

The Neighborhood and Its School in Community Revitalization:

Tools for Developers of Mixed-Income Housing Communities



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URBAN

STRATEGIES

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It's about the schools.

CHAPTER 2



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2.1 The “Enhanced” Neighborhood School

All of our experience points to an “enhanced” neighborhood elementary school as the most potent additional ingredient to build social integration and upward mobility in MI/MR communities. Much has been written in recent years about schools in relation to community development⁴⁹ and the impact of improving schools on neighborhood appeal. Our contribution to the field is to describe the characteristics of these schools and to describe how housing development and community development sectors can work within existing political, social and economic contexts to build them.

We will begin by describing our operating definition of an enhanced neighborhood elementary school.

An enhanced neighborhood school:

1. Serves the entire revitalized (or revitalizing) community—a very high percentage of elementary-age children who live in the neighborhood attend the school and, concomitantly, a very large percentage of the children who attend the school live in the neighborhood;
2. Achieves a higher degree of parent involvement than comparable schools;
3. Has new or upgraded physical assets including air conditioning;
4. Has technology resources that give students and teachers an opportunity to learn and teach using state-of-the-art computer-based resources;
5. Is the beneficiary of both public and private resources;
6. Serves the educational and developmental needs of children well beyond the hours of the traditional school day, including summers;
7. Offers programming and learning opportunities to parents and other adults in the community;
8. Is led by a principal and lead staff who have a degree of autonomy with respect to the use of resources and expectations that are set for children and families; and
9. Has a leadership team with the determination to run a high-performing, model school that will produce improved educational outcomes for children.

The question is: Why does the enhanced neighborhood school, in combination with high-quality MI/MR housing, achieve more with respect to social integration and upward mobility than either could achieve alone?

In this chapter will we examine the following ideas, based upon our experience and that of others in the field.

2.2 The Effect of Stabilizing Housing

“Over their entire elementary and secondary [school] careers, most students [in the United States] make at least one non-promotional school change.”⁵⁰ But in America’s distressed urban areas, student mobility rates—the non-promotional movement of incoming and outgoing students in a given school year—are considerably higher. A 1994 report by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) concluded that about one-sixth of all third graders nationwide had attended three or more schools since the first grade, with the frequent movers disproportionately low-income and minority.⁵¹ Thirty percent of children whose family income was less than \$10,000 per year had attended at least three schools by the third grade.⁵² In a study of the Los Angeles Unified School District, James Bruno and Joann Isken found that the average mobility rate for the 1989-1990 school year was 43%.⁵³ In one elementary school that was studied it was a whopping 96%.⁵⁴ Other analyses of student mobility in several U.S. cities found annual average mobility rates approaching 50%.⁵⁵

Experts agree, without exception, that chronic movement in and out of schools negatively impacts children socially, psychologically and academically. Frequent movers feel alienated

and lose continuity of instruction, important peer relationships and access to remedial programs. The 1994 U.S. GAO study, for example, showed that mobile students are less likely to receive the Title I reading services for which they are eligible.⁵⁶ Not only are standardized test scores lower and dropout rates higher for these children, but their new classmates also suffer as teachers repeatedly disrupt classroom routine and continuity of instruction as well as spend less time on creative, integrated teaching strategies in order to devote extra time to transfer students.⁵⁷

Among the causes of high student mobility, inadequate housing and inadequate schools intertwine in complicated ways. It is noteworthy that although much of the movement between schools is associated with changes of residence, a significant proportion—30-40%—is not linked to housing.⁵⁸ In general, public schools in deteriorated neighborhoods are substandard and unsafe with deteriorating physical plants, few resources, low academic and behavioral expectations, and high teacher turnover rates, which further hurt a school’s working climate and ability to function effectively.⁵⁹ Parents often transfer their children in and out of schools in an effort to improve their educational experience. At a minimum they have no reluctance to pull children out of these schools when they experience setbacks or opportunities in other districts present themselves. Interestingly, mobility tends to occur within narrow geographic boundaries. David Kerbow found that the median distance students moved between schools in the Chicago Public Schools was only 2.4 miles.⁶⁰ Fifty-nine percent of the moves were less than three miles.⁶¹

The federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) may exacerbate the problem of children moving



from school to school and district to district. NCLB mandates school choice for parents whose children either attend a Title I school recognized as “needing improvement” (not achieving “adequate yearly progress” for two or more years) or a school identified as a “persistently dangerous school.”⁶² This type of mobility under NCLB is intentional and positive in that it affords parents the opportunity to transfer their children to a better school.⁶³ However, the right to transfer could have a perverse effect on low-performing schools seeking to improve and on the children enrolled in them: These schools “may selectively encourage parents to exercise their right of transfer for those children who are viewed as the hardest to educate.”⁶⁴ Moreover, NCLB’s overall emphasis on school accountability for student achievement may cause schools to take additional measures to ensure that low-achieving students are not enrolled for the entire year.⁶⁵

Nonetheless it appears that the majority of school changes are associated with housing issues ranging from evictions for inability to pay rent and condemnations, to

life changes such as divorce and marriage.

The synergy between enhanced neighborhood schools and the revitalized, mixed-income communities they serve is apparent from a search of the literature. Though still limited, data on student mobility and achievement, especially, is showing excellent outcomes.⁶⁶

After studying four of the most dramatic neighborhood revitalization projects undertaken in the 10 years since the enactment of HOPE VI, Turbov and Piper concluded that a holistic approach to redevelopment with a high-quality neighborhood school as the cornerstone results in communities that are perceived as good places to live.⁶⁷ Not surprisingly, families tend to remain in neighborhoods with quality amenities and high-performing schools, thus lowering the student mobility rate. At the same time, the availability of subsidized, high-quality housing removes a great deal of insecurity and instability from the lives of the low-income residents. For the public housing-eligible residents, for example, the loss of a job need not lead to

eviction for failure to pay rent. The rent is adjusted downward until the resident is again employed.

An enhanced Jefferson Elementary School was considered integral to a HOPE VI-like revitalization program in one of St. Louis, Missouri's most deteriorated neighborhoods now known as Murphy Park or COVAM, which is an acronym for the housing developments that comprise the community (Carr Square, O'Fallon Place, Vaughn, and Murphy Park). Once among the poorest performers in the St. Louis Public Schools, Jefferson Elementary reopened in 1998 with a new, strong and visionary principal who, during her five-year tenure, replaced incompetent teachers and instituted new curricula, year-round classes, an after-school program, a summer program now attended by nearly all students,⁶⁸ an enhanced physical plant, access to modern technology, partnerships with the broader community and an emphasis on bringing parents into the education process. In the 1997-1998 school year, fewer than 25% of the neighborhood's children attended Jefferson Elementary. By the end of the 2003-2004 school year, Jefferson was attracting 75% of the neighborhood's children.⁶⁹ In the St. Louis Public Schools as a whole, the mobility rate is believed to be approximately 50%.⁷⁰ Jefferson Elementary had a considerably lower mobility rate of 29%.⁷¹

In addition, Jefferson Elementary's test scores in Science and Communications Arts improved for the period from 2000 to 2004.⁷² Khadduri et al. concluded that, test scores aside, "parents may like the school because it is violence-free, has a promising curriculum and an after-school program. Conversely, the attractiveness of Murphy Park may be retaining families in the

neighborhood and thus reducing turnover at the school. . . ."⁷³

2.3 Engaging Parents

Experts agree that among the key predictors of student success is the extent to which the family is involved in the education process.⁷⁴ We have found consistently in our work, and the literature supports this observation, that the converse is true as well: Improved student achievement leads to increased parent engagement.⁷⁵

Efforts to bring parents into the education process have been part of many public school reforms in the last two decades. Dr. Pedro Noguera, professor of graduate education at the University of California, Berkeley, argues that public schools can more effectively serve their students by addressing the need for greater social capital and closure between schools and parents.⁷⁶ Noguera writes, "When parents are respected as partners in the education of their children, and when they are provided with organizational support which enables them to channel their interest to the benefit of the school, the entire culture of the organization can be transformed."⁷⁷ And when parents see tangible evidence that educators care about their children and provide great opportunities for them, they are more likely to be supportive.⁷⁸

Unfortunately, schools have particular difficulty engaging low-income parents and parents of color despite research that shows they want to participate.⁷⁹ As an example, parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences at poor schools in distressed urban neighborhoods is typically only 10%.⁸⁰

The specific reasons for this are many. Low self-esteem makes some parents reluctant to become engaged. They may be intimidated by their own personal negative school experiences and by their lack of education.⁸¹ Logistical issues—time, transportation, childcare—also keep parents from getting involved.⁸²

But experts agree that these impediments are reinforced by other barriers that emanate from the school and its culture: lack of communication between families and schools over expectations for parent involvement, as well as the organizational structure and culture of most public schools that use a hierarchical model of decision-making⁸³ and discourage collaboration between the schools and parents.

It is apparent from a search of the literature that concerted efforts to give children every opportunity to succeed and to make parents feel welcome and integral are hallmarks of enhanced schools in revitalized urban communities.

Jefferson Elementary, which serves the revitalized, mixed-income Murphy Park/COVAM neighborhood in St. Louis, for example, once had a typically low rate of parent participation. Today, parent participation at parent-teacher conferences is a stunning 90%, up from 10% seven years ago.⁸⁴

Similarly, the new Centennial Place Elementary School in Atlanta, Georgia opened in 1999 as a year-round school with an emphasis on math, science and computing. Also located in a revitalized, mixed-income neighborhood, the new school replaced Fowler Elementary, a “rock-bottom” school that reflected the distressed neighborhood.⁸⁵

Centennial Place Elementary now ranks among the top schools in Atlanta.⁸⁶ But, beyond standardized

test scores, it is a place filled with music, art, and other enriching opportunities through partnerships with local businesses, civic organizations, industry, and educational and cultural institutions. Parent participation is an expectation established by the principal and teaching staff. Parents participate in a variety of ways as partners in their children’s education and as volunteers supporting the work of the school.

The enhanced neighborhood schools employ a multitude of strategies aimed at involving parents. Developers and administrators include parents and other area residents in the planning of new or enhanced schools and curricula. School personnel are trained to be welcoming, non-threatening and to communicate more effectively with parents, especially about expectations for their involvement. Parent liaisons, usually from the cultural group that is predominant in the student body,⁸⁷ persistently remind parents about PTO meetings, volunteer commitments and report card conferences. Jefferson Elementary, for example, has a parent liaison who welcomes parents to the parent lounge in the morning, and who also calls or visits parents when there may be issues at home that the school should know about.

It is also important to describe the way in which the management staff of the housing development collaborates with the school to support families. The Centennial Place Elementary School staff has a particularly collaborative relationship with the management of the housing development, which is also called Centennial Place. When housing management staff becomes aware of problems in a family due to loss of a job, for example, they communicate this to school



personnel so that the classroom teachers will be alert to signs of stress in the children. And when school personnel learn of a difficult situation in a child's household, such as the serious illness of a parent, they communicate this to the resident liaison who can work with the family to get the help that it needs.

Participation in teacher conferences is of course an important means for parents to be involved in the academic progress of their children. Attendance at these conferences can be increased by communicating to parents in a friendly and non-threatening way the purpose and importance of these meetings, scheduling them at times convenient for parents who have other obligations and time constraints, and providing child care for younger children.

But in our work we have found that teacher conferences may not be the only or even the best way to initiate parent involvement. Hearing that one's child is below grade level in reading, which too often is the subject matter of the parent-teacher conference, is unpleasant news to any parent, even when

the information is communicated in a friendly way and when the teacher offers positive and useful suggestions for the parent to help the child improve. Often a better strategy is to provide parents with an occasion to see their children succeeding, even shining! Arts activities offered through community partnerships are an important element of the programming of the enhanced elementary schools with which we work because they give a broader opportunity for children to be good at something, to succeed. School-based and school-linked art activities provide children the chance to participate in plays, musicals, dance performances, or even visual arts exhibits then give parents different reasons to come to the school—the thrilling prospect of seeing a child starring in a role, mastering a part, or learning a new discipline. Jefferson Elementary has a partnership with St. Louis-based COCA, the Center of Creative Arts. Through its Urban Arts program, COCA offers programs in visual art (including computer art), dance and theater after school and during the summer. Children who exhibit talent and discipline are

recruited, and offered scholarships, for more intensive work at COCA's main facility.

Arts activities are not the only vehicle for entry-level parent involvement. Sports and community service projects can function similarly. The important point is that skillful school personnel can use this expression of interest to gently shift the focus of the parent's interest to the child's academic work.

The importance of these schools being neighborhood schools that parents can walk to and that are a part of their residential community cannot be overstated. The logistical convenience, especially for a parent without a car, with younger children and with non-standard working hours, is obvious. Less obvious is the fact that in enhanced neighborhood schools, performances or team sports are community events. Neighbors reinforce the participation of parents and share in the parents' pride in their children's success. This kind of reinforcement is much more difficult to achieve in a school that is not associated with a particular residential community.

2.4 Reducing Risk, Supporting Students

Reducing the risk of failure is a complex and daunting challenge that goes beyond academics and requires rallying all the resources of the community. Enhanced neighborhood schools that are integral to revitalized housing communities provide both academic and other supports to help children, and their families, succeed. They are able to do this with strong, visionary leadership and exceptional, vibrant partnerships—financial and otherwise—with the broader

community. Typically this means putting in place and empowering a principal and school leadership team that combine a “no excuses” passion for the success of all children and an entrepreneurial spirit that throws open the schoolhouse doors to the best educational, cultural and human services supports that the community has to offer.

In the early 1990s, Atlanta's Techwood/Clark Howell neighborhood was in distress, as was the Fowler Elementary School that served it. Fowler Elementary was replaced in 1999 by the new Centennial Place Elementary School. The school and the revitalized community, now called Centennial Place, work hand-in-hand to address inextricably linked school, family and neighborhood issues. As was mentioned earlier, the relationship between school leadership and housing management is an important element in the system of community supports. For example, Centennial Place Elementary's Principal, Cynthia Kuhlman, has regular meetings with the development's site manager to discuss early warning signs of trouble for children and families.⁸⁸ Strong housing management also reinforces high standards for both student achievement and parent behavior. Included among the lease conditions at Centennial Place is regular school attendance for children. Parents are aware that school truancy can put their (very desirable) housing situation in jeopardy. In addition, prospective residents are screened for credit and criminal records, and those in the public housing “tier” must agree to annual housekeeping checks as well as agree and then adhere to participation in a local work program.⁸⁹

In St. Louis, the enhanced Jefferson Elementary School is



The potential for these partnerships to contribute to the educational program and to the school's broader mission in the community are virtually limitless.

the hub of the revitalized Murphy Park/COVAM neighborhood. The school principal and parent liaison work closely with the housing development's resident liaison to quickly identify family issues that may pose a risk to school performance and/or continued occupancy of an apartment at Murphy Park or O'Fallon Place. The resident liaison helps residents to connect with resources for addressing family problems.⁹⁰ The resident liaison also staffs a community-based 501(c)(3) called COVAM that monitors the integration of the school and housing management practices to reinforce high community standards for both.⁹¹ When unmet needs are identified, particularly in the area of youth activities, COVAM seeks grants and other resources to provide programming to supplement what the school is able to offer and, especially, to offer opportunities for older children in the community to learn new skills while serving their community.

There are several characteristics that the enhanced schools we examined have in common with respect to community partnerships providing enriched

resources to children and families in the school community. One is the intense commitment of partners who are stakeholders. At Centennial Place, Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) and Coca-Cola have been stakeholders/partners from the beginning. Both had an intense interest in the successful revitalization of this previously troubled section of Atlanta. In the case of Georgia Tech, the neighborhood and school, formerly liabilities, are now assets in attracting graduate students, faculty and staff. The serendipitous dual roles that Norman Johnson played as a member of the Atlanta Board of Education and the Director of Institute Partnerships at Georgia Tech (along with being the keeper of the vision of the development/management team with respect to a high-performing school) were also key to the construction and establishment of the new school, as well as to the continuing intense and multi-faceted relationship between the school and Georgia Tech.

At Jefferson Elementary, the stakeholder relationship was not a pre-existing condition of the community, so it had to be invented and spearheaded by the developer,



Richard Baron, President and CEO of McCormack Baron Salazar, along with the staff of the locally based Danforth Foundation. After raising funds to upgrade substantially and install state-of-the-art technology in the school, Baron, with the Danforth Foundation, developed a vision for an educational compact—the Vashon Educational Compact—between feeder elementary and middle schools and the Vashon High School, the public secondary school serving the Murphy Park community. Richard Baron and Robert Koff, then Vice President of the Danforth Foundation, led the effort to raise funds from the corporate and philanthropic community to provide enhanced and enriched programming in the “compact” schools. A strong Executive Director, Bill Carson, essentially coordinated the enhanced educational resources for the compact schools and monitored performance.

Another serendipity for Jefferson Elementary is the relationship of Richard Baron with the local arts organization COCA, which he founded as a center for teaching performing and creative arts. COCA provides

arts programming at Jefferson Elementary and has been a key source of after-school and summer programming that keeps a large number of students engaged and learning during after-school hours and the summer. More importantly, the extensive Urban Arts program at Jefferson Elementary is a magnet for parent participation in success-driven school activities.

Adams Elementary School is another enhanced neighborhood elementary school with which we work. It is not in a neighborhood where there is large-scale, mixed-income and HOPE VI-type revitalization. Instead, some for-sale and rental housing in the neighborhood is gradually being rehabilitated by a number of investors and developers. Development interest in the neighborhood was largely generated by the decision of the Washington University Medical Center (WUMC) to invest in the deteriorated Forest Park Southeast neighborhood that lies immediately south of its world-class medical campus. With the commitment of WUMC to the revitalization of the neighborhood and the involvement of the residents, the Danforth Foundation and U.S. Bank, the project management

team was able to persuade the St. Louis Board of Education to make a major investment in renovating and reopening the school. While the absence of secure and stable subsidized housing has continued to create high levels of student mobility, the school has benefited from its continuing partnership with WUMC.

These three schools, and other enhanced schools, share another characteristic: Their strong principals have been almost singularly focused on student outcomes. Rather than being led in a million directions by well-meaning partners, they have served as orchestra conductors, signaling to each player when they should come in and what their contribution should be.

2.5 Education for All

In a 2000 Harvard Children's Initiative lecture on School Reform and At-Risk Children, Richard Weissbourd said, "We will simply never stop a wide range of developmental and school problems without making a much more serious commitment to parent education in our schools, in our preschools, in our home visiting programs, and in many other settings."⁹² Parent education, both to increase their own skills and chances of employment as well as to help them help their children succeed in school, is a hallmark of enhanced schools.

In the enhanced neighborhood school model, the school becomes a center for learning for children and adults. When the school is open and welcoming and parents are confident that their children are being helped within its walls to reach their potential, it becomes possible both emotionally and logistically for these parents and

other neighborhood adults to use the school's resources to improve their own skills. From our work, the best example of a successful school-based adult learning opportunity is the Adult Computer Lab at Jefferson Elementary. The lab is staffed by an instructor, and adult learners can receive training in Microsoft Office or even check encoding in conjunction with a partnership with U.S. Bank. Others may choose to build Adult Basic Education skills or study for the GED. The lab and its programming have been a success, with almost every seat taken during operating hours.

As word of the success of adults interacting within the school spreads in the community, the programming and place become a magnet for more and more complex interactions. For instance, Jefferson Elementary's school-based adult learning project caught the attention of St. Louis WizKids, which is funded by the Department of Commerce Technology Opportunity Program. WizKids is a program designed to put technology in the form of desktop and laptop computers in the homes of lower-income children, train both children and adult caregivers in the home to use the technology, link the home to the school, train a coach to work with the school and home, and then explore how such a technology model might improve student achievement and parent engagement in student learning. The program is a rousing success at Jefferson Elementary.

2.6 Building Leadership

When Urban Strategies is under contract to work in a community, we state explicitly that one of our most important "deliverables" is to identify residents with leadership ability and to increase their skills for

leadership. It is our goal to leave behind a comprehensive network of human services and human capital-building assets, but the work of identifying community needs and seeking resources in the community is a continuous and dynamic process. The resident liaisons coordinate some of this work in the McCormack Baron Salazar/Urban Strategies communities, and in many cases they are residents of the housing development. But it is important that a group of resident leaders be identified to populate a governing council, to provide outreach to and communication with their neighbors, and to do the work that is required to plan and execute the kinds of community events that create social interaction and liveliness in an MI/MR community.

The challenge that we encounter is that some of the people with the most potential are overextended. Many of the low-income families in the MI/MR communities are female heads of household. In moving into the new community, they are often also making radical transformations in their lives. There is an expectation that they be engaged in work and/or job training and that they be more involved in their children's education. There is active encouragement to participate in physical exercise and to learn improved financial management skills. For these residents, investment of social capital in schools works on a number of levels. It allows parents to become engaged in their children's school while learning to be leaders. There are many jobs that make a school a better place if the opportunity is structured for the volunteers. Cookies can be baked, children read to, parties planned, sports teams coached and fundraisers organized.

The road to success for a school volunteer is fairly short and fairly certain. Often people realize that not only can they do volunteer jobs well but that they have a talent for involving and leading others.

Centennial Place Elementary has been very successful in fostering leadership among community residents. One example is a resident-led parking service for Georgia Tech football games that raises money for school programs. The principal actively fosters this kind of participation, leadership development and growth. She told us proudly that the past several PTO presidents have been public housing parents, who ably and confidently led the parking fundraiser with a cohort of other parent volunteers from across the income spectrum.

2.7 Enhanced Schools and "Organic" MI/MR Communities

"A community is known by the schools it keeps."
*Motto of Shaker Heights (Ohio) School District.*⁹³

There is overwhelming evidence in the literature as well as in the experiences of those involved in "pure" real estate development and those engaged in comprehensive community development that the quality of the schools serving an area are important to people when making decisions about where to live. While low-income people often cannot vote with their feet, people who have a choice about where to live can and do make the decision based upon schools. In several communities in which we work, we have observed the importance of the caliber and reputation of the schools to a wide variety of

“A community is known by the schools it keeps.”

Motto of Shaker Heights (Ohio) School District.

prospective residents. We have observed that:

1. The impact of schools on residential choice extends to people who do not have school-aged children.

In St. Louis's Forest Park Southeast neighborhood that surrounds Adams Elementary School, after years of disinvestment, the opening of the school and community center stimulated rehabilitation of a substantial number of rental and for-sale units that are a combination of affordable and market-rate. While the school is at this time about 99% minority, the houses are being purchased by middle-class families both black and white and who do not have school-aged children or are not public school users. The enhanced school and community center in essence announced that this is a neighborhood that is revitalizing, and the middle-class buyers were certainly motivated by the idea that they will realize major

appreciation of their homes' values as the neighborhood continues to improve. Meanwhile these middle-class homeowners are investing social capital in the school and the community.

In Murphy Park/COVAM, another neighborhood that had not experienced new residential construction in the past 50 years, the new Jefferson Elementary, with the mixed-income rental development that surrounds it, has spawned the development of a community of for-sale houses. The buyers are typically middle-class African Americans who had ties to the neighborhood, often through their churches, but until the development of these houses had no opportunity to become homeowners with reasonable confidence in their investment. While in most cases the decision to purchase was driven by the brighter future that the enhanced school projected for the neighborhood rather than by a clear decision to use the school, the greatly improved performance of

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Integrated Community Support: What Else Has to Happen to Increase the Likelihood of Social Integration Leading to Upward Mobility?

CHAPTER 5



- 5.1** Work Readiness for Real Jobs
- 5.2** Residents Own the Positive Change in the Community Leadership Development by Doing
- 5.3** Create, Maintain and Sustain Housing Choice in the Neighborhood
- 5.4** Pitfalls to Avoid
- 5.5** Funding the Ancillary Activities Post-HOPE VI—
Creating and Sustaining Political Will, Public Capital
and Private Commitment

5. Integrated Community Support:

What Else Has to Happen to Increase the Likelihood of Social Integration Leading to Upward Mobility?

Throughout this work, sometimes more directly than at other times, we have alluded to the fact that there is a bundle of activities that do not appear to be about enhanced schools or about improved housing stock, but that nevertheless must be seeded and nurtured in order for the lower-income families to live successfully in the MI/MR community and for their children to matriculate successfully in the enhanced school environment. Our observations and experiences have taught us that a specific set of activities is essential to the success of community revitalization/school reform strategies in MI/MR communities. The distillate from this group of essential services is that the lower-income families in MI/MR communities must feel real and measurable positive change in their lives, beyond the fact that their children are attending different and ostensibly better schools. In essence this bundle of activities contains the ingredients of family social integration and upward mobility.

Moreover, the desired result is that residents who are achieving upward mobility and experiencing social integration will stay in

the community. Staying in your formerly “low-income,” highly disinvested neighborhood once your personal circumstances start to improve is counterintuitive, so, like the careful planning that^A goes into the school reform, there must be a planned approach to keeping these families in the community. If you lose these families, the result is civic infrastructure drain—i.e., emerging community leaders leave just as they are realizing their potential to influence others and to use their skills to demand and work for high-quality community assets for themselves and their children. This chapter will describe strategies that we and others have employed successfully both to build upward mobility and social integration and to maintain families once they begin to experience this individual and family transformation.

5.1 Work Readiness for Real Jobs

The opportunity to work and progress toward living-wage, career-track employment is essential to upward mobility for the low- and moderate-income families in the MI

community. These are the families with the least choice about where to live. While they are the most likely to choose to stay in the community, they are also the most vulnerable to displacement from the community because of the uncertainty that the lack of steady employment brings. A revitalized housing and school community can provide support for and access to tailored services designed to assist the unemployed or the underemployed within the MI community in obtaining the real jobs so essential to stabilizing this population. Placing the work readiness or job training in the school setting can create new synergy between parent and school and parent work success and child success. However the key success point for this additional service is that it is a targeted “work first” service approach. The focus of a “work first” approach is on getting the head of household to get and retain a first job or to progress from minimum-wage work to a living-wage job.

Adding a successful “work first” approach to the group of services available to adults in transforming MI community means:

1. Acknowledging that many of the heads of household may have significant “other” issues that underlie the inability to get and retain good employment; and
2. Persuading a group of employers to take small risks by employing entry-level workers from the target population.

The significant “other” issues will likely include things such as,

low educational attainment, health and/or mental health issues and child care issues. “Work first” is a commitment to first offering people an opportunity for real work as an incentive to address the other issues.

This is a distinctively different strategy than a typical workforce readiness approach that focuses first on removing some of the barriers that the chronically unemployed and underemployed commonly face, and then sending the^B more motivated clients forward for work opportunities. In our experience, the most powerful incentive to an unemployed head of household living in dilapidated housing in a community on the cusp of change is the opportunity to have housing in the new community and a job to help support that new lifestyle. Typically the motivated low-income resident is the most ardent critic of the revitalization process, asserting that the revitalization will result in him or her being removed from the community and then not being able to “afford” to return. However, with a “work first” approach, the goal is to find a jobs partner that will commit to putting residents to work once they meet some minimum qualifications. With the promise of a job, the energy of the motivated resident opposing the transformation can be quickly directed toward addressing personal barriers to employment. The development team is again uniquely well-positioned to use its clout to bring to the community revitalization team a jobs partner that is willing to provide real job opportunities to folks who would not be traditionally considered as candidates. The

A. In building and sustaining successful mixed-race communities there are additional essentials like cross-cultural exploration and sharing that must be developed and nurtured that are not discussed here.

B. The “work first” approach mirrors the housing first strategy to eliminate chronic homelessness in that people needing to enter and advance in the workforce are taken where they are and the system of employment support adapts to move them forward.



trade-off for the employer taking the additional risk of dedicating job slots to these candidates is that the employees will be supported in addressing their barriers so that the employer does not have to “nursemaid” the employees. In HOPE VI communities there are generally funds in the Community and Supportive Services budget to provide the needed support for a “work first” program. In other MI revitalization communities, the developer needs to attract partnerships and grant funds to implement this type of program.

Increasing the number of working adults in a MI community is essential to housing stability in that it changes the view that low-income residents have of themselves and the way that their neighbors view them, and, consequently, it supports social integration. Working adults see and feel something different in their lives in addition to improved housing. They begin to see how they fit into the community of productive adults. The increased income, no matter how moderate, increases their upward mobility. Their children are the natural beneficiaries in that children of working parents are generally more

successful in school performance and school completion.

5.2 Residents Own the Positive Change in the Community Leadership Development by Doing

It might appear to be axiomatic that residents of a community would have a sense of ownership about what goes on in that community, particularly those things that are related to overall community improvement. This sense of ownership and efficacy around the positive aspects of a neighborhood is generally seriously eroded in deteriorated urban core communities. In fact, from our experience of surveying thousands of residents in low-income deteriorated communities at the start of revitalization projects, we have learned that while the residents are able to identify community strengths and community assets, the assets identified are most often institutions or programs with long historic roots in the community. Residents are proud of the historic institutions or programs, but they

have no immediate sense of personal ownership of and responsibility for those community assets.

Creating or fostering a sense of ownership of the positive transformation taking place in the community is an essential ingredient of success and sustainability. The challenge is finding the catalytic activity or initiative impacting a MI community that will attract a sense of ownership from both the low-income residents and residents from other income segments. Again and again we have observed and experienced that improving community safety does provide a broad sense of ownership. Targeting a neighborhood safety program as a platform for organizing volunteers and as a tool for bridging socioeconomic differences in communities works! A neighborhood safety strategy (that may include simple outcome-based activities like neighborhood beautification projects) typically involves people of all income levels. And it often gives low-income people a sense of efficacy in controlling their environment that is much more common among more affluent people. Promoting and improving safety is a measurable and tangible concept that everyone in a community can get behind. More importantly, when increasing safety is an adopted goal, new and old, low-income and more affluent residents all have assets to bring to the table. Low-income neighbors who typically are the longer term residents of the revitalizing community often have the historic knowledge about the sources of nuisance and negligent or criminal activity in the community. New residents are strongly motivated to make certain that the new community is not plagued by any criminal remnants from the old community. All residents want the revitalized community to be

safe and secure for all families. The matter of safety equalizes the residents, and from the nexus of their common interest, residents in a MI community can develop a strong sense of ownership of plans for improving, keeping safe and ultimately redeveloping the community.

Beauty, functionality and safety are linked. Focusing on any of these as the organizing platform for creating a real and immediate sense of ownership of neighborhood transformation can work. Experience suggests that safety works the best. The residual outcome, which is what is really of value, is the sustainability of change because residents have participated in the process of problem identification, have observed how common interests can override seeming differences and have designed a set of solutions. Because residents across differences in income and possibly race have experienced this set of processes, they understand what “ownership” feels like. Building ownership in the transformation through work that is rooted in enlightened self-interest, real priorities and real-time activities has, in our experience, worked much better to create and support sustainable change than theory-based leadership training initiatives.

5.3 Create, Maintain and Sustain Housing Choice in the Neighborhood

No matter how beautiful the rental housing development, how luxurious the condo component of the community or how well-supported the Habitat for Humanity housing in the neighborhood, an

overabundance of any one housing type and a shortage of other housing types diminish the livability and ultimately the sustainability of the MI/MR community. The need for housing choice and balance is most important to the lower-income residents.

The MI community by definition has families with limited ability to choose where and how they will live. When decent housing that they can afford shows up, they take it. They are more than willing to move to relatively attractive, affordable housing in a MI community, but if MI communities are to successfully support the social integration between income levels, it is essential that they be developed so as to operate organically like other “good” communities.

The lower-income families in the community must see the range of housing from rental to for-sale, from rental multi-family to rental town home to condominium. Lower-income residents must see the opportunity to move into various types of housing as a natural result of improving their personal circumstances and a natural outgrowth of the improving community. In other words, even though poor folks have not had the ability to choose to live in places with wider ranges of housing options, they know that when a community is good, those options exist and people within and without the community take advantage of those options. It is obvious to low-income residents (and in survey after survey they have told us so) that the problem with their distressed community is that it does not look or operate like

other communities—the folks who are able to leave move away, the folks who are there are stuck: They do not move up, and no one moves in by choice.

In our experience, the option for affordable home ownership does not necessarily have to inure to any existing low-income residents in the community. In spite of the view of policy-makers that homeownership represents a panacea for the poor, we have not found a natural progression among low-income people from distressed public housing to improved subsidized housing and then to affordable home ownership. It is a tidy and attractive linear assumption that low-income people should strive for home ownership, but for most low-income people in transforming communities, renters start as renters and end as renters, with significant numbers of lower-income folks expressing a preference for renting, particularly when the rental housing stock is improved. But housing choice, including some affordable for-sale options, has social value in that it brings into their community upwardly mobile families with whom the indigenous lower-income families can identify, even if they do not aspire to follow their lead.

To overcome the inherent stigma that being a low-income housing consumer creates, and to foster the social integration that is possible when low-income residents are confident of real and measurable change in their lives, it is imperative that the MI neighborhood present a range of housing choices that are the hallmark of “good” neighborhoods by all commonly accepted definitions.

5.4 Pitfalls to Avoid

While our experience and the experiences of others engaged in comprehensive community development have offered us many promising lessons for success, we have likewise learned a great deal about what does not work. We address the matter of what does not work from the standpoint of principles rather than specific programs or practices. These principles, when applied to programs and practices, will guide practitioners toward success and away from ineffective approaches.

Training without work, whether paid or not!

First, training, of any variety, with the possible exception of short-term workplace entry coaching, does not positively impact the social integration of lower-income families in MI/MR communities. We have observed that the starting point for the chronically and often critically unemployed and underemployed is a job! Basic workforce readiness skills like getting to work on time, dressing for workplace success and managing family and work are indeed needed for adults entering the workforce for the first time or returning to the workforce after some delay, but this training must be given in conjunction with a real job opportunity. This kind of training with no real connection to a job creates a negative and futile experience for the would-be worker trainee and, in fact, can undermine the candidate's motivation to succeed. Basic elementary workforce readiness training without a job connected to the training is often viewed by the lower-income residents who are relegated to such

training as seriously condescending and disrespectful of their capabilities as adults.

Again, the chronically unemployed or underemployed residents discern very quickly that the basic workforce readiness training, without a job commitment, means that those sending them to the training find the residents to be unemployable. Once this message is sent, it cannot be rescinded. Residents get the message, they internalize the message and the road to a job, self-sufficiency and social integration has some additional potholes. Identical workforce readiness training with a job connected to it demonstrates that the resident is considered a successful and employable candidate who requires only minimal training. This is a message that builds. It is the beginning dose of confidence that many residents so desperately need at the start of personal transformation in a community undergoing transformation.

Amazingly, the work that must be connected to basic workforce readiness training does not have to be fully compensated work. We have observed residents who get as much of a social integration boost from unpaid but meaningful work as they do from paid work. Avoid training without real work, whether paid or not!

Volunteerism and professional support: neither is effective alone

Over and over again we observe the same series of mistakes with regard to volunteerism, or what residents in the transforming MI/MR community are expected to do as part of their leadership agenda and what professionals are paid to do.

The potential for these partnerships to contribute to the educational program and to the school's broader mission in the community are virtually limitless.

One scenario goes something like this: Residents in transforming MI/MR communities are viewed as some version of pioneers who are called upon to set up a governance structure, develop a list of consensus priorities about community values and principles and then enact and enforce those principles in an emerging community. To achieve this design, development and implementation agenda, the residents need to be legal experts, social workers, urban planners, politicians and property managers all rolled into one.

An alternative scenario is this one: Professionals of the types described above are paid to perform their services for residents without any responsibility for making certain that residents, present and future, have the wherewithal to perform some of the essential functions on their own. Those communities that successfully transition to MI/MR communities have a balance of resident and stakeholder leadership roles, properly supported by professional services.

Residents alone volunteering their time, no matter how skilled and committed they are, simply cannot provide the leadership to develop and implement effective governing principles and practices in emerging communities without paid professional services. Paid professionals, no matter how skilled, cannot establish governance structures and operating principles and practices for MI/MR communities without engaged and committed residents or prospective residents actively involved in setting up the parameters and precepts for which the community will be known.

The question is how does the developer or community builder

work to bring together residents, stakeholders and professionals in the right mix, with the right scope of responsibilities delineated between them, for the right amount of time to secure a workable operating structure.

While we are unable to suggest a fool-proof recipe for the right mix, we have learned that certain temptations should be avoided:

- Open-ended appointment of residents, would-be residents or other interest-group stakeholders to the leadership or governance conversations. Resident/stakeholder representation should be term-limited by consensus of the organizing group to keep the thinking fresh, the leadership growing and ownership of the community operations expanding among residents.
- Fragmentation of paid professional services so that there are many professionals doing small, disjointed pieces of work with no managed way of connecting their work.
- Balanced involvement of residents and professionals in the planning processes with no provision for professional support at implementation.

Thoughtful consideration and balancing of short-term expediency and long-term goals are the best way to avoid these pitfalls. Regularly using and relying on the field experience of colleagues—that is the experience of those who have been there, been burned and come through the process older, wiser and with success markers you can use—is another recommendation.



5.5 Funding the Ancillary Activities Post-HOPE VI—Creating & Sustaining Political Will, Public Capital & Private Commitment

The bundle of additional items ancillary to the development of MI/MR housing communities with enhanced schools that we have discussed in this chapter contains the most difficult items for which to find funding support. As was mentioned earlier, when the MI/MR community is a HOPE VI community, there is an identified, if limited, funding stream for Community and Supportive Services. Carefully prioritizing what those funds will be dedicated to can usually provide sufficient resources to address enough of the ancillary items to show some improvement in the human and social capital of

the community, and hence some social integration for the original families and even more so for their children.

If, however, the transforming community is not funded by HOPE VI, the very first step in finding funding is to identify what items are currently supported, to any degree, by public funding. This process is often one of pulling at threads until you unravel the public funding source(s). The encouraging part of this process is that for most of the ancillary items that should be prioritized, and certainly for the ones described here, there is typically some public funding source for some part of the work that needs to be done. For example, in implementing a “work first” approach for low-income families in communities that are transitioning to MI/MR, there are, in every state and city in the country, Workforce Investment Act funds to provide



incentives to employers to take risks and hire people who do not squarely meet the typical new-hire profile.

Even in less tangible ancillary areas such as increasing resident ownership of the transformation to MI/MR communities, most cities have some funding to support resident-driven neighborhood leadership development. Positions such as neighborhood liaisons or neighborhood stabilization officers are typically funded from Community Development Block Grant funds and are designed to, among other things, improve citizen engagement in neighborhood management.

Again, the developer is uniquely poised to tap these funding streams as part of the investment infrastructure that developers, using the clout of their equity leverage, regularly ask cities and states to make to large, complex development projects.

A particularly fertile area of public funding for ancillary supports is public school budgets. These budgets are usually full of dedicated pots of funding for such learning

activities as adult basic education, parent engagement in student learning, community engagement in school development, integrated schools and community planning. Scouring public school district budgets will produce some funding opportunities.

The more daunting challenge is to generate the political will to tap into existing silos of funds in order to generate a pool of flexible funds for a comprehensive community approach. It is difficult but it can be done, and it is unquestionably worth the effort. Any successes that the developer or community building team experiences in this regard should be memorialized in writing so that they are not “one shot deals” and can survive changes in elected or appointed leadership.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

CHAPTER 6



6.1 Conclusion

6.2 Lessons Learned

6.1 Conclusion

Both our experience and the data show that mixed-income housing can be an effective means of increasing upward mobility and social integration—if it is accompanied by other kinds of supports and resources. In our experience the critical other services are: enhanced neighborhood elementary schools, services that focus on getting adults employed and services that focus on generating a sense of community ownership and a sense of safety.

We are writing this monograph for the field. Housing developers and community redevelopers are uniquely positioned to lead if they think about neighborhood schools and key supportive services from the very beginning as an integral part of community building. The development of an enhanced school can occur most readily when there is interest in the redevelopment of other physical elements in the community—if there is someone to capture the moment in time. If the right conditions and critical partnerships are in place, or can potentially be put in place, the developer is uniquely well-positioned to seize the moment.

6.2 Lessons Learned

1. Develop and articulate an excellence vision.
2. Commit to a first-rate housing program of sufficient scale to create a sense of change in the community.
3. Work with a school district but stand side-by-side with or, ideally, stand behind, civic leadership from the dominant culture in the district, preferably leaders who are also parents.
4. Find a way to partner with the school district bureaucracy and the district labor structure to modify the principal selection process in the targeted schools—this is even more important than the teacher selection process.
5. Identify an expert educator/reformer to customize the education reform initiative to the locale.
6. Identify the most powerful partners and get them to go along by giving them opportunities to take credit while limiting or eliminating their exposure to criticism.
7. Capitalize on local enthusiasm for the development and the school by getting jobs partners!!!
8. Capitalize on the initial enthusiasm for the investment in the housing and the school by getting a memorandum of understanding from the district that will survive changes in elected or appointed leadership.
9. Develop baseline school and community data and an evidence-based outcomes reporting format that is simple, clean and easy to understand. Report regularly.

