

Mid-sized Urban America:

Does Community School Add Value in a Primary School Setting?

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### **Authors' Note**

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### **Abstract**

Current literature provides quantitative and qualitative longitudinal research demonstrating the effectiveness of full-service community schools (FSCS) in improving student achievement. However, these studies examined schools in major urban cities such as New York, Chicago, and Boston (Children's Aid Society, 2006; Whalen, 2007). By localizing research to a Midwest school district with a mid-sized urban population of approximately 112,000, researchers can provide insights for other school districts of similar size and location. This qualitative, interpretive multiple case study explores perceptions from three stakeholder groups at two primary schools. In conducting this study, research examined student, parent, and faculty perceptions at Garfield Primary School, a full-service community school, and Tyng Primary School, a traditional school. Triangulated data collection efforts included focus groups, observations, and document reviews. Initial results seemingly demonstrated added value of FSCS in this setting. Key findings indicated: 1) teachers allowed more time to teach, and 2) a FSCS design was a much more holistic delivery model for educational services, as well as family supportive services. These research implications supports exploring the full-service community school model in other mid-sized urban school markets. Researchers recommend additional research. A longitudinal study, at this or other similar sites, should further describe the impact this model has on school culture and student achievement.

Mid-sized Urban America:

Does Community School Add Value in a Primary School Setting?

At Garfield Primary School (Garfield) in Peoria, Illinois, each Friday morning begins with a student, parent, and faculty members (faculty) gathering in the gymnasium. Following is their call to attendance chant with questions led by Garfield Principal Kevin Curtin and the students responding:

What do you want? Give me peace! What is your name? Hope. What is your work? To go to school! What is your job? To get an education! How do you get paid? With good grades! How do you serve? With respect! What is respect? A two way street from me to you and from you to me! Where are you going? College! (K. Curtin, personal interview, January 22, 2009)

A full-service community school (FSCS), as opposed to the traditional school model, partners with community resources to care for the whole child with the idea that the barriers to student achievement exist mostly in the out-of-school factors that prevent the children from being mentally and physically prepared and interested in learning. Coined as the Progressive Era from 1880 to 1917, the existence of full-service community school ideology dates back over one hundred years (Dryfoos, 1994). Therefore, it is not a new chapter in school reformation.

The concept of full-service community schools began to re-emerge in the early 1980s in response to concerns about serious challenges facing inner city school students such as violence, drugs, and poverty (Dryfoos, 2005 b). Lee (2005) summarized full-service community schools as a model to provide stability and resources that help not only the student, but also the student's family. School becomes the community center for

learning and a central resource to help keep children in school and focused on education. From the provider perspective, full-service community schools seek to form a mutually beneficial partnership with schools and human service providers (Adelman & Taylor, 1999; Dryfoos, 1994a, 1995, 1997, 1998; Morrill, 1992 as cited in McMahon et al., 2000).

In an era of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, schools challenged by absenteeism and mobility issues during the school year struggle to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals. Mobility rate, as defined by the Illinois State Board of Education (2008<sub>a</sub>, p. 1), is the number of times students enroll in or leave a school during the school year. Focusing on out-of-school factors can help directly address this problem (Berliner, 2009).

Research by Berliner (2009) named the following out-of-school factors considered as barriers to learning:

- 1) Inadequate health care,
- 2) Lack of consistent access to food,
- 3) Environmental pollution,
- 4) Stressful family relationships,
- 5) Neighborhood violence, and
- 6) Lack of access to out-of-school learning opportunities. (p. 35)

Through his exploration of both qualitative and quantitative information, Berliner contributed to the hypothesis that out-of-school factors influence poor student behavior and performance; strengthening the ideology of full-service community schools.

Poverty has an impact on both families and the day to day operation of schools. The National Center for Children in Poverty examined the 2002 United States (U.S.) census data, which estimated that over 11 million children live in poverty. Over four million of these children live in severe poverty as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as those maintaining incomes of 50% below the poverty line (Lee, 2005). Lee further explained:

Especially in low-income communities, children bring numerous non-academic problems to school that severely detract from their school performance.

Traditional schools, by focusing only on learning and teaching, are not capable of dealing with the effects of these problems -- unstable homes, gang violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancies, physical abuse and neglect, and emotional trauma -- on their students' learning ability. As a result, the familiar pattern of generational poverty continues: school dropout rates in these communities are high, economic opportunity stagnates, and many of these children become burdens on the welfare and correctional systems. (Lee, 2005, p. 1)

Another more recent study indicates the poverty numbers are growing at an alarming rate. As of 2009, it is estimated 6,484,000 children under age 18 are below the 50% poverty line (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p.1). The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) defines poverty as low income students from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches (ISBE, 2008<sub>a</sub>, p. 1).

The full-service community school concept places the school as a hub in the neighborhood providing a whole child approach to addressing out-of-school barriers,

such as poverty. For example, the in-school health center at Garfield is available to students as well as their family members. In offering prompt and accessible medical care, the center seems to affect the school's ability to keep children healthy and able to continue their educations.

Critics of the full-service community school model contend that the focus of schools should remain on education, but Lee (2005) found that this approach is too narrow because it avoids confronting the out-of-school impacts. Addressing out-of-school factors offers cost-saving opportunities for creating in-school achievement. One example is the availability of on-site mental health services that allows Garfield students to remain in school while addressing their emotional needs (K. Curtin, personal interview, January 22, 2009). Today, the scope of full-service community schools spans from a single program with an outside organization to an intricate multi-agency cooperative (Tripses, 2010).

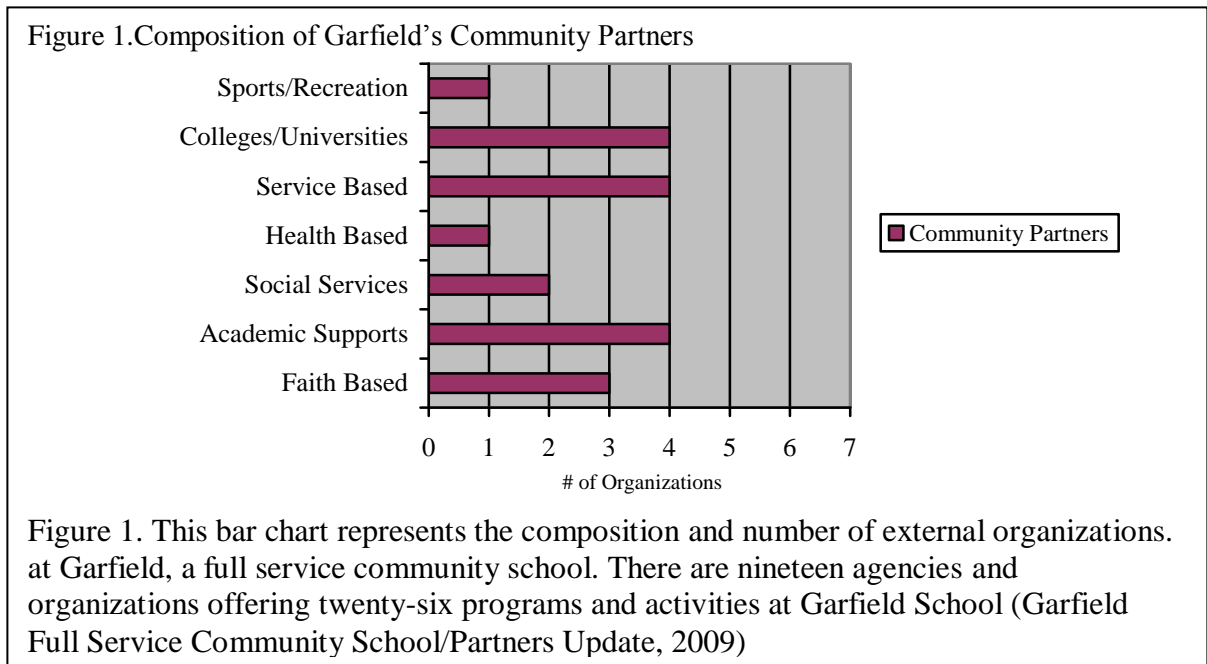
### **Purpose of the Study**

Public education remains under continued scrutiny. Exploring and understanding how the delivery of our educational services affects academic outcomes is paramount. The inability of our students to compete in a global economy has profound consequences for society and individual. Therefore, seeking ways for improving the effectiveness of our educational strategies becomes a research responsibility rather than an option.

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question: What are the student, parent and faculty perceptions at Garfield and Tyng Primary Schools? In this way, researchers could determine those elements which were unique in a FSCS versus characteristics of another traditional primary school in the district.

Descriptions of the Two Sites

This study inspects the perceptions and dynamics of two primary schools located within the same school district, but with distinct approaches to public education. A mid-sized, Midwestern community of approximately 112,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), Peoria, Illinois, has only one inner city school district in which Garfield Primary School resides. Garfield Primary School with 299 students and 20 teachers emulates the full-service community school model. There are 19 community partners at Garfield, offering 26 programs and activities as illustrated in greater detail in Figure One.

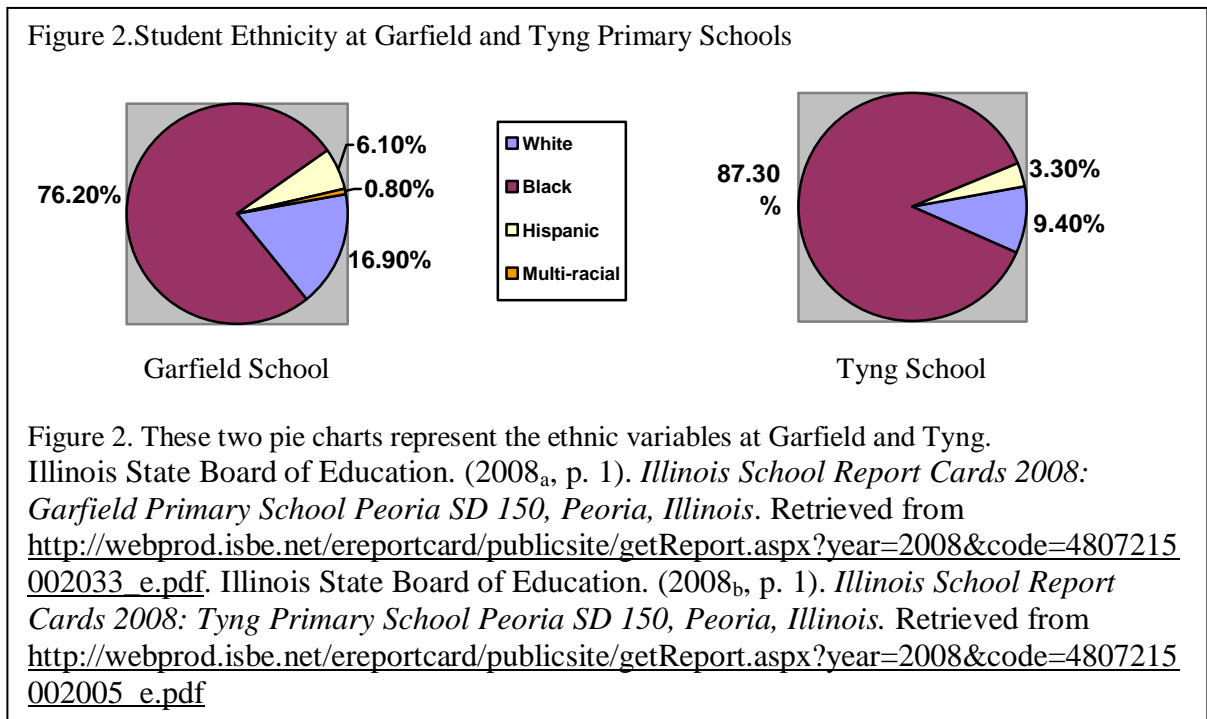


Tyng Primary School (Tyng) with 381 students and 21 teachers was the second case study site due to its similar kindergarten through grade four status, analogous demographics, and non-implementation of the community school model (Public School Review, n.d.). Tyng is also located in the same inner city school district as Garfield Primary School.



Both sites are markedly alike in several other characteristics. The Public School Review (n.d.) described adults living in both schools neighborhoods as having an average age of 29, only 7% having achieved a college degree, a median annual household income of \$18,355, and a majority renting a living unit with a median value of \$34,000. For students, Garfield enrolls 47% male and 53% female while Tyng reflects the reverse of 53% male and 47% female. School administrators at both sites create budgets that spend 58% on instructional costs, 11% on support services such as the library and health care, 11% on administration, and 20% on other expenditures such as utilities, maintenance, buses, and food service. A staggering 90% or more of the students at each site are eligible for free lunches compared to the State of Illinois average of 37%.

Important demographic variables of the two schools were reasonably similar. As shown in Figure Two, student ethnic variables were comparable. Both schools had poverty rates in the mid-90 percentiles and mobility rates at or slightly above 50%.



## **Methods**

Researchers employed focus groups, performed observations, and reviewed documents to triangulate the data at the two primary schools, one that engaged the FSCS model, and the other which did not (Creswell, 2007). Focus group respondents were not limited to the number of responses they could provide interviewers encouraging an open-ended, naturalistic dialogue. The goal was to allow respondents to answer openly in their own words. Where warranted, some responses could have more than one assigned descriptor code. To ensure case study credibility, researchers extracted responses germane to the pending closure of Tyng Primary School. On site field observation and analyses of pertinent documents allowed for greater description and depth of findings. Results and conclusions are a melding of the three data sources.

## **Participants**

Utilizing purposive sampling (Monette, Sullivan, & Dejon, 2005) to target key stakeholders at Garfield, a FSCS, and Tyng, a traditional school, provided the most valid participant groups. Garfield Primary School study participants included twenty-five students, six parents and four faculty, one being the principal. Tyng Primary School study participants included eighteen students, six parents and four faculty, one also being the principal. Isolating subgroups provided a better understanding of the program as a whole, and produced key informants and participants.

Parents and faculty also had pre-identified focus group criteria. Garfield parent participant characteristics included: (1) having a student in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade, (2) who participates in FSCS activities, (3) received physical or mental health services, (4) or as a parent received FSCS services or assistance. Tyng parent participants were to have a

student currently enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade at Tyng. The single requirement for Garfield and Tyng faculty participation was that they were on staff at their respective schools.

Study participation was entirely voluntary and conducted with the written consent of each participant. Student participants varied. At Garfield, students were:

- (1) Currently enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade,
- (2) Involved in at least one FSCS activity,
- (3) Received physical or mental health services, and
- (4) Could have attended another primary school prior to Garfield, but attended Garfield at least one year continuously.

At Tyng, students were:

- (1) Currently enrolled in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade,
- (2) Attended Tyng for the last two years, and
- (3) Could not have attended a community school.

Selection process for students at both schools reflected a similar reality. In addition to obtaining parental consent for each student, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Bradley University required students to give their verbal assent prior to the commencement of the student focus groups. The Director of Research, Testing and Assessment, for Peoria School District #150 authorized a formal request to conduct research with the understanding that school names could be published.

### **Focus Groups**

This case study utilized a focus group approach to collect data on the perceptions of stakeholder subgroups and key informants seeking to identify trends or differences

across those subgroups. This type of approach is a common tool utilized in qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2009). Focus groups, as opposed to interviews, are more likely to generate the desired qualitative data and therefore, offered a more suitable data collection choice. This was especially significant in light of student and parent stakeholder subgroups. Therefore, utilizing a focus group format was more likely to: 1) create a higher level of comfort for our stakeholder subgroups, and 2) generate data from the responses of others. After each focus group session, the two interviewers debriefed; cross-checking with each other for observed nonverbal cues and behaviors. Where noteworthy, further discussion and analysis for relevance resulted.

### **Document Reviews**

For this study, researchers examined several relevant documents. Researchers reviewed 2004-2005 Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) scores for both Garfield and Tyng. The ISAT data was prior to the implementation of FSCS design at Garfield. ISAT scores for 2007-2008, three years post FSCS implementation, further expanded our data set and included both Garfield and Tyng. The ISAT offers parents, teachers, and schools one measure for student achievement and school performance. Other reviewed records included documents dedicated to Tyng and Garfield Primary Schools that reflected mobility rates, poverty rates and community partnerships which are a key concept of community schools protocol (Dryfoos, 2005 b). Document reviews were essential in that: “use of documents is also a data collection technique that is least reactive” (Royse, Thyer, Padgett, & Logan, 2006, p. 101). Therefore, document reviews offered another and possibly more objective lens to view school data and to better understand stakeholder perceptions. Additional documents included: the Illinois State Board of Education

Annual Report Cards, the United Way's Peoria Area Community and Educational Services (PACES) program, and Garfield School partnership logs.

### **Field Observations**

Field observations consisted of school tours, attendance at school programs and activities, and interactions with faculty, students and parents. Field observations are essential evaluation protocols. Through the use of unstructured observations, researchers gained an insider's view to the nuances of stakeholders' reactions, behaviors, relationships, and interactions (Worthen et al., 1997). An argument can exist that tone of voice and nonverbal communications, as well as physical surroundings, all provide valuable information. The opportunity to conduct observations gave a vital understanding of what others experience as well as the physical environment. No researcher participated directly in the activities.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative study is a catalyst for helping key stakeholders understand the complexity of an issue (Creswell, 2009). It is a tool for illuminating the discovery process and improved understanding of current practices. This case study is not a panacea for school reincarnation because qualitative research in and of itself may not effect a solution.

Generalizing to other schools or communities is not the intended objective of case study research. This research provides rich description for those interested in the unique elements of a school model that departs from the conventional delivery of education in a mid-sized market.

While case study offers some benefits, limitations do exist. First, research preference would ideally consider additional stakeholder groups for interviewing. However, researchers were not able to convene community stakeholder focus groups. Similarly, due to time constraints, the study consisted of research at two schools as opposed to all primary schools in the district. Lastly, not considered for analysis was data related to Tyng's pending closure.

Other limitations relate to the issue of student focus groups. Our sample population of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade students may have somewhat limited the amount of focus group data elicited, even though a typical benefit of focus groups is people can hear and expand upon the ideas of peers they might not otherwise generate themselves.

### **Data Analysis**

This research design embraces multiple case study strategy blending within-case and cross-case analysis to strengthen our understanding of the data collected through focus groups, field observations and document reviews. Researchers framed the multiple case study analysis around the methodology authored by Merriam (1998).

In a multiple case study, there are two stages of analysis – the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis. For the within-case analysis, each case is first treated as a comprehensive case in and of itself. Data are gathered so the researcher can learn as much about the contextual variables as possible that might have a bearing on the case . . . . Once the analysis of each case is completed, cross-case analysis begins. A qualitative, inductive, multicase study seeks to build abstractions across cases. (Merriam, 1998, p. 194-5)

Merriam's contribution to the field of qualitative research supports the application of qualitative analysis in tandem with case study. By combining the two, augmentation occurs, expanding the breadth and depth of the qualitative research.

Qualitative research tends to generate an incredible amount of rich, descriptive data. For this study, we recognized differences in the more limited amount of data and are not confident in providing one particular reason or reasons for this result. As noted in the description of the sites, many characteristics of the children and the adults in these neighborhoods generally have characteristics unlike those in other areas of the region or State. Therefore, those characteristics reflect the breadth of our data analysis and conclusion.

In order to systematically analyze the layers of data, multiple levels of analysis are desirable (Merriam, 1998). For this case study, within-case analysis began by examination of the school sites as individual cases. For construction of categories, extracting emergent themes was a process of scanning the student, parent, and faculty focus group responses in conjunction with field observations and documents review, relative to each school site. The categories then became the findings or themes for the individual case sites. In an additional tier of analysis, researchers then separately examined the Garfield and Tyng case themes for subcategories. Similarly, the subcategory data organized into sub theme findings for each school site. In viewing both sites collectively, researchers conducted cross-case analysis, searching for similarities and differences in conditions between the two individual case sites. Researchers detail these categories and themes in the next section.

### **Within-Case Analysis for Garfield Primary School**

Based on data collected from the Garfield School case site, Figure Three depicts the emergent student, parent, faculty perceptions, in conjunction with field observation and document analyses data. Delineation of anticipated or expected, and unanticipated or unexpected sub themes is from the view of the researchers possessing significant background in education and human service administration. A semi-structured interview guide also helped elicit the central themes (Bailey, 2007).

Figure 3.

Central Themes and Sub Themes for Garfield Primary School Stakeholders

FULL SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL MODEL		
CENTRAL THEMES	SUB THEMES	SUB THEMES
	Anticipated/Expected Results	Unanticipated/Unexpected Results
	Students	
General student perceptions of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewed school as a positive place</li> <li>Felt genuinely valued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly verbose and expressive about school day</li> <li>Engaged in the educational process</li> </ul>
School programming perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Range of activities</li> <li>Most indicated participation</li> </ul>	
School improvement perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reducing negative behaviors made school a better place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bored/wanted more work</li> <li>Wanted more opportunities, more faculty to help</li> <li>Wanted grade levels expanded so they would not have to leave</li> </ul>
	Parents	
General parent perceptions of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive engagement</li> <li>Mutual exchange</li> </ul>	
School programming perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wide range of activities and services</li> <li>Accessibility to families and their children</li> </ul>	
	Faculty	
General faculty perception of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education as a collaborative effort</li> </ul>	
Perception of role/responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First priority - student education</li> </ul>	
School programming perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Added value from supplemental activities and supportive services</li> </ul>	

Figure 3. This figure represents data summary results at Garfield School.

**Anticipated or expected student perceptions.** Garfield student data produced anticipated or expected perceptions. Garfield students stated their school was a positive place where the teachers are “really great” and “you go to get a good education.” One



Garfield student spiritedly commented: “People should come and visit Garfield and see what it’s like.” Students appeared to feel genuinely valued indicating their school was a place they could go to: feel good about themselves, be cared for, be made to feel popular, work together, and help them be a better person. A field observation showed that if a child is late for school, a staff member awaits at the front door to greet the child, check them in, and record the daily lunch order. Based on the document analyses one might reasonably expect children to be late given the economic and educational realities of nearly all families in the region. In describing their school, several student respondents spoke of the many programs and activities at Garfield, “good after school activities like drama and tutoring,” and “{they} teach a lot of stuff.” Most students indicated participating in some type of extracurricular school activity or program.

In sharing their views and opinions with focus group leaders, students conveyed a solid understanding of how reducing negative behaviors caused their school to be a better place for all. While at the school, researchers noted that classroom doorways were alight with Christmas tree lights and discovered that this was when perfect student attendance occurred; yet another indication of supporting the positive and undervaluing the negative. The link between how appropriate social skills created a better learning environment seemed to be evident. Garfield students appeared to understand how their behaviors impacted the school.

**Unanticipated or unexpected student perceptions.** Garfield students shared unexpected or unanticipated perceptions, as well. Surprisingly, students expressed a desire to stay at Garfield by expanding the number of grades, “so we won’t have to leave {Garfield and attend another school}.” On site observation data echoed these unexpected

statements from student focus groups. Teachers showed consistently positive verbal and nonverbal communications when interacting with students. Student participants were quite expressive and articulate about their school, displaying enthusiasm in their descriptors. They were highly verbose about the positive contributions the school and faculty played in their school day. One student even went as far to say to focus group leaders, “{Garfield is} somewhere you would want to go.” Document test scores below the State average might suggest an atmosphere not quite as positive between the internal and external stakeholders at Garfield, yet, to some surprise, this did not appear to be reality.

Conversely, other students indicated a desire for even more opportunity to expand their experiences. When focus group leaders asked how school might be better, they responded by wanting more work to do and “being bored.” However, they seemingly understood the connection between the need for more faculty to create those additional school offerings.

**Anticipated or expected parent perceptions.** Overall, Garfield parents recognized school faculty members as friendly and willing to engage in positive, two-way communication with parents. There was a sense of relief from parents that communication from school was not limited to when something negative happened and that teachers showed a willingness to listen. A corroborating example of high, positive parent engagement happened during a field observation where it was standing room only at the school’s annual spring play.

Parents that participated in this study emphasized the number of activities and supportive services. They further noted that services were available and accessible to

them and their children, seemingly setting Garfield apart from other schools. One Garfield parent stated, “Garfield has suppers and other events during the year which are good opportunities for parents to meet and get to know each other.” There were no unexpected parent perceptions.

**Anticipated or expected faculty perceptions.** The first anticipated perception of Garfield faculty was awareness that their ability to do it all was simply unrealistic. “It takes parental involvement and community effort to educate the children and enable them to succeed,” commented one Garfield faculty member. However, it is clear via observation that establishing a tone of civility is not left to chance; signs of the “Peaceful Kingdom” and formal daily affirmations prevail. Faculty also recognized the value external partnerships could bring to the education table. “Getting the community involved plays a big part,” remarked one Garfield teacher. They felt that by allowing education to be a collaborative process, with the school acting as the hub of the community, it created added value for students and families. Possible, additional value for the teachers themselves becomes something worth exploration in a later discussion. They also viewed student education as their number one priority or focus. Akin to the parents, there were no unexpected faculty perceptions.

### **Within-Case Analysis for Tyng Primary School**

Similar to the Garfield School case site, Figure Four chronicles the Tyng case site data for emergent student, parent and faculty themes and subthemes, further corroborated with field observations and document analyses. Again, questions from a semi-structured interview guide impacted the creation of central themes (Bailey, 2007).

Figure 4.

Central Themes and Sub Themes for Tyng Primary School Stakeholders

TRADITIONAL SCHOOL MODEL		
CENTRAL THEMES	SUB THEMES	SUB THEMES
	Anticipated/Expected Results	Unanticipated/Unexpected Results
	Students	
General student perception of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewed school as a good place to go and learn</li> </ul>	
School programming perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Articulate about school activities</li> <li>However, many students opted not to participate in those activities</li> <li>Instead, went home after school</li> </ul>	
School improvement perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eliminating negative behaviors made their school better</li> </ul>	
	Parents	
General parent perception of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accepting and supportive</li> </ul>	
School programming perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledged availability of onsite supportive services</li> <li>Nonexistent recognition of available parent activities</li> <li>Denoted activities for their children</li> </ul>	
	Faculty	
General faculty perception of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value in community outreach</li> </ul>	
Perception of role/responsibility		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First focus - advocacy and supportive services</li> </ul>
School programming perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School programs/activities for both students and parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor parent attendance at formal school activities</li> </ul>
Figure 4. This figure represents focus group results at Tyng School.		

**Anticipated or expected student perceptions.** Much like Garfield, Tyng students generally had positive perceptions about their school, citing school as, “a good place to go and learn, with good teachers and friends.” In terms of school programming, student respondents talked about school activities. Akin to their Garfield peers, Tyng students also recognized that improved student behavior equated to school improvement.

While Tyng student respondents mentioned school activities, responses placed no particular emphasis on additional school programming. Field observation notes and analyses mirrored student statements during focus groups. The preponderance of student feedback did not indicate participation in additional or after school programming. “I go home, do homework, play outside,” remarked a Tyng student. This was an expected

perception, in that; the opportunity to extend or enhance their school day through participation in additional school activities was not indicated.

**Anticipated or expected parent perceptions.** Expected Tyng parent perceptions conveyed school as a place where they felt accepted and teachers were supportive. A Tyng parent said, “Everyone goes out of their way to help the kids.” They further indicated that Tyng School was like family to them. Dialogue with parents produced evidence of onsite supportive services, but that other supportive services were nonexistent or required an external referral. A vast majority occurred with the teacher acting as an advocate, thus limiting instructional time as heard during a school tour field observation. Parental responses also included a few comments about activities available for their children. Tyng parents did not articulate school programs or activities available specifically to them.

**Anticipated or expected faculty perceptions.** During focus group dialogues, Tyng faculty members perceived value in linking with external entities; however, primarily as links to capture resources for their school and not so much to create a community-centered school. For example, organizations such as Rotary Club Readers and Junior Achievement visited the school to provide services to the students. Faculty did share about available opportunities at Tyng through programs and activities for both parents and students. However, housing an organization that could provide on-site services for the families and the surrounding neighborhood was not evident.

**Unanticipated or unexpected faculty perceptions.** When Tyng faculty discussed their perceptions in dealing with the challenges presented by at-risk students as described earlier and in the document reviews, school faculty indicated their core foci as

advocacy and supportive service providers. They did not verbalize teaching and the educational process as their primary activity. School faculty appeared to play a significant role working to stabilize families in need. When asked how they viewed their role in dealing with the challenges presented by students from at-risk environments, two faculty summarized in saying: “Be an advocate for students” and “Sharing resources with parents.”

### **Cross-case Analysis for Garfield Primary School and Tyng Primary School**

Figures Three and Four reflect aggregated data resulting from the three sets of stakeholder focus groups, document analyses and field observation at the two case sites. Central themes and sub themes between the two case sites divided similarly between our three data collection efforts. After completing the initial analysis of each case individually, researchers analyzed the two case sites in comparison and contrast of one with the other. This step is considered cross-case analysis (Merriam, 1998). Researchers will discuss the three stakeholder groups first and conclude with commentary on the critical similarities and differences.

**Student perceptions.** The students at Garfield and Tyng had many similar characteristics, yet critical differences emerged. Both sets of students had overall positive perceptions about their respective schools and faculty. What was striking, and obviously apparent during field observation about Garfield student respondents, was a higher level of intensity when asked about their school. This was in stark contrast to the responses received from Tyng students. School was an integral part of the day in Garfield student responses where there was a pronounced alignment between the student and the school mission. Garfield student responses emulated high engagement in their school

relationships. Roles and responsibilities between student and school appeared to be clearly defined.

Student groups from both case sites were able to make important connections when asked about school improvement. They were clearly aware of the linkage between positive behavior and making school a better place to learn. Differences arose in that Garfield students shared a desire for the following: 1) more classroom work, 2) more opportunities, 3) more faculty to help, and 4) expansion of grade levels so they would not have to leave their primary school for middle school.

**Parent perceptions.** Researchers observed a limited amount of parent interactions, yet those still add value to the consideration of the two cases. Document data might suggest that it could be more challenging for parents to attend and participate in school interactions when faced with more pressing economic and basic needs demands.

Parent participants at both case sites had comparable statements and perceptions. Garfield and Tyng parent groups were similar in their positive remarks about school and the respective faculty. Overall, parents from both case sites were complimentary about their students' school.

Notably, Tyng parents did not mention activities available to them, as parents. Field observation and Tyng faculty focus group responses seem to support this, in that school activities were available to parents; however, actual attendance was generally low.

At the Garfield case site, there appears to be an understanding that school is for the advancement of all stakeholders and not just limited to the children. Parents at Garfield were aware of the opportunity to build social and political capital through available school programming, adding value to their lives. As an example, every Friday

morning parents, students, and faculty gather together in the gymnasium for breakfast. Often there are guest speakers and community representatives in attendance. One Friday morning in particular, books were carted in from the school library for parents to borrow, encouraging parents to read with their children. As a result, Garfield facilitated those important connections between school and family: minimizing the possible feelings of isolation and allowing all parties to work collaboratively (Quint, 1994).

**Faculty perceptions.** Faculty at both case sites viewed community partnerships as an integral part of the educational process. Yet, respective stakeholders considered the situation differently in terms of how this interface should occur.

Delving deeper into the data revealed some interesting variances. Tyng faculty appeared to see community partnerships more as a liaison-type relationship in order to bring resources to the school. Garfield school faculty seemed to view community partnering more as a collaborative effort; in that, the school functions as the hub or center of the community creating a tangible space for those collaborations to work. These impressions stemmed from the field observation efforts and in consideration of the focus group responses.

Partnerships at Garfield were much more intentionally extensive. In some cases, services were actually housed within Garfield school. This small nuance in how collaboration is applied within school boundaries seems minor at first inspection, but is potentially significant in outcome. Having services housed on-site, allowed teachers more time to teach and to participate more actively in the educational and developmental processes and reduced the amount of time needed to secure services for students and their families. Garfield teachers now have the time to conduct after-school reading programs,



individual tutoring or assist with other after school activities. Given that, this may explain why Garfield faculty perceived education as their first focus. One Garfield teacher said, “Services in the school helps fill different voids immediately that poverty puts on teachers on a daily basis.”

Alternatively, Tyng teachers noted being an advocate or agent for students as a greater part of their typical work day. In order for Tyng students to have better opportunities and stability, teachers absorbed much of the responsibility to find resources for parents and students. Telling statistics from document reviews in the Public School Review webpages as detailed in the descriptions of the two sites confirm this expected reality for Tyng faculty members, particularly statistics related to college degree attainment, household incomes, and free lunches.

**Critical similarities and differences.** Comparatively, the two case sites display at least a degree of commonality regarding the importance of community partnerships for enriching educational opportunities. Additionally and through document reviews, the two case sites were: demographically similar, possessing high student mobility rates and high poverty rates. Geographically both schools were closely located in the south side of Peoria. The south side of Peoria is an area with limited economic and recreational opportunities: creating analogous out-of-school factors for both case sites. This, in addition to similar kindergarten through grade four status, allowed reasonable comparison of the purposely chosen two case sites.

Critical differences manifested during cross-case analysis. One key example was how the case site schools implement community partnerships into their respective school culture and are subsequently perceived by stakeholders. Relative to that, the most

significant consequence was the ability for Garfield faculty to have more time to teach and to educate.

### **Discussion**

One possible criticism of the FSCS model is integration of education with school-based human services allows parents to abdicate their responsibilities. Melissa Trumbill Mitchell, Associate Director, The Federation for Community Schools responded:

Part of the argument is that because community schools work to remove barriers to student success, they are in fact encouraging parents to take less ownership over their children's education and development. In effect, this leaves some stakeholders with the perception that school is taking the place of parents.

(Melissa Trumbill Mitchell, personal communication, December 21, 2010)

Opponents of the model could contend that FSCS fosters the doctrine of *in loco parentis* or school plays more of a custodial role in place of the parent. Epstein et al. (2009) counters that when the model is implemented correctly, parent engagement can become even more collaborative.

Few would argue that student achievement remains the critical goal for schools, regardless of the educational delivery model. However, Smith (2000, 2004) questions the long term impact of FSCS and its effect on the community as a whole. He highlights the challenges that may arise concerning school management, decision making protocols, and liability issues. Unintended consequences remain unknown on the culture of school and human service organizations that serve others outside the boundaries of school. At this juncture, it is too premature to provide any conclusive results. However, he does offer the

counter perspective that full-service community schools initially appear to show some success and can be helpful in strengthening a collaborative school culture.

### **Implications for Practice**

While this case study is not generalizable to other primary schools, it holds value for Garfield and Tyng, as well as to practitioners in the fields of education and human service. Especially for those professionals serving mid-sized communities, this research may provide insight for future school programming and possible partnership models (Quint, 1994). It follows that, offering a comprehensive, holistic approach to education, especially when students are in their early stages of academic development, may provide greater assurance for success, potentially costing less in outlay of future resources (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007). A likely alternative is waiting for failure to occur and capturing the students in our country's second chance network such as the welfare and correctional systems. As students proceed through the educational system, packaging their educational experience with a cohesive array of programming and services makes sound economical and humanitarian sense.

Suggestions and implications for practice do exist. Full-service community school teachers at Garfield indicated student education as their first priority. By not wasting costly resources, especially time securing additional supportive programs and services, faculty had more time to focus on teaching and student learning. Removing the burden of unplanned social service coordination from teachers allowed for better synchronization between school's original mission to educate, and student achievement (Henderson et al., 2007).

Although no one consistent model for FSCS exists, the premise is consideration of the student as a whole person (Santiago, Ferrara, & Blank, 2008). The Garfield FSCS model recognizes the value in addressing both in-school and out-of-school factors for educational success. When exploring critical barriers that impede students' academic success, proponents of the model feel ignoring out-of-school factors are unrealistic. Based on that premise, a holistic or whole child approach offers a strong argument, layering in those additional family supporting services for an effective best practice.

Similarly, students involved in the full-service community school seemed more relationship oriented toward their faculty and, collectively, toward their school. Garfield students were highly articulate about their day and the role school and community members played in it. There was an intangible union between them and the institution of school: subtle student recognition their success was dependent on that life enriching connection to school (Epstein et al., 2009). Therefore, FSCS students may possess more ownership when understanding education as a mutual effort.

Parents that perceive school as a community focal point may potentially feel more comfortable attending school functions when they view them as a community event. In saying that, there may be a bit of the chicken or the egg parable in play, here. When school leadership offers the life supporting, family stabilizing resources, parents may have more time to focus on participating in their child's school.

A key driver to the community school model is leadership. Dialogue with Garfield staff netted a clear understanding that creating a community school culture can only be accomplished through shared vision and grassroots collaboration. At the basic level, education of children is the responsibility of all. The Principal of Garfield Primary

School, Kevin Curtin, states “The school is owned by the community.” In turn, the school becomes the hub of the neighborhood maintaining an active presence and providing services for students and their families. As the traditional delivery of educational programming continues to undergo a metamorphosis and the shift to a community-centered focus evolves, staff adaptability is tantamount. Rechanneling resources and utilizing the school as a hub is a gargantuan change in mindset requiring faculty to be more resilient as the school doors literally open to the community (Henderson et al., 2007).

### **Implications for Further Study**

Literature defining how full-service community schools impact student achievement has been relatively scarce, quantitative, and focused primarily on qualitative single interview, observation, and non-longitudinal studies (Abrams, 2000). This gap reflects the relatively short history of FSCS. England, Scotland, and the Netherlands are leaders in full-service community schools implementation with both government and community support. So, exploring longitudinal research on student achievement may provide further information (Dryfoos, 2005<sub>a</sub>). However, a word of caution when comparing international schools and those in the United States as there are additional factors such as school regulations, testing, and funding structures that may yield incomparable findings.

To more specifically determine how full-service community schools impact student achievement, there exist a few options to begin. Proposing a three year study to track student achievement in relationship to participation and use of full-service community school programs and services is a logical next step. A defined set of common

variables could be compared between full-service community schools and traditional schools sharing similar demographics as a single national definition of a FSCS does not yet exist. Future research also warrants causal-comparative data that tracks key barriers and key student achievement indicators needed to see if the FSCS model is the independent variable driving improved student outcomes when compared to a traditional school model.

During the time frame of this study, a review of 2005 Illinois State Report Card data (ISBE, 2005<sub>a</sub>, p. 4) indicated a Garfield ISAT score of 42.2%. The 2005 report card data was prior to implementation of the Garfield community school model. Figure Five offers a comparison of Garfield and Tyng 2005 and 2008 ISAT scores.

Figure 5. Comparison of Garfield and Tyng ISAT Scores for 2004/2005 and 2007/2008 School Years.

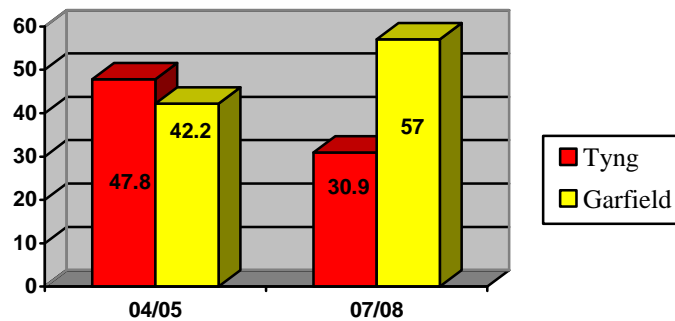


Figure 5. This bar chart represents a comparison of ISAT scores between Garfield, a full service community school and Tyng, a traditional school model for school years 2005 and 2008. *Illinois School Report Cards 2005: Garfield Primary School Peoria SD 150, Peoria Illinois*. Retrieved from: [http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2005&code=4807215002033\\_e.pdf](http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2005&code=4807215002033_e.pdf). *Illinois School Report Cards 2005: Tyng Primary School Peoria SD 150, Peoria Illinois*. Retrieved from: [http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2005&code=4807215002005\\_e.pdf](http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2005&code=4807215002005_e.pdf). *Illinois School Report Cards 2008: Garfield Primary School Peoria SD 150, Peoria, Illinois*. Retrieved from: [http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2008&code=4807215002033\\_e.pdf](http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2008&code=4807215002033_e.pdf). *Illinois School Report Cards 2008: Tyng Primary School Peoria SD 150, Peoria, Illinois*. Retrieved from: [http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2008&code=4807215002005\\_e.pdf](http://webprod.isbe.net/ereportcard/publicsite/getReport.aspx?year=2008&code=4807215002005_e.pdf).

According to 2008 Illinois State Report Card data (ISBE, 2008<sub>a</sub>, p. 4), and post community school implementation, Garfield's ISAT scores were 57.0% or a 14.8% gain. Comparatively, 2008 Illinois State Report Card data (ISBE, 2008<sub>b</sub>, p. 4) indicated a Tyng ISAT score of 30.9% or a 16.9% decrease. This seems to be an implication for Garfield's success: possibly, due to the implementation of the new community school model. A 14.8% increase in ISAT scores further strengthens the case for future research.

### **Conclusions**

Limited information exists for the FSCS model in a mid-size market. Garfield Primary School or other similar FSCS schools offers an opportunity to test the viability and impact of the community school model in a Midwest locality. An evaluation of indicators suggests that community school practices offer solutions to the problems and challenges facing public schools. This study seemingly provides compelling evidence for making informed decisions to key stakeholders who are considering or currently participating in a community school model so that the students of their school districts are better served. Four key findings all indicate a value-added notion attached to a FSCS model.

#### **Allows Teachers to Focus on Education**

What does this mean for our future citizens? From researcher discussions with teachers, the full-service community school model gives teachers the freedom to focus on education. As teachers spend more time on referrals, there is less and less time for teachers to teach. When teachers have more time to educate, opportunity for academic achievement and a better developed individual is the naturally occurring by-product.

During a time of crisis, the FSCS on-site support systems offer the ability to quickly re-stabilize the family household allowing both the parent and child to refocus much faster (Epstein et al., 2009). In reducing the duration of household stress, the likelihood of interference with a child's academic development decreases and minimizes the time teachers need to spend closing the proficiency gap. By having the physical and mental health services and the after-school activities, teachers at Garfield have more time to focus on learning. Unlike their counterparts at Tyng, who spent a great amount of their time finding supportive services for students, teachers at Garfield now have the freedom to personally help students with one-on-one tutoring, conducting after-school reading groups, or assisting with activities such as drama club. Consequently, Garfield teachers and parents have peace of mind knowing there is a connection taking place between in-school and out-of-school activities.

### **Provides a More Well-rounded or Holistic Approach to Education**

Beyond the classroom, there is a vast menu of on-site offerings such as mental health services, recreational activities, and an in-school medical clinic that provide much needed supportive programming. Garfield hosted 19 such offerings. Typically, at-risk youth have fewer resources and limited access to the same opportunities available in more prosperous families. Fundamental to Garfield's community school model is the whole child approach to education (Dryfoos, 1994; Lee, 2005; Santiago et al., 2008).

Contrary to the traditional school model, Garfield takes a more comprehensive approach. By addressing a child's education as a multi-faceted methodology encompassing social, emotional, physical, and academic needs, staff creates a culture maximizing the learning experience. The 19 community partners at Garfield, offering 26



programs and activities present positive opportunities. Through these additional positive connections of adults and peers, at-risk students become less vulnerable and more likely to succeed in an increasingly complex society. Students have greater exposure to life shaping, life enhancing role models: forging positive relationships that teach young people how to be successful citizens, and future leaders.

### **Narrows the Service Gap to At-risk Students**

Prior to a community school implementation, delivery of supportive services to at-risk students and families often represents a fragmented model. High on the list of FSCS priorities is the delivery of on-site services. According to a community assessment conducted in 2005 and 2006, comprehensive delivery of services to children with multiple challenges was inadequate as traditionally delivered (Leonard, 2006). One of the features central to Garfield is the wide array of close partnerships that make services readily available. Previously, service delivery was lacking cohesiveness. Referrals took place by giving those in need a phone number, placing them on a waiting list, or referring them to another agency. In other words, critical supportive service needs were not immediately addressed. The Garfield community school philosophy endorses the whole child approach to education and promotes ease of access to much needed supportive services mitigating the burden for at-risk students and families. For example, a primary provider of mental health and prevention services for Garfield is the Peoria Area Community and Educational Services (PACES) funded by the Heart of Illinois United Way. According to school Principal, Kevin Curtin, “PACES is truly integrated into our school. The family school liaison is part of our team (K. Curtin, personal interview,

January 22, 2009).” PACES provides a comprehensive student support system through the addition of two on-site mental health counselors.

Data from the United Way PACES program revealed a significant increase in mental health and prevention services for Garfield. Figure Six offers a comparison of service units provided between 2007 and 2009 at Garfield School.

Figure 6. Units of Mental Health Services and Prevention Education for Garfield School Between 2007 and 2009

	2006/2007 - Outputs	2008/2009 - Outputs
<b>Prevention Services</b> (anger mgmt, social skills, Second Steps/violence prevention education)	167	365
<b>1-on-1 Mentoring &amp; Monitoring</b>	14	
<b>Mental Health Therapy/Counseling</b>	N/A	23
<b>Case Mgmt Services</b>	7	31
<b>About My Feelings</b> (mental health education)	N/A	328
<b>Total Units of Service</b>	188	747 (297% increase in services from 2006/2007)

Figure 6. This figure represents a comparison of service outputs received by Garfield students and families between 2007 and 2009. PACES did not become a Tyng service provider until 2009. Therefore, no Tyng data is included. *PACES Garfield School Reports*. (2009). Available from Heart of Illinois United Way, 509 W. High Street, Peoria, Illinois, 61606.

School year data for 2006-2007 indicated 188 outputs of service (PACES Garfield School Reports, 2007). During the 2008-2009 school year, data showed an enormous increase in service outputs to 747 units or a 297% increase in service levels at Garfield (PACES Garfield School Reports, 2009). An increase of this proportion demonstrates the

previous level of unmet needs and how critical school-based services are to the well being of students and their families.

### **Expedites the Delivery of Supportive Services**

With the availability of on-site services, responding rapidly to students' and families' critical needs is now a reality. No longer must children and their families wait for much needed services. "Children with special needs are immediately recognized and services immediately provided at the school, no waiting list as is common at other schools," states one Garfield parent. Research data suggests rapid delivery of supportive service may be associated with improved student attendance, reduced behavior and discipline problems, and improved personal or family situations (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003). However, this case study was not conclusive since the research model did not test for those specific outcomes.

What we do know is the expeditious mobilization of services does have multiple benefits. Besides a full offering of after-school programming, other services such as legal advice for low income families, an in-school health clinic, and the Humane Society are also available as community resources. In the words of another Garfield parent, "I wish all schools could be like this." When asked how their school helps with challenges that they must face on a daily basis, a vast majority of the Garfield parent responses indicated experiencing school-based services. Yet, only one-third of Tyng parents responded similarly. Such a wide response disparity underscores the significance of accessibility through placement of school-based services. Clearly, both efficiency and efficacy is critical in producing positive outcomes for our students and families.

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