

Dayton's University-Assisted Neighborhood School Centers: Adapting to Local Realities

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Abstract

This article reviews the eight-year history of Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers, highlighting both successes and failures, lessons learned, and observations regarding the sustainability requirements of community schools. Special attention is given to the initiation of the community schools effort in Dayton, on one hand, and the current situation and challenges, on the other. The organizational response to leadership changes in Dayton Public Schools is described. Highlighted is the role of the University of Dayton (UD), especially the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community. The University of Dayton is a major Catholic university of 11,000 students located in the city of Dayton, Ohio. It has a long history of significant community partnerships. The Fitz Center plays a pivotal role in implementation of this highly collaborative effort, including initial project leadership; community organizing; coaching of five site coordinators at neighborhood school sites; faculty-mentored student interns to assist with programming for student success, family support, health and team sports, and extensive university student engagement. The authors are hopeful that communities attempting to grow their community schools from a few to a system-wide program and those exploring the potential role of local colleges and universities will benefit from the information, insights, and ideas shared.

History

In 2004, the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community at the University of Dayton (UD) was awarded a \$250,000 grant over two years (2004-2006) from the Dayton Foundation and asked to lead planning for Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers (NSC) project. In 2006, a three-year pilot (2006-2009) was initiated with a total budget of \$1.2 million using the community school concept advocated by the Coalition for Community Schools. The Dayton Foundation, Dayton Public Schools, City of Dayton, Montgomery County, and 16 local foundation and corporate supporters joined the Fitz Center in a bold initiative to reconnect five Dayton public elementary schools to their neighborhoods after more than 30 years of court-ordered busing and to create full-service, year-round opportunities for neighborhood families and youth at these new neighborhood schools. All new school buildings, funded by a local levy and matched by tobacco lawsuit settlement funds awarded through the Ohio School Facilities Commission, opened through 2010, but the programming began in fall of 2006.

A community's project

Our shared community vision was simple: *New public schools are the centers of their Dayton neighborhoods, serving as healthy places of learning for children and families.* Our Neighborhood School Centers' mission was more complex: *Committed to children and families, we work with many partners to develop inventive, enduring relationships to create environments where students will excel and neighborhoods will flourish with schools as their centers.*

Our objectives for the three-year pilot were:

- Secure start-up funding,
- Achieve strong involvement,
- Identify and remove policy barriers,
- Identify and leverage neighborhood assets,
- Plan and open new schools, and
- Align with academic outcomes.

Over the next five years, our objectives were:

- Improve quality of life in the neighborhoods,
- Attract families with school-aged children,
- Improve student performance,
- Realign community resources to support youth achievement,
- Sustain leadership and support for Neighborhood School Centers, and
- Serve as replicable national model.

In practice, the Neighborhood School Centers focused on three outcomes: young people succeeding, neighborhood schools as the first choice of residents, and neighborhood schools as centers of community involvement. The Neighborhood School Centers' operational plan was initially developed to sustain the relationships critical to successful outcomes. Partners played various roles in guiding and managing the project. It was truly the community's project.

Community schools, in general, and Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers, in particular, are ideal for the work of community building. The opportunity to adapt the community school model in Dayton arose from the reality that Dayton neighborhoods were and still are highly segregated racially (See Appendix A). Court-ordered busing to achieve racial integration of schools was in place for more than 30 years. The order was lifted in 2002 due, in part, to the fact that the Dayton Public School system had become predominantly African American and local leaders and the federal district court saw nothing further to be gained from mandatory busing.

The Board of Education and Dayton Public Schools leadership offered the community a return to neighborhood schools (by choice, but not forced busing) in exchange for passing a school building levy. If approved, funds from this capital levy would be matched by the State of Ohio and enable the construction of new buildings throughout the district. The levy passed, in part due to the promise of neighborhood schools, but there was no plan in place to deliver on the campaign promise that schools would once again be centers of neighborhoods and would be available for community use. Dayton Public Schools appealed to the Dayton Foundation for

help. The Foundation turned to the University of Dayton Fitz Center because of its capacity for community building in urban neighborhoods. The Center staff members had many years of collective experience in Dayton as organizers and facilitators.

Not school reform

A key challenge at the outset was to distinguish the effort to reconnect schools and neighborhoods from other “school reform” initiatives. While the academic achievement of Dayton Public School students was and still is below local expectations and statewide standards, the Neighborhood School Centers did not promise to improve standardized test scores. While effective after-school programs, improved early childhood education, healthier students, and safer neighborhoods could be expected to help student achievement, project leaders distinguished the initiative from school reform efforts such as the creation of charter schools that are popular and numerous in our urban community.

The Fitz Center accepted the leadership role while insisting the project become something more than the latest school reform initiative – the acknowledged agenda of many of the sponsors and community leaders. Previous experience in developing a partnership with Patterson-Kennedy Elementary School, supported by a West Philadelphia Improvement Corporation (WEPIC) Replication Grant, taught many at the University of Dayton the importance of defining the University’s role as partner versus expert advisor or reformer.ⁱ Teachers, administrators, and parents of elementary school students had experienced wave upon wave of reform efforts and had grown both skeptical of and resistant to change proposed by outsiders including community leaders, foundations, and universities. Clearly, any significant change had to come from within the Dayton Public Schools with the support of parents and the community. The Fitz Center had an insight to the development of Neighborhood School Centers that was the result of work on dozens of other community projects. The school levy promise to connect Dayton Public Schools to neighborhoods and rebuild schools was an opportunity to build what Robert Putnam and others describe as “bonding” social capital within schools and neighborhoods and, simultaneously, to develop “bridging” social capital with hundreds of agencies and associations committed to urban children, their families, and the neighborhoods.ⁱⁱ

Community building precedes programming

The creation of effective community partnerships that operate democratically and are highly inclusive is a daunting challenge. It is our opinion that most community collaborations fail because they do not pay adequate attention to building and sustaining relationships. Strong community partnerships resemble good friendships. Widely shared visions supported by citizens and professionals who enjoy working together are essential. To achieve a shared vision, citizens and professionals alike usually have to relinquish some aspect of their own beliefs and practices. Citizens do not simply accept what professionals identify as “best practices.” Professionals, in our experience, struggle to give voice to ordinary citizens and to acknowledge practical wisdom.

There is a not-so-obvious reason why the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community was asked to lead this effort. It is not because we were experts, advocates, or even thoughtful critics of public urban education. It is because we approached all of our work as a challenge of community building. The Fitz Center defines its mission as *community building in urban Dayton for the purposes of increasing the community’s capacity for change and providing a rich context for experiential learning for University students and faculty*. “Consensus organizing” techniques, as described by Michael Eichler (2007), are used in a variety of community settings. Dozens of Fitz Center projects are in progress in Dayton at any given time. Each emphasizes one or more of the five community building principles identified through staff experience over the past four decades. These principles have informed the University’s role in the Neighborhood School Centers. Each is described in detail in books by the authors noted below.

- *Developing community assets*. John McKnight and John Kretzmann (1993) of Northwestern University’s Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research initiated a national movement to focus on a community’s assets instead of its needs when developing devastated communities. The same thinking informed the Search Institute’s developmental assets for youth. Appreciating is leading.
- *Strengthening social capital*. Harvard’s Robert Putnam (2000) documented the loss of social capital in the United States in his book *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of*

American community. Trust, information sharing, reciprocity, and some shared norms characterize this illusive form of capital that, according to Putnam, is essential to strong communities. Trusting is leading.

- *Balancing inquiry and advocacy.* In *The fifth discipline: the art and practice of the learning organization*, Peter Senge (1990) describes conversational skills that build relationships and improve understanding. Good questions, it seems, may be as important as good arguments. Asking is leading.
- *Cultivating leadership for adaptation.* Reviving communities means people and institutions must change. The style of leadership that helps communities hold on to what is precious and let go of the nonessential is described by Harvard's Ronald Heifetz (1994) in *Leadership without easy answers* as "adaptive." Learning is leading.
- *Finding a shared vision based on mutual self-interest.* Community organizing, long associated with the conflict organizing techniques of Saul Alinsky, has a new style described by its champion Michael Eichler (2007) in *Consensus organizing: building communities of mutual self-interest*. This style works toward a shared vision as opposed to the vision of a dominant group or individual. Listening is leading.

We have taken the best insights of these creative thinkers and experimented with them in our work. The process does require new thinking on the part of experienced community leaders and constant practice by the citizens and professionals doing the work at the neighborhood sites. Compromise is essential. The Fitz Center uses the skills of consensus organizing to build community. Consensus organizers identify mutual self-interest to build and sustain community work. Community building, for the Fitz Center, is the art of co-creating a desired community future based on a widely shared vision. We use consensus organizing to get to the shared vision.

The Challenges of the Present

In 2012, recognizing that Dayton Public Schools were the single largest investor in the Neighborhood School Centers and that, in fact, the school board was the most accountable governing body for student outcomes, the leadership of the Neighborhood School Centers shifted from the Dayton Foundation to Dayton Public Schools. Administrative staff, in addition to the superintendent and principals who had been invested from the beginning, became more directly involved and responsible for the success of the Neighborhood School Centers. Parent and community engagement became a deputy superintendent responsibility.

Even as the national economy rebounded, the City of Dayton and the Greater Dayton Region continued to experience a very difficult economic situation in terms of job loss and subsequent unemployment. This economic situation, which continues into 2015, has in turn created very difficult challenges for families and children in almost every Dayton neighborhood. In the City of Dayton, almost half of its 38 census tracts have poverty rates of 30% or higher. Sixty-three percent of children in the City of Dayton live in these high poverty neighborhoods; 83 percent of Dayton's poor children live in high poverty neighborhoods (See Appendix B).

This prevalence of high poverty students from high poverty neighborhoods with little or no middle income families presents a major challenge for Dayton Public Schools. To address this challenge, Dayton Public Schools Superintendent Lori Ward, the third superintendent since the initiation of Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers, outlined the elements of her REACH (Raising Educational Achievement of Each Child Higher) model in December 2012 (See Appendix C). The REACH model focuses on enhancing the ability of Dayton's young people to be college and career ready at the point of their high school graduation. To achieve this goal, the district

and the community working together must provide excellent academic programs and remove the barriers to learning that families and children experience in many of our neighborhoods. The REACH model calls for a new partnership within our community.

One approach to implementing the REACH model is to give new attention to the Neighborhood School Center partnership. Initiated and led by the Dayton Foundation from 2006-2011, the Neighborhood School Centers are now an innovative educational partnership led by Dayton Public Schools. This partnership continues to bring together the original five preK-8 public schools, non-profit agencies, Montgomery County agencies, City of Dayton departments and the Fitz Center with the aim of improving the success of young people navigating the critical transitions necessary to obtain a post-secondary credential. The partnership links schools with lead non-profit agencies (Cleveland – YMCA, Edison -- YMCA, Fairview – Good Samaritan Hospital, Kiser – Salvation Army of the Greater Dayton Area, and Ruskin – East End Community Services). Funding for the partnership is provided by DPS, Montgomery County, the United Way of the Greater Dayton Area and the University of Dayton.

Superintendent Ward initiated a conversation among the partners that called them to “rededicate, reimagine, and realign” their efforts to bring the Neighborhood School Centers to new levels of effectiveness for the children, families, and neighborhoods of Dayton (*Handbook*, 2014). The Dayton community has always been able to innovate to meet new challenges. Innovation in Dayton includes everything from advanced science and technology to public policy, the arts to the environment, social services to recreation. Education and economic development clearly share the spotlight at present and, as in most communities, are linked as priorities.

New start to the Neighborhood School Centers partnership

To give the partnership a renewed purpose, a theory of action was developed for the implementation of the REACH model through Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers. The theory of action includes the shared vision, key outcomes, and the roles that are played by the partners. This, in turn, was used as a framework for creating a *Handbook for the Neighborhood School Centers Partnership* which details the roles and responsibilities of each of the partners.

Adapting the definition of a community school from that of the Coalition for Community Schools, we believe that a DPS Neighborhood School Center is “both a place and a set of partnerships between the Dayton Public School in a Dayton neighborhood and a variety of other community resources (*Handbook, 2014*).”

Supporting the five centers, “the DPS Neighborhood School Centers partnership is a collaboration lead by Dayton Public Schools that aims to improve student learning, to build strong families, and to develop healthy neighborhoods. The neighborhood school becomes the center for the neighborhood and is open to everyone – during the school day, evenings and weekends (*Handbook, 2014*).”

The vision is bold – “by 2020, DPS Neighborhood School Centers will provide children and youth in their neighborhoods with access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education, successfully transition to college and career and to become civically engaged (*Handbook, 2014*).” This vision statement was adapted from the Promise Neighborhood

Vision proposed by the U.S. Department of Education. The concept of civic engagement was added.

To realize this vision, the Neighborhood School Centers partners at each site endeavor to realize the outcomes listed below. These are aligned with those of the U.S. Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods application. While not all of these outcomes can be addressed in the short-term, they should eventually be addressed as the partnership evolves and expands. These outcomes are prioritized by each building's leadership team.

- Children are healthy and ready to enter kindergarten.
- Students attend school consistently.
- Students succeed academically.
- Students are actively involved in learning and in their communities.
- Families are increasingly involved with and supportive of their children's education.
- Schools are engaged with families and communities.
- Children are healthy – physically, socially, and emotionally.
- Students live and learn in a safe, supportive and stable environment.
- The neighborhood is a desirable place to live.

Partner roles

The partners were redefined to include only those playing an active role in the delivery of Neighborhood School Centers programs. The partners each play a specific role in helping to

accomplish the key outcomes. Using the language of the REACH model for all neighborhood schools, “the Excellent Neighborhood School provides an exciting and engaging environment for learning. The Excellent Neighborhood School is characterized by strong principal leadership, a culture of high academic achievement, highly effective teachers, and a spirit of hospitality that welcomes parents and community as partners in learning. A DPS neighborhood school building becomes a center of community life and contributes to the strength of the neighborhood (*Handbook*, 2014).” Here is how the Handbook describes the key roles.

The **principal** is responsible for leadership of the Neighborhood School Center and works with the Building Leadership Team to coordinate all facets of the Neighborhood School Centers partnership in the school. The principal, in collaboration with the partners, develops a plan for the Neighborhood School Center that aims to ensure academic success for students, supportive and enrichment programs for children and families, and engagement of families and the neighborhood in the success of the children in the school. The principal, in collaboration with NSC site coordinator and the kindergarten teachers, is responsible for organizing a Neighborhood Readiness Coalition to enhance kindergarten readiness within the neighborhood.

The **building leadership team** is led by the principal and is responsible for developing, coordinating, and sustaining all facets of the Neighborhood School Centers partnership. The building leadership team identifies barriers that inhibit learning and develops an annual building improvement plan to enhance learning for the children, the support of families, and the engagement of the neighborhood.

The **faculty and staff** working at a Neighborhood School Center are critical to the success of the Neighborhood School Centers partnership. The key outcome of *students succeeding academically* depends on a faculty that works collaboratively to set high standards of academic success and is skillful in working with families and children from high poverty neighborhoods. Faculty and staff must be willing to engage families by visiting the homes of their students and to assist parents in supporting the learning of their children. Staff members must begin to work collaboratively with faculty and community partners to make the school a welcoming neighborhood center.

The **Community Engagement Council** is coordinated by the principal and includes key constituencies in the Neighborhood School Center, especially parents and neighborhood partners. The goal of the Community Engagement Council (CEC) is to serve as a coordinating and reporting mechanism to promote family and community engagement in the Neighborhood School Center. A member of the NSC CEC represents the school at the meetings of the system-wide Dayton Education Council. The CEC develops an annual plan for family and community engagement and assists in its implementation so that the NSC site is a center for community life and contributes to the success of children and families within the neighborhood.

The **lead community partner** is a critical component in the success of the Neighborhood School Centers. The lead community partner is a not-for-profit social service agency that has as part of its mission the building of assets and relationships within a neighborhood that support children and families. The lead community partner dedicates some its resources to the success of the Neighborhood School Center.

The **executive liaison** from the lead community partner is an agency executive that provides integration of the agency and the Neighborhood School Centers operation e.g., the school and other community resources. The executive liaison, in collaboration with the principal and the University of Dayton Fitz Center facilitator, hires the site coordinator and coordinates an annual evaluation of the site coordinator.

The NSC **site coordinator** is an employee of the lead community partner and is also part of the building leadership team of the Neighborhood School Center. The site coordinator is a relationship builder and broker who forges partnerships that align community resources, such as other not-for-profit social service agencies, public social service agencies, colleges and universities, faith communities, and business to benefit children, families, and the neighborhood.

The NSC site coordinator working with the principal and the building leadership team organizes **action teams** that focus on specific objectives that are important to the success of the Neighborhood School Center. Examples of action teams are: (1) A Family Café Team that works with one or more faith communities to organize family cafés at the school, (2) an After-School Team that organizes after-school programs to support reading and mathematics, and (3) and a Health Team that makes sure children are coming to school healthy and ready to learn.

A Neighborhood School Center, whenever possible, provides a space and an opportunity for relevant **public agencies** to deliver services to children and families in the neighborhood. For example, in our community, these agencies can include public health, children services, mental health, and employment services at the county level and public safety, parks and recreation, housing inspection, and trash removal at the city level.

The site coordinator is also responsible for mobilizing additional **community resources** that assist children's success in learning and assist their parents in supporting the growth of their children. These resources include other social service agencies that have specialized competencies and resources as well as volunteers from colleges, universities, faith communities, and service clubs. These community resources can be part of an action team organized by the NSC site coordinator. The site coordinator is to be more of a recruiter and organizer of services than a provider of services.

The **Neighborhood Readiness Coalition** endeavors to align the early learning in the neighborhood (day care, pre-k, and kindergarten) around the Common Core Standards. The coalitions have not been formed yet. When they are, each coalition will consist of the pre-kindergarten teachers, kindergarten teachers, NSC site coordinator and representatives of the early learning providers in the neighborhood. The primary objective of the coalition is to ensure that every child in the neighborhood is kindergarten ready, regardless of what school the students attend.

University-assisted community schools

The University of Dayton is a charter member of the University-Assisted Community Schools coalition.ⁱⁱⁱ The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community in the College of Arts and Sciences has served the Dayton Public Schools' Neighborhood School Centers by coordinating and integrating a number of important functions. The Fitz Center has assembled a team to mentor the site coordinators who work for the nonprofit organizations that are the partners at each of the Neighborhood School Centers. Through monthly meetings of the site coordinators

and periodic one-on-one meetings, the Fitz Center team works to support the coordinators in their roles as they engage members of the community and to assist with the communication concerning what is working effectively and not working as effectively at each of the schools.

When the Neighborhood School Centers began, the Dayton Foundation was the convener of individuals and organizations committed to this initiative. The Fitz Center worked on behalf of the Dayton Foundation to prepare agendas and provide information concerning the progress of the program. As the program has evolved, the superintendent of Dayton Public Schools and her staff have taken on the role of the lead partner in the Neighborhood School Centers. The Fitz Center now works with the Dayton Public Schools administration to schedule meetings including the five meetings during the school year of the superintendent with the Neighborhood School Centers' principals and site coordinators, the three meetings during the school year of the superintendent with the Neighborhood School Centers' nonprofit partners and funders, and other meetings as necessary. The Fitz Center staff assists the superintendent in formulating the agendas for these different coordinating meetings. These meetings are held to assure that issues are brought to the table for discussion and resolution and that those who are vested in the program fully understand the progress being made and the barriers yet to be overcome. The Fitz Center also has assisted Dayton Public Schools in reporting on the progress of Neighborhood School Centers at school board meetings and at meetings with the other public and nonprofit agencies that have been supporters of the program.

The Fitz Center coordinates the recruitment of University of Dayton urban teacher education students as interns at the five schools, ongoing weekly volunteers who work with Dayton Public School students in academic activities, and one time volunteers for major events.

During the 2013-2014 school year, 751 University of Dayton students shared their time and talent as community engaged learners and volunteers. About one third of these served on a consistent basis for a semester or school year.

We hope to continue to improve the ability of the Fitz Center staff to facilitate community dialogue or structured community conversations. Helping groups learn to come together and suspend judgment long enough to fully digest each other's viewpoints has proven critical to the community building process. Conversation circles have not won general acceptance yet, but the Center continues to begin most of its projects with such open, nonjudgmental dialogue. It is usually where we begin to identify the potential for a shared vision. Without a shared vision, in our experience, community schools and most other community initiatives are usually short-lived and ineffective.

Tracking progress

Beginning in 2014-2015, the Dayton Public Schools Office of Accountability, Assessment, and Research will semi-annually organize the academic indicators into a Neighborhood School Centers Report Card. This report card will include proficiency ratings, information on attendance and discipline, and students moving in and out of the schools. Using these data, the site coordinator and the curriculum instruction assessment person at each school will be responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of Neighborhood School Centers programs.

We have developed a preliminary list of outcomes and indicators that can be used to measure progress being made by the Neighborhood School Centers. Data for some of the indicators are easily obtained from Dayton Public Schools, county health department data, and

census data. Data on some of the indicators will require parent or neighborhood surveys (See Appendix D). We believe that the indicators present a more complete assessment of the conditions necessary for learning than previously endorsed by community leaders and concerned citizens. Whether indicators show progress or not, they remind the community that many things matter in the life of a child and that there are many preconditions of student success.

Sustainable funding

Without sustainable sources of funding, community programs do not build community. Youth programs, in particular, risk leading impressionable young citizens on a roller coaster ride of programming. This can happen due either to the “three year and out” approach of many private sponsors, failure of local levies or United Way campaigns, or the inconsistency of fiscal federal block grant funding. In any event, children, youth, and adults alike see many summer programs, after-school opportunities, and youth employment programs as occasional and unpredictable rather than as part of the neighborhood community fabric. By always blending private and public funds available primarily from or through local sources, Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers hope to avoid the roller coaster ride and establish predictable neighborhood assets.

The annual operating budget for the Neighborhood School Centers partnership is \$290,000 for fiscal year 2014-2015 (See Appendix E). This is 17 percent less than the budgets of the five previous years. As start-up financial support from multiple private sources ramped down in years four and five, Dayton’s key public human service partners assumed a larger

funding role. Each has been involved from the start. The public partners participate in a variety of ways, not all of which are financial. Dayton Public Schools contributes just under half of the annual funding. The superintendent, deputy superintendents, members of the Board of Education, and principals are directly involved in the planning and implementation of Neighborhood School Centers. The superintendent hosts a monthly meeting of the partners, including city, county, lead nonprofit executives and Fitz Center team members with the expressed mission of removing barriers to achieving the shared vision. Besides the public funders, the Neighborhood School Centers receive annual private-dollar support from the United Way and the University of Dayton.

Site coordinators as the essential investment

Each of Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers has a full-time site coordinator. As shown in Appendix E, the salaries of the site coordinators represent 83 percent of the annual operating budget. Each site coordinator is employed by a nonprofit agency partner, although the funds are provided by the Neighborhood School Centers' funding partners, not the agencies themselves. Supervision is provided by the agencies and the school principals. Coaching is provided by two consultants from the Fitz Center, one for support on building community in the neighborhood and one for assistance with building community within the school. Site coordinators are selected by a team of partners representing the school system, the school building, the nonprofit agency partner, and the Fitz Center. The current site coordinators were selected primarily from outside the school community and represent a variety of experiential backgrounds. All are skilled community builders who use consensus organizing techniques to add value to the schools as centers of their neighborhoods.

The site coordinator supports the school principal by managing the contributions of various community partners who bring programs voluntarily to the school site. The site coordinators' employers are leading Dayton nonprofit organizations committed to the vision of making schools the centers of their neighborhoods. The site coordinators and their employers are the brokers of partnerships for the Neighborhood School Centers. Three paid interns from the University of Dayton assist each site coordinator and help bring other University students and faculty to the school site as community engaged learners.

Neighborhoods as partners

While it is, in our opinion, more difficult to create and sustain partnerships between schools and loosely organized neighborhoods than between schools and highly accountable agencies, neighborhood partners are vital to our community school concept. Leaders of neighborhood associations, community development corporations, churches, parent organizations, and neighborhood hospitals have all participated in the planning and implementation of Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers. With the assistance of the City of Dayton Planning Department, the neighborhoods joined forces to secure Ohio Department of Transportation Safe Routes to School funding for the NSC neighborhoods. For three of the school sites, neighborhood planning teams, organized by the Fitz Center, participated directly in planning new school buildings and locating them to maximize their impact on the future of the neighborhoods. The social capital – bonding and bridging – developed during the building planning period exceeded anything that could be expected from any other organizing strategy.

The neighborhoods included in Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers have both great assets and serious needs. For Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers to be successful, these neighborhoods must move forward. Each neighborhood has identified one or more key developmental assets on which to build. These include a national park site in the neighborhood that was home to the Wright brothers, home building projects in two neighborhoods, a new family center funded by the Kroc family in another, a comprehensive neighborhood redevelopment project around one school, multiple city parks, reasonably stable neighborhoods, major anchor hospitals, and strong neighborhood associations. Barriers to a hopeful future still have to be removed or reduced. These include extensive poverty and little economic diversity, above average foreclosure rates, low student academic achievement, tragic youth crime, and continued parent preference for busing over walking to school. Assets must be leveraged to overcome barriers and assure that each neighborhood and its citizens continue to work for the school as the center of the community.

Persistent uncertainties

There are many remaining uncertainties for Dayton’s Neighborhood School Centers. These can be grouped into a few big questions.

Can our community school model contribute to improved student academic performance? Most schools are in “academic emergency” status, according to Ohio performance standards, and the entire district is at risk of being classified as in “academic distress.”

Can the community take the Neighborhood School Centers to scale? Dayton has 21 public preK-8 schools, and only five are Neighborhood School Centers. How would a larger scale program be administered and by whom? Dayton Public Schools does not have sufficient staffing to do this, and there is a limited number of nonprofit agencies with the capacity to be strong partners in neighborhood schools.

Will Dayton parents eventually choose to have their children walk to a neighborhood school after a generation of busing them to the school of their choice? Since the start of the Neighborhood School Centers, the percentage of students living within a mile or two miles of the schools they attend has increased for three of the five schools. However, even in the Dayton neighborhoods served by the Neighborhood School Centers, few children walk or bike to elementary school.^{iv}

Acknowledging these uncertainties, the key partners have not walked away from their leadership of this project. The partners, though few in number, remain committed. The University of Dayton continues to play a supportive role with staff leadership from the Fitz Center and financial support from the University president. The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community believes that Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers are an excellent demonstration of the power of community building in urban Dayton. When properly oriented and structured, they are also a significant democratic means of engaging University students and faculty in what John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley (2011) have described as "reciprocal" relationships with community partners. Patient persistence may be the most important leadership trait needed to realize a hopeful future for our youngest citizens.

The possibility that smaller is better

Since the demise of its manufacturing prowess during the first two thirds of the twentieth century, Dayton has been as hard hit as any urban center in the United States.^v

Significantly, the city that educated talented leaders as diverse as the Wright brothers and Paul Laurence Dunbar has reinvented itself in many ways, including leadership in advanced technology. But the urban core that was home to Dunbar and the Wrights, the public school system that nurtured them, and the community that is home to the Neighborhood School Centers is smaller, poorer, and less hopeful than ever. If Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers succeed in realizing their mission and shared vision, the importance of planning and programming within neighborhood scale and leveraging strong interpersonal relationships will have been demonstrated in a new way. If so, the lesson of Dayton may be that smaller is better.

One of the biggest challenges faced by youth programs and other so-called "nonessential" social services in all urban communities is inconsistency. In Dayton, our youth have experienced a roller coaster of programming throughout their young lives. Depending on the availability of federal and foundation grants and the resulting large fluctuations in local youth program opportunities, these kids and their families have experienced school years and summers with interesting and even exciting programs followed by years of nothing. As just one example, no significant neighborhood youth sports teams or leagues have survived the inconsistent support and funding. Summer literacy programs, camps and employment programs for urban youth have done only slightly better.

Our community developed its Neighborhood School Centers to provide predictable and sustainable programs for youth, families, and neighborhoods. We formed partnerships of public elementary schools with effective nonprofits to build program capacity that can be counted on year to year at the neighborhood level, with or without grant support from sources beyond the region. To accomplish this, we started small, moved ahead methodically, and emphasized the strength of personal and institutional relationships.

Conclusion

The authors are hopeful that communities attempting to grow their community schools from a few to a system-wide program and those exploring the potential role of local colleges and universities will benefit from the information, insights, and ideas shared. While the programs offered, the leadership of key partners, and the talents of site coordinators are essential to community schools, the organization of the effort, the resilience of the community, and the persistence of the relationships matter too. Whether the community schools model is just being tested or the concept is fully imbedded in the culture of a community, the lessons learned in Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers can be useful. Community schools are more than an educational reform tactic; they are the essential building blocks of our democratic society in the United States.

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Dick held several administrative positions in 41 and 1/2 years at the University of Dayton. He retired in December 2014. In 2001, he began full-time service as executive director of the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community. He team-taught the *Leadership in Building Communities seminar* for the past 20 years. He helped initiate and direct Dayton's Neighborhood School Centers, an initiative of the Dayton Foundation, Dayton Public Schools, the City of Dayton, Montgomery County, United Way, and the Fitz Center. He is a 1973 graduate of the University of Dayton (B.A. in English) and a 1993 graduate of The Ohio State University School of Public Policy and Management (M.A. in Public Policy). His wife, Susan, is director of the Center for Catholic Education in the UD School of Education and Health Sciences. They have three grown sons, two daughters-in-law, and a beautiful granddaughter and grandson.

Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., Ph.D.

Father Ferree Professor of Social Justice

Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M. was the longest-serving president in the University of Dayton's history. He stepped down from his position after 23 years in June 2002 and now works in the Fitz Center for Leadership in Community as the Father Ferree Professor of Social Justice. This position works to connect Catholic social teaching and the social sciences through the community-building mission of the Center. In 2015, Brother Ray received the prestigious Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for Leadership Excellence in Higher Education from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities.

In the region, Brother Ray facilitates conversations that address the "wicked problems" of the cycle of poverty. His major focus is on how our community can move parents and children out of poverty. He was the initial chairperson of the Montgomery County Family and Children First Council and has served on the Executive Committee of the Council. Brother Ray works with Fitz Center colleagues on the Neighborhood School Centers project and is chair of the Dayton Public Schools Family and Community Engagement Council.

Prior to becoming the University of Dayton's 17th president in 1979, Brother Ray spent a decade in a variety of University-related positions, ranging from a faculty member in the School of Engineering to executive director of the Center for Christian Renewal. He entered the Society of Mary, a Roman Catholic religious order, and began his studies at the University of Dayton in 1960. In 1964, he graduated with honors with a B.S. in electrical engineering. He holds an M.S. and Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Polytechnic University.

Footnotes

ⁱ From 2000-2004, a CHESP sub-grant (part of University of Pennsylvania's national WEPIC Replication Project) helped support UD's service-learning partnership with nearby Patterson-Kennedy School (750 students). The University of Dayton and Patterson-Kennedy shared a neighborhood in transition and a commitment to community involvement. CHESP results included a lead paint awareness campaign, tutoring, ESL support, after-school programs, physical education for special needs classes, parent and teacher workshops, concerts, playground upgrades, marketing and public relations, citizenship lessons, and mini-grants to PK teachers for K-6 service learning. By 2004, the positive effects of the UD-PK partnership (a model for Neighborhood School Centers) were evident at all grade levels. At PK, 150 students had participated in service or community-building lessons, while overall activity involved 35 PK teachers, 50 UD faculty, staff and graduate assistants from 20 departments, and an average of 175 UD students per year. Though funding ended, the partnership remained intact with many UD students still involved until the school closed.

ⁱⁱ Robert Putnam in *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* aptly distinguishes between bonding and bridging social capital.

Bonding social capital is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity....Bridging networks, by contrast, are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion....Bonding social

capital constitutes a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40. (pp. 22-23)

iii The university community school model, originated at the University of Pennsylvania, been replicated nationally. From 1994-2004, 23 colleges and universities participated in the University of Pennsylvania Netter Center's national replication project, through which local sites adapted the framework of the university-assisted community school model, while an additional 75 teams of higher education, community, and school partners were trained on the model. The Netter Center now supports regional training centers on university-assisted community schools. Each year, the Netter Center hosts more than 50 visitors from colleges and universities around the country and around the globe. For more information, please visit: [University-Assisted Community Schools National Replication Project](#).

iv The number of students living within 1.5 miles of each Neighborhood School Center (and attending that school) is one important indicator of “parent choice” of neighborhood schools. The percentages of such student enrollments have increased for all five of the schools identified as Neighborhood School Centers since the origins of NSC. In fall 2014, the percentages of enrolled students living within 1.5 miles of the schools were as follows: Cleveland (73.2 percent), Ruskin (72.5 percent), Fairview (62.0 percent), Kiser (50.0 percent), and Edison (50.0 percent).

v According to the U.S. Census of Manufacturers, Dayton lost over 80 percent of its manufacturing jobs between 1947 and 2007.
