

98 Community Partnerships for School-Based Services

Action Principles

Dennis L. Poole

Definitions of
Community (Latin)
Partner → interesting!

A *community partnership* is an alliance between citizens and professionals to bring about planned change for the public good. *Community* stems from the Latin word *communis*, which implies something shared and public. The term *partnership* derives meaning from its derivative *partner*. A partner once referred to a piece of timber used to buttress the deck or mast of a wooden sailing ship. This is a fitting analogy to the discussion here. Community partners for school-based services work together to achieve a public good that is above and beyond the reach of any one partner—namely, the safe passage of the community's youth into responsible adulthood.

SAFE PASSAGE OF YOUTH

Most adolescents make the passage to responsible adulthood safely. They enter the labor force, become effective parents, and participate in the mainstream of community life. But an increasing number of teenagers do not make this transition successfully. Harmful environment conditions and risky behaviors often result in poor health, delinquency, and school failure, which handicap them as adults (Ozer, Brindis, Millstein, Knopf, & Irwin, 1997).

A powerful consensus is emerging that no single community institution is powerful enough

Safe Passage
Movement - interesting!
↳ Look up for org.
elective!

to support youth during this critical developmental stage of life. Dryfoos (1998) calls it the *safe passage movement*. As with all social movements, this one aims to bring about fundamental changes in social relationships between community institutions. A major goal is to replace fragmented, uncoordinated services with integrated, collaborative networks of care.

SCHOOL-BASED SERVICES

Advocates of the safe passage movement call on schools and agencies to build *seamless* institutions. A priority concern is delivery of integrative community services in school settings—hence, the term *school-based services*.

School-based services cover a variety of types and nomenclatures (Dryfoos, 1994; Friedrich, 1999). Many of them include the word *center* in their name—e.g., youth center, family resource center, school health center, and after-school center—to indicate the central location of multiple support services in a school site. Other school-based services use the words *program* or *clinic* to reflect the delivery of one primary community service, such as a school dental clinic, psychosocial counseling program, school mentoring program, and a case management program.

Exemplary school-based service initiatives include Caring Connection, a comprehensive, multicomponent, multiagency effort run by the Marshalltown School District in Marshalltown, Iowa; Turner Middle School, a university-assisted community school run in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania; Quantum Opportunities Program, an after-school enrichment program run by Opportunities Industrialization Centers in Philadelphia; and El Puente, a high school in a community center in Williamsburg, New York (Dryfoos, 1998).

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The common denominator in virtually all school-based service initiatives is the presence of community partnerships. Powerful alliances between citizens and professionals are needed to disrupt status quo arrangements between community institutions that serve youth and their families in piecemeal fashion.

School-based services usually do not materialize without such partnerships. Institutional

boundaries between schools and agencies are rigid, inflexible, and impenetrable in many communities. Each institution has its own set of rules, regulations, and customs, which prohibit sharing of information, staff, facilities, and financial resources with other community institutions. Fixed institutional boundaries surface in school-based service initiatives when school superintendents, say, deny requests by mental health centers to outpost therapists at school sites; health department directors block efforts by schools to conduct preventive health screenings; mental health administrators protest Medicaid-reimbursement to schools for behavioral counseling; and youth center directors insist that after-school services be provided in their own facilities.

Community partnerships have the power to remove or blur previously fixed institutional boundaries between schools and community agencies. They minimize interagency competition, reduce fragmentation in service systems, and increase efficient utilization of community resources (Burt, Resnick, & Novick, 1998; Schorr, 1997).

ACTION PRINCIPLES

Social workers can play a leadership role in community partnerships for school-based services. Six action principles in the community partnership model are offered in Figure 98.1 to guide them throughout the capacity-building process.

Community Agenda Building

Initiate the process by getting a core group of citizens and professionals to place the issue on the community agenda. Agenda building refers to predecisional processes that lead decision makers to select some issues for deliberation and reject others (Cobb & Elder, 1983). The challenge is to convince them that an issue deserves a prominent position on the community's agenda. An agenda is the list of items that a school board, youth council, city human services commission, or other community decision-making body is willing or able to consider at a given point in time.

To illustrate, let's assume that the issue is school failure. A social worker learns that a fourth of the students at a middle school are being "written off" as school failures. Standardized test scores are low; school behavioral problems are high; and these students are at imminent risk of being left



Figure 98.1 Community Partnership Model. Credit: Copyright Dennis L. Poole, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin, 2000.

behind their peers in high school. Let's also assume that the appropriate community decision-making body to address the issue is the city human services commission. The social worker knows that complex social, emotional, and health forces stand in the way of success of at-risk students, and that multiple community support services are needed to prevent failure in the middle school.

The social worker's first leadership task is to identify a core group of concerned citizens and professionals that can get the issue placed on the agenda of the city human services commission. A common flaw at this stage of the process is for professionals to try to address the issue without citizens. The practitioner must appreciate the key role citizens play in agenda-building. Citizens are the central actors in a democracy—and trustees of the public interest (Cooper, 1991). Hence, the social worker's first task is to bring a sense of citi-

zenship to the capacity-building process. This begins by heeding the adage that "an issue is not an issue until three or four leading citizens say it's an issue."

Members of the agenda-building group should represent four types of power. One member should have *political* power. Citizens elected this person to represent their interests on the city council, local school board, county commission, or state legislature. Another member should have *economic* power. Citizens recognize this person as a successful business leader committed to human services—the board president of the local United Way, for example. Another member should have *moral* power. Citizens respect this person as a longstanding advocate for youth and families. One or two other members of the agenda-building group should also have *technical* power—a principal, teacher, or agency professional with expertise on school failure.

* should be represented by a citizen! →

The social worker should meet with each of these representatives individually, then as a group, to discuss the issue and develop a strategy to get it placed on the meeting agenda of the city human services commission. Once this is achieved, the social worker helps the group prepare for the meeting. (A citizen delivers the presentation, rather than a professional that might be perceived as having a personal stake in the outcome.) The main objective of the meeting is for the commission to vote in favor of a motion to establish a community partnership structure to investigate school failure at the middle school, then report back with key findings and strategic recommendations.

Community Partnership Structure

Develop a community partnership structure to involve citizens and professionals in the capacity-building process. Once the issue achieves agenda status, the next phase is to build a community partnership structure and sustain it throughout the process. This type of structure provides a channel through which responsible citizens can take a leadership role with professionals in solving pressing community problems. It usually operates under the auspices of a community decision-making body, taking the form of a committee, task force, or advisory council. Citizen-driven and action-oriented, a community partnership structure fosters shared responsibility for local problems, prompts behavioral change in community institutions, and initiates and sustains reform efforts over time (Poole, 1997).

Let's assume that the city human services commission decided to establish a 25-member community partnership structure called the Youth Safe Passage Committee. The social worker must ensure that the majority of the members appointed to the committee are leading citizens in the community, including the chairman. The balance of the members should be professionals from schools and community agencies that have resources to address school failure in the middle school. School representatives might include the superintendent, middle school principal, a teacher, guidance counselor, or social worker. Agency representatives might include administrators or staff of the public health department, mental health center, department of human services, or YMCA.

The social worker's knowledge and skills in social group work are essential to the future success of the Youth Safe Passage Committee. The

practitioner may need to negotiate an agreement with the director of his or her own agency to provide staff support services to the committee. As in treatment groups, this leadership function is performed by helping a community work group identify goals and objectives, facilitating group action and interaction, maintaining group cohesiveness and member satisfaction, and providing means for group task performance (Ephross & Vassil, 1988). The entire capacity-building process for school-based services is likely to disintegrate if the group maintenance needs of the Youth Safe Passage Committee are not met.

Analysis

Utilize community action research to analyze the issue and alternative solutions. The analysis phase of the capacity-building process involves community action research. Traditional research will not satisfy the full requirements of this phase. Hiring a consultant to analyze the issue, report findings, and offer recommendations will not suffice. The main objective is for the community to become the research team, not a consultant or a few professionals (Kelly, 1998).

As in traditional research, community action research seeks to improve the quality of decision making through the careful collection of facts. But greater emphasis is given to participatory strategies than nonparticipatory strategies. Key informant interviews, public forums, surveys, and focus groups are used to engage divergent community groups and organizations in data collection and analysis. These strategies foster broad-based community participation, increase public awareness of the issue, and identify community partners that must share in the solution.

Accordingly, the leadership role of the social worker is to ensure that each member of Youth Safe Passage Committee participates in the process and shares ownership of the findings and proposed solutions. Tasks include helping committee members reach consensus on the nature, scope, and causes of school failure at the middle school; identify alternative strategies for the community to address the issue; and submit a written report to the city human services commission, with recommendations. The social worker may help to write the report, but his or her name is not prominently displayed. The authors are the 25 members of the committee that gathered the information, analyzed the findings, and identified solutions penned into the report by staff.

Community action research
more participatory in nature → goal is to get comm. views / input! → fosters participation

goal is to shift ownership from the institution to the community-at-large!

Community Ownership

Establish community ownership of the issue and solution. Ownership refers to actions taken by a community decision-making body that demonstrate that it owns an issue. Community ownership is established when this body has power to define the issue, determine its causes, and assign responsibility to local institutions to implement a solution. Some community institutions will not want to give up their power to define the issue because it would mean forfeiting their right to control the solution. Others will want to "disown" the issue because they might be asked to share responsibility in solving it (Gusfield, 1981).

In the example of school failure, the main leadership role of the social worker is to shift ownership of the issue from the school system to the community at large. The practitioner must recognize that prevention of failure at the middle school cannot take place without a change in the status quo. The community—via the city human services commission—must demonstrate that it owns the problem and will hold relevant local institutions accountable for their fair share of the solution. At some point in the capacity-building process a community institution will attempt to renege on prior public commitments to solve the problem or attempt to control the solution. The city human service commission must win this battle for ownership of the issue and solution.

Technology

Identify, transfer, and design sound technology: "Don't reinvent the wheel." In the technology phase, attention of the social worker shifts to the identification, transfer, and design of a sound technology to implement the strategy adopted by the city human services commission. Frequently too little attention is devoted to this important phase of the capacity-building process. Organizations that do not have adequate and appropriate staff, facilities, hardware, funding, or intervention techniques usually have great difficulty implementing a new product or service innovation (Glisson, 1992).

The social worker must recognize that school failure is not a new issue. Other communities have faced the same issue and devised good technical solutions. The social worker must help the Youth Safe Passage Committee find these solutions, assess their outcomes, determine transferability, and modify the solution to fit the particular needs and specifications of his or her community. Library

research, surfing the Internet, phone calls, and site visits help the social worker meet this challenge. Fortunately, ample literature exists on the causes of school failure, and an array of solutions involving diverse practitioners have been tested in school settings (Dryfoos, 1994). Roles for social workers in the solutions are rich and varied (Franklin, 1999; Poole, 1997).

The practitioner must also help the committee ensure that all relevant community institutions contribute resources—cash or in-kind—to implement the plan. Most school-based service innovations require a diversified funding base, reflecting the complexity of interventions needed to prevent school failure. While a diversified funding base is usually needed to sustain a school-based service innovation over time, small contributions from the Junior Welfare League, the United Way, or private donors can be used as seed money. These contributions foster community ownership, provide an opportunity to test the viability of the technology, and give the community time to secure larger, stable sources of funding.

Regarding the latter, several federal agencies now provide funding for school-based services, including Medicaid, Maternal and Child Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Departments of Education and Justice (Dryfoos, 1998). Recent major trends with integrative provider networks and managed behavioral health care also offer opportunities as well as challenges in long-term funding for school-based services (Friedrich, 1999; Franklin, 1999).

Stewardship

Demonstrate accountability, commitment, and constancy implementing the innovation and evaluating outcomes. Once the city human services commission endorses the technical plan and startup funding is secured, the work of the Youth Safe Passage Committee shifts to the stewardship phase of the capacity-building process. Stewardship means to hold something in trust for another, beginning with the willingness to be accountable for some larger body than ourselves—namely, the community (Block, 1993).

Stewardship is the most difficult phase in the capacity-building process. School-based service innovations never work exactly as planned. Community partners become disgruntled; paperwork gets burdensome; resources grow thin; and early service outputs inevitably fall short of expectations.

secure resources

funding from comm. sources fosters comm. ownership!

design the intervention

accountability

During the stewardship phase it is easy for community partners to lose sight of the fact that they must fulfill the public trust—that they must deliver the public good they promised and be accountable for the results. Self-interest, feelings of defeat, and burnout take their toll on partners in this phase of the process. The social worker must demonstrate courage to withstand criticism, constancy to maintain vigilance, commitment to reach the community goal, honesty to admit shortcomings, creativity to fix problems, and optimism to repel defeat.

This phase is not for the light-hearted. Victory stands faintly at the end of a long, dark tunnel. Reaching it brings great joy, however, and restores public confidence in schools and community agencies. Fortunately, a community partnership has many partners. Each partner can buttress and support the innovation when one partner is weak—or behaves irresponsibly. The partnership also makes flight from social responsibility difficult because the community holds the partners accountable for the public trust bestowed on them. Good stewards find ways to implement an innovation as planned, refine the technology as needed, and demonstrate that outcomes make a difference in the performance of youth in school.

CONCLUSION

Safe passage of youth to responsible adulthood require schools and agencies to provide seamless services in school settings. Community partnerships between citizens and professionals are needed to disrupt status quo arrangements that serve youth and families in piecemeal fashion. Social workers can take a leadership role in building and sustaining school-based service initiatives by adhering to the six action principles of the community partnership model of practice presented in this chapter.

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good stewardship
requires flexibility

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Albert R. Roberts

Gilbert J. Greene

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Barbara W. White

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