



SESSION 6: INSIDE AND OUT – REENGINEERING THE SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP TO SERVE HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOLS AND CHILDREN

Moderator: *Regis Shields – Director, Education Resource Strategies*

Panelists:

- *Rebecca Boxx – Director Full Service Community Schools, Providence Public Schools*
- *Pam Cantor – President and CEO, Turnaround for Children*
- *Mary Anne Schmitt-Carey – President, Say Yes to Education*
- *Mary Walsh – Executive Director, City Connects*

How can turnaround schools and districts take a comprehensive approach to education and supports for children and families on the turnaround timeline?

Approach

Each of the panelists represented unique approaches to providing comprehensive supports to students and families.

Providence Public Schools, Full Service

Community Schools: Boxx began by pointing out that Providence has one of the highest child poverty rates in the United States. “We know we can’t do it alone. We need to leverage the community. But how do we make that happen?” Providence’s approach is to create Full Service Community Schools, with schools open from 6:30am-8pm, and providing supports that serve two-generations, students and their parents. The FSCS approach is integrated into school turnaround in Providence, which has 10 of the state’s 13 persistently lowest achieving schools.

Community partners and the district collaborated to develop shared accountability: they asked, “How do we put us all on the hook as a community for student success?” The result was the Strategic Framework for Student Success, which brings all partners and community organizations into the same accountability structure, and is part of the district’s strategic plan. The process has resulted in much better relationships between the district and community groups, a “big win.”

Turnaround for Children partners with schools, districts, and state education departments to build capacity and staff proficiency of schools serving high-poverty communities, to optimize school performance and drive improvement in student behavior and academic achievement. Turnaround transforms schools by establishing new school-wide structures and processes, delivering highly targeted professional development for teachers and leaders, and implementing school-based intervention strategies for highest-need students, including the cultivation of partnerships with community-based mental health agencies and other child-serving providers.

Say Yes to Education has taken on a citywide turnaround strategy, of which school turnaround is a core component. Based currently in one city—Syracuse, NY—Say Yes’s overall goal is to ensure that students are ready and complete post-secondary education, and guarantees college scholarships for every graduate of Syracuse Public Schools. Say Yes doesn’t focus solely on the education system: “it’s one piece that has to be

embedded in a city strategy.” So, as a condition of receiving the scholarship funds, the key partners—city, state, county, school district, and other community leaders—had to agree to work together, and to plan programming that was integrated principally within the school building. There was an intentional effort to develop collaborative governance: “The silo hierarchies had to agree to give up some of their power and be a part of a consensus process, create more transparency with reviews and accountability and outcomes studies.” The process also relies on sharing data and accountability, so the partners had to agree to fiscal transparency. The scholarship incentive tied to this collaborative governance approach is driving reforms within the district and in the city.

City Connects’ mission is to optimize student supports for every student, so that each child receives a tailored set of services and enrichments in order to succeed and thrive in school. This approach engages all teachers and student support staff and secures services from community-based organizations to provide comprehensive, coordinated, customized and evidence-based supports for students. The organization is currently working with 16 Boston Public Schools (6 of which are turnaround schools) and 6 turnaround schools in Springfield (MA). A Masters’ trained school site coordinator meets with every classroom teacher to determine each student’s strengths and needs in four areas: academic, health, family, and behavior. If the child has intensive needs, a multidisciplinary student support team helps to think through the full range of services the child might need, sets benchmarks, and monitors the results. An electronic tracking system allows City Connects staff to follow up, track, and measure outcomes. The student support process is transformed by embedding the school site coordinator within each school to coordinate with school staff, families,

and community agencies. A rigorous evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of the model in significantly improving academic achievement (statewide test and report card scores) and thriving.

Barriers

Lack of sustainable resources is a barrier for comprehensive supports. In Providence, 60% of the funding for Full Service Community Schools comes from external sources. As Schmitt-Carey noted, “Too much of our work is tied to short-term grants. Programs happen short term... But [efforts] won’t work in the long term unless we have long term supports.” The Say Yes model costs \$3500, but just shy of 75% of the core things that make up that figure are now funded sustainably through the district budget. Still there is a perception that this approach is “too expensive.” City connects costs about \$350 per student.

Cantor also described barriers related to Medicaid resources. “Our partnerships with mental health providers are based on the idea of the provider being able to respond to the regular and recurring needs of high poverty schools.” She described key mental health activities that Turnaround for Children believes are vital to schools but which providers cannot usually deliver because of Medicaid funding barriers, such as case management across systems, culturally competent family engagement, teacher consultation and crisis management. “Medicaid doesn’t cover any of these.”

Cantor was also concerned about the capacity of schools to address and deliver mental health services. “How many social workers do you need to serve a whole school of 300-800 kids?” She described social workers who were “burnt out, stressed and frightened” and emphasized that social workers need to be “nested” in a larger

systemic structure such as a student intervention team comprised of school staff and a partnership with an outside provider. “We can’t drive all the problems to one school social worker.”

Also regarding the capacity at the school level, Walsh raised the issue of retraining existing workers. She noted, “School guidance counselors are not trained to be mental health workers, and neither are school psychologists.” The rethinking of student support roles has been done by national associations, but “it’s not impacting the ground yet.”

Lessons

Most of the models described above operate based on key lessons learned during the careers of those leading the work. Cantor described how the Turnaround for Children initiative launched on the premise that just changing student supports and school culture “could fix schools.” But initial data showed that approach alone didn’t work. “We had to focus on the behavioral side as well as the academic side.”

Similarly, Schmitt-Carey pointed to her past experience with the New American Schools Development Corporation, which invested in comprehensive school models. Investment was significant, but “we didn’t see reform sustained.” She surmised that the reforms were too narrow, and focused on academics only. “If you want to focus on college and career readiness for all students, an academic only focus might help a little with math and reading, but didn’t fundamentally change who went to college, who dropped out, and who completed a 2 vs. 4 year degree.” She concluded that reforms must also attend to the social and emotional development of students. She encouraged a concerted effort and an “obsessive focus on issues of implementation” to address these issues and sustain improvements.

This work is also an ongoing effort. Walsh noted that the three-year turnaround timeline is a “myth. A sense of urgency is important, but this is a long-term process.”

The Future

Regis Shields asked the panelists to close with “bright spots” about the future of this challenging work. Boxx noted that there was more openness to thinking “outside the box,” and mentioned the Common Core standards as an opportunity for schools and community-based providers to align their services. Cantor was encouraged that the need for a “more comprehensive framework” was present at all levels. She noted superintendents who are seeking out comprehensive supports and the Harkin-Enzi ESEA re-authorization bill, which has “opportunities in it for a more comprehensive approach to whole school transformation.” Schmitt-Carey emphasized what she has learned about sustainability. Say Yes’s work in Syracuse has been sustained despite turnover in local and state leadership. “[The work] is bigger than leadership transition.” Finally, Walsh noted the trend in using data to improve instruction, and predicted that a similar effort is underway relative to student supports.