Comprehensive Educational Equity:
The Path to Meaningful Opportunity for Excellence

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Our nation believes, by and large, in every child’s right to educational opportunity; this belief is built into our nation’s history and our national psyche. In our American dream, school success is the prime route to all future success. In spite of this belief, we understand that educational equity does not yet exist in our country. More than 50 years after the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education, states and localities around the country are still struggling to make education a right “available to all on equal terms.” Although there is increased awareness of the inequities that persist in the American public education system and numerous efforts are ongoing to address those inequities, the American dream of equal educational opportunity for all remains unrealized. In spite of steady improvements in the overall caliber of our nation’s public schools and the educational attainment of many Americans, wide achievement gaps persist between low-income and minority students and their peers in other groups.

After closing rapidly during the 1970s, the black-white and Latino-white achievement gaps began to grow again in the late 1980s and have remained fairly consistent since the late 1990s. Today, on average African-American and Latino students rank at about the 30th percentile of achievement, as compared with their white peers who score on average at the 61st percentile. Research shows little difference in mental ability among very young children (Fryer & Levitt, 2006), but achievement gaps for poor and minority children begin before they start school and widen throughout their school careers (Education Trust, 2003a,b; Robelen, 2005; Rothstein, 2004).
Gaps in the performance of these students are not limited to the areas most frequently measured and reported by schools—that is, basic reading and math skills. Richard Rothstein and colleagues’ Report Card on Comprehensive Equity also found black-white performance gaps in other areas considered critical for preparation for successful adulthood: critical thinking and problem solving; social skills and work ethic; readiness for citizenship and community responsibility; foundation for lifelong physical health; foundation for lifelong emotional health; appreciation of the arts and literature; and preparation for skilled work for those youths not destined for academic college (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008).

The causes of these achievement gaps are complex, and we are just now beginning to understand them fully. Low-income and minority families’ inequitable access to health care, stable housing, and early childhood education, among other resources, put their children at an academic disadvantage even before they begin school (Allgood, 2006; Barton, 2004; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Lee & Burkam, 2002; Rothstein, 2004). Because these children attend income- and race-segregated schools that commonly receive less funding and have fewer qualified teachers, more teacher and student turnover, less challenging curricula, larger classes, and poorer facilities than schools attended by more affluent white students, they continue to fall further and further behind (Rebell, 2007; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Wells & Frankenberg, in press). The impact of poverty and low academic achievement on the life chances of millions of poor and minority children is devastating. Whereas 30 years ago high school dropouts earned about 64% of the amount earned by diploma recipients, in 2004 they earned only 37% (Rouse, 2005).
These inequities carry enormous costs not only for the individuals involved but for the nation as a whole. The annual price tag of inadequately educating our young people is staggering, in the realm of $250 billion per year in lost tax revenues, health and welfare costs, and criminal justice expenses. The heavy toll on the social and civic fabric of the nation is an additional, inestimable price that we all pay every year. We can ill afford this price in even flush times; in lean times, like those we are currently facing, the obligation to stop these losses becomes an absolute necessity.

**Comprehensive Educational Inequities Require a Comprehensive Response**

This approach to educational equity-- and the tools required to implement it -- are critically needed now. Our nation’s stated policy under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is to ensure that *all* of America’s students are proficient in meeting rigorous state educational standards within the next decade. Even before NCLB, as part of the growing standards movement, nearly every state had already proclaimed that virtually all children could learn at these high levels if provided the proper supports and resources.

What are the “proper supports and resources” needed to ensure all students the opportunity for a quality education? Current federal, state, and local education policies do not fully address this question, but it is central. Certainly they include essential educational resources like high quality teaching; reasonable class sizes; a full and rigorous curriculum; up-to-date libraries, laboratories, and technology; and safe school buildings –resources that are not reliably available in schools that serve students from low-income and minority families. In addition, as reformers and researchers such as Jean Anyon, Geoffrey Canada, James Comer, Joy Dryfoos, Ronald Ferguson, Edmund Gordon, Richard Rothstein, and Lisbeth Schorr have argued for years, essential
educational resources also include complementary, “out-of-school” supports and services that address the full range of physical, social, economic, political, and psychological factors that indisputably affect children’s readiness and ability to succeed in school. The inequities in the availability of these resources for disadvantaged students also contribute to achievement gaps (Anyon, 2005; Barton, 2003; Coleman, 1966; Comer, 1997, 2004; Gordon; 1999, Gordon, Bridglall, & Meroe, 2005; Leichter, 1975; Mercer, 1973; Rothstein, 2004; Varenne & McDermott, 1998; Wilkerson, 1979; Wolf, 1966).

Since both within-school and out-of-school factors impede academic achievement, none of these factors can be relegated to the sidelines of the education policy dialogue. They all must be tackled head on. This insight is not new. As we will describe, for more than a century in this country, the necessity of adopting a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of children, particularly those from backgrounds of concentrated poverty, has been recognized by reformers and rediscovered periodically by policymakers. From the settlement houses in the 19th century through the current community schools movement, there have been numerous efforts—private, public, and in partnership—to combine education, family involvement, and human services with the goal of improving outcomes for children.

**Moving from Pilots to Policy**

Today our nation must build on this history and implement a comprehensive approach to children’s needs in service of *educational equity*. It is time for a national *education* policy that pursues the systematic delivery to public school students of the resources determined most vital for meaningful educational opportunity, that is, what we call *comprehensive educational equity*. This is a pragmatic approach to educational
policy and practice that recognizes the complex relationship between education, class, and poverty and, while not attempting the total elimination of poverty or the righting of all social and political wrongs, does not ignore their profound effects on children’s ability to learn and to succeed in school. Funding for public education and human services is not and cannot be unlimited. Therefore, just as research proceeds to refine our understanding of which within-school resources are most critical to student learning, so research and careful analysis must also determine which health, family support, and/or social service deficits most directly affect learning and which are most amenable to improvement in response to a focused infusion of resources. As we pursue adequacy and equity of in-school educational essentials, we must also pursue adequacy and equity of out-of-school educational essentials.

It is time to advance from our broad acknowledgment of the need for comprehensive educational equity, from our debates over the relative strength of “school effects” versus non-school effects, from our many demonstration projects, and from our inconsistent, cyclical support of this approach, to make this our central educational policy. Concrete knowledge about how to implement the necessary comprehensive approach is vitally needed. State and national policies are aligned in their expectations that all children be well educated. In addition, school-funding lawsuits around the nation are establishing students’ constitutional right to the opportunity for a quality education and ordering states to ensure adequate funding to provide this. As this funding starts to flow, policymakers must better understand how, given sufficient but not unlimited resources, to direct funding to get the most from these dollars. Critical decision makers from the state legislatures and state education departments, mayors and superintendents,
to principals, teachers, and parents, must be equipped with this information to ensure that new funding translates into improved achievement for all of our children.

Creating a New Paradigm

Rejecting the Artificial Dichotomy between Within- and Out-of-School Factors in Student Learning/School Success

Ever since the 1966 Coleman report, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, was interpreted to mean that schools could not overcome the disadvantages that some students brought to school, there has been a debate about whether schools or family background are the critical variable in whether students succeed academically (Gamoran & Long, 2006). This debate has created and maintained an artificial dichotomy between within-school and out-of-school factors. In this polarizing environment, many argued that if schooling could not overcome the academic disadvantages of low socioeconomic status then there was no reason to invest in the education of these children.

This argument was employed within the past decade by some state governments when they became defendants in education adequacy lawsuits seeking additional resources for high needs schools and districts. In these cases, those who opposed efforts to ensure adequate funding for all public school students argued that, however much we invested in educational resources, many children would not become academically proficient because poverty and other elements of family background put them at too great a disadvantage. This argument was used to justify limited investments and limited success.

In fact, it inverts the reality: If children from poverty backgrounds enter school with learning deficiencies, this is a reason to provide them more resources – both in
school and to supplement what can be provided by the schools. Certainly it is not a reason to provide them less. As the Supreme Court of New Jersey court wrote in 1990, “If the claim is that these [disadvantaged] students simply cannot make it, the constitutional answer is, give them a chance. The Constitution does not tell them that since more money will not help, we will give them less; that because their needs cannot be fully met, they will not be met at all. It does not tell them they will get the minimum, because that is all they can benefit from” (Abbott v. Burke, 1990).

Subsequent research and further analyses of Coleman’s data have shown that both school and family or out-of-school factors play important roles in school success for all students (Gamoran & Long, 2006). What is critical, we are beginning to understand, is the complementary relationship between what goes on in school and what goes on outside of and around it. School success depends on meeting students’ needs for a range of within-school and out-of-school resources. With this understanding, out-of-school inequities can no longer be used as an excuse for school outcome inequities (achievement gaps) but must be widely recognized as factors that can and must be acted upon in applying resources and otherwise creating means for improving outcomes. As a nation, we have the opportunity— and the obligation— to improve students’ educational outcomes not only by improving their schooling but also by improving their access to certain essential out-of-school resources.

There is a growing consensus that the time has come to embrace this approach. In recent months, this has been expressed by a number of important groups and individuals from the signers of the statement “A Broader, Bolder Approach to Education,” to the endorsers of “A Community Agenda for America’s Public Schools,” from Randi
Weingarten to Barack Obama. Each has called for increased attention to students’ out-of-school needs and other factors that create a context for successful schooling. Though some critics have tried to contrast these demands with other calls for greater accountability for quality schooling, this, too, is a false dichotomy. Comprehensive educational equity is not an either/or proposition but a “both/and” one. Children from backgrounds of poverty depend even more greatly on quality schooling. It is critical both to ensure that schools are accountable for the achievement of every child, and to provide the out-of-school essentials that students need to succeed in school.

**Focusing on School Success, Broadly Defined**

Past efforts to provide a broad range of services to meet children’s needs have often been initiated to improve child welfare or well-being generally. Typically they were not specifically focused on or evaluated for their effectiveness at ensuring educational opportunity and school success. A policy of comprehensive educational equity focuses intentionally on the resources required for school success. The goal of the policy is to maximize students’ school-based learning ensuring quality schooling, promoting their overall development, and ensuring that their families and communities are as supportive of learning as possible.

This narrower focus is important for several reasons. First, concentrating on school outcomes is a means for focusing efforts, targeting resources, and controlling costs in this endeavor. While numerous interventions may improve the quality of life for disadvantaged children, not all of them contribute directly to school success. Since resources for public education and children’s services are finite, it is critical to invest in
those resources that are most effective in improving academic achievement. Second, the narrow focus makes it easier to study and evaluate the effects of such a policy and to provide accountability for effectiveness and results. As we discuss below, research evaluation of comprehensive initiatives has been limited because of the complexity of the task. With the coherent goal of improving school success, the task of evaluating the success of policy change becomes somewhat more manageable.

Finally, focusing a policy of comprehensive educational equity on academic achievement makes such a policy more viable politically because it builds on the longstanding U.S. tradition of public education as sole social service provided universally. “Americans have never agreed that citizens have the right to jobs, to health care, or to homes. But even our courts have acted to enforce children’s right to schooling” (Cohen, 2005, p. 512). Indeed, for most of U.S. history, our nation has depended almost exclusively on the public schools to provide a path out of poverty. Examining the history of federal education policy, Amy Stuart Wells (2009, in press) writes that “instead of building a more comprehensive social safety net, policymakers in this country continue to lay the bulk of the burden of solving inequality at the schoolhouse door.”

[O]ver the last century as governments of other industrialized countries built and enlarged comprehensive social welfare systems to offset inequality among their citizens, U.S. policymakers have invested in public schools and relatively few other supportive social services. Thus, while other industrialized nations began subsidizing income, health care, child care, pensions, and housing to take care of their citizens’ most urgent
needs, in the United States the public schools became the central means by which the government would help improve the lives of the poor and disadvantaged. (Wells, 2009, in press)

Americans firmly believe in the proverbial “hand up” rather than “hand out.” In the past, social welfare advocates used our country’s commitment to public schooling to expand other services (Cohen, 2005). Similarly, though there is a growing recognition that schools will need to enlist other agencies as partners in closing the achievement gap, support for these partnerships is likely to be more forthcoming though new policies and initiatives in the service of improved educational outcomes.

Importantly, however, the school outcomes that a policy of comprehensive educational equity is designed to achieve should not be defined narrowly as proficiency on basic reading and math tests. The goal of this policy is to ensure all students a meaningful opportunity to graduate from high school equipped with the knowledge, values, and skills needed to succeed in higher education or in the competitive marketplace. In addition, we expect this policy to narrow performance gaps among students in a number of other areas. Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder’s (2008) work, *A Report Card on Comprehensive Equity* “describes eight broad goals of American schools and other institutions of youth development and suggests that the ideal of comprehensive equity must include a narrowing of the performance gap” between groups of students. They demonstrate black-white performance gaps in eight major areas:

1. Basic academic skills
2. Critical thinking and problem solving
3. Social skills and work ethic
4. Readiness for citizenship and community responsibility

5. Foundation for lifelong physical health

6. Foundation for lifelong emotional health

7. Appreciation of the arts and literature

8. Preparation for skilled work for those youths not destined for academic college

A policy of comprehensive educational equity will narrow performance gaps in a many, if not all, of these areas. In addition, such a policy provides for the acquisition of qualities like agency, efficacy, and other dispositions and learning behaviors critical to school success that are thought to be acquired outside of the classroom.

**Utilizing Diverse Conditions and Settings for Learning**

Focusing on school success as the goal of a policy of comprehensive educational equity does not necessarily privilege the school as the sole or even prime “delivery” site for the policy. As Cremin, Gordon, and others have pointed out, education is a ubiquitous activity and not by any means something that only occurs in school.

Human beings, in our conscious hours at least, are always learning. We cannot do otherwise; learning is an involuntary human activity. … And although there may be value in all types of learning experiences, a deep understanding in the field of education of the range of learning experiences available to people who thrive is the first step toward ensuring adequate access to these experiences for all. (Gordon & Rebell, 2007, p. 1836)

Children from well-resourced families and communities, in addition to being able to
depend on quality schooling, benefit from a range of complementary learning experiences outside of the school that support their schooling. Myriad institutions provide vital complementary learning experiences, as Cremin pointed out:

Every family has a curriculum, which it teaches quite deliberately and systematically over time. Every church and synagogue has a curriculum. . .

. . every employer has a curriculum. . . libraries have curricula, museums have curricula, Boy Scout troops have curricula, and day-care centers have curricula, and most important, perhaps, radio and television stations have curricula. . . . The fact is that the public is educated by many institutions.

. . . (Cremin, 1975, pp. 6-7)

For many children, these experiences create important “redundancies” that ensure learning and school success. The importance of this critical—but largely invisible—aspect of the educational experience of most students cannot be underestimated. The inequity in access to these resources that support school success contributes significantly to achievement gaps.

In its simplest form, a policy of comprehensive educational equity seeks to provide all children with the full range of resources, services, and supports for learning and school success that most children take for granted. For most students, many of these resources are delivered in, by, and through schools; others are provided by different means—by peers, parents, extended families, family friends and other mentors, tutors, after-school sports and lessons, summer camp, libraries, museums, routine doctors’ visits, travel, employment, faith-based activities, and so on, with parents often fulfilling what Gordon calls the “orchestration function,” that is, determining which additional
resources are needed and ensuring that they are provided.

Calls that “schools can’t do it alone” are being heard increasingly today, but, in this way, for most students, they never have. As Cremin wrote in 1975,

. . . the public school has never functioned alone or in isolation. Where it has succeeded, it has functioned as part of a large configuration of institutions, including families, churches, Sunday schools, and reform schools, committed to essentially complementary values. When the configuration has disintegrated, however, as it has from time to time in our larger cities, and when the centrifugal forces of heterogeneity have overbalanced the centrifugal forces of community, the public school has been less successful. . . . And the moral is simple: The public school ought never to take the entire credit for the educational accomplishments of the public, and it ought never to be assigned the entire blame. (p. x)

Unfortunately, those students who lack the necessary “redundancies” in their homes and communities, and who therefore depend most heavily on quality schools, are the least likely to have them. Thus it is critical to improve the schools, and it is also critical to promote the family support for learning and/or seek to provide it outside the family to set up the same redundancies for all on which successful students.

Many also stress the importance of the availability of education-relevant resources that a number of authors refer to as forms of “capital.” They call these supports for academic and personal development “preconditions that enable to good schooling to be effective” (Gordon & Bridglall, 2005, p. 20). Among the forms of capital understood to be critical for school success are cultural capital (the advantages of belonging to the
dominant culture); financial capital (the advantages of wealth); health and nutrition
capital (the advantages of good health and nutrition); human capital (the advantages of
relationships with other people); and social capital (the advantages of belonging to social
networks) (Gordon & Bridglall, 2005). Differences in access to these forms of capital
affect how effective schools are for different children.

A policy of comprehensive educational equity promotes and makes use of the
diverse conditions and settings in which learning that supports schooling takes place.
Programs for parent education beginning during pregnancy and continuing throughout
students’ academic careers, partnerships with cultural and faith-based organizations, and
mentorships and apprenticeships are just a few of the ways this work can begin.

**Building on History and Research**

As we have said, the recognition that, to succeed in school and in life, children
require a comprehensive range of resources and supports is not new. Beginning with the
settlement houses at the end of the 19th century, and continuing to the present in forms
like Head Start, community schools, and the Harlem Children’s Zone, many efforts have
been undertaken to provide socioeconomically disadvantaged children and their families
with these critical resources. There have been literally hundreds of initiatives designed to
improve access to the resources vital to school success—some concentrating on one
resource area (like health), others taking a comprehensive approach that attempts to
assure and coordinate the provision of multiple resources. In addition, thousands of
studies and reports have chronicled, studied, and promoted these initiatives. A policy of
comprehensive educational equity must build on this history and research.
Patterson (1986) writes about our nation’s periodic “rediscovery” of poverty at various times during our history (p. 78); similarly, we have periodically rediscovered the notion that children require a range of basic resources in order to thrive academically (Crowson & Boyd, 1993; Kagan & Neville, 1993). To shape a national policy of comprehensive educational equity, we must capture the available data from past initiatives and research in order that we not reinvent the wheel and that we recapture past momentum rather than start each time from scratch. In the sections that follow we sketch out some of the history most relevant to the current need for building a policy of comprehensive educational equity.

*Early U.S. Efforts to Offset the Impact of Poverty on Children*

The end of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century marked a time of major changes in resources and supports for poor children and their families. The practice of warehousing poor gave way to progressive reforms and growing government aid designed to prevent extreme poverty. Though some reformers took a comprehensive approach; early policymaking efforts set a precedent for a fragmented approach to meeting children’s needs.

The late 19th century saw the dawning of a new recognition that some people suffered from poverty through no fault of their own and a growing desire to alleviate their suffering (Bremner, 1956; Patterson, 1986). Early ventures to offset the impact of poverty and provide improved opportunities were largely private, charitable initiatives. The urban settlement house, an idea imported from England, was an early comprehensive, community-based, private-sector model for providing a wide variety of educational and other social services meet the needs of children and their families. This model took hold
with reformers in the Progressive Era—the period from the 1890s until World War I—in part because it departed so dramatically from the state-run institutions of the time—the asylums, poorhouses, prisons, and orphanages—that segregated and warehoused “the deviant and dependent” (Kagan & Neville, 1993, p. 7). Aimed at improving the lives of poor immigrants in conditions of extreme concentrated poverty while maintaining the community, these local centers provided health services, recreation programs, and classes for children and adults, among many other resources, at one location (Soler & Shauffer, 1990; Tyack, 1992).

During the same era, in large part to provide economic opportunity for poor and immigrant children (and to curb child labor practices), states began to enact compulsory school attendance laws; by 1918, every state had one. Building on these policies and in keeping with the work of the settlement houses, Progressive reformers pushed for additional services in schools, including school lunches, medical and dental clinics, school social workers and child welfare officers, classes for disabled and sick children, vocational services, and summer programs (Tyack, 1992, p. 20) to improve educational opportunity and cope with the widespread poverty of the huge waves of new immigrants who were amassing in urban slums.

Starting in 1911, some state governments also initiated limited support systems for poor children through funds to establish “mothers’” or “widows’ pensions” (also sometimes called “home scholarships or school pensions”). These were intended to allow poor single mothers raise their children at home, where they could both provide children with supportive care and ensure that they went to school (Cohen, 2005). Though government spending for the social welfare of the poor generally had weak public
support, these measures passed because they “not only appealed to the popularity of motherhood, they also exploited America’s unique commitment to education” (Cohen, 2005, p. 518). By 1933, nearly every state provided this type of support.

Eventually, the Progressive movement began to effect a shift in popular attitudes about providing supports for the poor. “Rather than regarding the government as the provider of last resort, Progressives envisioned the federal government’s role as the protector of the distressed and the guarantor of individual opportunity and equity” (Kagan & Neville, 1993, p. 10). The U.S. government’s efforts to understand and deal with the needs of poor children began in the early 20th century, with the first White House Conference on Children in 1909, called by President Theodore Roosevelt. The second White House Conference on Children took place in 1919, which had been dubbed “Children’s Year” by President Woodrow Wilson. President Wilson declared that “Next to the duty of doing everything possible for the soldiers at the front, there could be, it seems to me, no more patriotic duty than that of protecting the children who constitute one-third of our population,” and he called for the establishment of “certain irreducible minimum standards for the health, education, and work of the American Child” (Children’s Bureau, 1967, p. 6). At the conference, there was widespread agreement about “the need for certain basic fundamentals – an adequate family income, as few broken homes as possible [and] adequate opportunity for ‘education, recreation, vocational preparation for life and for moral and spiritual development’” (Children’s Bureau, 1967, p. 7), but no federal action.

The Great Depression finally forced the federal government to take a much bigger role in providing social services to children and families. In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt
launched the New Deal programs to stabilize the economy, provide relief for families, and create reforms to insure the country against a similar disaster in the future. The Social Security Act of 1935 was one of the reforms designed to protect vulnerable groups, including children, from falling into desperate poverty. Along with federal aid for the elderly, the Act included monies for dependent children and maternal and child health, child welfare, and public health services. Most of these items were funded through categorical assistance programs, that is, through aid that must be used for narrowly defined purposes.

*War on Poverty Initiatives*

The War on Poverty launched in the 1960s greatly expanded human services for children and their families. President Johnson’s Great Society legislation included the Manpower Development and Training Act and the Social Security Amendments of 1962; the Community Mental Health Act (1963); the Economic Opportunity Act and food stamp legislation (1964); Title XIII (Medicare) and Title XIX (Medicaid), the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Head Start legislation (1965), and more. All of these federal initiatives were created from special purpose legislation and were funded with categorical aid “Between 1962 and 1966 the number of federal categorical grant programs increased from 160 to 349, and by 1971 there were 500” (Kagan & Neville, 1993, p. 15). These many programs were largely uncoordinated and there were many variations in how these programs were funded and administered. The result was a chaotic system of funding and service delivery that produced waste and inefficiency, and underutilization; a lack of evaluation and accountability; and bureaucratic hurdles for agencies, community organizations, and families.
Recent Comprehensive Initiatives

The 1980s and ‘90s saw a renewed national commitment to providing a quality education to all students. The standards-based reform movement -- though it began as an “excellence” initiative to ensure that the nation could remain competitive in global markets and industry -- drove this commitment to equity. As it developed state by state with the credo that virtually all children can learn at high levels and meet challenging standards, the movement also reoriented public school systems to the important duty and considerable challenge of serving all children, including growing numbers of students at risk of academic failure as a result of socioeconomic factors.

At the same time, there was wide recognition that existing social welfare systems, designed to shore up these students and their families, had grave shortcomings, especially when it came to dealing with the growing effects of concentrated poverty. Among these shortcomings were the crisis-oriented nature of social service provision that forced children and families to sink below a certain threshold before they could receive help, the segregation and fragmentation of services that divided the needs of children and families into different problem areas and addressed them separately, the poor communication between systems and providers that caused both waste, inefficiency and unmet needs, and the lack of sufficient funding to cover all the children needing services. As Joy Dryfoos (1994) wrote, “The cumulative effects of poverty have created social environments that challenge educators, community leaders, and practitioners of health, mental health, and social services to invent new kinds of institutional responses” (p. xv).
Spurred by research in the social sciences in the 1970s and 1980s, a widespread understanding began to emerge of the benefits of the coordinated delivery of a wide range of health, mental health, family, and educational services to children.

In health, social services, family support, or education... the programs that work best for children and families in high-risk environments typically offer comprehensive and intensive services.

Whether they are part of the health, mental health, social service, or educational systems, they are able to respond flexibly to a wide variety of needs. In their wakes they often pull in other kinds of services, unrelated in narrowly bureaucratic terms but inseparable in the broad framework of human misery. These programs approach children not with bureaucratic or professional blinders but open-eyed to their needs in a family and community context. (Schorr, 1988)

A shift from the early fragmented model of social services toward a more “holistic” approach began to take place (Wilken et al., 2003). At the time, this entailed a new emphasis on finding ways for service providers, including educators, to work together more effectively.

As Crowson and Boyd (1993) wrote at the time, “Few ideas have caught on in public education as rapidly or as widely as the notion that public schools and other social and health agencies should collaborate to provide more effective services for children” (p. 143). In this country and internationally, the ‘90s saw a huge burgeoning of initiatives, programs, projects, and activities seeking to integrate schooling with supports and services in other areas that enhance students’ abilities to succeed. Among the many needs
areas addressed in various of these initiatives were prenatal care; early childhood education; programming for after-school and out-of-school time; dropout prevention; mental health; physical health; housing and student mobility; drug counseling; teen pregnancy prevention; the home-school partnership, parent education, and adult literacy.

National, state, and local policies that supported this approach welled, and a wide range of actors, from federal and state agencies to national and local foundations, to individual schools and community-based organizations, implemented some type of related initiative. Crowson and Boyd (1993) wrote,

The broad appeal, rapid dissemination, and “bandwagon” flavor of the coordinated-services concept are shown in the widening array of proposals and agencies with plans, recommendations and project descriptions. Since 1989, major reports or proposals have been produced by the National Association of State Board of Education (Levy, 1990), the National Governors’ Association (1990), the Council of Chief State School Officers (1989), the Council of Great City Schools, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent development (1989), and the Institute for Responsive education (1990). Paralleling these reports, experimentation throughout the nation has been growing at a pace that makes the tracking of developments difficult, despite the help of newly established conferences and computerized directories.

The delivery models employed included school-based initiatives (community, full-service, and extended schools) that sought to collocate health and other services in schools; comprehensive early childhood programs that sought to meet a full range of
needs for young children; school-linked services initiatives that created partnerships between schools and providers of other services; school-community partnerships; private interagency commissions; parent involvement/family support and education programs; community-based integrated-services initiatives; comprehensive community initiatives; and state initiatives and even national legislation. Within these models, individual efforts had varying goals, rationales, methodologies, scopes, participants, scales, and time frames. Unfortunately, it appears that, to date, no comprehensive research has yet been done to catalog these experiments. Spot checking for this paper reveals that many of them no longer exist; some have been scaled down; some have been absorbed by the education system; and others, like community schools, appear to be thriving.

A new wave of comprehensive initiatives has begun in recent years, most notably the Harlem Children’s Zone Project (HCZ), a pioneering community-based effort to provide poor children and their families with the full range of resources they need for improved academic and other outcomes. Designed to enhance the quality of life for children and families in one of New York City's neighborhoods that is most devastated by poverty, unemployment, and a paucity of public resources. Through its own schools, programs, and community centers, HCZ provides a comprehensive range of education, health, nutrition, parent education, and early childhood support services to more than over 10,000 at-risk children in a 100 square-block area in central Harlem.1 Another recent example is Atlantic Philanthropies’ Integrated Services in Schools Initiative, now known

1 In collaboration with Teachers College’s Institute for Urban and Minority Education (IUME), the Equity Campaign Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Initiative (AERI) is in the initial stages of a longitudinal study of the Children’s Zone’s Babies College (a parent-education initiative) and Harlem Gems (an early childhood education program). In addition, these units of the Equity Campaign provide two demonstration programs for HCZ, an intensive summer student academic development activity, and a year-round student academic development service that utilizes monitoring and tutorial services.
as Elev8, a public-private partnership begun with a multiyear, multimillion dollar grant program in 2007. The initiative is designed to provide disadvantaged middle schoolers and their families with “a coordinated array of services to support students in succeeding in school and life.” The resources include out-of-school time learning opportunities; school-based health care; and family supports provided through a partnership between schools, local nonprofits, and community partners. New Mexico, Chicago, and Oakland now have Elev8 initiatives.

Great Britain recently initiated national reforms to move the country toward comprehensive educational equity. With the goal of improving children’s outcomes defined comprehensively, the government passed a new Children’s Act in 2004. The Act expands services for children and legislates broad changes in the way that children’s services work together. The detailed, long-term program requires both national and local change. It focuses on integrating services, starting early in children’s lives, improving the quality of programs and personnel, effective use of resources, and providing leadership and support. For schools, the program for change includes new criteria for the inspection teams that evaluate school functioning that would include “the contribution schools make to pupil well-being” (UK Department of Education and Skills, 2004, p. 2). Under the new legislation, beginning in 2006, localities had to develop “children’s trust” arrangements, working with schools, to “integrate front-line services, backed up by integrated processes, planning and interagency governance” (p. 2). Inspired by work in the United States on full-service schools in the ‘90s (see, e.g., Dryfoos, 1994), an ambitious effort is currently underway to convert all schools to extended-services schools by 2010.

**Fostering Evidence-Based Practice**
As we outlined above, the mission of providing comprehensive resources to children and families has enjoyed popularity throughout the century, having been “rediscovered” several times, including the most recent major resurgence of initiatives in the late 1980s and ‘90s. The proliferation of these efforts provides a rich and complex field of study for potential models, best practices, and policy directions on which to build. However, their many variations point to challenges for study, evaluation, and replication. The editors of a 1992 issue of the *Future of Children* wrote of the promising school-linked services movement,

> We believe [it] should be supported. However, we believe also that it is in an early stage and that much about its complexities and potential for effectiveness remains unknown. To date, evaluation of most initiatives is either insufficient or too preliminary to offer much guidance. Key policy choices regarding the design, governance, and financing of school linked services are still matters of experimentation.

This remains largely true today. To advance a policy of comprehensive educational equity, therefore, requires the creation and use of a firm base of research. We must learn all we can from the numerous efforts to date, in the hope of gaining insight from past successes and mistakes and regaining some past momentum. A viable, cost-effective policy for comprehensive educational equity must be based on evidence of which resources are most essential for school success and of which methods are the most effective for delivering these resources. We will need to understand the best way to evaluate these endeavors to ensure, once systems are put in place, accountability for their effectiveness.
Unfortunately, though perhaps understandably, thoroughgoing study of comprehensive efforts has lagged behind the numbers of experiments (Knapp, 1995; Crowson & Boyd, 1993). Researchers worried about the paucity of quality research at the time, with the difficulty of studying and assessing comprehensive initiatives due to the enormous number and variety of experiments, as well as their “complexity and flexibility, the nature of the collaborative effort, and the convergence of different disciplines” (Knapp, 1995, p. 5), and with the attendant risks of insufficient or inappropriate research and evaluation efforts.

Despite widespread interest, there have been few in-depth evaluations, to date, of coordinated-services experiments . . . the rapidly expanding literature abounds with testimonials and anecdotal claims to success. However, little hard evidence exists documenting significant gains in either education or child and family welfare . . . Indeed, what careful evaluation exists shows a history of experimentation colliding with ubiquitous problems of institutional deficiencies, professional training, differences, resource constraints, communication gaps, authority and turf issues, and legal and leadership problems. (Crowson & Boyd, 1993, p. 153)

The lack of research and evaluation on these efforts became a growing problem as, later in the decade, there developed “a deep unease regarding children’s services coordination, and perhaps an at-a-crossroads sense that some clear evidence of success in coordinated endeavors must soon be demonstrated” (Crowson & Boyd, 1996, p. 254).
As the 1990s went on, frequently changing programs and policies with fluctuating funding did not improve the potential for evaluation. One of the most recent reviews of contemporary literature on comprehensive initiatives was undertaken for the U.K. Department of Education and Skills (Wilkin, White, & Kinder, 2003). Searching for studies undertaken after 1980, and using databases from several disciplines including education, sociology and psychology that covered the United States, the United Kingdom, the rest of Europe, and Australia, they found 55 relevant studies.\(^2\) Three-quarters of these studies they characterized as descriptive and only one quarter (14) were considered as “adopting a more evaluative approach, involved in-depth research based studies of initiatives. Though most of the 55 studies originated in the United States, of the 14 evaluative studies, 10 focused on U.K. initiatives. Wilkin et al. (2003) concluded, “There would appear to be little systematic, rigorous evaluation of the concept and its implementation. … Given this lack of rigour, opportunities therefore still exist for a more systematic and critical approach” (p. v).

Accepting that students need a comprehensive range of resources to succeed in school but recognizing that funding for such resources is not unlimited, it is vital to determine which resources are most “essential” or the highest priority. Similarly how best to deliver these resources, services, and supports has not yet been established and may be different for different students, families, communities. These questions must be studied in a focused way. As research methodologies develop that produce clearer answers, this evolving understanding must be applied to ensure that the policy is implemented with

\(^2\)Wilken, White, and Kinder (2003) used the following as search terms for their literature review: extended schools, full-service schools, inclusive schools, integrated services interagency working, multi-agency interventions, multi-agency working, extended service schools, new community schools, community-based services, interagency collaboration, joined-up thinking (a U.K. term), and multi-agency support teams.
evidence-based practice. Finally, a system of accountability must be created that includes appropriate evaluation of effectiveness and results.

To begin to understand which resource areas are most critical for improving academic outcomes and educational equity, in 2006 the Campaign for Educational Equity at Teachers College launched a major research initiative to provide research-based analyses of key educational policies and practices. The first step of this initiative was to gather information on the changing nature of poverty and racial inequality in the United States and identify the gaps in the existing research on the policies and practices in education that are supposed to address achievement gaps. As part of this initiative, comprehensive reviews of the existing educational and social science research about children’s access to educational opportunities are being conducted in 12 areas:

- high quality early childhood education programs
- rigorous and challenging curricula for all students
- high quality teaching
- effective, sustained educational leadership
- appropriate class sizes
- mental and physical health care services
- appropriate academic support for English language learners
- appropriate academic support for special education students
- appropriate academic support for children in areas of highly concentrated poverty
- effective after-school, community, and summer programs
- effective parental involvement and family support
- policies that foster racially and economically diverse schools.
Each review will cover what existing research says about the importance of these areas and the access that poor students and students of color, as well as English language learners and students with disabilities, have to the resources, supports, and services they need to succeed in school. Collectively, these reviews also examine the role of schools in overcoming inequalities and closing the achievement gap and focus on what is missing from the existing body of research on disadvantaged students’ access to each of the essential elements.

The need for quality research and evaluations of comprehensive initiatives has today become central to the agenda of some organizations that promote them. The Coalition for Community Schools, for example, has made evaluation a priority, advocating that community schools methodically collect data to aid comparison with traditional schools. The U.K. extended schools initiative has a rigorous, ongoing evaluation program. However, to implement a policy of comprehensive educational equity, there is still much work to be done in developing research methodologies, creating evidence-based practices, and fostering appropriate evaluation of effectiveness and results.

**Conclusion**

For a meaningful opportunity to meet challenging state academic content and performance standards, as well as fulfill the other important goals of education, students require the coordinated provision of the opportunities essential to learning both in and outside of school—what we call “comprehensive educational equity.” There is widespread recognition that it is time to move from pilots to policy in this endeavor. This requires
that we bridge the current divide between education research and policy focused on school-based improvements and research and policy focused on family, health, and social services. We must also consider policies with respect to a wide variety of institutions that educate not only schools and colleges but libraries, museums, day-care centers, radio and television stations, offices, factories, and farms. Education must be looked at whole, in all the situations and institutions in which it occurs. Clearly, public policy will not touch and ought not to touch every situation with equal intensity. Indeed, there are some situations that public policy will not touch at all. But it must consider each so that wise choices can be made about where to invest what effort to achieve which goals.

References


