Post-Study Tour Discussion Group Summary

*Engaging School and Community in Meeting the Needs of the*

*Common Core State Standards*

March 30, 2015

A few months after a December 2014 study tour, the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) hosted a Post-Study Tour Discussion Group for former Campaign for High School Equity (CHSE) partners to discuss their recent Oakland, CA trip, *Engaging School and Community in Meeting the Needs of the Common Core State Standards*. Marty Blank from the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) and Mary Kingston Roche of the Coalition For Community Schools (CCS) facilitated conversations for the other partner representatives, including the National Council of La Raza, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the National Urban League, and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

***Reflections on the Study Tour***

Loretta Goodwin, Senior Director at AYPF, began the discussion with reflections on the study tour. The group reflected on the opportunities and wraparound supports that are necessary and the hard work that it takes to persist in providing these supports, despite staff and leadership turnover. While participating in the study tours, two educators’ remarks stood out for trip participants. First, a teacher commented that she felt more opportunity to teach the Common Core State Standards without having to worry about her students’ social or emotional wellbeing because other adults were focused on that aspect. Second, a principal suggested that the most effective way to run a school is not to ask ourselves ‘what works’ but instead to ask ‘how can we bring all the puzzle pieces together to work collectively to achieve the main goal.’

The importance of public will was hailed as a contributing factor to Oakland’s success. Administrative turnover matters less when the whole community supports an initiative; however, parents take offence at being told to become “more involved.” Lastly, the success of the community can be debated through the lenses of ‘too much federal oversight’ versus ‘regulation that protects all students.’ The key to a well-run community school (CS) is to include schools and communities in the policy discussion.

***Scalability***

Marty Blank explained that in order to have successful scalability in a CS organizing groups need to be present; while the strongest groups are in big cities, counties, United Ways and others can play an organizing role in suburban areas; and regional education agencies or community collabratives in rural places. For example, the scaling of community schools is working in Hartford, CT because the Mayor’s office, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Hartford United Way, and the Hartford Public Schools all worked together.

There are four characteristics of scaled-up CS systems that should be taken into consideration:

* **Ownership**. All partners should feel that they have a voice and a stake in the outcomes of the school system.
* **Depth**. Community schools evolve along a continuum so what is important is not just scaling the program, but also scaling the interactions between students and adults so that there is a common culture (i.e. afterschool teachers talking with classroom teachers about materials and student development).
* **Spread**. There need to be common principles throughout the community (i.e. Seattle University sent student tutors into the community to help in a missionary role).
* **Sustainability**. While money is a huge factor in maintaining community schools, relationships are as important. Resources already in place should be used before spending additional dollars on a service or program.

# For more information on scaling up community schools see the [Scaling Up School and Community Partnerships](http://www.communityschools.org/resources/systems_web_guide.aspx) interactive guide.

# Community schools are a strategy, not a program. They require community-wide leadership that has a results driven approach (see [Trying Hard Is Not Good Enough](http://resultsleadership.org/product/trying-hard-is-not-good-enough-by-mark-friedman/) by Mark Friedman). If leaders are clear about the results that are desired then all the partners can agree to funnel the supports to achieve that goal. School site leadership teams provide a place where results and connections between the work each partner contributes can be discussed. Finally, intermediary leadership refers to the entity that provides support to strengthen the policy landscape, maintains the community engagement, and puts professional development in place. Those in leadership positions need to talk to each other because school leadership cannot completely mobilize the community by itself; but it can engage in conversation by partners with community organizations that have the capacity to fully mobilize community resources.

Overall, to scale community schools those in leadership should emphasize and articulate what the goal is and look into what *is working and not working* and why. They should take into account teacher, student, parent, and partner feedback. Being results-focused gives leaders a vehicle to examine what is and is not working, though it can be difficult to stop a policy, practice, or program that is not working (i.e. DARE). The better the results, the deeper the conversation about scale, and the deeper the conversation about scale the more work can be done to inprove results for young people.

For more information see “[A Process for Building a 6-State Scaled-Up System](http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Spiral%20Process%20and%20Characteristics%20of%20Effective%20Scale%20Up.pdf)” spiral and other resources from [Coalition for Community Schools](http://www.communityschools.org/ScalingUp/).

***Finances***

How to fund a CS is the third most commonly asked question around community schools, preceded by ‘What is a community school?’ and ‘How do you start a CS?’ Community schools cannot be effectively sustained and funded without community support. These schools need different funding streams as well as agencies willing to bring their programs and resources to the school in order to operate successfully. Examples in the “[Financing Community Schools](http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf)” report show the redirecting through partnerships that drives the money. Another strategy to achieve this is to bring different stakeholders together to address issues they care about, e.g. chronic absence or third grade reading levels.

Initiatives vary in how community schools are started. They can be spearheaded by one person (e.g. a principal). Federal funding can also initiate a CS (i.e. Full Service Community Schools), though it is not necessarily sustainable, a point participants expressed concern over. Lastly, a school district, United Way, community foundation, or a strong non-profit organization can lead the initiative on community schools. Participants were apprehensive about the evidence-based trend in grant making decisions and wondered how CCS plans to measure more qualitative evidence. Mary Kingston Roche explained that they are still working on finding ways to track the harder-to-measure variables and that surveys can help measure certain aspects of parent engagement.

Finally, participants focused on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the supports community schools can receive from CCS. Kingston Roche noted that they could create a list of best practices and examples for the participants; however, she did note that CCS is not as focused on Common Core though they do have conversations around how Common Core and community schools work together.

***ESEA***

Kingston Roche explained how CCS views the federal role to support and incentivize local communities to start community schools. States and districts that are receiving Title I funds should report more than academic feedback; health and wellness, discipline, attendance, and family engagement data should also be expected. However, there was disagreement among participants on how to measure parent engagement and if that should even be measured since low socio-economic, immigrant, and similar families are not always eager to be as “involved” as other families. While everyone agreed that it is difficult to prevent certain at-risk families from being punished for lack of involvement, it was noted that we need to frame this measurement in an inclusive way (i.e. ‘family partnership’).

A final comment also noted the importance of School Improvement Grants (SIG) and 21st Century School Funds that should be included in ESEA.

***Requests***

Throughout the meeting participants had a few requests for CCS, including:

* A list of all community schools across the United States
* Examples of places that have limited resources and have positive CS implementation
* Examples of help for teachers doing English as a Second Language (ESL) work while using existing resources.

In response to a request of who the community schools across the country are, the Coalition For Community Schools said they could share a list of their partners with everyone. They are also working on compiling a directory of all the community schools; however, they are finding that a number of schools who say they are CS are not really doing a good enough job. CCS isn’t discouraging these schools but belives they should try to improve since the Coalition has been intentional about not mandating a certificate program so that everyone would be encouraged to work toward the vision of a full-service community school.

***Wrap Up***

Participants expressed that the trip to Oakland, CA was a great opportunity to see community schools in practice. Being able to speak to students, teachers, district leaders, and county leaders was a great experience and emphasized the importance of relationships and breaking down silos.

Blank concluded that he appreciated the conversations and pushback everyone provided during the meeting, acknowledging that this is hard work. The key lesson and theory from all of this is that we are better together (see [Better Together: Restoring the American Community](http://www.scottlondon.com/reviews/putnam2.html) by Robert Putnam and Lewis Feldstein with Don Cohen) and that communities need to have a very hard conversation about where they need to go moving forward.