

Case Study on Building Capacity Boston Public Schools DELTAS

The only way for schools to improve their educational mission for children is to engage with the children in communities where they live. To do this requires a commitment from everyone in a school to the whole child, as well as recognition that the instructional program within the school must be connected to a program of health and well-being in the community and family.

Former BPS Superintendent Thomas W. Payzant, in *Community Schools in Action: Lessons from a Decade of Practice*, Oxford University Press, 2005

We need to provide a high quality school. That is what builds stronger communities.
BPS Superintendent Carol Johnson

Brief History

Center staff have supported Boston's leadership in the community schools movement since 1997, when the Gardner Elementary School in Allston-Brighton became one of the initial adaptation sites in the Extended-Service Schools initiative, funded by the Wallace Foundation. As the Gardner's work expanded to ConnectFive (a multi-site initiative), our staff continued to provide guidance, training and other assistance. We subsequently invited Boston Schools Superintendent Thomas Payzant to contribute a chapter to our 2005 book entitled *Community Schools in Action: Lessons from a Decade of Practice* and have worked collaboratively with the Boston Full-Service Schools Roundtable as it sought to coordinate all the community schools activity in the Boston area.

In late 2008, the Boston Public Schools asked the Center to provide intensive training and consultation to staff of the BPS Department of Extended Learning Time, Afterschool and Services (DELTAS), which expanded our role into building the capacity of the capacity-builders—BPS staff whose role is to assist 35 local community school and after-school sites. Center staff focused specifically on building the coaching skills of DELTAS managers as they work within their portfolio of sites to develop full-service schools. The mission of the DELTAS is to ensure that every student in the Boston Public Schools has access to quality out-of-school time activities and extended services. DELTAS helps remove barriers to learning and promotes well-rounded, successful students through collaborations with community organizations, health organizations, higher education institutions, families, and other government agencies.

Through many of its initiatives, DELTAS have created under the umbrella of their Triumph Collaborative of the 35 schools that incorporate various components that constitute their development of a full service schools. Funding sources are grants from the 21st CCLC; United Way of Massachusetts Bay; Boston Afterschool and Beyond; and Massachusetts Department of Education's After-School/Out-of-School Time Quality Program.

Capacity-Building Activities

The 2008-9 contract between BPS and the Children's Aid National Center for community schools involved building the coaching capacity of the DELTAS team members as they work within their portfolio of sites to develop full-service schools. After an initial consultation with Department leaders, we proposed to provide a series of on-site technical assistance sessions to one pilot site around furthering the development of their full-service agenda, with the DELTAS team members serving as observers. Then a debriefing session would be conducted with the DELTAS, using a "teaching rounds" approach based on the medical model, to answer specific questions regarding the technical assistance methodology employed by our consultant. Throughout the rounds, the pilot site team and DELTAS coach were instructed in the use of a variety of tools or activities to assist in the development of action plans that would build the full-service school. The Center provided six

monthly “teaching rounds” sessions. In addition, we organized a study visit to two of our New York City community schools for 14 key staff from the Tobin School and DELTAS office.

Results to Date

The Tobin team has developed clear goals in moving their full-service schools agenda and demonstrated a clearer vision and alignment with these plans. Each of their working subcommittees—which are organized around the Coalition for Community Schools five “conditions for learning”—has become more active and invested in its own responsibilities and in the transformation of the school. Strong principal leadership has contributed substantially to the results to date.

At the systemic level, many elements that are needed to create and support full-service schools are part of the philosophy incorporated in DELTAS work. Additional coordination and integration at the district level would advance the community schools agenda and harness the potential of different district offices that work on student and family support services. Superintendent Carol Johnson has voiced public support for increased parent and community involvement; extended learning opportunities and partnerships with outside organizations. The funding streams, though varied, continue to support current programs. The DELTAS have created many tools that can be used by school sites to assess their quality and structure the work under similar guiding principles. However, recent staff turnover may affect their infrastructure. Subsequent work could focus on how the teaching rounds approach can be extended into the overall work of the DELTAS team for all their schools and for the district as a whole.

Lessons Learned

- *Collaboration*: The Tobin School had a list of over 50 partners but how they were accountable and aligned with the outcomes for families and children was not clearly defined. The Tobin now incorporates processes for regular meetings with all program or service providers to demonstrate alignment with the school goals and outcomes.
- *Comprehensiveness*: The Center’s technical assistance has helped Tobin distinguish between service providers and committed partners who enter into agreements with the school about how they will integrate their work to better address the needs of students and families. The partners (Hospital, Mental Health, and Family Resource Center) have felt that this distinction highlights the value they add to the school and how their services are an integral part of the Tobin full-service school.
- *Coordination/Integration*: The DELTAS understand that the MELS position was created to coordinate OST and they now see the need for an overall site coordinator. They are re-evaluating how other district positions such as the MELS or Parent Coordinators could be repositioned into that of a Full Service School Coordinator. This would enhance the integration efforts and create a more coherent approach to the work.
- *Commitment*: The partners at the Tobin have become fully invested in continuing and improving their efforts toward demonstrable achievement outcomes. The DELTAS are focused on working within their own internal infrastructure to create what is needed to systemically advance the full-service school agenda within BPS.