

Chapter 4

Building Capacity to Implement Community Schools

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ABSTRACT

This chapter outlines the importance of capacity-building assistance in implementing the community school strategy with quality; describes and assesses the work of the nation's oldest and largest community school capacity-building organization—the Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools; and positions that work in the context of community school reform efforts nationally and internationally. The chapter provides case studies of capacity-building efforts with three community school initiatives, two in the United States and one in Europe, and also offers a listing and brief description of other engagements from 2012 to 2018.

INTRODUCTION

In the most thorough analysis to date about the processes and results of community schools, researchers at the Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center examined 143 evaluations and drew a comprehensive set of conclusions, including one about the strong relationship between the quality of implementation and the achievement of positive results. The research team observed that “effective implementation and sufficient exposure to services increase the success of a community school approach, with research showing that longer operating and better implemented programs yield more positive results for students and schools” (Maier, Daniel, Oakes, & Lam, 2017). While this finding, like much good research, corroborates common sense, it also adds considerable credibility to the role of capacity-building supports as a central part of a community school system.

A Brief History

In 1994, the Children's Aid Society (now Children's Aid) in New York City received a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to launch a National Technical Assistance Center for Community

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Schools. The impetus for this grant was a set of related events that had occurred two years earlier. The first was the publication of a Carnegie study entitled *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours*, which called attention to the major disconnects between young people's lives in and out of school, and exhorted education and human service leaders to develop more effective strategies for working together on behalf of youth (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992). The second impetus for the Carnegie grant was the March 1992 opening of the Salomé Ureña Middle Academies as the Children's Aid Society's first community school, which exemplified the very kind of collaborative strategy called for by the Carnegie report.

The school was designed at the outset as a long-term partnership between the New York City Board of Education and New York City's oldest and largest youth organization, Children's Aid. The school would be open from early in the morning until late in the evening, offering not only the core instructional program typically associated with public schools but also medical, dental, mental health, social services, after-school and summer enrichment programs, adult education, parent and family engagement, and community and economic development. Hundreds of visitors flocked to this school soon after it opened, spurred in part by the writings of researcher Joy Dryfoos, who around this same time was documenting and speaking about the community school strategy as "a new revolution in health and social services for children, youth, and families" (Dryfoos, 1994).

Hosting study visits quickly became a burden to this young enterprise. The energetic and committed staffs of the Board of Education and Children's Aid Society had their hands quite full with the implementation challenges associated with starting a large middle school in what was then New York City's neediest neighborhood. Leaders at Children's Aid quickly saw the need to hire and assign staff who could dedicate their time and attention to organizing study visits to the school and documenting the emerging collaborative practices. They sought and received funding from the Carnegie Corporation for this fledgling adjunct to its direct service work. Thus, the National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools (the Center) was born.

During the early years of the Center's history, study visits represented the major service, although quite soon thereafter education, youth development, and human service colleagues started requesting tools and materials to help them begin to adapt and implement what they had seen. In 1993, in response to these requests, Children's Aid staff wrote and distributed over 20,000 copies of an implementation guide entitled *Building a Community School*. But as colleagues in other fields were learning, written materials—even when coupled with the kind of "vision implant" that a study visit can offer—only serve to create demand for additional kinds of assistance. The Center's small staff began to add a variety of methods to their repertoire—training, consultation, presentations, facilitation, and creation of tools to structure learning and propel change.

BUILDING ON SOLID KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CAPACITY BUILDING

As the Center's practice grew, the staff reviewed the literature on technical assistance and capacity building, and found its thinking informed and influenced by a 1998 paper written by Norman Fruchter, Michele Cahill, and Ellen Wahl, entitled *Building to Capacity: A Review of Technical Assistance Strategies*. These authors traced the history of technical assistance focused on education reform and observed that capacity-building as a central tenet represented the fourth "generation" of education-oriented technical assistance. Early efforts, going back to the 1950s, focused first on knowledge transfer, then on a medical

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