Enhancing School-Community Infrastructure and Weaving School-Community Resources Together

http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/studentsupport/toolkit/aidg.pdf

Comprehensive linkages represent a promising direction for generating essential interventions to address barriers to learning, enhance healthy development, and strengthen families and neighborhoods. For schools, such links are seen as a way to provide more support for schools, students, and families. For agencies, connection with schools is seen as providing better access to families and youth and thus as providing an opportunity to reach and have an impact on hard-to-reach clients. The interest in working together is bolstered by concern about widespread fragmentation of school and community interventions. The hope is that integrated resources will have a greater impact on "at risk" factors and on promoting healthy development.

While informal school-community linkages are relatively simple to acquire, establishing major long-term connections is complicated. They require vision, cohesive policy, and basic systemic reform. The difficulties are readily seen in attempts to evolve a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of school-community interventions. Such a comprehensive continuum involves more than connecting with the community to enhance resources to support instruction, provide mentoring, and improve facilities. It involves more than school-linked, integrated services and activities. It requires weaving school and community resources together in ways that can only be achieved through connections that are formalized and institutionalized, with major responsibilities shared.

School-community connections often are referred to as collaborations. The intent in forming a collaboration usually is to sustain the connections over time. Optimally, such collaborations formally blend together resources of at least one school and sometimes a group of schools or an entire school district with resources in a given neighborhood or the larger community.

Building an effective collaboration requires an enlightened vision, creative leadership, and new and multifaceted roles for professionals who work in schools and communities, as well as for all who are willing to assume leadership. And, in thinking about all this, it is essential not to overemphasize the topics of coordinating community services and co-locating services on school sites. Such thinking ignores the range of resources in a community, including human and social capital, businesses, community based organizations, postsecondary institutions, faith-based and civic groups, parks and libraries, and facilities for recreation, learning, enrichment, and support. Also, the overemphasis on service agencies downplays the need to also restructure the various education support programs and services that schools own and operate. As we have noted, some policy makers have the mistaken impression that community service agencies can effectively meet the needs of schools in addressing barriers to learning. Even when one adds together community and school assets, the total set of services in impoverished locales is woefully inadequate.

In general, collaboration among schools, families, and communities could improve schools, strengthen families and neighborhoods, and lead to a marked reduction in young people's problems. Poorly implemented collaboration, however, risks becoming another reform that promised a lot, did little good, and even did some harm. With hope for a promising future, this chapter briefly

- underscores the "why" of school-family-community collaborations
- highlights their key facets
- sketches out the state of the art across the country

- discusses steps for building and maintaining school-community partnerships.
- offers some recommendations for local school and community policy makers and other leaders

Why Connect?

Schools are located in communities, but often are islands with no bridges to the mainland. Families live in neighborhoods, often with little connection to each other or to the schools their youngsters attend. Neighborhood entities such as agencies, youth groups, and businesses have major stakes in the community. All these entities affect each other, for good or bad. Because of this and because they share goals related to education, socialization, and well-being of the young, schools, homes, and communities must collaborate with each other if they are to minimize problems, maximize results with respect to overlapping goals.

Dealing with multiple and interrelated problems, such as poverty, child development, education, violence, crime, safety, housing, and employment, requires multiple and interrelated solutions. Interrelated solutions require collaboration. Promoting well-being, resilience, and protective factors and empowering families, communities, and schools also requires the concerted effort of all stakeholders. All stakeholders means *all*, not just service providers. As important as health and human services are, such services remain only one facet of a comprehensive, cohesive approach for strengthening families and neighborhoods. The community side of school-community collaboratives must encompass more than representatives of service agencies. The school side must include more than student support staff. Teachers and families, in particular, have a major stake in school-community connections.

It seems evident, that when schools are an integral and positive part of the community, they are better positioned to address barriers to learning, enhance opportunities for learning, development, and academic performance, reduce discipline problems, expand home involvement, increase staff morale, and improve use of resources. Indeed, *leaving no child behind is only feasible through well-designed collaborative efforts.*

Similarly, by working with schools, families and other community entities can enhance parenting and socialization, address psychosocial problems, and strengthen the fabric of family and community well-being and community self-sufficiency. Agencies, for example, can make services more accessible to youth and families by linking with schools and can connect better with and have an impact on hard-to-reach clients.

Interest in working together also is bolstered by concern about widespread fragmentation of school and community interventions. Clearly, appropriate and effective school-community collaboration should be part of any strategy for developing comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approaches to promote well-being and address barriers. Strong school-community connections are critical in impoverished communities where schools often are the largest piece of public real estate and resources and also may be the single largest employer.

Comprehensive collaboration represent a promising direction for generating essential interventions to address barriers to learning, enhance healthy development, and strengthen families and neighborhoods. This is accomplished by weaving together a critical mass of resources and strategies that enables effective teaching and learning by supporting all youth, their families, and teachers.

Defining Collaboration and its Purposes

As we have noted, some wit defined collaboration as *an unnatural act between nonconsenting adults*. This captures the reality that establishing a "collaborative" is a snap compared to the task of turning the group into an effective, ongoing mechanism. Collaboration involves more than simply working together, and a collaborative is more than a process to enhance cooperation and coordination. Thus, teachers who team are not a collaborative; they are a teaching team. Professionals who work as a multidisciplinary team to coordinate treatment are not a collaborative; they are a treatment team. Interagency teams established to enhance coordination and communication across agencies are not collaboratives; they are coordinating teams.

Coalitions are not collaboratives, they are a form of collaboration that involves multiple organizations that establish an *alliance* for sharing information and jointly pursuing policy advocacy and/or cohesive action in overlapping areas of concern. A collaborative is a form of collaboration that involves establishing an infrastructure for *working together to accomplish specific functions* related to developing and enhancing interventions and systems in arenas where the participants' agendas overlap.

One hallmark of authentic collaboration is a *formal agreement* among participants to establish

mechanisms and processes to accomplish *mutually desired results* – usually outcomes that would be difficult to achieve by any of the stakeholders alone. Thus, while participants may have a primary affiliation elsewhere, they commit to working together under specified conditions to pursue a shared vision and common set of goals.

Effective collaboratives are built with vision, policy, leadership, infrastructure, and capacity building. A collaborative structure requires shared governance (power, authority, decision making, accountability) and weaving together an adequate set of resources. It also requires establishing well-defined and effective *working* relationships that enable participants to overcome individual agenda. If this cannot be accomplished, the intent of pursuing a shared agenda and achieving a collective vision is jeopardized.

Growing appreciation of human and social capital has resulted in collaboratives expanding to include a wide range of stakeholders (people, groups, formal and informal organizations). Many who at best were silent partners in the past now are finding their way to the collaborative table and becoming key players. The political realities of local control have expanded collaborative bodies to encompass local policy makers, representatives of families, nonprofessionals, and volunteers. Families, of course, have always provided a direct connection between school and community, but now they are seeking a greater decision making role. In addition, advocates for students with special needs have opened the way for increased parent and youth participation in forums making decisions about interventions. Clearly, any effort to connect home, community, and school resources must embrace a wide spectrum of stakeholders.

In the context of a collaborative, collaboration is both a desired process and an outcome. That is, the intent is to work together to establish strong working relationships that are enduring. However, family, community, and school collaboration is not an end in itself. It is a turning point meant to enable participants to pursue increasingly potent strategies for strengthening families, schools, and communities.

Effective collaboratives, then, attempt to weave the responsibilities and resources of participating stakeholders together to create a new form of unified entity. For our purposes here, any group designed to connect a school, families, and other entities from the surrounding neighborhood is referred to as a "school-community" collaborative. Such collaboratives may include entities focused on providing programs for education, literacy, youth development, the arts, health and human services, juvenile justice, vocational education, economic development, and more. They may include various sources of human, social, and economic capital, including teachers, student support staff, youth, families, community-based and linked organizations, such as public and private health and human service agencies, civic groups, businesses, faith-based organizations, institutions of postsecondary learning, and so forth.

Operationally, a collaborative is defined by its *functions*. That is, a collaborative is about accomplishing functions, not about establishing and maintaining a "collaborative" body.

Major examples of *tasks* include:

- facilitating communication, cooperation, coordination, integration
- operationalizing the vision of stakeholders into desired functions and tasks
- enhancing support for and developing a policy commitment to ensure necessary resources are dispensed for accomplishing desired functions
- advocacy, analysis, priority setting, governance, planning, implementation, and evaluation related to desired functions
- aggregating data from schools and neighborhood to analyze system needs
- mapping, analyzing, managing, redeploying, and braiding available resources to enable accomplishment of desired functions
- establishing leadership and institutional and operational mechanisms (e.g., infrastructure) for guiding and managing accomplishment of desired functions
- defining and incorporating new roles and functions into job descriptions
- building capacity for planning, implementing and evaluating desired functions, including ongoing stakeholder development for continuous learning and renewal and for bringing new arrivals up to speed
- defining standards & ensuring accountability
- social marketing

These tasks include mapping and analyzing resources; exploring ways to share facilities, equipment, and other resources; expanding

opportunities for community service, internships, jobs, recreation, and enrichment; developing pools of nonprofessional volunteers and professional pro bono assistance; making recommendations about priorities for use of resources; raising funds and pursuing grants; and advocating for appropriate decision making.

In organizing a collaborative, the fundamental principle is: *Structure follows function.* Based on clear functions, a differentiated infrastructure must be developed to enable accomplishment of functions and related tasks. Minimally, the need is for infrastructure mechanisms to steer and do work on a regular basis. And, since the work almost always overlaps with that of others, a collaborative needs to establish connections with other bodies.

Collaboration: a Growing Movement

Most of us know how hard it is to work effectively with a group. In fact, we all can point to committees and teams that drain our time and energy to little avail.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that no organization can be truly effective if too many staff work in isolation. The same is true when school and community entities do not work together. Thus, calls for collaboration have increased, and, initiatives for school-community collaboration and collaborative bodies are springing up everywhere. Moreover, increased federal funding for after school programs at school sites is enhancing opportunities for collaboration by expanding recreation, enrichment, academic supports, and child care programs.

Various levels and forms of school, community, and family collaboration are being tested, including state-wide initiatives. Some cataloguing has begun, but there is no complete picture of the scope of activity.

From what is known, it is clear that many efforts to collaborate have not taken the form of a collabortative. Many demonstration projects are mainly efforts to incorporate health, mental health, and social services into *centers* (including health centers, family centers, parent centers). These centers are established at or near a school and use terms such as school-linked or school-based services, coordinated services, wrap-around services, one-stop shopping, full service schools, systems of care, and community schools.

When collaborations and collaboratives are developed as part of funded projects, the aims generally are to improve coordination and eventually integrate many programs and enhance their linkages to school sites. Scope varies. Most of the projects want to improve access to health services (including immunizations, prevention programs substance abuse, asthma, and pregnancy) and access to social service programs (including foster care, family preservation, and child care). In addition or as a primary focus, some are concerned with (a) expanding after school academic, recreation, and enrichment, including tutoring, youth sports and clubs, art, music, museum programs, (b) building systems of care, including case management and specialized assistance, (c) reducing delinquency, including truancy prevention, conflict mediation, and violence reduction, (d) enhancing transitions to work, career, and post-secondary education, including mentoring, internships, career academies, and job shadowing and job placement programs, and (e) strengthening schools and community connections through adopt-a-school programs, use of volunteers and peer supports, and neighborhood coalitions.

Projects have been stimulated by diverse initiatives:

- some are driven by school reform
- some are connected to efforts to reform community health and social service agencies
- some stem from the community school and youth development movements
- a few stem from community development endeavors.

Currently, only a few projects are driven by school reform. Most stem from efforts to reform community health and social services with the aim of reducing redundancy and increasing access and effectiveness. These tend to focus narrowly on "services." Projects initiated by schools are connecting schools and communities to enhance school-to-career opportunities, develop pools of volunteers and mentors, and expand after school recreation and enrichment programs.

The community school and youth development movements have spawned school-community collaboration that clearly go beyond a narrow service emphasis. They encourage a view of schools not only as community centers where

families can access services, but as hubs for community-wide learning and activity. In doing so, they encompass concepts and practices aimed at promoting protective factors, asset-building, wellness, and empowerment. Included are efforts to establish full-fledged community schools, programs for community and social capital mobilization, and initiatives to establish community policies and structures that enhance youth support, safety, recreation, work, service, and enrichment. Their efforts, along with adult education and training at neighborhood schools, are changing the old view that schools close when the youngsters leave. The concept of a "second shift" at a school site to respond to community needs is beginning to spread.

School-community linkages are meant to benefit a wide range of youngsters and their families. For example, considerable attention has been paid to linkages to enhance outcomes for students with emotional disturbance and their families. This population is served by classrooms, counseling, day care, and residential and hospital programs. It is widely acknowledge that all involved need to work together in providing services, monitoring and maintaining care, and facilitating the transitions to and from services. To address these needs, considerable investment has been made in establishing what are called *wrap around services* and *systems of care*. The work has tended to be the focus of multi-disciplinary teams, usually without the support of a collaborative body. Initial evaluations of systems of care have been discussed in terms of the difficulty of studying linkages, and the policy issues that arise regarding appropriate outcomes and cost-effectiveness. We would add that the studies highlight the need for the involvement of a school-community collaborative.

While data are sparse, a reasonable inference from available research is that school-community collaboration can be successful and cost effective over the long-run. Moreover, school-community collaborations not only have potential for improving access to and coordination of interventions, they encourage schools to open their doors and enhance opportunities for community and family involvement.

Currently, schools and community entities usually function as separate agents, with a few discrete linkages designed to address highly circumscribed matters. Often the linkages are encouraged by and/or directed at parents of school aged children. The immediate goal of many school-family-community collaboratives is to bring the entities together to work in more cooperative ways and where feasible to integrate resources and activities when they are dealing with overlapping concerns. Ultimately, some argue that it is all about community and that families should be understood and nurtured as the heart of any community and that schools should be completely embedded and not seen as a separate agent.

How many members of a collaborative does it take to change a lightbulb?

- 14 to share similar experiences of changing light bulbs and how the light bulb could have been changed differently;
- 7 to caution about the dangers of changing light bulbs
- 27 to point out spelling/grammar errors in posts about changing light bulbs
- 53 to flame the spelling/grammar critics
- 1 to correct the spelling and grammar in the spelling/grammar flames
- 6 to argue whether it's "lightbulb" or "light bulb"

Understanding Key Facets of School-Community Connections

As should be evident by now, school-community connections differ in terms of purposes adopted and functions pursued. They also differ in terms of a range of other dimensions. For example, they may vary in their degree of formality, time commitment, breadth of the connections, as well as the amount of systemic change required to carry out their functions and achieve their purposes.

Key dimensions. Because family, community, and school collaboration can differ in so many ways, it is helpful to think in terms of categories of key factors relevant to such arrangements (see Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1

Some Key Dimensions Relevant to
Family-Community-School Collaborative Arrangements

I. Initiation

A. School-led
B. Community-driven

II. Nature of Collaboration

A. Formal
- memorandum of understanding
- contract
- organizational/operational mechanisms

B. Informal
- verbal agreements
- ad hoc arrangements

III. Focus

A. Improvement of program and service provision
- for enhancing case management
- for enhancing use of resources

B. Major systemic changes
- to enhance coordination
- for organizational restructuring
- for transforming system structure/function

IV. Scope of Collaboration

A. Number of programs and services involved (from just a few -- up to a comprehensive, multifaceted continuum)
B. Horizontal collaboration
- within a school/agency
- among schools/agencies

C. Vertical collaboration
- within a catchment area (e.g., school and community agency, family of schools, two or more agencies)
- among different levels of jurisdictions (e.g., community/city/county/state/federal)

V. Scope of Potential Impact

A. Narrow-band -- a small proportion of youth and families can access what they need
B. Broad-band -- all in need can access what they need

VI. Ownership & Governance of Programs and Services

A. Owned & governed by school
B. Owned & governed by community
C. Shared ownership & governance
D. Public-private venture -- shared ownership & governance

VII. Location of Programs and Services

A. Community-based, school-linked
B. School-based

VIII. Degree of Cohesiveness among Multiple Interventions Serving the Same Student/Family

A. Unconnected
B. Communicating
C. Cooperating
D. Coordinated
E. Integrated

IX. Level of Systemic Intervention Focus

A. Systems for promoting healthy development
B. Systems for prevention of problems
C. Systems for early-after-onset of problems
D. Systems of care for treatment of severe, pervasive, and/or chronic problems
E. Full continuum including all levels

X. Arenas for Collaborative Activity

A. Health (physical and mental)
B. Education
C. Social services
D. Work/career
E. Enrichment/recreation
F. Juvenile justice
G. Neighborhood/community improvement

Range of resources. Exhibit 2 highlights the wealth of community resources that should be considered in establishing family, community, and school connections.

Exhibit 2

A Range of Community Resources that Could Be Part of a Collaboration

County Agencies and Bodies
(e.g., Depts. of Health, Mental Health, Children & Family Services, Public Social Services, Probation, Sheriff, Office of Education, Fire, Service Planning Area Councils, Recreation & Parks, Library, courts, housing)

Municipal Agencies and Bodies
(e.g., parks & recreation, library, police, fire, courts, civic event units)

Physical and Mental Health & Psychosocial Concerns Facilities and Groups
(e.g., hospitals, HMOs, clinics, guidance centers, Planned Parenthood, Aid to Victims, MADD, "Friends of" groups; family crisis and support centers, helplines, hotlines, shelters, mediation and dispute resolution centers, private practitioners)

Mutual Support/Self-Help Groups
(e.g., for almost every problem and many other activities)

Child Care/Preschool Centers

Post Secondary Education Institutions/Students
(e.g., community colleges, state universities, public and private colleges and universities, vocational colleges; specific schools within these such as Schools of Law, Education, Nursing, Dentistry)

Service Agencies
(e.g., PTA/PTSA, United Way, clothing and food pantry, Visiting Nurses Association, Cancer Society, Catholic Charities, Red Cross, Salvation Army, volunteer agencies, legal aid society)

Service Clubs and Philanthropic Organizations
(e.g., Lions Club, Rotary Club, Optimists, Assistance League, men's and women's clubs, League of Women Voters, veteran's groups, foundations)

Youth Agencies and Groups
(e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, Y's, scouts, 4-H, Woodcraft Rangers)

Sports/Health/Fitness/Outdoor Groups
(e.g., sports teams, athletic leagues, local gyms, conservation associations, Audubon Society)

Community Based Organizations
(e.g., neighborhood and homeowners' associations, Neighborhood Watch, block clubs, housing project associations, economic development groups, civic associations)

Faith Community Institutions
(e.g., congregations and subgroups, clergy associations, Interfaith Hunger Coalition)

Legal Assistance Groups and Practitioners
(e.g., Public Counsel, schools of law)

Ethnic Associations
(e.g., Committee for Armenian Students in Public Schools, Korean Youth Center, United Cambodian Community, African-American, Latino, Asian-Pacific, Native American Organizations)

Special Interest Associations and Clubs
(e.g., Future Scientists and Engineers of America, pet owner and other animal-oriented groups)

Artists and Cultural Institutions
(e.g., museums, art galleries, zoo, theater groups, motion picture studios, TV and radio stations, writers' organizations, instrumental/choral, drawing/painting, technology-based arts, literary clubs, collector's groups)

Businesses/Corporations/Unions
(e.g., neighborhood business associations, chambers of commerce, local shops, restaurants, banks, AAA, Teamsters, school employee unions)

Media
(e.g., newspapers, TV & radio, local access cable)

Family Members, Local Residents, Senior Citizens Groups

Operationally, a collaborative is defined by its *focus* and *functions.* We have outlined the functions earlier in this chapter.

The *focus* may be on enhancing

- *improvement of direct delivery of services and programs* (e.g., improving interventions to promote healthy development, prevent and correct problems, meet client/consumer needs; improving processes for referral, triage, assessment, case management)

and/or

- improving major systemic concerns (e.g., improving resource deployment and accessing more resources; moving from fragmented to cohesive approaches; developing a comprehensive, multifaceted continuum of integrated interventions; replicating innovations; scaling-up)

Organizationally, a collaborative must develop mechanisms and a differentiated infrastructure (e.g., steering and work groups) that enables accomplishment of its functions and related tasks. Furthermore, since the functions of a collaborative almost always overlap with work being carried out by others, a collaborative body must pursue connections with other bodies.

> Heard at a collaborative meeting where a member was talking on and on about too little.
>
> "Has he finished yet? "
>
> "Long ago but he won't stop talking."

Building And Maintaining Effective Collaboratives

It is commonly said that collaboration is about building relationships. That's fine, as long as the aim is to build potent, synergistic, *working* relationships, not simply to establish positive personal connections. Collaboratives built mainly on personal connections are vulnerable to the mobility of participants that characterizes many such groups and to exclusion of folks who are not already "in the inner circle." The intent must be to establish stable and sustainable working relationships and to recruit and involve all who are willing to contribute their talents. Remember: *It's not about having a collaborative . . . it's about collaborating to be effective. It involves more than meeting and talking . . . it's about working together in ways that produce effective interventions.*

Effective collaboration requires ensuring participants have the training, time, support, and authority that enables them to carry out their roles and functions. Participants need well-delineated functions and defined tasks, clear roles, responsibilities, and an institutionalized infrastructure, including well-designed mechanisms for performing tasks, solving problems, and mediating conflict. Also needed are respected leaders and thoughtful, skilled and content-focused facilitation.

In the absence of careful attention to the above matters, collaboratives rarely live up to hopes and expectations. Participants often start out with great enthusiasm. But poorly facilitated working sessions quickly degenerate into another ho-hum meeting, lots of talk but little action, another burden, and a waste of time. Meeting and meeting, but going nowhere is particularly likely to happen when the emphasis is mainly on the unfocused mandate to "collaborate." Stakeholders must do more than embrace an important vision and mission. They need an infrastructure that ensures effective work is done with respect to carefully defined functions and tasks.

An optimal approach to building a school-community collaborative involves formally weaving together resources of at least one school and sometimes a group of schools or an entire school district with local family and community resources. The intent is to sustain connections over time. As indicated in Exhibit 2, the range of entities in a community can be extensive. Developing a comprehensive approach to shared school and community concerns requires expanding participation in a strategic manner and with a commitment to inclusion.

From a policy perspective, policy makers and other leaders must establish a foundation for building collaborative bridges connecting school, family, and community. Policy must be translated into authentic agreements. Although all this takes considerable time and other resources, the importance of building such bridges cannot be overemphasized. Failure to establish and successfully maintain effective collaboratives probably is attributable in great measure to the

absence of clear, high level, and long-term policy support. For example, the primary agenda of community agencies in working with schools usually is to have better access to clients; this is a marginal item in the school accountability agenda for raising test scores and closing the achievement gap. Policy and leadership are needed to address the disconnect in ways that integrate what the agency and school can contribute to each other's mission and elevates the work to a high priority.

When all major parties are committed to building an effective collaboration, the next step is to ensure they understand that the process involves significant systemic changes and that they have the ability to facilitate such changes. Leaders in this situation must have both a vision for change and an understanding of how to effect and institutionalize the type of systemic changes needed to build an effective collaborative infrastructure. This encompasses changes related to governance, leadership, planning, implementation, sustainability, scale-up, and accountability. For example:

- Existing governance must be modified over time. The aim is shared decision making involving school and community agency staff, families, students, and other community representatives. This involves equalizing power and sharing leadership so that decision making appropriately reflects and accounts for all stakeholder groups.

- High level leadership assignments must be designated to facilitate essential systemic changes and build and maintain family-community-school connections.

- Mechanisms must be established and institutionalized for analyzing, planning, coordinating, integrating, monitoring, evaluating, and strengthening collaborative efforts. All participants must share in the workload – pursuing clear functions.

Evidence of appropriate policy support is seen in the adequacy of funding for *capacity building* to accomplish desired system changes and ensure the collaborative operates effectively over time. Accomplishing systemic changes requires establishment of temporary facilitative mechanisms and providing incentives, supports, and training to enhance commitment to and capacity for essential changes. Ensuring effective collaboration requires institutionalized mechanisms, long-term capacity building, and ongoing support.

About building from localities outward. Collaborations can be organized by any group of stakeholders. Connecting the resources of families and the community through collaboration with schools is essential for developing comprehensive, multifaceted programs and services. At the multi-locality level, efficiencies and economies of scale are achieved by connecting a complex (or "family") of schools, such as a high school and its feeder schools. In a small community, such a complex often is the school district. Conceptually, it is best to think in terms of building from the local outward, but in practice, the process of establishing the initial collaboration may begin at any level.

As suggested above, developing an effective collaborative requires an infrastructure of organizational and operational mechanisms at all relevant levels for oversight, leadership, capacity building, and ongoing support. Such mechanisms are used to (a) make decisions about priorities and resource allocation, (b) maximize systematic planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation, (c) enhance and redeploy existing resources and pursue new ones, and (d) nurture the collaborative. At each level, such tasks require pursuing a proactive agenda.

Exhibit 3 provides a simplified illustration of the basic infrastructure needed. Exhibit 4 provides a more detailed picture.

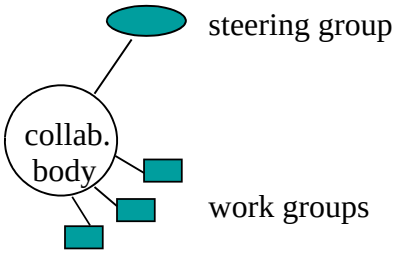
An effective school-community collaborative must coalesce at the local level. Thus, a school and its surrounding community are a reasonable focal point around which to build an infrastructure. Moreover, primary emphasis on this level meshes nicely with views that stress increased school-based and neighborhood control.

To maintain the focus on evolving a comprehensive continuum of intervention that plays out in an effective manner in *every locality,* it is a good idea to conceive the process from the local level outward. That is, first the focus is on mechanisms at the school-neighborhood level. Based on analyses of what is needed to facilitate

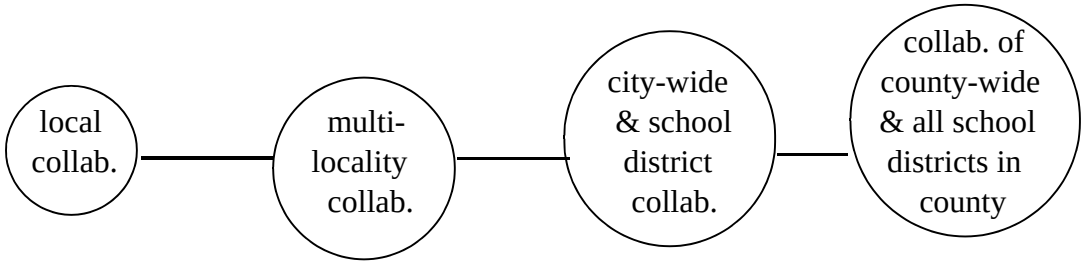
Exhibit 3

About Basic Collaborative Infrastructure

Who should be at the table?
>families[1]
>schools[2]
>communities[3]



Connecting Collaboratives at All Levels*



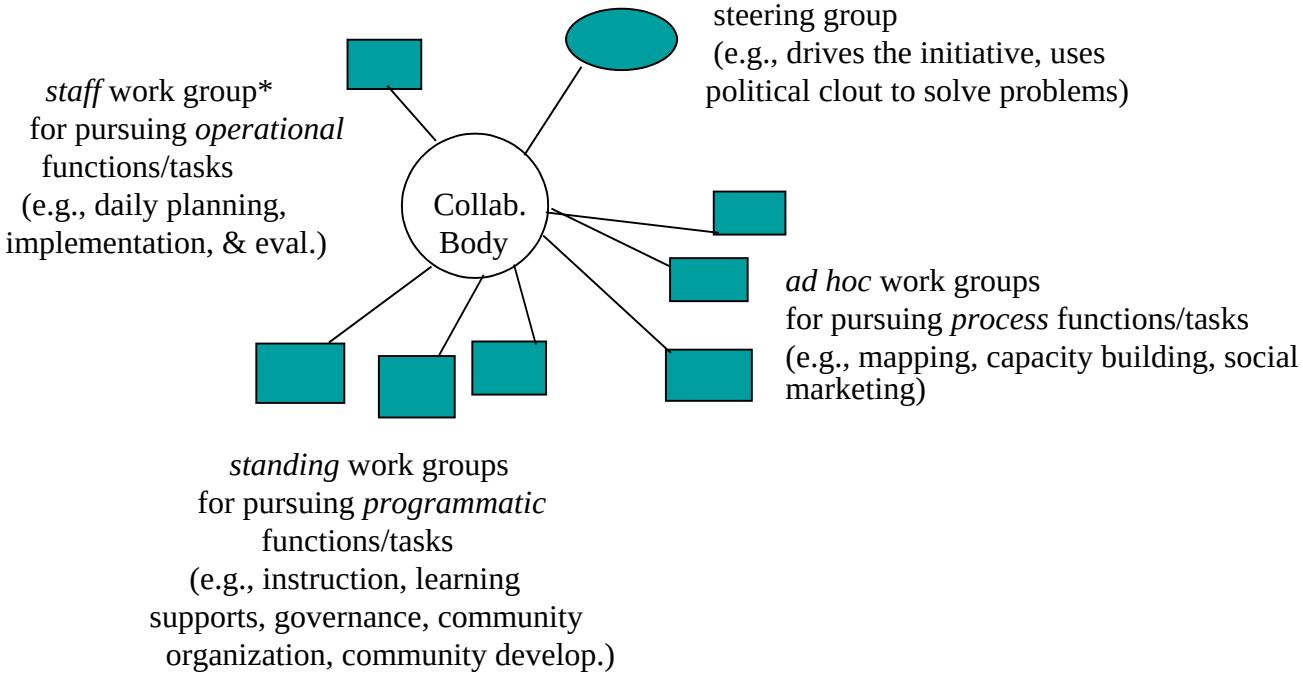
[1]*Families*. It is important to ensure that all who live in an area are represented – including, but not limited to, representatives of organized family advocacy groups. The aim is to mobilize all the human and social capital represented by family members and other home caretakers of the young.

[2]*Schools*. This encompasses all institutionalized entities that are responsible for formal education (e.g., pre-K, elementary, secondary, higher education). The aim is to draw on the resources of these institutions.

[3]*Communities*. This encompasses all the other resources (public and private money, facilities, human and social capital) that can be brought to the table at each level, such as health and social service agencies, businesses and unions, recreation, cultural, and youth development groups, libraries, juvenile justice and law enforcement, faith-based community institutions, service clubs, media. As the collaborative develops, additional steps must be taken to outreach to disenfranchised groups.

Exhibit 4

Comprehensive Collaborative Infrastructure



Who should be at the table?
>families
>schools
>communities

**Staffing*
>Executive Director
>Organization Facilitator (change agent)

and enhance efforts at a locality, mechanisms are conceived that enable several school-neighborhood collaboratives to work together for increased efficiency, effectiveness, and economies of scale. Then, system-wide mechanisms can be (re)designed to provide support for what each locality is trying to develop.

About capacity building. As noted, oversight, leadership, resource development, and ongoing support are required at all levels. With each of these functions in mind, specific mechanisms and their interrelationship with each other and with other planning groups can be developed. A well-designed infrastructure provides ways to (a) arrive at decisions about resource allocation, (b) maximize systematic and integrated planning, implementation, maintenance, and evaluation, (c) outreach to create formal working relationships with all concerned stakeholders, and (d) regularly upgrade and renew the collaborative.

A special concern of school-community partnerships involves what often is called diffusion, replication, roll out, or scale-up.

A few lessons learned. The following are lessons we learned the hard way and should be kept in mind by those who establish collaboratives. First, an obvious point. A collaborative needs financial support. The core operational budget can be direct funding and in-kind contributions from the resources of stakeholder groups. A good example is the provision of space for the collaborative. A school or community entity or both should be asked to contribute the necessary space. As specific functions and initiatives are undertaken that reflect overlapping arenas of concern for schools and community organizations, such as safe schools and neighborhoods, some portion of their respective funding streams can be braided together. Over time, there will be opportunities to supplement the budget with extra-mural grants.

A caution here is to avoid pernicious funding. That is, it is important not to pursue funding for projects that will distract the collaborative from vigorously pursuing its vision in a cohesive (nonfragmented) manner. A related concern has been the trend to try to expand resources through providing services that can be reimbursed through third party payments, such as medicaid funds. This often results in further limiting the range of interventions offered and who receives them. Moreover, payments from third party sources often do not adequately cover the costs of services rendered, and as the numbers receiving services increases markedly, third party payers seek ways to "cap" costs.

A second lesson relates to how agreements are made. In marketing new ideas, it is tempting to accentuate their promising attributes and minimize complications. For instance, in negotiating agreements for school connections, decision makers frequently are asked simply to sign a memorandum of understanding, rather than involving them in processes that lead to a comprehensive, informed commitment. Sometimes their motivation mainly is to obtain extra resources; sometimes they are motivated by a desire to be seen by constituents as doing *something* to improve things. In both instances, the result may be premature implementation that produces the form rather than the substance of change.

Third, without careful planning, implementation, and capacity building, collaborative efforts rarely live up to the initial hope. For example, formal arrangements for working together often take the form of meetings. To be effective, such sessions require thoughtful and skillful facilitation. Even when they begin with great enthusiasm, poorly facilitated working sessions quickly degenerate into another meeting, more talk but little action, another burden, and a waste of time. This is particularly likely to happen when the primary emphasis is on the unfocused mandate to "collaborate," rather than on moving an important vision and mission forward through effective working relationships and well-defined functions and tasks.

Finally, given how hard it is to work effectively in a group, steps must be taken to ensure that work groups are formed in ways that maximize their effectiveness. This includes providing them with the training, time, support, and authority to carry out their role and functions. It also requires effective meeting facilitation.

Some Policy Recommendations

Any school-community collaborative agenda that addresses barriers to learning and development must focus on evolving a comprehensive, multifaceted, and cohesive approach. The agenda must encompass addressing the complex needs

of all youngsters, their families, the participating schools, and the surrounding neighborhood.

The work must be resource-oriented so that existing resources are used in the most cost-effective manner. This includes braiding together many public and private resources.

To these ends, a cohesive, high priority policy commitment is required. This encompasses revisiting current policies to reduce redundancy and redeploy school and community resources that are used ineffectively.

Policy must be operationalized in ways that (a) support the strategic development of comprehensive approaches by weaving together school and community resources, (b) sustain partnerships, and (c) generate renewal. In communities, the need is for better ways of connecting agency and other resources to each other and to schools. In schools, there is a need for restructuring to combine parallel efforts supported by general funds, compensatory and special education entitlement, safe and drug free school grants, and specially funded projects. This includes enhancing efficiency and effectiveness by connecting families of schools.

With all this in mind, Exhibits 5 and 6 outline some policy and practice guidelines for those leaders who are concerned with the development of effective school-community collaboratives.

You know you are an education leader if:

>You want to slap the next person who says "Must be nice to work 8 to 3:20 and have summers free".

>You've ever had your profession slammed by someone who would "Never DREAM" of doing your job.

>You think caffeine should be available in intravenous form.

Concluding Comments

Interest in connecting schools, communities, and families is growing at an exponential rate. Collaboratives often are established because of the desire to address a local problem or in the wake of a crisis. In the long-run, however, school-community connections must be driven by a comprehensive vision about strengthening youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods. This encompasses a focus on safe schools and neighborhoods, positive development and learning, personal, family, and economic well-being, and more.

Collaboratives can weave together a critical mass of resources and strategies to enhance caring communities that support all youth and their families and enable success at school and beyond. Strong school-community connections are critical in impoverished communities where schools often are the largest piece of public real estate and the single largest employer.

While it is relatively simple to make informal linkages, establishing major long-term collaborations is complicated. The complications are readily seen in any effort to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach to promoting healthy development and addressing barriers to development and learning. Such efforts necessitate major systemic changes involving formal and institutionalized sharing of a wide spectrum of responsibilities and resources. The nature and scope of change requires stakeholder readiness, an enlightened vision, cohesive policy, creative leadership, basic systemic reforms, and new and multifaceted roles for professionals who work in schools and communities, as well as for family and other community members assuming leadership.

It is unwise to limit school-community connections to coordinating community services, recreation, and enrichment activities and co-locating some on school sites. As we have stressed, this tends to downplay the need also to restructure the various education support programs and services that schools own and operate, and, it has led some policy makers to the mistaken impression that community resources can effectively meet the needs of schools in addressing barriers to learning. Policy makers must realize that increasing access to services is

Exhibit 5

Recommendations to Enhance and Sustain School-Community Collaboratives

Effective school-community collaboratives require policies and leadership to

- establish collaborative *governance* in ways that move toward shared decision making, with appropriate degrees of local control and private sector involvement; a key facet of this is guaranteeing roles and providing incentives, supports, and training for effective involvement of all concerned stakeholders

- delineate high level *leadership assignments* and underwrite essential *leadership/ management training* regarding vision for outcomes and collaboration, how to effect and institutionalize changes, and how to generate ongoing renewal

- establish *institutionalized mechanisms* (e.g., work groups) to carry out collaborative functions and tasks (e.g., analyzing, planning, coordinating, integrating, monitoring, evaluating, and strengthening ongoing efforts)

- provide adequate funds for *capacity building* of collaborative participants to enhance operational quality over time; a key facet of this is a major investment in stakeholder recruitment and development using well-designed, and technologically sophisticated strategies for dealing with the problems of frequent turnover and diffusing information updates; another facet is an investment in technical assistance at all levels and for all aspects and stages of the work

- encourage using some braided funds to hire two staff members to carry out the daily activities stemming from work group activity (e.g., an executive director and someone with organization facilitator/change agent capabilities)

- require a sophisticated approach to *accountability* that calls for data that can help develop effective collaboration through initial focus on short-term benchmarks and evolves into evaluation on long range indicators of impact.

Such as strengthened policy focus would allow collaborative participants to build the continuum of interventions needed to make a significant impact in addressing learning, behavior, emotional, and health concerns through strengthening youngsters, families, schools, and neighborhoods.

Exhibit 6

Some Ways to Begin or Reinvigorate a Collaborative

(1) **Adopt a Comprehensive Vision for the Collaborative** – Collaborative leadership builds consensus that the aim of those involved is to help weave together community and school resources to develop a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of interventions so that no child is left behind.

(2) **Write a "Brief" to Clarify the Vision** – Collaborative establishes a writing team to prepare a brief concept paper, Executive Summary, and set of "talking points" clarifying the vision by delineating the rationale and frameworks that will guide development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach

(3) **Establish a Steering Committee to Move the Initiative Forward and Monitor Process** – Collaborative identifies and empowers a representative subgroup who will be responsible and accountable for ensuring that the vision ("big picture") is not lost and the momentum of the initiative is maintained through establishing and monitoring ad hoc work groups that are asked to pursue specific tasks

(4) **Start a Process for Translating the Vision into Policy** – Steering Committee establishes a work group to prepare a campaign geared to key local and state school and agency policy makers that focuses on (a) establishing a policy framework for the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach and (b) ensuring that such policy has a high enough level of priority to end the current marginalized status such efforts have at schools and in communities

(5) **Develop a 5 year Strategic Plan** – Steering Committee establishes a work group to draft a 5 year strategic plan that delineates (a) the development of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach and (b) the steps to be taken to accomplish the required systemic changes (The strategic plan will cover such matters as use of formulation of essential agreements about policy, resources, and practices; assignment of committed leadership; change agents to facilitate systemic changes; infrastructure redesign; enhancement of infrastructure mechanisms; resource mapping, analysis, and redeployment; capacity building; standards, evaluation, quality improvement, and accountability; "social marketing.")

>Steering Committee circulates draft of plan (a) to elicit suggested revisions from key stakeholders and (b) as part of a process for building consensus and developing readiness for proceeding with its implementation

>Work group makes relevant revisions based on suggestions

(6) **Move the Strategic Plan to Implementation** – Steering Committee

>ensures that key stakeholders finalize and approve strategic plan

>submits plan on behalf of key stakeholders to school and agency decision makers to formulate formal agreements (e.g., MOUs, contracts) for start-up, initial implementation, and on-going revisions that can ensure institutionalization and periodic renewal of a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated approach

>establishes work group to develop action plan for start-up and initial implementation (Action plan identifies general functions and key tasks to be accomplished, necessary systemic changes, and how to get from here to there in terms of who, how, by when, who monitors, etc.)

only one facet of any effort to establish a comprehensive, cohesive approach for strengthening students, schools, families, and neighborhoods.

Clearly, the myriad political and bureaucratic difficulties involved in making major institutional changes, especially with sparse financial resources, leads to the caution that such changes are not easily accomplished without a high degree of commitment and relentlessness of effort. Also, it should be remembered that systemic change rarely proceeds in a linear fashion. The work of establishing effective school-community connections.

The success of school-community connections is first and foremost in the hands of policy makers. For increased connections to be more than another desired but underachieved aim of reformers, policymakers must understand the nature and scope of what is involved. They must deal with the problems of marginalization and fragmentation. They must support development of appropriately comprehensive and multifaceted school-community collaboratives. They must revise policy related to school-linked services because such initiatives are a grossly inadequate response to the many complex factors that interfere with development, learning, and teaching.

Focusing primarily on linking community services to schools downplays the role of existing school and other community and family resources. This perpetuates an orientation that overemphasizes individually prescribed services, results in further fragmentation of interventions, and undervalues the human and social capital indigenous to every neighborhood. And, all this is incompatible with developing the type of comprehensive approaches needed to make statements such as *We want all children to succeed* and *No Child Left Behind* more than rhetoric.