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Lightening the Load

A Look at Four Ways that Community Schools
Can Support Effective Teaching

Theodora Chang, with Calyssa Lawyer January 2012

Introduction and summary

The job of a teacher these days seems to stretch beyond the walls of a classroom, especially in primary and secondary schools in high-poverty communities. We hear stories of teachers purchasing food for hungry students, going door to door in neighborhoods to boost parent involvement in school, and referring students and families to health services. Teachers in these communities know how important these types of nonclassroom activities are to improving the educational performance of their students. So, too, do education experts and policymakers, who call for including these “wraparound services” in high-poverty schools.

While there is research on the potential for wraparound services, including health care services, family involvement programs, and expanded food assistance programs to eliminate barriers to student learning, there is little known about the possible connection between wraparound services and teacher efficacy. This report examines specific examples of schools where wraparound services are benefiting teachers in addition to students.

This paper draws on phone interviews conducted with teachers, principals, or site coordinators at 14 schools across the country that integrate wraparound services with a strong academic focus to serve large percentages of low-income students. These types of schools are known as “community schools” among education professionals. Four main trends emerged from these conversations:

- Providing wraparound services at school helped reduce health-related issues that would otherwise cost students instructional time.
- Wraparound services help students and families stay in the community by meeting basic needs, and the resulting decrease in mobility benefits teachers by creating classroom stability.
- Offering family programs, such as English language learner classes, can encourage parents to communicate more with teachers and empower them to

help their children with homework and support the work that teachers do in the classroom.

- Enlisting the help of community partners and service providers, such as onsite health professionals, can free teachers to concentrate on instruction with fewer worries about nonacademic student needs, which reduces their stress levels and burnout tendencies.

These four findings lead us to recommend several steps that schools, districts, and states can take to maximize the benefits of wraparound services for teachers. Specifically:

- Creatively combine multiple funding streams at the federal, state, and local levels and align school services with any existing commitments to provide wraparound services.
- Incorporate teacher input when aligning instructional strategies with wrap-around student services, and provide opportunities for teachers and service providers to sit down and collaborate.
- Include strategies for data collection and analysis whenever possible.
- Conduct further research to explore the impact of wraparound services on teacher effectiveness to see whether there is an optimal mix of services to provide at high-poverty schools, and whether the presence of these services makes a high-poverty school more attractive to teacher candidates.

In the pages that follow, we explore the ways in which wraparound services help teachers in high-poverty schools focus on student achievement by addressing the nonacademic needs of students. We conclude with our detailed recommendations—steps that we believe would help teachers and students alike perform to the best of their ability.

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