



A National Educational Imperative:

Support for Community-Based, Integrated Student Services in the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

The dropout epidemic in the United States merits immediate, large-scale attention from policymakers....
– Bridgeland, et al., *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (2006)



What Are Community-Based, Integrated Student Services?

I Introduction

Community-based, integrated student services are interventions that improve student achievement by connecting community resources with both the academic and social service needs of students. Such interventions focus programmatic energy, resources, and time on shared school and student goals. Through the efforts of a single point of contact, individual student needs are assessed and research-based connections made between students and targeted community resources.

Research and experience indisputably reflect the continuing crisis in education: America's youth are dropping out of school in record numbers, and gaps in student performance among low-income and minority students continue to widen. In the wake of a call to action by educators, business leaders, and government officials, attention to these issues has generally focused on (and been limited to) academic issues. Notably, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has focused nearly exclusively on core academic accountability measures—standardized testing and related accountability systems, teacher quality, supplemental educational services, and the like.

Those areas of focus are, indeed, vitally important, but they do not reflect the research- and practice-based reality that more is required to support most at-risk students. They do not reflect the reality that at-risk students often need more than the best teachers or the most rigorous curriculum in order to succeed—they need additional supports that will reinforce the work of educators in the schools. More specifically, these areas of focus do not reflect the positive impact that community-based, integrated student services have on at-risk students and their families. One recent national study found a “nearly universal acknowledgement by educators, parent groups and community groups about the vital impact that supporting [and] trusted community organizations [could] have in helping students and schools succeed.”¹

In thousands of schools throughout the country, organizations provide community-based, integrated student services as a way to help at-risk students—and their schools—succeed. These services, ranging from providing mentors to meeting health and counseling needs, vary by student, but by definition are systemically linked to school-based efforts to meet the health, safety and counseling needs of at-risk youth. They include an array of student-specific support services centered on the establishment of:

- a. A one-on-one relationship with adults who mentor or help guide students;
- b. A safe place for students to learn and develop before, during and after the school day;
- c. Connections to health professionals and counselors;
- d. Connections with college and career counselors – as well as internship opportunities – that can help students envision their potential for achieving significant goals; and
- e. Connections to community service and service-learning opportunities.”²

Despite overwhelming evidence of the need for -- and positive impact of -- community-based, integrated student services on student learning outcomes,³ federal law has not included support for comprehensive reform strategies that include these services. And, too few schools have resources to provide them. Thus, as put cogently by the director of the Harvard Family Research Project, many years of research confirm that “[n]ow is the time...[for] action. The question we must ask is, in addition to quality schools, what nonschool learning resources should we invest in and scale up to improve educational outcomes, narrow achievement gaps, and equip our children with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the complex and global 21st century?”⁴ The simple answer is that we must, as a nation, invest in more comprehensive, proven and cost-efficient strategies that will help reduce dropout rates and close the achievement gaps. Supporting community-based, integrated student services is one critical step in that direction.

II

What Research and Experience Tell Us: Facts About Community-Based, Integrated Student Services

1 The dropout epidemic and the pervasive achievement gap, both of which disproportionately affect low-income and minority students, are the central, unmet challenges facing public education in America.

- “For the nation’s ethnic and racial minorities, particularly Hispanics and African Americans, the consequences of dropping out are... daunting. There is a high school dropout crisis far beyond the imagination of most Americans, concentrated in urban schools and relegating many thousands of minority children to a life of failure.”⁵
- A half-dozen recent studies report “little progress” in closing the achievement gap, and the “landscape” reflects that the gap between African Americans or Hispanics and white students is widening over the course of 12 years in school.⁶
- “It is clear that minority students and poor students have disproportionately faced conditions that are hindrances to achieving at levels reached by majority students, from birth to school completion—if, in fact, they complete. At different points along the way they will, on average, be behind white children in their cognitive development.”⁷

2 The failure to comprehensively address the dropout epidemic and the corresponding achievement gaps among students will result in continuation of the status quo—with adverse consequences affecting America’s economic prosperity and national security interests.

- “Increasing the high school completion rate by 1 percent for all men ages 20-60 would save the United States \$1.4 billion annually in reduced costs associated with crime.”⁸

- “Dropouts are substantially more likely to rely on public assistance than those with a high school diploma. The estimated lifetime revenue loss for male dropouts ages 25-34 is \$944 billion. The cost to the public of their crime and welfare benefits is estimated to total \$24 billion annually.”⁹

- “The U[nited] S[tates] would save \$41.8 billion in health care costs if the 600,000 young people who dropped out in 2004 were to complete one additional year of education. If only one-third of high school dropouts were to earn a high school diploma, federal savings in reduced costs for food stamps, housing assistance, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families would amount to \$10.8 billion annually.”¹⁰

- Societal costs of students dropping out—including welfare and crime costs—make it “crucial to have a national focus on the identification and broad use of efficient and replicable dropout prevention...programs.”¹¹

3 The American public has identified the need to improve schools and student performance as a national priority.

- “[There] is virtually an undisputable agreement that education is a good thing, indeed an irreplaceable element in achieving success in the current and future marketplace...”¹²

- “The adverse impact that dropping out of school has on both those who drop out and society itself has long been recognized... Given the multiple adverse consequences associated with dropping out, lowering the dropout rate has long been a goal of educators and legislators.”¹³

4 Efforts to eliminate the epidemic of students dropping out of school and the pervasive achievement gaps among students will succeed only if they are comprehensive and student-centered. In addition to classroom-based reforms, schools must ensure that a definable range of community-based, integrated student services are provided.

- “Schools alone cannot resolve problems of violence, family crises, mental health challenges, and other child and family problems that naturally find their way to the school house door.”¹⁴
- Non-school supports “will not achieve the goal of making sure that children are successful” if they are provided in the “same old ways—piecemeal, in silos, disconnected from each other and from schools... To be effective, non-school supports must be “linked and aligned with each other and with schools to maximize their effectiveness in leveling the playing field for children.”¹⁵
- “Intentional strategies” to link community partners with students and families in need “can overcome fragmentation” within a school and lead to positive student outcomes.¹⁶
- [E]vidence of positive impacts from these integrated approaches include[s] better family functioning and parental involvement, healthy youth development and improved social behavior, improved academic achievement and learning outcomes, and enhanced community life.”¹⁷
- A review of 45 prevention and intervention studies addressing dropouts or school completion establishes that “there is no single best program; preventing dropout can occur in a variety of ways.” “Student engagement” is a “key ingredient,” with its focus on “promoting school completion through approaches that... involve multiple systems in the students’ lives, occur over time, and are individualized to meet student needs.”¹⁸

5 Community-based, integrated student services, which provide vital support in mitigating the risk that students will drop out of school and in improving student achievement, permit school and district officials to focus their energies on issues central to classroom learning.

- “Adolescents who participate regularly in community-based youth development programs (including arts, sports, and community service) have better academic and social outcomes—as well as higher education and career aspiration—than other, similar teens. We also know that when the core academic curriculum is tied to the community, removing the artificial separation between the classroom and the real world, student outcomes are improved.”¹⁹
- “Through community-based observation, discussion, and problem solving, students acquire both facts and multiple perspectives against which to refine their existing knowledge and skills. Teachers also connect school-day learning with learning in before- and after-school, community-based, and work-study programs and value these venues as important opportunities for students to apply skills from across the curriculum.”²⁰
- “In community schools, educators do not operate on the assumption that the school has all the assets and expertise necessary to improve student learning. Instead, they collaborate with partners who demonstrate they are committed to results that are important to the school system and the community. Schools are transformed into much more than just a portfolio of programs and services. They become a powerful agent for change in the lives of young people and their families and improve the climate of the entire school.”²¹

6 Well designed and implemented community-based programs effectively leverage non-public resources and are cost effective.

■ One national nonprofit organization, with a 30-year history of providing at-risk youth with community-based, integrated services, serves nearly one million young people nationwide in more than 3,000 schools, by leveraging the help of 53,000 volunteers and 14,000 community organizations so that:

- Only 5 percent of all human resources are paid staff; and
- On average, each paid staff member serves nearly 300 students.

In addition, through its focus on management of resources, each \$100 of public resources leverages \$82 of private resources.²²

7 The No Child Left Behind Act currently fails to strategically address the importance of schools and districts leveraging community-based, integrated student services to improve student achievement and the success of schools.

■ “The United States does not have a coherent youth policy to prevent at-risk youth from becoming disconnected and to help disconnected youth become productive members of society. Instead we have a patchwork of fragmented and often poorly funded programs at the federal level that do not have common objectives or accountability measures. Nor do state and local areas typically have comprehensive youth policies.”²³

■ “Although the federal government has expressed considerable interest and funded some discrete projects, its efforts have been limited. The movement toward school-linked services will not be successful, or even successfully evaluated, without a decision...to make a deeper commitment to...this approach.”²⁴

“Schools need to provide a wide range of ...intensive assistance strategies for struggling students in schools— [including]...counseling, mentoring, tutoring, service learning, ...and more—and provide adult advocates in the school who can help students find the support they need.....Schools also need to...enhance their coordination with community-based institutions and government agencies.”

— Bridgeland, et al., *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (2006).

III

Federal Law Should Promote Community-Based, Integrated Strategies That:

- Improve achievement of at-risk students;
- Support schools in need; and
- Leverage significant non-federal resources.

1 The effective and efficient delivery of community-based, integrated student services to at-risk students depends upon the existence of dedicated staff in schools who can identify and match student needs and community resources to meet those needs. Thus, Congress should provide competitive grant funding for community-based, nonprofit organizations to provide integrated, school-based services to at-risk students.

Congress should provide funding to support competitive grants to community-based nonprofit organizations, which will (in collaboration with districts and schools) hire and support school-based outreach coordinators who will be responsible for identifying student needs and connecting available community resources to meet those needs. Funding should be available to support the efforts of Title I districts that have identified high-poverty, low performing schools in need of significant community-based resources, which have also failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress. Funding should be targeted toward nonprofit organizations working with schools that have:

- Leadership committed to establishing strong relationships with community organizations that can meet the needs of at-risk students;
- The clear need for community support for at-risk students and their families;
- The community capacity and willingness to support significant school improvement efforts; and
- Data systems that will permit meaningful evaluation of student outcomes and relevant investments over time.

This recommendation reflects current research and tracks the specific recommendation of one recent study recognizing that “districts and schools [should]...leverage their own limited resources by engaging community organizations” and dedicating staff “who are responsible for making the necessary connections between community resources and student/parent needs.”²⁵

2 The effective and efficient delivery of community-based, integrated student services should be a strategy that all schools are required to evaluate and, as appropriate, pursue, when they do not to meet state performance goals over time. Thus, Congress should expand the range of support for schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

Schools that have failed to make AYP for one year, and that are designated as “in need of improvement” should be required to, in their development of school improvement plans, include with specific goals and timetables:

- A plan for identifying students in the greatest need of support, along with the kind of academic and non-academic support those students likely need;
- A plan for identifying and coordinating community services that can provide support to identified students;
- A set of strategies designed to leverage community resources to meet identified needs of low-performing students; and
- Criteria upon which such efforts will be evaluated over time, including relevant student performance criteria.

For schools designated as “in need of improvement” for two or more consecutive years, districts should be required to provide

technical assistance to enhance their efforts to implement school improvement plans that will improve student achievement, which include a focus on matching community-based, integrated student services with identified student needs.

All middle schools designated as “in need of improvement” for two consecutive years, and high schools that meet the same criteria that also have dropout rates exceeding 10 percent, should be required to develop individual student performance plans for students identified as significantly at risk of dropping out of school based on key factors (e.g., attendance, achievement, behavior, suspensions) in order to target access to an appropriate range of community-based, student support services.

3 The delivery of community-based, integrated student services in schools should be guided by research- and evidence-based criteria that reflect the provision of systemic, replicable, cost-effective, and student-centric services. Thus, Congress should authorize funding for new national initiatives that establish and implement these criteria.

Congress should authorize funding for new national initiatives – administered by nonprofit organizations. These initiatives would combine research and evidence-based strategies, training, and technical assistance with certification and evaluation of efforts of community-based organizations. These community-based organizations are dedicated to meeting student needs, improving student achievement, and mitigating the risk of dropping out of school. In particular, those funds should be targeted to ensure that community-based organizations providing support for at-risk students are as effective in their interventions as possible and that they are working in ways that are most cost-effective.

The “most successful” school-community arrangements have a coordinator of community services “serving as part of the school’s management team.”

– Martin J. Blank, “Community Schools Creating Comprehensive Opportunities and Supports for Children and Families,” Boston Children’s Institute of the Home for Little Wanderers, (2000)

There needs to be a “federal evaluation of [dropout prevention] programs and the sharing of the most innovative and successful programs that can be brought to scale.”

– Bridgeland, et al., *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (2006)

ENDNOTES

- ¹Appleseed Foundation, "It Takes a Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act," (2006), 35.
- ²William E. Milliken, "The Five Communities In Schools Basics" © 1992. The inter-relatedness of these strands is also central: "We know...that high quality, organized [out-of-school-time] activities have the potential to support and promote youth development because they (a) situate youth in safe environments; (b) prevent youth from engaging in delinquent activities; (c) teach youth general and specific skills, beliefs and behaviors; and (d) provide opportunities for youth to develop relationships with peers and mentors." Harvard Family Research Project, "Beyond the Classroom: Complementary Learning to Improve Achievement Outcomes," The Evaluation Exchange, XI (1), <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue29/theory.html>, 2. Common elements of successful dropout programs include "trying to increase the holding power of the school by creating meaningful personal bonds" and "connecting students to an attainable future." Olatokunbo S. Fashola and Robert E. Slavin, "Effective Dropout Prevention and College Attendance Programs for Students Placed At-Risk," *Journal of Education Research for Students Placed at Risk*, 3(2), (1998), 159-183.
- ³Extrapolated from findings of Communities In Schools, "Connecting Kids With Community Resources," 2004-2005 Results From the Network report.
- ⁴Heather Weiss, "From the Director's Desk," The Evaluation Exchange, 10 (1), (2005) <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue29/director.html>, 1.
- ⁵Rima Shore, "Kids Count Indicator Brief: Reducing the High School Dropout Rate," Annie E. Casey Foundation, (2005), http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/indicator_briefs/dropout_rate.pdf, 2.
- ⁶Sam Dillon, Schools Slow in Closing Gap between Races (New York Times, Nov. 20, 2006) <http://travel.nytimes.com/2006/11/20/education/20gap.html?n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/D/Dillon,%20Sam>.
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- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰Ibid.
- ¹¹Fashola and Slavin, "Effective Dropout Prevention...", supra.
- ¹²Richard E. Berman, "The Future of Children, School Linked Services" Center for the Future of Children and The David and Lucille Packard Foundation, 2(1), (1992), 8.
- ¹³United State General Accounting Office, "School Dropouts Education Could Play a Stronger Role in Identifying and Disseminating Promising Prevention Strategies," Report to the Honorable Jim Gibbons, House of Representatives, (2002), <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d02240.pdf>, 4-5.
- ¹⁴Martin Blank, "Community Schools Creating Comprehensive Opportunities and Supports for Children and Families," Boston Children's Institute of the Home for Little Wanderers, <http://www.thehome.org/site/pdf/4C2Blankpap.pdf>, 100.
- ¹⁵Harvard Family Research Project, "Beyond the Classroom: Complementary Learning to Improve Achievement Outcomes," The Evaluation Exchange, XI (1), <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/eval/issue29/theory.html>, 1.
- ¹⁶Blank, "Community Schools Creating Comprehensive Opportunities and Supports for Children and Families," supra.
- ¹⁷Catherine Jordan, Evangelina Orozco, Amy Averett, "Emerging Issues in School, Family & Community Connections," Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, (2001), <http://www.sedl.org/connections/resources/emergingissues.pdf>, 43-44.
- ¹⁸Camilla A> Lehr, "Increasing School Completion: Learning from Research-Based Practices that Work," Research to Practice Brief 3(3), (2004), http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2/content_storage_01/0000000b/80/2e/17/a8.pdf, 1.
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- ²¹Blank and Berg, "All Together Now: Sharing Responsibility for the Whole Child," supra.
- ²²Communities In Schools, "Connecting Kids With Community Resources," supra.
- ²³Jodie Levin-Epstein and Mark H. Greenberg, "Leave No Youth Behind: Opportunities for Congress to Reach Disconnected Youth," Center for Law and Social Policy, (2003), 4.
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- ²⁵Appleseed Foundation, "It Takes a Parent: Transforming Education in the Wake of the No Child Left Behind Act," supra, 35.



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