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The Path of Most Resistance

Reflections on
Lessons Learned
from New Futures



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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

**Comprehensive Strategies for Children and Families:
The Role of Schools and Community-Based Organizations**

**Report of the July 15, 1994
White House Meeting**

September 1994

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to many people for their help in planning the July 14-15 meeting and producing this report. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Danforth Foundation provided essential funding for both activities; Tony Cipollone of the Casey Foundation and Janet Levy of the Danforth Foundation had instrumental roles in planning the discussion and reviewing this document.

Bill Galston, Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, conceived the idea for the meeting and was an observant and diplomatic facilitator. Carol Rasco, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, offered a heartfelt and insightful luncheon address. Peter Edelman, Counselor to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Tom Payzant, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education, gave perceptive and informative presentations on legislative and policy matters.

Gaynor McCown, White House Fellow, took the lead role in planning and organizing the meeting. Other planners included Terry Peterson and Judy Wurtzel, Department of Education; Margaret Dunkle, Institute for Educational Leadership; Sheldon Bilchik and Reggie Robinson, Department of Justice; and Ellen Haas, Department of Agriculture.

A special thanks to Policy Studies Associates' Leila Fiester, who documented the meeting and wrote the final report, and Elizabeth Reisner, who provided editorial guidance.

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Andre was 16 when he met Urban Family Institute president Kent Amos. Andre's father had been killed by Andre's mother eight years earlier. A self-described gangster, Andre carried a gun, dealt drugs, and had witnessed a murder. But under Amos' guidance, Andre learned to read and to enjoy simpler pleasures, like trimming a Christmas tree. Andre flourished; he became animated and alive--until a drug dealer from his past gunned him down.

"We have to understand these children run a gauntlet every day, a gauntlet of fear and terror," Amos says. "Our children are crying out to us in the only way they can. We have an obligation and a responsibility to give them more than platitudes."

Summary

Andre's compelling story was one of many shared by participants in a discussion about comprehensive strategies for helping children and families and the role of schools and community-based organizations in developing and implementing these strategies. The working meeting, held July 15, 1994, in Washington, DC under the direction of President Clinton's Domestic Policy Council, convened a diverse group of 56 people with practical insights and policy experience concerning comprehensive strategies. The group included experts on education, social services, and policy development from foundations, universities, and non-profit organizations. Participants were local practitioners; public and private funders; representatives from federal and state governments; policy analysts; academicians and researchers; consultants; and journalists.

The purpose of the meeting was to spark a broad inquiry into "going to scale" with promising programs that already exist, in response to President Clinton's premise that every problem in the United States has already been solved by someone somewhere in the nation--and that the real problem is not inventing solutions, but disseminating and replicating them. "We are drawn here by a shared understanding that most of our children and young people need more opportunities to develop and to thrive than they now enjoy....[Yet] the fragmented ways that we typically try to help them are part of the problem," said meeting moderator William Galston, deputy assistant to the President.

The meeting acknowledged the fact that in communities around the country, schools, human service agencies, and community-based organizations are collaborating to develop comprehensive strategies for helping children and families. Schools and community-based organizations are staying open in the afternoon, evenings, and on weekends to allow students, families, and community members access to recreational and educational activities; coordinating with other agencies to provide social and health services; opening their doors to parents and other community members for adult

education programs; and forging partnerships with businesses to provide on-the-job training, paid apprenticeships, and training in entrepreneurial skills. Although this meeting focused on school-based and school-linked programs, participants recognized that these efforts are only part of a larger set of issues involving comprehensive services—and that these strategies are part of a broader agenda of reform in education, health, and human services.

Domestic Policy Council staff asked participants to address the following questions:

- What are the key issues regarding the development, sustainability, and effectiveness of comprehensive strategies for helping children and families?
- What are some of the federal strategies to promote comprehensive strategies?
- What are some of the specific federal, state, and local barriers to developing school-linked or school-based comprehensive strategies?
- How might the federal government play a role in reducing these barriers?

The resulting discussion included reports from participants about activities in local communities—the “front lines” of education and social service reform, a similar assessment of state-level efforts, and an update on proposed federal legislation that will affect efforts at all levels. Although participants in the diverse group advocated differing approaches, for all participants the objective was the same: building strong children, families, and communities. As participants shared their experiences with each other and with the Administration representatives, the following themes emerged as central to current efforts and expected needs:

Effective support for children and families requires changes in philosophy and focus.

Educators and funders should shift their efforts as much as possible from fragmented, piecemeal, and often inadequate supports and services to comprehensive strategies that emphasize development, opportunities, and prevention, viewing children and young people as assets rather than bundles of problems. Moreover, children and youth are best served in the context of families, and families are best served in the context of communities.

Both schools and community-based organizations have a role in “community partnerships” that are essential to meeting the comprehensive needs of children and families. Leadership may vary among communities or even neighborhoods, and a variety of effective models exist. Regardless of who leads the effort, true collaboration requires shared planning, implementation, and assessment.

Community-building efforts should be an important component of comprehensive strategies. These efforts involve not only services but the active and meaningful engagement of all stakeholders.

Effective, comprehensive strategies require new funding structures that are more flexible and reliable than current arrangements. Possible approaches include consolidation and decategorization of federal programs, improved waiver options, and more options allowing units of local government and community-based organizations to deal directly with federal grant programs. Participants did not unanimously endorse any of these changes, however.

Comprehensive strategies must be held accountable to outcomes. Implementing this priority will require the improvement of current evaluation methods for monitoring and assessing the impact of these programs.

Certain policies, practices, and realities are barriers to comprehensive strategies. These barriers include: hostility or contradictory philosophies within entities necessary to successful collaboration; lack of trust or participation by parents or communities; an overly competitive, inflexible, or categorical funding process; differing eligibility rules for funding; lack of funding; cultural misunderstanding or insensitivity; community violence; and turf battles.

This report highlights these themes and summarizes the discussion by participants in the meeting. Enclosed as appendices to the report are a list of participants and a summary of pending legislation.

This report is intended to be a jumping-off point for further action. Domestic Policy Council staff will next determine key areas that must be addressed at the federal level and will ask federal agencies or interagency teams to develop additional plans for addressing these issues and identify existing initiatives that are relevant to comprehensive strategies for children and families. The agency plans may include:

- Recommendations, such as improved mechanisms for federal interagency coordination (e.g., consultation on policy guidance, development of agreed-upon principles, or procedures for funding comprehensive strategies)
- Possible regulatory or statutory changes
- Changes in policy guidance
- Improved or coordinated technical assistance
- Coordinated research
- Evaluation strategies

After the plans are developed, the White House will work with the agencies to develop a strategy for further efforts.

What's Happening on the Front Lines

Participants laid the groundwork for discussion by describing comprehensive efforts in selected local communities. These projects included Intermediate School (I.S.) 218 in New York City; the Beacon Schools in New York City; the Austin Project in Austin, Texas; two initiatives in Chicago sponsored by the Chicago Community Trust and the MacArthur Foundation; New Beginnings in San Diego, California; the Vaughn Family Center initiative in Los Angeles; Caring Communities in St. Louis, Missouri; Birmingham, Alabama's Community Schools; the Healthy Learners program in Miami; Kentucky's Family Resources Youth Service Center initiative; and the Youth Futures Authority in Savannah, Georgia. Participants described their projects' goals, philosophies, structure, activities, partners or collaborators, resources, and accomplishments.

Goals and Philosophies

The inspiration for most of these programs arose from community concerns. "Most successful programs have deep roots in the community. They are not 'parachuted' into communities, but carefully integrated with specific local community needs and strengths, so that local communities share a genuine sense of ownership," noted participant Lisbeth Schorr. The Beacons, for example, began as a drug reduction and prevention effort that would simply extend the school day, but a wave of crime and violence stirred interest in funding broader youth programs and led to priorities on crime prevention and community building. The inspiration also came from successful efforts already being conducted by community-based organizations within schools—and a recognition that these organizations have strengths that schools can build on, including organizational flexibility and the ability to link with communities.

Participants listed active community involvement as both a goal of comprehensive strategies and a crucial element of program success. With this orientation, the school becomes "a presence of change" in the community and students are empowered by making a positive contribution to their environment. The Urban Family Institute in Washington, DC, tries to create a "village" mentality—in which community members have clear expectations of positive behavior and achievement—by providing intervention, guidance, and support to at-risk children and youth. A Beacon School in Central Harlem built community support by asking residents to clear their cars from the school block every weekday morning so children could play in the street. Young people established connections with the community by going from door to door asking residents to agree to the plan, and residents had to make a conscious commitment to support the effort and create a safe place for children. Slowly, the relationship grew; now students help keep the street clean and have raised money to plant trees on the block. Beyond the block, students help register voters and hold hunger drives to feed

homeless people. "We're trying to give people a sense that Central Harlem is a place on the rise," explained Geoffrey Canada, president of Rheedlen Centers for Children and Families. "We wanted to instill a desire to become part of that change."

Community and neighborhood involvement is closely related to building family strength and individual empowerment. "Successful programs do not work with one generation alone, but with two and often three," Lisbeth Schorr observed. "Successful schools, Head Start programs, and family support centers make special efforts to nurture parents so they can nurture their children." The Beacons, for example, focus on the "upbeat factors" associated with healthy development and create opportunities to cultivate those elements:

- Caring adults are available for interaction with young people consistently and during extended hours. "Programs alone are not enough," said one Beacons representative; the school offers "somewhere to go, something to do, someone to be with."
- Beacon schools use high expectations and clear standards to establish respect and motivate achievement for the neighborhood and school.
- Participating students have opportunities to engage in the same high-quality after-school and weekend activities as more economically advantaged students.

The Chicago Community Trust Initiative, described by University of Chicago professor Harold Richman, also builds on the notions of investment and community building—not merely services to children—to serve children and families. Richman and others make a distinction between asset-oriented services that promote youth development, and deficit-oriented efforts that focus on treatment. "We'll succeed when it's as easy to enroll a kid in Little League and to buy a uniform as it is to buy an hour of counseling," Richman said. The community trust's strategy was to "broaden and deepen the sense of what it means to deal with a child," Richman said: Broaden by including activities such as Little League or library visits as much as traditional services, and deepen by involving all levels of government. The resulting \$30 million project in seven Chicago communities revolves around collaborations that are representative of each community.

The Barrier: Institutions that deal with only a small part of people's lives
The Solution: Expand the range of services in response to community needs to include literacy, sports, and community efforts that benefit children and families

In one racially mixed community in Chicago, a very traditional library used the Community Trust collaboration to create a Little League team. When the team wins, each player receives a book instead of the traditional T-shirt. When the team loses, players get a story hour. Players' parents also meet at the library. In another community a library holds a "lock-in" sleepover for neighborhood children, who read together and tell ghost stories.

New Beginnings in San Diego, which placed integrated social and health services at a school-based center, began as a partnership among public agencies with the goal of making the service delivery system more holistic and responsive to clients. New Beginnings focuses on serving families rather than individual children, with a prevention-oriented approach that uses public funding where possible.

A foundation representative noted that local program administrators have to be trusted—and allowed—to make their own decisions regarding program operations. Administrators at all levels must face some tough issues, including what services should be offered, who should have access to them, how the quality of services can be improved, how continued funding can be obtained, what structures are needed to operate the program, and who should be responsible for decision making.

Several programs, including New Beginnings and the Vaughn Family Center initiative in Los Angeles, turned to parents to help establish goals and make decisions. The Vaughn Family Care Center program—a collaboration between the Los Angeles Educational Partnership and the United Way—devoted an entire year to planning, with the mission of eliminating educational barriers in a community of high crime, single-digit test scores, and families so poor that some lived in chicken coops or cars. Parents identified a need to focus on health services and child care. "My job is not to set the agenda...but to hold up mirrors in front of this community and say, 'See how brilliant you are? See how much you know?' and to turn up the light," said program director Yoland Trevino. The result? "Nobody asked for parenting classes...[or] financial help," Trevino said wryly. "They were asking for opportunities to do for themselves." Through a partnership with Head Start and a local child care resource center, the program began to address the community's child care needs; now, 20 homes provide licensed care. A partnership between a local hospital and the UCLA Medical

Center provides education and prenatal support services to expectant families, using trained mothers in the community as mentors.

Similarly, based on needs identified by a parent group, a collaboration in Miami established a bilingual information center in the school, staffed by trained parent volunteers. The center has served more than 500 families that are more comfortable with the volunteers than with traditional counselors or social workers, giving the professional counselors more time to perform other work. The program also negotiated with the school to open its library in the evenings for monitored homework sessions. These after-school sessions now serve about 200 students a day, with aides provided by the parents' group or paid by the local Boys and Girls Clubs.

The student-operated CARES Program in Birmingham allows participants to set their own agenda. This initiative brings social service agencies into the school on a weekly basis to address student needs. Activities include AIDS awareness and testing; special classes in schools, churches, and community centers; paid employment, community service credit, and free training for youth as tutors for younger students; counseling; a dropout prevention program funded by the Job Training Partnership Act; nutrition education; GED classes; and computer instruction.

In some cases, such as Caring Communities in St. Louis, inspiration for a comprehensive program came from a combination of efforts by state agencies (i.e., Health, Mental Health, Social Services, and Elementary and Secondary Education) and private concerns (i.e., the Danforth Foundation). In these cases, participants noted the importance of uniting multiple providers under one vision with a strong director. Caring Communities, which provides school-based comprehensive services, focused on addressing the fragmentation of available services, lack of access to services, and the challenge faced by schools in dealing with children's multiple problems. Like other programs described in the meeting, Caring Communities' goals included promoting school success for all children, increasing safety for children and families, and building a moral and ethical foundation in the community to increase family support and improve opportunities for education, housing, and employment. "Communities are to families what families are to children," said Director Khatib Waheed. "To focus on one without focusing on the other would be a serious mistake."

Caring Communities' activities include an early-morning latch-key program for school-age children with working parents, co-dependency counseling intervention, behavior therapy, periodic "respite nights" for parents in which students participate in a sleepover at the school, and drug marches and rallies in the community. These activities, which reaffirm the program's commitment to the community, often have dramatic results.

The Barrier: Violence that hinders access to services

The Solution: Using programs to establish a community support system, not just to provide services to individuals

In 1993, the father of a student at a Caring Communities school tried to organize his neighbors to push drug dealers out of the community. Under threats from the dealers, however, he stopped—until Caring Communities began anti-drug marches on his block. After 20 community members attended a meeting in the man's home, his house was fire-bombed. Caring Communities responded by holding a support rally with 100 participants, and Caring Communities members stayed in the man's gutted house every night for two weeks to protect his home. The drug dealing decreased.

"This ~~was~~ a support system we felt we had to provide," said Director Khatib Waheed. "These are the kinds of challenges many of us need to face if we're really going to deal with the problems children face...in order for families to feel a sense of hope."

Finally, participants noted that it is not enough simply to add new services; comprehensive strategies must focus on clear and specific outcomes, addressing what comes out of a program as well as what goes into it.

Location and Structure

Participants agreed that comprehensive programs can be located at a variety of sites and controlled by a variety of stakeholders, as long as the program is accessible, versatile, and family-oriented. For example, after conducting an extensive feasibility study of parents and front-line workers in education and social services, New Beginnings' planners realized that parents viewed schools as a place that they trusted—but didn't think that schools had a system for providing services. Thus the school became the site for New Beginnings services, but the program added extensive partnerships to form a structure that reached far beyond the site.

Educators in Kentucky based comprehensive services at Family Resource and Youth Service Centers within schools because they viewed schools as the institutions that were most accessible to all community members, said Charles Terrett, superintendent of schools in rural Fulton County, Kentucky. Operating under a formal agreement among the schools, social service agencies, and business community, the Centers focus on building community pride, involvement, and program ownership.

Locating comprehensive services at school sites can help solve a "disconnect" between schools and communities and clarify the relationship between the two, said an organizer of the Beacon Schools in New York. Geoffrey Canada said the group chose an old, run-down elementary school in Central Harlem as one of the first Beacon sites because "it was extremely important to us to face the same challenges that children and communities face in making collaborations work." This was not a hollow choice; the day before the school re-opened under the Beacon plan, a man was fatally shot in front of the school. But with its year-round schedule, open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to at least 11 p.m., this Beacon School now offers a safe zone where children can learn and play.

I.S. 218 in New York City demonstrates the power of a school site working in collaboration with a community-based organization, in this case the Children's Aid Society. The school is open six days a week, from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., for before- and after-school programs, teen and job-related programs, and adult education. More than 1,300 students and 1,000 parents use the school weekly; services include a health and dental clinic and an in-school store, and assemblies draw standing-room-only crowds. Success came from developing "real, organic" partnerships between the entities instead of a host-and-guest arrangement, said Children's Aid Executive Director Philip Coltoff. The impact: "Before, the community was isolated from the schools," said I.S. 218 principal Mark Kavarsky. The effort also has had an "internal" impact on families who now view the school more positively and have become involved in designing new programs.

The question of location is not simple; sometimes, programs occur at a combination of sites. New Beginnings, for example, found it most effective to work with families of preschoolers in the place where parents are most comfortable--their homes. In conjunction with home visits, however, a Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program clinic is available three times a month at the New Beginnings school, providing a nonthreatening way to help families make connections with other services. Clients don't come to New Beginnings in convenient, class-sized groups, noted San Diego Schools Administrator Jeanne Jehl; staff must try to reach clients individually and as families.

Location needs also vary depending on activities. The Caring Communities program in St. Louis found that adults participating in evening education activities at the school felt threatened by the presence of youth participating in after-school programs at the same site. Although this situation was not a defining issue for the program, it did raise complications that leaders had to address.

The Austin Project emphasizes neighborhoods, not schools, in order to promote full employment, strong communities, and healthy children and families. The project, which serves 50,000 Hispanic and African American residents with incomes below the poverty level, has no eligibility requirements other than residence in the targeted neighborhood. The project's support

structure relies on tax abatements, waivers, and money from private capital markets. However, the project began with the backing of the "white, upper-middle class and upperclass power structure" in Austin—not with a structure that solicited involvement by the targeted community. In an attempt to rectify this gap, the project established five neighborhood development committees, whose locally elected members form part of a larger advisory council; at least half of the project's \$100 million budget will be controlled by these committees. In addition, project leaders decided to rehire the social workers who will be displaced by the planned system reforms, in part so that they will not become barriers to the project.

Although the structure and leadership of comprehensive strategies varies, all successful programs share a view that people who are to be "served"—children, families, and community members—must have a significant role in identifying their own needs as well as designing and operating programs. The Vaughn Family Center in Los Angeles, for example, uses an advisory committee of whom half are parents and half are service providers, public agency representatives, and public officials, in order to "equalize" the relationship between service providers and recipients. Approximately 25 parents volunteer daily to help teachers at the family center.

Partnerships and Collaborations

Successful partnerships require preparation and true collaboration, participants said. "We only wanted [the I.S. 218 program] if it was going to be a partnership...and we were not going to be invited out once we started to cause trouble," said Children's Aid's Coltoff—a statement echoed by others. In the case of I.S. 218 and Children's Aid, the agency insisted on a legal resolution ratified by local boards of education that invited the organization into the school. "That was very important in terms of the structure and our ability to participate from the beginning of the project," Coltoff said. Now, "we're accomplishing as a social service agency what we believe in...and we're finding educators aren't too tough to deal with."

Partnerships also require flexibility. Although the Beacon Schools program provides guidelines for each participating site, the structure and activities of each site are individually tailored by local community advisory councils that consider each site's cultural, size, and demographic differences. The Chicago Community Trust collaborations are dominated by "citizen collaborators," not professionals, according to Harold Richman. As a result, commitment is strong—but progress is slow. "When you're trying to work with a community from the bottom up, ability is variable and it takes time," Richman advised.

All collaborations require attention to leadership, noted Edward Tetelman, director of legal and regulatory affairs for the New Jersey Department of Human Services. New Jersey's School-Based Youth Services program has learned the following lessons about leadership:

- Strong state leadership can keep programs politically viable at state and local levels
- Local collaborators need plans that address both core services and optional service needs
- States should be flexible and avoid establishing extensive hierarchies when they create state and local collaborations
- Collaborative programs that are spread across all areas of the state reinforce statewide investment—programmatically and politically
- State technical assistance to local collaborations is crucial to success

It isn't always easy for foundations and government agencies to form partnerships with communities, but it is essential for foundations to try, several participants said. One problem is that many collaborations involve subordinate-superordinate relationships rather than equal partnerships. "The pain of watching foundations ask communities to be partners...and then [showing] their own inability to model that behavior is very corrosive" to efforts, explained Richman. The same problem exists in some partnerships between public agencies and local communities. "We have not clearly articulated what the terms of such partnerships might be," Richman warned—and until those terms are clear, local communities are likely to view public agencies with distrust. Finally, if programs are to become self-sufficient, collaborators must learn to trust local administrators to make their own decisions.

Resources

Many projects draw from a variety of funding sources and find that funding must constantly be considered. The Beacons, for example, receive direct funding from New York City but also help sites draw child welfare funding from city agencies and blend these sources to form a basis for programs. The politics of funding can have an impact on programs beyond material support, however. In the first round of Beacon funding, political issues prevented the local board of education from participating in Beacon site planning; now that those issues have been resolved, a joint decision-making process allows principals from the schools targeted for change to become more involved.

Some programs encountered unexpected funding dilemmas. When the Vaughn Family Center in Los Angeles gained charter school status and the new school found it could save \$1 million through more effective practices, auditors wanted the school to return the saved money. "What incentives are there to be accountable?" asked Yoland Trevino. "If you're making a difference, they punish you."

Participants also described cultivating human resources to build support for comprehensive strategies. Beacon Schools are organized around membership rather than a client-provider relationship; participants have identification cards and are asked to contribute their time to the program. "Everybody who comes is seen as a resource instead of someone who wants something," said Michele Cahill, a Beacon funder. Tania Alameda, director of Miami's Bureau of Children's Affairs, agreed:

We have got to rely on our families as resources. They may be dysfunctional in some ways, but they are very functional in others. We have to learn how to identify those strengths in families....If we rely more on their expertise, we're going to feel a lot more satisfaction and have a lot more help in what we're trying to accomplish.

The Barrier: Health needs that affect education

The Solution: Cultivating parent and community involvement; focusing efforts on families and communities as well as children

When Tania Alameda realized that many children in Miami were missing significant amounts of school—as many as 60 days a year—because of head lice, she organized parents to solve the problem. The parent group formed a "Lice Busters" patrol; armed with a small vacuum cleaner, detergent, and donated treatment supplies, parents visited the homes of children with the most severe cases. One parent even gave haircuts.

The Lice Busters' success increased parent involvement at school in other ways, as educators began asking parents for advice on improving attendance. When parents offered to visit the homes of absent students to help address the extenuating circumstances—health needs, lack of clothing, or parents' scheduling problems—contributing to truancy, the principal agreed to help. She gave parents access to normally confidential home addresses—and then watched the attendance rate shoot from last to first place in the district.

Accomplishments

In addition to the stories of individual lives saved, participants described the development of program infrastructure, improvements in academic achievement, and positive impacts on communities

as major accomplishments. Building on its infrastructure, the Beacon project has noted decreased crime rates and increased reading skills. Caring Communities focuses on mental health and removing other barriers to education so that teachers can focus on academic improvement.

Urban Family Institute founder Kent Amos had many success stories from his experience of "adopting" 87 urban youth into his own home. Seventy-three of these youth attended college, 49 graduated from college, and 7 obtained advanced degrees. The Vaughn Family Center's Trevino was also able to provide hard outcomes. Test scores for students in this program rose 48 percent, the high transiency rate among students fell, and the attendance rate improved from "horrific" to 99 percent. Trevino also described her program's success in eliminating the "us versus them" mentality that fosters gang rivalry. When Trevino noticed one self-described gangster urinating outside the school, she learned that he felt unwelcome inside the building—so she invited him to join her "gang." That youth is now the center's program coordinator. "If we create this kind of opportunity for youth, the money you provide for gang diversion will not be necessary," she told meeting participants.

Accomplishments can be difficult to assess, however; program evaluation is an important aspect—and predicament—that most participants noted. Furthermore, services, programs, goals, and structures alone do not guarantee success. One participant likened the situation to a game of musical chairs in which 12 players compete for eight chairs:

We tend to blame the participants because they don't get a chair. We want them to move quicker, position themselves better, try harder. We should really look at the game: Four people are always going to be left out....We can only do so much with support services and counseling, and then people have to find a way to live.

What Needs to Be Changed?

Participants discussed many barriers that they have experienced or anticipate. In some cases, participants suggested needed policy changes; in other cases, they simply warned colleagues about situations that can be avoided or ameliorated.

What Are the Barriers and Where Do They Come From?

Participants identified the following challenges to developing and implementing comprehensive strategies for children and families:

Philosophical barriers. Community-based activities require providers and planners to have a philosophical "investment" in providing adequate services, supports, and opportunities for children and families. "Every day, the normal world...is fighting this philosophy," said one participant. For example, the parents of students not targeted by comprehensive strategies often have trouble understanding the need for the services within schools and may oppose them. Such "hostility" makes it important to regularly reiterate the underlying vision of the initiative, focusing on positive development rather than punishment and control.

Effective programs take nothing for granted; goals, issues, and services must be revisited and addressed continuously. In particular, effective community participation is "a hard-won treasure"; the goal of participation and development of the capacity to participate are not givens and must be addressed early in a program's evolution, participants said. Programs may have to cultivate participation skills in community members. One participant described holding three informal meetings for every one formally scheduled by her program—one meeting to explain to parents what they would be expected to discuss, one to hold the actual discussion, and one to evaluate the discussion and formulate responses.

Effective programs also must solicit feedback from clients at least as much as from experts, several participants said. In Miami, an attempt to create a full-service school—combining education and access to multiple social services under one roof—failed at first because it provided services selected by experts, not families, a participant said. After realizing their mistake, planners successfully redesigned the school with only eight agencies providing services—but chose the services most wanted and used by families.

Funding barriers. In addition to the funding issues discussed earlier, the nature of funding for comprehensive programs can present barriers. The bidding process for state and federal grants creates competition rather than collaboration, many participants said, leading programs to "cannibalize" each other. Even after funds are awarded, different providers may retain a competitive orientation. Programs need to find ways to erase the distinctions between providers and focus on common goals, participants said. "We've learned that cooperation is easy, but collaboration hurts a little bit," said one participant.

In some cases, state and federal funding is so inflexible that programs are unable to address certain issues that affect school attendance, participants said. Many called for fewer federal restrictions linked to funding, which would allow programs greater flexibility to address needs that affect students' ability to attend school—say, to purchase eyeglasses. Leaders of the Lice Busters group, for example, had to turn to donations to pay for lice detergent because Medicaid would not cover it. Other programs find it difficult to use federal funding to pay for staff development, transportation, and evaluation. "Maybe all we need from the federal government is a little help and empowerment to make our own decisions," said a participant from a rural area.

The categorical nature of federal programs "forces us to squeeze people into boxes and then go around trying to find ways around the boxes," agreed a participant from an urban area. Chapter 1, the Job Training Partnership Act, and Medicaid are among the programs that should allow schools and agencies to provide services to all members of communities in which a high percentage of members meet program guidelines, several participants said. Categorization "labels the poor as special, needy people, which they are not," said one, adding that the problems addressed by these categorical programs are not limited to poor people. But decategorization is not a simple solution, nor is categorization the only barrier, other participants warned; it is naive to think that simply decategorizing funding will solve these complex issues.

The multiple eligibilities required for various similar but separate federal programs also produce funding barriers, participants said; the differences among requirements create inefficiencies and make it difficult for children and families to qualify for the services they need. Eligibility requirements such as the assets tests used by AFDC, the food stamp program, and in some states Medicaid, are particularly troubling because they pose access barriers to major federal programs that meet basic family needs, said consultant Sarah Shuptrine. "The asset test for the family automobile should be eliminated if we want families to be able to get to work, training [opportunities], and health care," Shuptrine said.

Health care financing presents another barrier to comprehensive strategies, by making it difficult for schools to be access points for health services. Recent trends in health care, including managed care, pose significant barriers to financing school health by restricting access to providers or failing to cover basic preventive and primary care. Under many plans, schools will not be reimbursed for all the health services they provide to students—making a comprehensive approach to student well-being less feasible. In addition, schools find it extremely difficult to obtain Medicaid reimbursement for health services because of the heavy paperwork burden and because they are unable to bill Medicaid until they have first billed families: in poor communities, billing families generates overwhelming paperwork but little revenue.

Cultural and contextual barriers. Cultural issues present additional barriers; these are solved only by extensive community outreach and a willingness to adapt to local context. For example, the Vaughn Family Center in Los Angeles discovered that pregnant Latino women in the community were not using existing health services because doctors and nurses treated them impersonally. "[Latinos are] not going to tell you anything about ourselves unless we have established a relationship with you," said center director Trevino.

Rampant violence in some communities also complicates comprehensive programs because it requires them to focus on providing safe havens and transportation to children and families, in addition to actual services. Transportation, affordable housing, personal safety, and other basic human needs were recurrent issues that many participants identified as major barriers to program implementation.

Additional barriers identified by participants include:

- Lack of time allowed by funding cycles to develop collaborations
- Squabbles over turf and terminology
- Parents' lack of trust in agencies, government entities, and schools
- Differing confidentiality requirements of schools, medical providers, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the school lunch program, and other providers, which sharply limit information sharing and make it difficult to reduce duplicative paperwork for families and providers
- The political risks required to cause change—"We're talking about changing a bureaucratic system in which a lot of people have financial investment," cautioned one participant. "When you go into the structure...and start empowering those at the bottom of the food chain, that is not going to go over well."

- The "squeeze effect" that occurs in top-down, bottom-up reforms when the players in the middle—often local bureaucrats and service providers—no longer have a role to play or are asked to change substantially, and therefore resist the reform. Collaborations that may displace workers or need union support require strong communication among stakeholders to avoid resistance that can undermine progressive change.
- The difficulty of finding funding for capital budgets or infrastructure for community-based organizations. For example, state-of-the-art technology is a much-needed tool for documenting and implementing programs

What Are the Solutions? State and Local Responses

Participants proposed many solutions, some of which were hotly debated. Some solutions are transitional, while others require long-term commitment. The following menu of ideas represents the breadth of suggestions made by participants and is not an integrated plan; inclusion in this list does not indicate that consensus was reached on a particular solution:

Funding changes.

Funding streams:

- Re-examine the sources of revenues used for funding comprehensive efforts—whether through new or old taxation systems, new financing, or creative strategies for leveraging private funding. Examine the costs, effects, and political feasibility of each to find the most effective approach. Apply the same rigorous standard of return on investment that the private sector uses.
- Change federal eligibility rules to reduce barriers to federal programs. Eliminate the asset tests for family automobiles for recipients of AFDC, food stamps, and Medicaid.
- Promote funding linkages by establishing a new fund for investment in children, families, and communities that requires health, housing, transportation, and education systems to collaborate.
- Direct the federal government to take responsibility for negotiating state matching agreements. Allow states to negotiate rates for different programs; this would likely result in more funding that targets prevention and early intervention programs.
- Consider allowing units of local government and community-based organizations to bypass state governments and negotiate funding directly with the federal government if the state is uncooperative. However, some participants cautioned that cities and counties may need that requirement to enforce collaboration with the state, and others noted that bypassing states would not be a simple or productive solution.

Availability:

- Ensure that funding is permanent, stable, and reliable—not just allocated through demonstration grants—so programs can concentrate on maintenance of effort. "Some of you people are doing heroic things, but you're spending half your time on grant applications," noted one participant. "When we fix these kinds of systems, we cannot stop the fix when they cost too much money," said another. State and local governments and other organizations sometimes cannot match demonstration funding after it expires.
- Streamline the federal funding system by providing multi-year funding on a basis other than entitlement. Year-to-year funding is wasteful, inefficient, and encourages funding fads.

Competition and collaboration:

- Reduce the competition created by the federal discretionary grant process, which sets up "isolated islands" of change but excludes many other needy sites. Instead, concentrate on building links among all types of comprehensive efforts.
- Encourage state funding reforms, because fragmented state funding streams contribute to turf issues at the local level.
- Recognize that funding cuts for programs with large, single sources of funding, while not desirable, can motivate the program to build a stronger base by collaborating with private funders and diverse agencies.

Focus:

- Fund prevention efforts, not just crisis programs. Prevention programs have the additional advantage of being less stigmatizing for participants.
- Grant federal waivers to local programs where needed so they are able to implement comprehensive, radical improvements; consider statewide research and demonstration waivers.
- Retain arts and sports programs as legitimate funding recipients. "Everywhere you go, it's the first thing that's dropped...and then [communities] are concerned about young people and gangs," noted a project funder.

Accountability and evaluation:

- Improve accountability measures to gain a better understanding of who receives services, why, and with what results. Accountability works two ways, noted some participants: programs must answer to service recipients as well as politicians. One participant urged policy makers to link accountability for desired outcomes to the budget process.

- Evaluate program cost-effectiveness as well as achievements.
- Link funding to success rather than failure. "Getting money depends on the failure of programs, the failure of education," said one participant. As a result, programs aim for "studied mediocrity: You try to make things better but not so much better that you lose your job."

Philosophical changes.

Collaboration and community building:

- Have the federal government model collaboration in the ways that departments work together.
- Look at school, health, and education reforms not as separate reforms but as complementary components of "positive development."
- Market collaboration more aggressively among relevant service systems—both from the top down and from the bottom up—to build investment. Continue marketing efforts after collaboration begins.
- Emphasize community building when considering incentives and program evaluation, and consider how new interventions will affect communities. Comprehensive strategies and community building are not the same thing; for example, centers that offer one-stop shopping for a wide service area may force recipients to leave their local communities.
- Focus on empowering site-based professionals, neighborhood organizations, and families. Parent and community involvement is crucial.

Focus and approach:

- Don't focus on existing or potential barriers; be patient and remain optimistic. Don't let concerns about funding, facilities, or staffing prevent the establishment of effective programs or services, one participant advised: "If we are going to get stuck on barriers we have not confronted yet, we're never going to do anything." Maintain an evolutionary, long-term perspective on serving families and children; don't expect quick solutions.
- Require new projects to be built on best practice and research, not failed but familiar programs.
- Build backward from desired outcomes to design your efforts. Focus on outcome-driven projects based on a vision of a continuum of care and support that addresses children's various developmental stages. Focus on issues, not programs, that affect access and capacity for education—such as violence.

- Resist the urge to view school-based services as an innovation that will fix flaws in the education system. Comprehensive services do not let schools off the hook regarding other needed education reforms.
- Don't try to make all changes in all places at once. Concentrate resources in areas where you can demonstrate the applicability of the effort on a large scale.
- Focus on learning as development and schools as operating in concert with a "whole continuum of learning, in and out of school."
- Be realistic. Do not oversell programs; realize that they must operate within a broader social context that is affected by many contradictory forces.

Evaluation:

- Reduce the "hostility barrier" between program and evaluation components.
- Use evaluation data—regarding services, clients, families, and assessment processes—as a planning tool as well as a measurement of program success.

Program and service changes.

Collaboration and community building:

- In addition to formal programs, establish informal networks of supplemental services to address needs that don't fit into clear categories or that fall through the cracks. Remove the barriers between these and more formal education programs.
- Be certain that current reform efforts in education, welfare, and health care support rather than inhibit comprehensiveness and collaboration.
- Provide a continuum of care to children, families, and communities, with new elements added at each developmental stage; make transitions between programs smoother.
- Recognizing that community building is a difficult task, allocate more funding to prepare and sustain community-building efforts. Broaden the type of community involvement activities that programs can use federal funding to support.
- Find more innovative uses and better management systems for public spaces.

Focus and approach:

- Pay more attention to providing mental health services and find a better way to fund these services.
- Be serious about outreach. "We have a come-and-get-it system, [but] we need to be in homes, helping people access services," one participant said.

- Be aware of cultural differences and complexities. The Austin Project is one of several in which the complex politics and relationships between client groups—in this case the indigenous Mexican American, immigrant Mexican, and African American populations—can have an impact on the effectiveness of the program. "Errors have been avoided just by trying to understand that these are different groups of people," said one project director.
- Find better ways to institutionalize the effort to connect individual children and families with the services they need, in particular by improving training for program staff responsible for matching clients with services.

Structural changes.

- Recognize the difference between social services, which build dependence, and social support, which assists families and communities in rearing children effectively. Instead of only doing things to or for clients, include clients as full partners in planning and discussions.
- Improve the methods used to evaluate comprehensive efforts. Develop and use evaluation tools that measure empowerment and community building; emphasize knowledge development strategies and build co-learning models. "We need evaluations that take family empowerment seriously...and involve families in constructing at least some part of the evaluation," urged a research director. "The strategies we come up with have to be diverse enough and accommodating enough to deal with the community folks, the organizations, the families, and at the same time [outside evaluators]."
- Teach service recipients how to use the political process to bring about change. Increase political savvy at all levels. "We are insufficiently political in marketing our approach. It's not enough to be able to do the right thing," said one participant.
- To resolve turf issues and break the tendency of some agencies to deal only with their own constituencies, the federal government could consider requiring that states determine the allocation of federal funding that flows through them by using a collaborative process involving major state service providers and agencies.

Administrative changes.

- Promote state and local leadership. State leadership at the governor's level is crucial to sustainable, systemic change because it gives state departments clear goals to focus on and permission to collaborate on meeting the needs of families and communities. Although direct funding connections between local communities and the federal government are useful, state leadership must cooperate in order to make longterm change occur.
- To build support for state and local efforts, involve prominent government leaders in articulating the emerging vision of the changes that are required to better serve children and families. Consider convening federal auditors and inspectors-general to

discuss their roles and determine how they could reward high quality and vision, rather than taking punitive positions.

- Make federal regulations easier to understand. "The language is so tough...it's onerous to people in small districts [who] are not specialists," one participant explained.
- Use the information highway to administer programs more effectively. Use electronic databases to enroll program applicants, verify their eligibility, and coordinate services and benefits at one time. Establish a single client identification number, such as the social security number, that will facilitate this process.

No matter what reforms they advocated, all participants urged the federal government to take strong, immediate action to address the barriers outlined earlier. There was an overwhelming consensus that experts and those on the front lines know well what needs to be done. Now they want support in doing it. "I don't think you ought to wait three years," said a state legislator. "You ought to do it next week, or maybe next month."

The Administration Response

Carol Rasco, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy, emphasized the importance of taking action—of finding "that fine line" that federal, state, and local players all can walk to improve collaboration. "Often, we aren't there to help [communities] build their dreams," conceded Rasco, a former teacher, counselor, state policy maker, and community activist. Rasco advocated efforts that bring together groups of people in local communities and help them realize what they can do through a problem-identification, problem-solving process. She reiterated the view expressed by many participants that families and communities must be an integral part of designing comprehensive strategies; solutions must be built from the bottom up, not imposed from the top down.

Rasco assured participants that the federal government is trying to build flexibility into its policies to allow communities to conduct their own strategic planning and create environments that foster collaboration among communities, foundations, and state or local agencies. Although she said it is too early to define a national youth policy, Rasco and William Galston have targeted late 1994 for action on developing such a policy; probably with an interagency group including Domestic Policy Council members.

Asked to address the problem of political pressures that result in resources spread too thinly to be effective in some communities, Rasco said the Administration's Empowerment Zones are a

movement toward concentrating resources. "We are also leaving room for foundations and other organizations to make themselves available to new projects," she noted. Collaborative relationships are key to success, Rasco added: "It would be wonderful if foundations would cultivate collaboration between groups," not necessarily with extra funding but by building collaboration requirements into grants. The Empowerment Zone planners also have discussed better ways to build rigorous evaluation components into the funding process, Rasco said in response to a participant who called the current state of evaluation "a crisis."

Thomas Payzant, U.S. Department of Education assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education, told participants that his department is committed to dealing with the changes within schools caused by changes in communities and society at large. Schools will continue to be logical sites for comprehensive program centers because they are closest to families and because schools are facing dramatic changes in the services (ranging from prenatal care to adult literacy) they are expected to provide to meet demographic changes, Payzant said. Payzant acknowledged the challenge of stimulating collaboration both across all levels of government and through relationships between communities and local, state, and federal governments, and he urged participants to find a nexus between the two types of collaboration. The real challenge, he added, lies in bringing solutions to scale.

Peter Edelman, counselor to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, echoed the theme of many participants in urging the experts to focus on "rebuilding, recapturing, rediscovering the idea of community" and creating a "specific, visible, identifiable place" in the community for children and families. Edelman also advocated a philosophical shift toward viewing young people as assets to be developed and toward providing incentives rather than punishment. He also emphasized the importance of focusing on outcomes. However, he recognized the difficulty communities face in assembling an effective balance of professionals, community representatives, and parents to implement change.

Clinton Administration officials already are responding to some of the needs identified by participants, Edelman said after the participants' discussion ended. These responses include: (1) discussions with developers of the Benchmarks approach in Oregon, which may have wider applications for outcomes-based initiatives; (2) discussions with officials in West Virginia and Indiana regarding negotiated decategorization in order to make funding more flexible; and (3) strong support for proposed federal legislation that provides a waiver option and negotiated local flexibility. In addition, the Administration is watching activities in several states to determine whether the federal government can play "a catalytic role" beyond funding to encourage collaborative approaches to violence prevention. Policy makers are also examining possibilities for providing technical assistance

to communities that submitted applications but are not designated as Empowerment Zones or Enterprise Communities. Other changes that may affect comprehensive strategies for children and families are embodied in the prevention portions of the crime bill, while still others, such as health and welfare reform, are still "very much open," Edelman acknowledged. The Administration's proposals include universal health coverage, which would give all children access to health care, and the establishment of more than 1,000 service centers nationally that would connect schools with communities.

Administration representatives assured participants that discussions between federal policy makers and experts in the field will continue—and that the federal government is not only sympathetic to local and state needs but is ready to act to improve policies. "We aren't always going to be able to do everything we want to do, but we'll die trying," Rasco said.

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Summary of Legislation

"Let's give our children a future. Let us take away their guns and give them books. Let us overcome their despair and replace it with hope. Let us, by our example, teach them to obey the law, respect our neighbors, and cherish our values. Let us weave these sturdy threads into a new American community that can once more stand strong against the forces of despair and evil because everyone has a chance to walk into a better tomorrow."

President William Jefferson Clinton
State of the Union Address
January 25, 1994

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Congress is well aware that policies and programs affecting children and their families must support and encourage the cooperation of existing organizations such as schools and community organizations. Several major pieces of recent or pending legislation present tremendous opportunities and challenges for schools and community-based organizations as they devise comprehensive strategies to serve children and families. The following list is not meant to be comprehensive, but it provides insight into the type of initiatives that promote comprehensive strategies.

Newly enacted or implemented legislation includes:

- **The Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community Initiative**, administered by the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Agriculture, is one of the Clinton Administration's most ambitious projects to promote community development and provide jobs and economic opportunities. Through this initiative, the federal government offers to create compacts with communities and state and local governments. More than 800 communities have submitted applications under this initiative; each application contains a comprehensive and strategic plan for change, with performance-based benchmarks. By participating in this initiative, community residents, businesses, financial institutions, service providers, neighborhood associations, and state and local governments can form or strengthen partnerships to support revitalization.
- **Goals 2000: Educate America Act**—the centerpiece of President Clinton's education agenda—recognizes and supports the need for a more comprehensive approach by providing resources to states and communities to develop and implement comprehensive education reforms aimed at helping all students reach challenging academic and occupational-skill standards. The law—which addresses school readiness; school completion; competency in challenging subject matter; science and mathematics achievement; literacy; safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools; and parental participation—asks states and local education agencies (LEAs) to create broad-

based planning groups that include educators; parents; business leaders; and representatives of health agencies, social service agencies, and community organizations that work with children and youth.

- **The School to Work Opportunities Act**, jointly administered by the Departments of Education and Labor and signed into law in May 1994, provides seed money for states and districts to develop programs that integrate challenging standards and workplace skills so that students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need enter their chosen professions or continue their education. These opportunities can enable this group—70 percent of American youth—to find employment with career potential.
- **The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994** contains significant funding for efforts to prevent crime and violence among children and youth and in communities. The Ounce of Prevention Council, with \$1.5 million available for 1995, will coordinate new and existing crime prevention programs, including many oriented toward youth; \$88.5 million will be available for competitive grants between 1996 and 2000. The Community Schools provision, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, will provide funding for supervised after-school, weekend, and summer programs. This provision will receive \$37 million in 1995 and \$530 million for 1996 through 2000. The Family and Communities Endeavor Schools (FACES) program, administered by the Department of Education, will provide \$243 million in funding for in-school and after-school activities.
- **PACT (Pulling America's Cities Together)**, administered by the Department of Justice, recognizes that the needs of children, youth, and families vary dramatically from community to community. PACT, a pilot program located in five cities, is a locally planned and operated initiative that brings together the strengths and resources of these communities to meet the needs of each locality.
- **The Family Preservation and Support Program**, authorized as part of the 1993 budget agreement, includes almost \$1 billion over five years for states to improve the well-being of vulnerable children and their families, particularly those experiencing or at risk of abuse and neglect. Because the multiple needs of these children and families cannot be addressed adequately through categorical programs and fragmented service delivery systems, states are encouraged to use the new program as a catalyst for establishing a continuum of coordinated, integrated, culturally relevant, and family focused services. Services range from preventive efforts to strengthen families by providing crucial support to services for families in serious crisis or at risk of having children removed from the home.
- **Youthbuild**, administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, was authorized as "Youthbuild (Hope for Youth)" under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1992. With \$40 million available for program implementation and development in fiscal year 1993, Youthbuild's goal is to provide economically disadvantaged youth with education, employment, and leadership skills through opportunities for meaningful work with their communities. Training includes on-site construction work and off-site academic and job skills development.

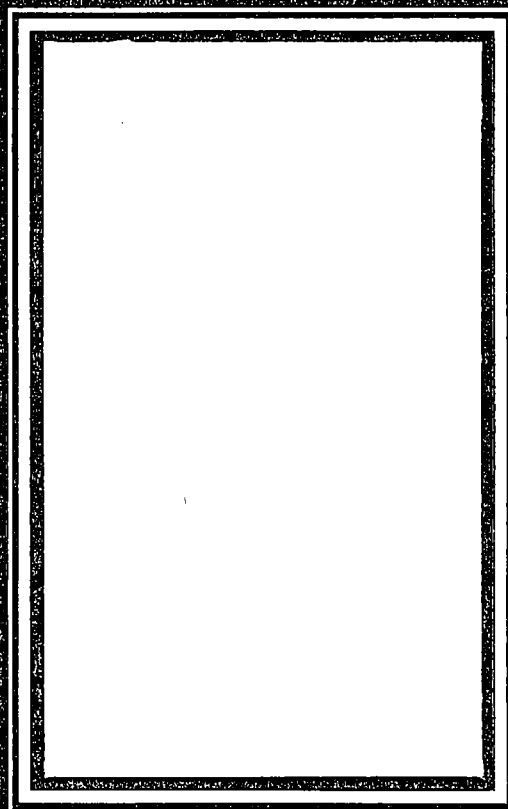
- **Head Start**, administered by the Department of Health and Human Services, has an impact on child development and day care services, the expansion of state and local activities for children, the range and quality of services for young children and their families, and the design of training for staff involved in such programs. Head Start has served more than 13.8 million children and their families since 1965; grants are awarded to local public or private non-profit agencies.

Proposed or prospective legislation includes:

- **The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)**, currently in conference, strongly encourages states and LEAs to coordinate services. ESEA's priority is high standards for all children, with the different elements needed for a high-quality education well aligned so that the education process works smoothly to help all students reach those standards. The proposal requires LEAs to identify in their Title I plans (distributed on a formula basis) exactly how they will coordinate education, health, and social services. The House and Senate versions of the bill both contain strong provisions addressing the need for collaboration.
- **The Welfare Reform Bill** would support teen pregnancy prevention programs at 1,000 middle and high schools. The programs would emphasize counseling and a skills-based approach while providing opportunities to develop sustained relationships with adults. National Service volunteers would play an important role in staffing programs.

Several other ongoing initiatives support the role of schools and community-based organizations in developing comprehensive strategies for children and families:

- **Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities**, administered by the Department of Education, supports comprehensive strategies that include drug prevention curricula and programs linking schools and communities; the version proposed for reauthorization has an increased focus on communities.
- **Youth Fair Chance**, administered by the Department of Labor, is designed to provide comprehensive employment and training services to youth (14-21 years old) and young adults (22-30 years old) in high-poverty areas of urban and rural communities.
- **Even Start**, administered by the Department of Education, is a family-focused program providing participating families with an integrated combination of early childhood education, adult literacy, basic skills instruction, and parenting education.



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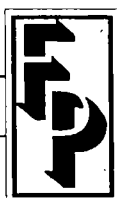


**Defining Barriers and Potential
Solutions to Creating Effective
Comprehensive, Community-
based Support Systems for
Children and Families**

April 1996

By Martin E. Orland
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Prepared for
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PREFACE

Public financing for education and an array of other children's services has become a topic of significant interest and political concern. Growing skepticism among a critical mass of American voters and taxpayers has fueled doubts about the ability of government to solve social problems and provide basic supports and services that enhance the quality of life in their communities. Voters spoke clearly in November 1994. They want more for their money. They want more and better services, but they also want balanced budgets and cuts in income and property taxes. In this time of big public deficits, they want government at all levels to operate more effectively and efficiently. They also want it to invest wisely and live within its means. On Capitol Hill in Washington, DC and in statehouses nationwide, policymakers are scrambling to respond.

Across the country, there is mounting evidence of efforts to reform and restructure education and other community supports and services in order to improve the lives and future prospects of children and their families. Critical to the success of these initiatives is the way in which they are financed. How revenues are generated and how funds are channeled to schools, human service agencies, and community development initiatives influence what programs and services are available. It determines how they are provided and who benefits from them. Financing also affects how state and local officials define investment and program priorities, and it creates incentives that guide how educators, other service providers, and community volunteers do their jobs. For these reasons, financing fundamentally affects how responsive programs and institutions are to the needs of the people and communities they are in business to serve.

In recent years, several blue ribbon commissions and national task forces have presented ambitious prescriptions for reforming and restructuring the nation's education, health, and human service systems in order to improve outcomes for children. While some have argued that public financing and related structural and administrative issues are critical to efforts to foster children's healthy development and school success, none has been framed for the specific purpose of inventively reconceptualizing public financing. Indeed, many of the most thorough and thoughtful reports have called for an overlay of new funds, but have neglected to provide cogent analyses of effective financing strategies, the costs of converting to these approaches, and the potential beneficial outcomes that might accrue from addressing financing reform as an integral aspect of program reform.

In addition, the past several years have witnessed a burgeoning of experimental efforts by mayors and city managers, governors and state agency directors, legislators and council members, program managers and school officials to make government work better and more efficiently. They have been enhanced by the work of people outside of government, including foundation executives, business and labor leaders, community organizers, and academic scholars. Some are creating new ways to raise revenues, manage schools, deliver human services, and spur community economic development. Others are designing new public governance and budgeting systems. Still others are developing and testing new approaches to more directly involve citizens in setting public priorities and maintaining

accountability for public expenditures. Taken together, these efforts suggest the nascent strands of new and improved public financing strategies.

Against this backdrop, a consortium of national foundations established The Finance Project to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public financing for education and an array of other community supports and services for children and their families. Over a three-year period that began in January 1994, The Finance Project is conducting an ambitious agenda of policy research and development activities, as well as policymaker forums and public education. The aim is to increase knowledge and strengthen the capability of governments at all levels to implement strategies for generating and investing public resources that more closely match public priorities and more effectively support improved education and community systems.

As a part of its work, The Finance Project produces a series of working papers on salient issues related to financing for education and other children's services. Some are developed by project staff; others are the products of efforts by outside researchers and analysts. Many are works in progress that will be revised and updated as new information becomes available. They reflect the views and interpretations of the authors. By making them available to a wider audience our intent is to stimulate new thinking and induce a variety of public jurisdictions, private organizations, and individuals to examine the ideas and findings they present and use them to advance their own efforts to improve public financing strategies.

This paper, *Beyond Decategorization: Defining Barriers and Potential Solutions to Creating Effective Comprehensive, Community-based Support Systems for Children and Families*, was written by Martin E. Orland and Ellen Foley. It examines the conditions that are likely to inhibit the development of effective comprehensive community-based service initiatives for children and families, even in a more deregulated policy environment. It also identifies policy directions, particularly at the state level, that appear to hold promise for overcoming these constraints. Through practitioners' views of operational barriers and potential solutions, the paper provides a greater understanding of both the promise and limitations of strategies for building more comprehensive and community-based support systems for children and their families.

Cheryl D. Hayes
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

Social service professionals, politicians, and other decision-makers are increasingly recognizing the disjuncture between the workings of the prevailing service delivery system, and well-established insights into the needs of children and families.¹ The problem is straightforward: Individual and social problems are complex and interconnected, while the delivery of children's and family services is all too often rigid, narrow, and uncoordinated. However, efforts are being made to align practice with theory. There has been increasing advocacy in recent years for comprehensive community-based support systems, which incorporate prevention-oriented, family-centered, locally controlled services. Numerous commissions, government agencies, and academics have produced reports that endorse the development of integrated service delivery systems.² Congress has passed at least 12 laws since 1991 that encourage the development of more comprehensive services for children,³ including many Clinton Administration initiatives, such as Goals 2000 and the School-to-Work Opportunities Act which contain incentives for cross-agency collaboration.

Despite this extensive rhetorical and legislative support for comprehensive initiatives, relatively little is known about the specific obstacles that such efforts can be expected to face in attempting to "do business" differently. Most existing commentaries on the subject focus primarily on the current legal and structural barriers in categorically based financing and service systems. These are cited as a primary roadblock to developing successful comprehensive, community-based support systems for children and families.⁴ For example, Dryfoos notes that, while it is technically possible to piece together categorical funds in order to finance comprehensive initiatives, this requires enormous managerial savvy, which many program administrators lack.⁵ Others observe how current categorical laws and structures

¹ Farrow & Bruner, 1993.

² See, for example, the National Commission on Children, 1991; Wynn et al., 1994; Kagan et al., 1995; and National Consensus Building Conference on School-linked, Integrated Service Systems, 1994.

³ See, for example, PL 103-252, Human Services Amendments of 1994 (Sec. 201); PL 103-322, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Sec. 40272); PL 103-382, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Sec. 1115); PL 103-66, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 (Sec. 2007); PL 103-160, the National Defense Reauthorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994 (Sec. 1339); PL 102-367, the Job Training Reform Amendments of 1992 (Sec. 492); PL 102-375, the Older Americans Act Amendments of 1992 (Sec. 703); PL 102-484, the National Defense Reauthorization Act for Fiscal Year 1993 (Sec. 195E); PL 102-569, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (Sec. 302); PL 102-586, the amendments to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Act of 1974 (Sec. 361); PL 102-590, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Services Program Act of 1992; and PL 102-236, the Abandoned Infants Assistance Act Amendments of 1991 (Sec. 3).

⁴ See, for example, Feister, 1994; Gardner, 1994; U.S. Department of Education & American Educational Research Association, 1995; and Sipe et al., 1994.

⁵ Dryfoos, 1994.

limit accountability,⁶ inhibit cross-sector collaboration, and retard flexible and innovative local practices.⁷

To be sure, while there are some inherent advantages to categorical laws and structures in targeting aid to those in need and developing technical expertise in complicated policy domains,⁸ such systems also make more seamless and comprehensive service delivery arrangements much more difficult to orchestrate. However, focusing solely on legal and structural impediments to reform provides only limited guidance in determining other types of barriers to reform and how they might be overcome.

An examination of these other barriers is particularly critical at this time. A changing federal role strongly suggests a new era of more flexible financing mechanisms. This should make it considerably easier for state and local policymakers and program officials to lift laws, regulations, and mandated eligibility and service requirements that have inhibited more comprehensive approaches. But will the elimination or easing of such legal and structural obstacles be enough to usher in a new era of widespread and effective comprehensive community-based service offerings for children and families? If not, what other barriers to success must be addressed? And what role, beyond decategorizing fragmented funding streams, can policy play in overcoming any of these obstacles?

The goal of this paper is to get "beyond decategorization," in order to understand more fully the conditions that are likely, even in a more deregulated environment, to inhibit the development of effective comprehensive community-based service initiatives for children and families. We will also identify policy directions, particularly at the state level, that appear to hold promise for overcoming these constraints. In conducting this analysis, we rely greatly on the voices and insights of current comprehensive program administrators. Through talent and perseverance, these individuals and their organizations have been able to overcome many hurdles to reform. But, as we will show, they are also well aware of the considerable obstacles that must still be overcome. By offering practitioners' views of operational barriers and potential solutions, this paper will provide a greater understanding of both the promise and limitations of legal and structural reforms in building more comprehensive and community-based support systems for children and their families.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Comprehensive, community-based support systems for children and families represent a fundamentally different approach to public service delivery. They differ from traditional servicing arrangements in four significant ways:

- *They incorporate more integrated and flexible service designs aimed at supporting the needs of children within the context of their families and communities.*

Most current children's service programs are administered by a single agency, which targets the use of funds for narrow, clearly delineated purposes (e.g., hiring substance

⁶ Gardner, 1994.

⁷ USDE and AERA, 1995.

⁸ Gardner, 1994.

abuse professionals) and places detailed restrictions on how resources may and may not be used. By contrast, comprehensive approaches blend resources and coordinate services and supports across professional domains (such as health, social welfare, education, and neighborhood development agencies) as well as public, private, and non-profit institutions. Further, the programs themselves frequently do not focus solely on the child, but also include supports to his or her family and community.

- *They place a greater emphasis on prevention-oriented services and supports.*

In traditional children's service programs, most resources are made available for treating a problem after it occurs (such as teenage pregnancy). A major objective of comprehensive designs is to prevent problematic outcomes in the first place.

- *They assign a greater role to local communities in program design, implementation, and governance.*

Most policy decisions in traditional children's and family programs are made by public agencies. In comprehensive initiatives, however, community members exercise substantial decision-making authority in defining high-priority needs and marshaling the resources and program strategies for meeting them.

- *The focus of their accountability systems is on achieving important outcomes for children and families.*

Instead of the traditional accountability system focus on measuring resource inputs (e.g., how many teacher workshops did the school system offer on classroom disruption), comprehensive initiatives attempt to measure and monitor performance in relation to achieving broad children's, family, and community goals (e.g., lowering the rate of violent incidents in and around neighborhood schools).⁹

Recently, The Finance Project conducted a thorough review of 50 comprehensive, community-based service initiatives currently operating in the United States.¹⁰ Twenty of these, representing a range of characteristics (e.g., location of the initiative, population served, types of services provided), were selected for additional study. The objective was to learn more about the perceived barriers in successfully implementing comprehensive children's and family services, as well as strategies for overcoming them. Administrators for 18 of the 20 initiatives were interviewed for approximately one hour each.¹¹

The next section of the paper attempts to document and further illuminate the nature of the barriers identified in the 18 interviews. This is followed by discussions on implications of these findings for policy reform.

⁹ Orland, Danegger & Foley, 1995.

¹⁰ Hayes, Lipoff & Danegger, 1995.

¹¹ One administrator was unable to find time for an interview, and another was unreachable.

BARRIERS TO CREATING COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Not surprisingly, comprehensive initiative administrators were able to identify several barriers to stable and effective programming.¹² Some of these were strongly associated with the laws, regulations, and requirements of current children's and family service delivery systems. Many others, however, went well beyond these structural impediments to reform.

Structural/Legal Barriers

Since each of the projects selected for study was currently providing services to children and families, it is not surprising that few interviewees claimed that their efforts were inhibited by the multiple rules and regulations of the current categorical system. Many did acknowledge however, that they needed to educate themselves regarding the nature of these rules and requirements in order to "navigate the system" successfully. As one administrator noted:

Once we knew what needed to be done and how to do it, we had to learn how to play the game, and had to learn how to be responsible for compliance, but that was just applying [what we learned].

Confidentiality requirements represent a potential barrier that, at least for this group, turned out to be less formidable than is often supposed. Access to needed data across agencies was negotiated fairly easily by most of the initiatives. In many cases, it was just a matter of finding out what the laws governing confidentiality actually said, educating the partner agencies, and developing data-sharing agreements that did not jeopardize client privacy. Confidentiality requirements did, however, sometimes provide a convenient rationale for the behavior of agency officials not wishing to share data with others, as is illustrated in this interviewee comment:

If you don't trust what they're [partner agencies] going to do with the data, you're not going to give it to them. We cut through all that nonsense by having accurate information about the laws that govern confidentiality. This was not readily available, though. We had to search for it. When we started hitting that wall, we researched. Was this practice or was this law? And often it was just practice. Then the legal barrier couldn't be used anymore.

Somewhat more difficult to overcome were categorical program requirements that made it difficult to draw down funds for planning, administration, and prevention activities:

We tried to find a way to decategorize a small amount [from federal program sources] for evaluation and program planning. We wanted to pool federal funds with a matching amount of state funds and effectively decategorize the administrative costs. We have not been wholly successful. It turns out that it's

¹² It should be noted that many of the barriers reported in this study have also been identified in investigations of service collaboration within a single service delivery domain. See, for example, Newachek et al., (1995) for an examination of barriers to collaboration and service integration in the health care field.

illegal to use federal money for prevention or cross-agency planning! As it exists today, the federal programs are designed in a way where the dollars meet the eligibility requirements for a particular population. This makes it very difficult to support cross-program planning.

Several administrators also frequently alluded to the structural difficulty in transferring funds for supplies and other necessities to their program sites:

There was no central pot of money that could be sent [to the site]. Although there were administrative and overhead dollars attached to each staff member we sent there, there was no way we could break it out of the overall budgets of the agencies . . . [The site] did not have control over its budget. When the director needed to get an approval for something, he had to go through a bunch of different processes, and several different contact people. He had to know which agency was responsible for everything from the copy machine to the toilet paper!

Even in the face of these legal/structural difficulties, resourceful administrators were often able to craft creative solutions to enhance service flexibility. One popular technique was for the initiative to enter into a partnership with a non-governmental agency. Funds from these sources could frequently be used more flexibly, for example, for prevention or professional development or to supply services to participants who were not eligible to receive assistance through other categorical funding streams. One school-based initiative found that the contrast between spending public versus private dollars was clearly visible to their service providers:

I have been surprised at how complicated it is to spend government education dollars. There is very little flexibility: procedures are complex and very slow. In a way, though, this was a plus, because when we were spending private dollars, our process was so fast that teachers were just thrilled. The contrast was a plus.

In summary, while interviewees did cite several legal/structural barriers to operating their comprehensive initiatives, they frequently also reported being able to overcome these obstacles by learning the legal and procedural requirements thoroughly, and working creatively with multiple funding sources. This allowed them to pursue strategies that were both legally compliant and consistent with their comprehensive program objectives.

Of course, our interview sample consists of those in programs whose very successes in launching and sustaining comprehensive service strategies reflect an ability to overcome many legal and procedural obstacles in their path. That our interviewees did not acknowledge these as significant barriers is, therefore, not surprising. What is more interesting is their sense of the obstacles remaining even after legal and structural impediments to reform are addressed.

Other Barriers

Interviewees consistently reported three types of non-legal/structural barriers that they considered critical obstacles to sustaining effective comprehensive service systems for children and families in their communities:

- inadequate knowledge and commitment to collaboration among administrators and staff,
- the lack of a sustainable base of political support, and
- the absence of quality management and evaluation data systems.

These three barriers are all interrelated. Together, they paint a vivid picture of the challenges that will remain for comprehensive service delivery, even under a more deregulated service delivery system.

Inadequate Knowledge and Commitment to Collaboration

Nearly all of the interviewees stressed the difficulty in developing and maintaining relationships with other collaborating agencies. In some cases, lead agency officials had trouble just getting their counterparts in other agencies to consider joint activities. As one administrator noted,

It seems natural...to want to make sure we're not overlapping [services], to form partnerships...and find much more efficient ways to do things. [However], it was difficult to get people thinking this way. You always have people concerned with turf. [They are] reluctant to do certain cooperative things. You have to work to prove that you are not trying to take over.

Even when agencies agreed to work together, administrators reported that developing and maintaining working relationships required nearly constant effort, in part because there was neither a clear model of collaborative service provision, nor prior experiences or useful documentary resources from which they could draw. One interviewee characterized the difficulty this way:

There was no relationship with trust, or a common vision, so that had to be built. It really was just understanding what collaboration was. We were on the first movement of collaborative services, [so] there was no culture of collaboration, nothing that is true to the working definition of collaboration.

As a result, many initiatives have continuously struggled to define what collaboration means operationally. What does it mean, for example, that the social worker and probation officer now share an office in a local school? How do agency roles, responsibilities, and interactions change? Crafting a vision for collaboration and understanding how that vision is put into operation on a day-to-day level is a significant and continuous challenge to comprehensive initiative administrators.

Not only did administrators find it difficult to understand what collaborative efforts meant in terms of their agencies' operations, they also struggled to make it happen. Implementation was a challenge because, even if agency *leaders* understood and shared the

same goals, the vision was not always conveyed thoroughly within and across participating organizations. Many interviewees expressed frustration about the difficulty in translating their vision of collaborative services to the “rank and file,” even in their home agencies. They spoke as if they were struggling constantly against their staffs’ and other agencies’ predilections toward the status quo. An administrator of a multi-site, school-based initiative suggested that there were some trial sites which simply did not understand that the goal of the program was not to co-locate separate services doing business as usual, but to transform the way that services were delivered. In those sites, the comprehensive initiative is treated like an add-on program and, the administrator disappointedly noted, “after the grant money is up, the social worker will leave the school and go back to the county office.” Another interviewee said:

[Getting] staff to think broadly with their whole community, even the whole state, in mind is hard...because they are used to working for their “cause,” [the issue] they think is most important.

This propensity to continue to offer (or revert to providing) fragmented, categorical services stems, at least in part, from a lack of training on how to interact constructively with other agencies and disciplines. As Farrow and Joe note, even when structural/legal barriers have been reduced or removed, both pre-service training and agency organization reinforce separate and narrow, rather than comprehensive, solutions to social problems. Several administrators echoed the words of one interviewee, who commented,¹³

Categorical programs...get people entrenched in their own space. They “always did it this way,” so it’s hard to think about things in a new way.

Another remarked that the staff was so used to traditional ways of doing things that they usually didn’t see any need for new training or skill acquisition.¹⁴

Some interviewees did point to strategies designed to foster more collaboration and cooperation. One interviewee reported giving small discretionary grants (\$5,000 or less) to participating organizations in order to ease some of the turf issues and lessen the perceived burden of additional work associated with being a part of the initiative. Another administrator of a school-based program actively recruited program detractors to get involved in the initiative in order to give them a stake in its success:

¹³ Farrow and Joe, 1992.

¹⁴ Many of the initiatives in our sample were sharing staff and, in some cases, space and other overhead, but almost none of our interviewees were involved in efforts that redirected *monetary* resources from one agency to another. While obstacles to collaboration occurred whether or not non-monetary resources were being redistributed across “collaborating” agencies, it is logical to expect that even greater resistance to collaboration will develop if initiatives begin to redirect *monetary* resources.

The music teacher might not like [the idea of] having lots of people in his room after hours, messing up the place. So you make him the leader of the after-school music program, or you have him be on the committee that selects the after-school music teacher. In that way you create a team, and three times as many people can use those [musical] instruments every day.

The apparent positive impacts of efforts like these suggest that, although they are certainly significant, the barriers to fostering constructive inter-agency partnerships for delivering comprehensive services to children and families are not intractable.

The Lack of Sustained External Political Support

In addition to the challenges inherent in developing both intra- and inter-agency support for their initiatives, interviewees also frequently reported difficulties in maintaining external political support for their comprehensive efforts. Such backing was viewed as an important element in securing continued cooperation from agency administrators and front-line service providers, as well as ensuring a stable and reliable flow of funds.

Political impediments to implementing comprehensive service reform were rarely mentioned by interviewees as being a concern during the early stages of an initiative. Indeed, interviewees often remarked that sponsorship by a politically influential “champion” or a cadre of key political supporters was a key factor in enabling them to launch their efforts. These individuals came from both government (e.g., an important state legislator) and the private/non-profit sector (e.g., a major corporate leader or foundation executive). However, many interviewees complained that their most powerful original political supporters were no longer in positions to assist them. As one administrator noted, “Before, the Chairman of the [state’s] House Ways and Means Committee was the biggest advocate of our program, but then he lost his office.”

When a comprehensive initiative’s political sponsors lose power, the initiative becomes increasingly vulnerable to budget cuts or outright elimination. Recognizing this, a number of interviewees cited strategies designed to minimize the impacts of an unstable political environment. One administrator tackled the vicissitudes of an annual funding cycle by obtaining legislation recognizing his collaborative as a public authority, rather than a traditional non-profit organization. The authority, unlike a non-profit, was able to have more stable, multi-year funding. Another made a conscious decision to have the chair of the collaborative be from the private sector and to have CEOs (as opposed to lower-echelon staff) provide active project leadership. A third devoted considerable ongoing energy to ensuring support among senior executive officials involved in the collaboration.

Political strategies such as these may be quite sufficient as long as the comprehensive initiative operates at the margins of service delivery systems. This is because marginal programs do not seriously challenge the status quo. Their small scale generally protects them from “high stakes” political turf battles over resource control, as illustrated in the following anecdote from one interviewee:

We wanted to use our money differently [for prevention-oriented services], but the state and federal money would not fund prevention and early intervention work...We had to find out, if you redeploy staff and have them do different things, does the money stop coming down? And the answer quite often was yes. But then, the project was small enough, these large agencies could just eat it [the loss in revenue].

Most interviewees recognized that this context changes drastically as comprehensive initiatives attempt to grow from demonstration projects to standard modes of local service delivery. To expand and institutionalize these efforts requires the restructuring of power relationships and reallocation of resource authority among major actors in the service delivery system. This is why interviewees cited project expansion and institutionalization as constituting their biggest challenge.

The Absence of Quality Management and Evaluation Data Systems

Many of the interviewees recognized that the development of quality data and evaluation systems for comprehensive initiatives was critical both to build administrative and staff support for collaboration and to generate the needed political backing for program continuation, expansion, and institutionalization. Interviewees believed that achieving the goals of interagency collaboration and cooperation was strongly inhibited by the fact that planning, budgeting, management, and accountability systems were almost always agency-specific. One administrator wondered,

How do you deal with audit trails when you blend money? If you still have separate systems following them, then that is not blended funding. [The categorical requirements] require a whole new subsystem to track those dollars. With two systems running at the same time, how do you get flexibility? And if you do get flexibility to use existing resources differently, is that such a benefit to them that the upfront costs [for data management] don't matter over time?

It is difficult to imagine administrators and frontline employees making major and sustained investments in collaboration when their basic data and reporting structures are incompatible with such behaviors.

Nearly all program administrators also expressed a compelling need to document positive outcomes from their initiatives. They believed that the political climate was becoming increasingly hostile to public spending, especially in the social services arena, and that the only way to compete effectively for scarce resources in this environment was to show that the benefits of these investments outweighed their costs:

The bottom line is that if we do not produce, we will not maintain support....Our strategy is to develop a system of outcome indicators and benchmarks, so we can show that we have achieved [our] goals.

Many were politically attuned to the importance of conducting assessments that demonstrate cost-effectiveness. As one noted:

If we can show that more kids are graduating from high schools and going on to college, that is pretty positive. If they can see that, they can see where the program pays for itself.

This near-universal perception of the need for improved information and outcome evaluation systems was often combined with frustration over the inability to meet current and anticipated future demands. One interviewee was particularly eloquent on the topic:

The main problem is that as the program has increased its funding, there have been more requests for documentation of results. We have had to put a lot of time into proving there are positive results connected with what we do....We have tried to develop a client tracking data system, but for evaluation, we have no comparison group. So we have no immediate data to present to the legislature.

The lack of capacity to acquire useful data and conduct sound outcome evaluations of comprehensive initiatives has been well documented by several authors¹⁵ and is reinforced by the findings in this study. While most program administrators felt strongly that showing positive outcomes is essential to the long-term survival of their efforts, they also reported lacking the resources and technical expertise to conduct rigorous evaluations and create new management information systems. At best, they were at the earliest stages of system design and, despite frequently ambitious objectives (one site, for example, was planning to build a community-wide database across agencies), acutely aware of the monumental challenges lying ahead of them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY

In sum, our study identified four major types of barriers:

- *Structural/legal barriers* are those endemic to the formal service delivery system, as reflected in legal constraints, regulations, procedural requirements, etc.
- *Staff knowledge and commitment to collaboration barriers* refer to a lack of technical expertise and/or the rigidity of attitudes among administrators and service providers that limit the ability of initiatives to work collaboratively.
- *Political support barriers* relate to the challenge of establishing and maintaining external support for an initiative among political and policy officials, key constituency groups, and the broader general public.
- *Management information and evaluation data system barriers* concern the difficulties involved in constructing new cross-agency data networks and outcomes-based assessment systems necessary for effective planning, budgeting, management, and evaluation of comprehensive servicing arrangements.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Hayes, Lipoff, & Danegger, 1995; Connell et al., 1995; Young, Gardner, & Coley, 1994; Hollister & Hill, 1995; and Levin, 1994.

¹⁶ Of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive, because the barriers often overlap or relate to one another in a significant way. Placing the identified barriers into this framework should therefore be thought of as a useful heuristic for better understanding the different types of impediments administrators perceive as important to address in order to deliver quality comprehensive services.

Table 1 lists the barriers by type. At least from the perspective of the administrators of these 18 initiatives, challenges to creating successful comprehensive children's and family support systems go well beyond overcoming unsupportive laws and regulations. In fact, as reported earlier, these sites frequently devised successful strategies to surmount legal and structural hurdles, such as agency-specific confidentiality requirements, and restrictions on using funds for planning and prevention. But these sites would often find themselves facing other obstacles that were at least equally telling: the dispositions, knowledge, and skills of administrators and staff; an unstable external political environment; and the lack of an adequate information base.

What, then, do these findings suggest regarding a constructive direction for public policy in stimulating more comprehensive, community-based service and support strategies? It is impossible to address this question without first understanding the evolving public policy landscape and what it is likely to mean for the comprehensive services movement. The 104th Congress has made an unprecedented attempt to devolve federal governance and financial responsibilities for children's and family services to the states. At this writing, a number of legislative proposals are pending to replace much of the current system of federally defined categorical grants and individual entitlements with a series of state-administered block grants in areas such as welfare, child welfare, child care, food and nutrition, and education and job training. There is also an emerging bipartisan consensus to reduce the size of the federal government's commitment to finance services and supports for low-income children and families, as a component of an overall strategy for achieving a balanced budget.

While the exact legislative outcomes from each of these trends are still being determined, two results are reasonably certain: 1) states will inherit greater responsibility for designing, administering, and funding services and supports for children and families, and 2) states will be given fewer federal resources to pay for them. From the perspective of implementing successful comprehensive service and support systems for children and families, these trends work in opposite directions, creating both unique opportunities and challenges in the months and years ahead.

Earlier in this paper, we observed that many administrators reported being able to overcome what at first glance appeared to be significant legal and structural obstacles to effective comprehensive service provision. However, it was also apparent from the interviews how much effort was involved in this process, and how these officials' own high levels of commitment and capacity were critical to their achievements. It is clear that in order for comprehensive service initiatives to expand beyond the purview of managerially gifted and talented administrators (and thus become a more prevalent mode of operation), more streamlined and flexible rules and regulatory frameworks will be required.

States will undoubtedly have greater opportunities to design these types of systems in the emerging era of reduced federal authority. But it cannot be assumed that the states will necessarily do so. Kansas state budget director Gloria Timmer, points out that many *current* legal and structural requirements for service delivery come from the state, not the federal

Table 1. Major Barriers Identified in Administrator Interviews

Structural/Legal Barriers
• Learning the nature of categorical rules and requirements • Learning the rules governing confidentiality • Using federal funds for planning, administration, and prevention
Other Barriers
Staff Knowledge and Commitment to Collaboration • Developing and maintaining interagency relationships (turf, trust issues) • Understanding what collaboration means in practice • Conveying the collaborative vision throughout and across organizations • Staff thinking narrowly and traditionally, not seeing the need for new skills
Political Support • Losing political “champions” • Resource instability/annual funding cycles • Limited backing for project expansion and institutionalization
Management Information and Evaluation Data Systems • Inadequate and uncoordinated data collection/data organizing mechanisms • Inability to document positive outcomes

government.¹⁷ Functionally fragmented categorical state infrastructures will continue to exist (at least for a time), irrespective of new federal policies. States can be expected to resist major restructuring of existing service delivery mechanisms. An equally significant barrier is that many, if not most, state policymaking officials are no more inclined than their federal counterparts to give up significant political and policy authority to local governments and communities.

In the event that states *do* design more streamlined and flexible regulatory frameworks that make it easier for localities to create and implement comprehensive approaches for serving children and families, upcoming fiscal constraints can be expected to inhibit the large-scale implementation of such designs. A transition to comprehensive service delivery systems will, in all likelihood, require *increased*, not decreased, spending levels, at least at the outset.¹⁸ But reductions in future federal funding, especially when combined with demographic and economic trends,¹⁹ are likely to strain state and local capacity to support existing spending levels, let alone funding increases.

Fiscal constraints can be expected to hamper efforts to move from fragmented to comprehensive service arrangements in at least two ways. First, they will make it more difficult for states and localities to move from crisis intervention to prevention-oriented activities. In an era of scarcer resources to address social service needs, there will be increased pressure to support urgent, frontline services (such as child protective services and emergency health care), crowding out monies for more long-term investments in prevention and healthy child development. Second, it will be harder to obtain the funds for badly needed investments in building administrative capacity (at all levels) to support some of the critical infrastructure development needs identified in the site interviews—such as the training and orientation of administrators and staff, and the development of quality management information and evaluation systems.

CONCLUSIONS: AN AGENDA FOR STATE REFORM

The foregoing discussions should make it abundantly clear that, at most, federal decategorization efforts constitute a necessary but far from a sufficient condition to usher in a new era of more comprehensive children's and family service and support systems. It also suggests that such restructurings are, and will continue to be in the foreseeable future, extremely difficult to implement in practice. But states are not impotent in this process. Feasible and appropriate policy actions can reasonably be expected to sustain the current momentum for comprehensive service systems in the short run and to facilitate their expansion in the longer term. Based mainly on the analysis of information provided in our 18 sites, we offer six specific suggestions on directions for state policy reform:

¹⁷ Public statement at media briefing sponsored by The Finance Project, September 29, 1995.

¹⁸ See the Conservation Company & the Juvenile Law Center, 1994; and Bruner, 1994.

¹⁹ See Orland & Cohen, 1995; and Wallace, 1995.

1. *Work to coordinate state agency program strategies and resource allocation policies.*

Developing a more collaborative organizational approach at the state level is an essential first step in supporting comprehensive, community-based services. With a few noteworthy exceptions, there currently exists little state-level coordination in service delivery strategies or resource allocation policies among children's and family service agencies (e.g., education, health, child protection, mental health, juvenile justice). This makes it exceedingly difficult to orchestrate such initiatives locally. An increase in state flexibility and policy authority brings with it an unprecedented opportunity to restructure state operations as well, because states will have less need to mirror federal categorical structures with their own fragmented "stovepipes." This opportunity should be seized.

2. *Move toward an accountability system based more heavily on achieving desired results for children and families through reducing procedural regulation of service delivery*

For comprehensive service designs to be considered seriously as service delivery options, local accountability mechanisms must be realigned accordingly. This means eventually replacing many input-based categorical and procedural regulations with accountability systems that focus on achieving broad outcomes or results. Holding service providers more accountable for performance outcomes that transcend traditional agency boundaries will give providers the organizational incentives necessary to collaborate in designing and implementing comprehensive service approaches. But overcoming the political, technical, and organizational difficulties inherent in developing and employing appropriate outcome accountability indicators will require significant sustained investments. Therefore, the transition from process- to outcome-based accountability systems should be carefully planned and gradually sequenced over a number of years, in order to ensure that vulnerable populations are protected, that the needed data and evaluation systems are in place, and that the staff working under the new system receive the necessary training.

3. *Invest in a cross-agency information infrastructure.*

Our informants consistently pointed out that effective and sustainable comprehensive service designs require responsive management information systems. Yet most current systems, with their agency-specific orientations, are ill equipped to serve comprehensive service information needs. States could address this problem by setting aside resources for the express purpose of coordinating data collection and management systems across agencies. While both technical and funding constraints will make full-fledged information system redesign a challenging multi-year endeavor, less ambitious reforms (such as streamlining processes for cross-agency data sharing) are feasible in the short run, and can be expected to both encourage additional collaborations and improve the effectiveness and long-term survival prospects of existing comprehensive efforts.

4. *Encourage more integrated pre-service training experiences for children's and family service administrators and front-line providers.*

The administrator interviews make clear that successful comprehensive initiatives need staff who are skilled in collaboration and have a broad knowledge of the social service

system and the multiple needs of children. Current pre-service professional development programs, largely based in higher-education institutions, fail to equip workers with such knowledge and skills. States can play a lead role in encouraging the professions to redefine what staff need to know as a prerequisite for employment. And states can use the policy levers available to them—such as their role in helping to set employee licensing and accreditation standards—to ensure that pre-service programs provide orientation and training that is consistent with the role of this new type of social service professional.

5. *Provide monetary incentives for collaboration.*

With their increased resource flexibility, states could provide some tangible financial incentives for increased local collaboration. For example, they could give funding priority to groups that represent a coalition of service providers, or award special planning grants earmarked for local collaboratives. By providing even relatively modest rewards for collaboration, states can help local policymakers and administrators to address some of the political, social, and psychological barriers to reform that were described in our administrator interviews.

6. *Help to ensure multi-year funding for comprehensive initiatives.*

There is no doubt that resource instability, driven by an annual funding cycle, makes developing collaborative relationships among public agencies and other service providers difficult. State policies that help secure stable multi-year funding for comprehensive children's and family initiatives would not only help to stabilize inter-agency relationships, but also permit the initiatives to develop longer-term plans, which is an appropriate activity for an intervention designed to make a lasting community impact.

Together, these six reform directions point toward a new role for the states in their relationships with local governments and communities. Interestingly, it is one that is consistent with much of the current rhetoric of state officials on a redefined state/federal relationship—one in which the federal government establishes broad policy direction and systems of outcome accountability, ensures standards of service equity, and provides supportive training and technical assistance, but does not micro-manage state service offerings or monitor isolated resource inputs. Ultimately, overcoming the barriers to creating, sustaining, and expanding comprehensive, community-based services and supports for children and families will require that states *do unto local governments as they would have the federal government do unto them*.

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THE FINANCE PROJECT

The Finance Project is a national initiative to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of public financing for education and other children's services. With leadership and support from a consortium of private foundations, The Finance Project was established as an independent nonprofit organization, located in Washington, DC. Over a three-year period that began in January 1994, the project is undertaking an ambitious array of policy research and development activities, as well as policymaker forums and public education activities.

Specific activities are aimed at increasing knowledge and strengthening the nation's capability to implement promising strategies for generating public resources and improving public investments in children and their families, including:

- examining the ways in which governments at all levels finance public education and other supports and services for children (age 0-18) and their families;
- identifying and highlighting structural and regulatory barriers that impede the effectiveness of programs, institutions, and services, as well as other public investments, aimed at creating and sustaining the conditions and opportunities for children's successful growth and development;
- outlining the nature and characteristics of financing strategies and related structural and administrative arrangements that are important to support improvements in education and other children's services;
- identifying promising approaches for implementing these financing strategies at the federal, state and local levels and assessing their costs, benefits, and feasibility;
- highlighting the necessary steps and cost requirements of converting to new financing strategies; and
- strengthening intellectual, technical, and political capability to initiate major long-term reform and restructuring of public financing systems, as well as interim steps to overcome inefficiencies and inequities within current systems.

The Finance Project is expected to extend the work of many other organizations and blue-ribbon groups that have presented bold agendas for improving supports and services for children and families. It is creating the vision for a more rational approach to generating and investing public resources in education and other children's services. It is also developing policy options and tools to actively foster positive change through broad-based systemic reform, as well as more incremental steps to improve current financing systems.

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