



Maximizing the Promise of Community Schools

Streamlining Wraparound Services for ESEA

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Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

As Congress moves to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, it should authorize a program to provide comprehensive services that create the conditions for students to learn in the classroom. These “wraparound” support services range from primary health and dental care to family engagement strategies. For many students, especially those who attend school in high-poverty communities, wraparound services are a vital complement to direct classroom interventions.

Congress should build upon existing federal efforts and implement the following recommendations to address the need for wraparound services:

- Consolidate the Full-Service Community Schools program and the Promise Neighborhoods program to maximize efficiency and resources
- Ensure that a consolidated program encourages the coordination of services
- Ensure that a consolidated program requires a planning year for grantees undertaking new initiatives
- Continue to allow school improvement funds and 21st Century Community Learning Center program funds to support a community schools strategy

The unmet needs of students have recently come into sharper focus in a nation where 42 percent of children live in low-income families.¹ When used in conjunction with highly effective classroom interventions, wraparound services can be a powerful lever to help close the achievement gap and level the playing field for low-income students.

Leveraging a community approach to raise student achievement

The Harlem Children’s Zone, or HCZ, a 100-block community revitalization effort, was launched in 2001 under the premise that raising student achievement is impossible if more pressing health and socio-emotional needs are not being met. HCZ works with students attending public schools within the Zone and has also created

its own pipeline of charter schools serving students from elementary to high school. Today, students and families within the Zone have access to a range of education initiatives, including pre-kindergarten, parenting seminars, and expanded learning opportunities. HCZ health and wellness programs include an Asthma Initiative, Healthy Living Initiative, and foster care prevention and family strengthening programs. HCZ served over 10,000 children and over 7,400 adults in 2009.² President Barack Obama has called it “an all-encompassing, all-hands-on-deck, anti-poverty effort that is literally saving a generation of children.”³

While there has been some debate about the effectiveness of HCZ charter schools relative to other charter schools in New York City, overall preliminary results for the initiative are promising.⁴ Fifty-three percent of the program’s first cohort of 4-year-old children scored “delayed” or “very delayed” on the Bracken Basic Concept Scale for school readiness in 2001. By the end of that year, only 26 percent scored “delayed.”⁵ In 2009, 100 percent of third graders enrolled in HCZ schools tested at or above grade level on the statewide math exam, outperforming their peers throughout the state. The same students who arrived in sixth grade scoring below their grade level in math are now scoring at or above grade level in eighth grade.⁶

HCZ’s impressive gains in student achievement have galvanized the federal government toward enacting similar programs. There are two existing programs within the U.S. Department of Education, or ED, which aim to similarly integrate communities, children, and schools—the Full-Service Community Schools program and the Promise Neighborhoods program. Neither program is authorized under the current iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, or ESEA, but the upcoming reauthorization of the law provides a key opportunity to address this void. In the following pages, we lay out a brief history of each program and provide a rationale for Congress to authorize a streamlined wraparound services program that incorporates the strengths of both Full-Service Community Schools and Promise Neighborhoods.

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