

Case Study: Sustaining Our Community Schools

The Children’s Aid Society (CAS) began its community schools work in 1987 by envisioning a new kind of institution for children and families, and by engaging in significant internal, neighborhood-based and city-wide planning. The internal strategic planning led to decisions by CAS board and staff leadership to realign existing resources in support of this new work, while the external planning resulted in explicit partnership agreements, forged in 1990, with the New York City Board of Education and Community School District 6. In 1992-3, the first two CAS community schools opened in Washington Heights, a neighborhood in upper Manhattan. Even at this early stage, CAS staff and board addressed the issue of sustainability—that is, how to plan for the long-term development, implementation, assessment and institutionalization of this new line of work. Now, in 2013, CAS operates 16 community schools in four New York City neighborhoods.

Conceptual Approach: CAS views sustainability comprehensively, in accordance with a conceptual framework developed by The Finance Project. This framework involves energetic fundraising as part of a strategic financing orientation and sustainability planning, but also involves six other elements: (1) vision; (2) results orientation; (3) strategic financing orientation; (4) adaptability to changing conditions; (5) broad base of community support; (6) key champions; (7) strong internal systems; and (8) sustainability plan. CAS currently maintains two tracks to its community schools sustainability work: local and national. This case study will describe only the local work (although both tracks follow this conceptual approach).

- 1. Vision:** The overarching goal of the CAS model of community schools is to promote children’s learning and development in ways that prepare them for productive adulthood. Recognizing that children’s learning and development are influenced by their ongoing experiences in their families, schools and communities, CAS community schools work to integrate the efforts of all three of these major influences through a partnership approach that addresses five sets of outcome domains: students; families; school; community; and education policy. The CAS model is characterized by:
 - ◆ *Comprehensiveness:* Responsiveness to a wide spectrum of identified needs by marshaling the full complement of partnership resources;
 - ◆ *Collaboration:* Structured involvement of all stakeholders—educators, parents, students, funders, community members, providers, policymakers;
 - ◆ *Coherence:* Intentional alignment of resources around shared results, and coordinated and integrated systems of management; and
 - ◆ *Commitment:* Sustainability planning and activities that are employed from the start.
- 2. Results Orientation:** As noted above, the CAS model seeks to address outcomes in five areas—students, families, school, community and education policy. From the outset, CAS committed itself to evaluation by commissioning a collaborative team from Fordham University’s Schools of Education and Social Services to assess the processes and outcomes of the community schools, focusing on the two initial CAS community schools— PS 5 and IS 218 in Washington Heights. The first three years (1993-6) primarily addressed formative issues, while during the next three years (1996-9) the evaluation explored a variety of outcome questions, using a comparison design involving two other New York City public schools that were not community schools. Overall, key findings included: improvements in academic achievement; improvements in student and teacher attendance; improvements in student attitudes toward school; improved school climate; increases in parental involvement; reductions in suspensions; and decreases in graffiti and neighborhood

violence. Subsequent evaluations have examined specific aspects of the community schools and have demonstrated such positive outcomes as decreases in inappropriate special education referral rates and improved functioning of students receiving mental health treatment. Another study—of our 21st Century Community Learning Centers programs in six middle schools—showed that students who participated in CAS after-school programs experienced greater academic and youth development gains than non-participants. The most recent study, conducted by The Finance Project, examined the social return on investments in community schools. This study, the first of its kind, found that every dollar invested in community schools produced more than \$10 in social return.

- 3. Strategic Financing Orientation:** CAS initiated this work with private funding but has consistently pursued an overarching strategy of balancing public and private funding, with a view toward a 50-50 balance. Each year, we assess the balance between public and private funding, which varies somewhat from year to year. During FY 2013, the funding is approximately 82% public and 18% private. In addition to assessing where the funding comes from, we analyze and report how the funding is allocated. For FY 2013, the operating budget for CAS's 16 community schools was approximately \$14.3 million, which included: approximately \$8M (\$5.4M out of the \$8M are public funds for a 67% - 33% split) for the extended-day, summer camp, teen, parent and adult education components; \$2.3 million for health services (medical, dental and mental health); and Early Head Start and Head Start programs operated by CAS at five of these sites, underwritten by Federal and City (\$1.8 million) grants totaling approximately \$4,030,000.

CAS generates support for its community schools through a wide variety of sources. During the initial years, core support came primarily from private sources, including foundations, corporations and individuals—with the exception of health and mental health services, which are financed partially by Medicaid as well as by other public and private sources. A major step in diversifying our funding sources occurred in 1999, when CAS and Community School District 6 were awarded a three-year Federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant, providing nearly \$1 million per year toward the support of our five Washington Heights schools. CAS subsequently received other 21st Century CLC grants, which provide partial support for our after-school and summer programs. Other sources of funding for after-school and summer programs in community schools are the New York State Advantage program, the New York State Extended-Day/Violence Prevention program and the New York City Out-of-School Time initiative sponsored by the Department of Youth and Community Development.

Small state grants have underwritten specific additions to the core work (i.e., substance abuse prevention, mental health services). Also on the public side, Medicaid continues to partially support our medical, dental and mental health services. In addition, CAS has worked closely with our DOE partners to secure substantial in-kind resources, such as custodial and security services, and to negotiate job-sharing arrangements through which CAS and DOE each pay for half the salary of selected full-time staff members.

- 4. Adaptability to Changing Conditions:** Many significant changes have occurred in public education, both nationally and locally, during the 21 years that CAS has operated community schools. Perhaps most significant was the inception of the academic standards movement, to which CAS responded by strengthening the academic component of our after-school and summer programs, taking an enrichment approach based on complementing the schools' core instructional programs and using the New York City and State academic standards as a guide. CAS has also adapted to, and to some extent influenced, the funding context—for example, by providing active input into New York City's new Out-of-School Time system; and by offering to serve in an advisory and technical assistance capacity to the New York State Education Department when the Federal 21st Century Community

Learning Centers dollars reverted to the states in 2002. Another example is that, with the renewed interest in parent involvement under the Federal *No Child Left Behind* legislation, CAS schools were highlighted in a video produced by the NYS Education Department and we now provide technical assistance on this topic to selected school districts around the state, based on our approach and lessons learned. Beginning in 2012, we aligned our after-school and summer enrichment programs with the Common Core State Standards.

- 5. Broad Base of Community Support:** CAS builds a broad base of community support through two related sets of activities: public relations and constituency-building. On the public relations front, CAS uses all of its regular channels of communication to generate visibility for its community schools work: annual reports; annual meetings; newsletters; annual *New York Times* Neediest Cases campaigns; speeches and presentations by CAS staff; board and advisory committee meetings; and the like. In addition, we have developed monographs (i.e., *Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action*), videos and other support materials that serve multiple purposes, including public relations. In 2005, we wrote a book (*Community Schools in Action: Lessons from a Decade of Practice*) that has helped to publicize our work. Because the community schools work is considered integral to the work of CAS, our communications director regularly promotes awareness of community schools among her key contacts.

CAS considers constituency-building to include activities at all levels, from the city's major political leaders (mayor, city council, school superintendent, director of youth services) to its own board of directors to neighborhood leaders, parents, principals, teachers and young people themselves. This is ongoing work, not a one-time event. Specific activities include: participating regularly in local school board and PTA meetings; making presentations about community schools at key events; inviting decision-makers to visit the schools; hosting visible community-wide events; responding to a wide variety of requests from parents and school personnel (i.e., demonstrating our value and our willingness to be a partner); and providing regular updates and site visits for our own board of directors. In addition, CAS played a primary role in founding the Coalition for Community Schools, which includes national constituency-building.

- 6. Key Champions:** Since the beginning of the community schools work, CAS has harnessed the power of its long-standing relationships with local, state and national political leaders to advocate for increased public support for community schools. CAS staff have: testified at government-sponsored hearings; participated in government-organized planning meetings; prepared public comments in response to *Federal Register* announcements; responded to invitations to review drafts of Federal and state Requests for Proposals; taught and organized parents (and even grandparents) to lobby for increased funding for after-school and related community school programs; and collaborated with colleagues from The After-School Corporation, Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA on city and state advocacy campaigns. Through these efforts, we have identified and worked with key champions at all levels of government (local, state and Federal), including elected officials and administrators of large-scale programs. Some of our most effective champions are members of the CAS Board of Trustees, who regularly tap into their networks of friends and colleagues to support community schools. One of our most effective strategies for enlisting champions has been to host site visits to our schools. To date, over 10,000 visitors have seen the CAS community schools in action—with the result that many have provided financial support and have helped to spread the word about the community schools strategy and approach.
- 7. Strong Internal Systems:** As the CAS community schools have grown from one site in 1992 to 16 currently, we have built strong internal systems for our community schools by creating new supervisory and support positions that include a Vice President of the School Age division (a former

NYC principal who provides overall direction, guidance and support to the division), three Deputy Directors (who supervise the Community School Directors at the 16 sites), a Deputy Director of Operations (who oversees the budget development process and the day-to-day fiscal operations) and two Education Directors (who provides resources, coaching and mentoring to the sites on their after-school, summer and parent involvement programs). Our community Schools are able to rely on the strong internal systems of CAS including the Development, Fiscal, Human Resources and Communications departments, which are guided by the CAS Executive Office and the CAS Board of Trustees—all of whom are very involved with and supportive of community schools. Their involvement has included exploratory trips (self-financed but CAS coordinated) to schools in the Dominican Republic and England that have worked with and are influenced by the CAS model.

- 8. Sustainability Plan:** Community schools are considered one of the core services of CAS and represent about 15% of the agency's \$130 million annual budget. As such, community schools are a priority in the agency's overall fundraising, public relations, advocacy and constituency-building. The CAS Development Department carries primary responsibility for the private fundraising and the CAS Strategy and Excellence Department carries primary responsibility for the agency's public funding, working closely with the community schools central team on proposal development, report preparation, researching possible funding sources, and meeting with current and prospective donors. The CAS annual budgeting process is fully integrated with fundraising. Each community school budget outlines the projected revenue sources as well as the proposed expenses. While the individual schools do not carry any fundraising responsibility (this is all done centrally), each school knows which sources support its specific work and understands the funding parameters and reporting requirements of each source. In other words, sustainability is a major and shared responsibility on the part of all members of the community schools team, who receive direct and substantial assistance from other CAS colleagues and divisions.

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