g. Utilizing parent strengths (asking a parent to give a conference, help students in career orientation, etc.)

   h. Other: _____

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how involved are most parents with their student's education at home? (checking homework, reading together, attending school events, etc.)

   (Scale from 1 to 10)

6. Does your school have relationships with community groups (non-profit organizations and universities, private agencies serving youth and families, faith-based institutions, neighborhood groups, and civic organizations)?

   a. Yes

   b. No

   c. Other: _____

7. If yes, what sort of partnerships with the community does your school have?

   (Long answer text response)

8. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much influence do parents and community partners have on changes in policy, resources, personnel, school culture, and/or educational programs?

(Scale from 1 to 10)

9. How has family and community engagement impacted your school setting (students, teachers, administration, and the community)?

(Long answer text response)

Collaborative Leadership and Practices

Collaboration through a shared vision and goals coming together and being implemented by a variety of stakeholders.

1. Who is involved in your school's leadership?

   a. Principal

   b. Teachers

   c. Non-teaching Staff

   d. Parents

   e. Students

   f. Alumni

   g. Community partners (nonprofit organizations, private agencies serving youth and families, etc).

   h. Teacher unions

   i. Other: _____

2. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being the least and 5 being the most, how much is each person or group involved in school leadership?

   (Scale of 1 to 5 for each example)

   a. Principal

       b. Teachers

       c. Non-teaching staff

       d. Parents

       e. Students

       f. Alumni

       g. Community Partners

       h. Teacher Unions

       i. Other

3. How are the people marked in the questions above involved in your school's leadership (spaces for frequent and open communication between players, allowing time for trusting relationships to be developed, etc)?

   (Long answer text response)

4. How has collaborative leadership and practice impacted your school setting (students, teachers, administration, and the community)?

   (Long answer text response)

Thank you for participating in this survey!

If you have changed your mind about adding your contact information or want to add any final comments or documents, this is an optional section where you can do so. Thank you so much for your time and knowledge in improving the research-base about community schools! Feel free to contact me at _____ with comments or concerns that you would like a response for.

1. Name and Contact Information

(Long answer text)

    2.   Additional comments:

(Long answer text)

    3.   Supplemental documents

(Space to drop a file)

Appendix B: Pictures of Wings of Mercy Dabaso Academy

Taken by Isabella Bejarano May 15-27, 2023

The water tank and bathrooms, painted with health and safety reminders during the pandemic.

Students who board at the school wash their uniforms and hand them to dry outside their dorm.

Girls sleeping accomodations. They keep personal belongings in the chest at the foot of the bed.

Boys sleeping accommodations, featuring a bunk bed with mosquito netting.

School cafeteria. This is where students do assemblies for guidance counseling as well.
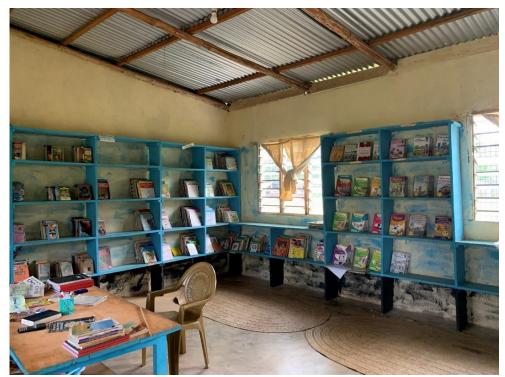

This water tank is decorated with a motivational message: "Don't devaluat(e) yourself, you are a

VIP tomorrow."

The main auditorium, where they do chapel on Fridays and church on Sundays.

The newly inaugurated classrooms for 7th and 8th grade.

The library.

Inside the 7ᵗʰ grade classroom.

Motivational messages in front of the office.

The 5th grade classroom during a math lesson. Students are working at their wooden desks.

PP1 Students work at longer tables which promote more collaborative learning.

Teachers use chalkboards to write on.

Student uniforms include a white button up shirt, a sweater, socks, and loafers. Girls wear a skirt and boys wear shorts.

The youngest students (2-3 years old) take a nap after lunch time.

Motivational messages are spread around the school. Lush outside spaces can be seen from the classroom.

Teachers keep and hang up their handmade anchor charts around the room.

Different classes have different seating arrangements to fit student needs.