Community Collaboration to Improve Schools: Introducing a New Model from Ohio

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Conventional school improvement models traditionally involve “walled-in” approaches. These models focus primarily on academic learning strategies in response to standards-based accountabilities. Although positive outcomes have been documented, expanded school improvement models such as the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI) are needed. Expanded models like this one enable educators to gain some influence over students’ out-of-school time and address nonacademic barriers to learning. This analysis presents OCCMSI’s process and content components. Its aim is to facilitate understanding of the complex improvement strategies incorporated in expanded school improvement models, including strategic school–family–community partnerships. These expanded school improvement models offer new roles, responsibilities, and opportunities for school social workers.

KEY WORDS: collaboration; partnerships; school improvement; youth development

School improvement in the majority of the nation’s schools is guided by a conventional model. In this model, each school is the planning unit. Each school has a site-based improvement team consisting of representative teachers, student support professionals, parents, and one or more principals. Teams typically focus on a limited number of improvement priorities, usually those targeting outcomes in core subject areas that can be addressed in the current academic year. Although some of these priorities are unique to each school, in the current policy climate, which is framed by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001), many of these priorities can be traced to top-down mandates emanating from the school district’s central office and, in turn, from state departments of education and the U.S. Department of Education.

For example, since the passage of NCLB in 2001, schools nationwide have focused on standards-based curricula and instruction, evidence-based teaching and learning strategies, performance-based accountability structured by standardized achievement testing, school choice, and alignment among schools, districts, and state departments of education. These standardized improvement priorities are in accordance with federal NCLB incentives, sanctions, and standards. In all such cases, site-based teams and their principal leaders have been handed improvement agendas in which the majority of priorities are set by top-level education authorities. In brief, this conventional school improvement model is a “within-system” approach; the education system brackets improvement planning.

This conventional model for school improvement exhibits two other important characteristics. Both are indicative of needs for expanded school improvement planning.

First, and consistent with this within-system approach, improvement planning, implementation, and evaluation are bounded by each school’s walls or boundaries. In other words, improvement planning is building-centered and “walled in.” This walled-in improvement planning reflects traditional thinking about schools as stand-alone institutions focused exclusively on...
young people's learning and academic achievement, and it also reinforces the idea that educators are the school improvement experts.

Of course, when improvement planning is walled in, external resources, opportunities, and assets are "walled out." In particular, educators and their site-based teams lose opportunities to gain control over students' out-of-school time, especially time that can facilitate learning and healthy development. Walled-in approaches also limit the school and community's influence on other nonacademic factors that are known to impede academic success.

Second, change-as-improvement follows an industrial logic. In this approach, linear, one-at-a-time planning and implementation are normative. This means that site-based teams faced with multiple priorities must restrict their improvement efforts to a few needs. Other priorities, which often are essential to improved outcomes and conditions in support of these outcomes, must be postponed until subsequent years. In effect, this means that school improvement is constrained and even impeded because the site-based team lacks the capacity to undertake complex changes mounted simultaneously across several fronts.

Shortcomings notwithstanding, this conventional school improvement model has several strengths and creates positive academic outcomes for students (Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2002). To use intervention language, this walled-in school improvement model is a necessary, but insufficient, intervention. The challenge today, most visible in schools with growing numbers of vulnerable students, is to benefit from this walled-in model's strengths without being saddled with its limitations.

Toward this end, new expanded school improvement models are being developed nationwide. The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI) is one such model (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2004). The OCCMSI derives in part from a growing theoretical and empirical literature. The international movement in support of community schools—schools that welcome community empowerment strategies alongside co-located health and social services, parent and family initiatives, and after-school programs—is a noteworthy example. The evidence suggests that community schools help "get the conditions right for learning" by improving students' academic readiness and addressing barriers to learning (Blank, Melaville, & Shah, 2003). Some schools also make progress in closing the achievement gap.

In the same vein, parent-focused and parent-led school improvement models, grounded in community organizing, provide multiple school improvement resources. For example, teachers, principals, and culturally diverse parents develop common purposes stemming from mutual understanding (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001), resulting in new instructional strategies and more parent involvement in children's education.

In addition, school safety and security improve, including the neighborhoods surrounding schools, and educators gain help and academic enrichment resources from parents and other community members (for example, Hatch, 1998). Schools and entire feeder patterns of schools gain the political supports offered by local communities, supports manifested in building improvements, approval of school levies, and elected officials committed to schools (for example, Shirley, 1997). At the same time, social capital develops among educators, other human services professionals, students, and families (for example, Shirley, 1997).

Examples like these have been instrumental in the development of the OCCMSI. That said, the OCCMSI is unique among current models because of its systematic organization, through a formal logic model, of multiple school improvement components. Moreover, and in contrast to community schools, the OCCMSI does not require massive relocations of programs and services at a school. Instead, it places a premium on place-based configurations involving the interweaving of school owned and operated and community owned and operated resources (Adelman & Taylor, 2005) for learning, healthy development, and success in school.

As such, the OCCMSI is introduced in the ensuing analysis, starting indicators of need and significance. Then the Ohio Department of
Education's (ODE) role in the development of OCCMSI is described. Its leadership as the state educational association in Ohio has been instrumental to providing information, resources, and technical assistance on educational matters to more than 3,500 schools in Ohio. Next, the OCCMSI logic model is featured, including its import for coherent and comprehensive planning, targeted implementation, and evaluation-driven, continuous learning and improvement. Implications for school improvement and for school social workers are identified.

**OCCMSI INDICATORS OF NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE**

OCCMSI responds to twin needs: to gain influence over students' time and to capitalize on family and community resources for learning, healthy development, and success in school. At the same time, OCCMSI enables educators and others working at schools, especially school social workers, to develop strategic school–family–community partnerships focused on barriers to learning. Details follow.

**Time Needs**

Increases in academic achievement hinge on increases in academically engaged learning time, along with opportunities to benefit from the subject matter expertise of a qualified teacher. On average, students spend about 30 hours a week in school during the academic year, and not all of this time is devoted to academic learning and achievement. Weigh into this picture students' time during the summer months when school is not in session, and the result is a scenario in which educators have access to, at most, 13 percent of a young person's time. This is not a formula for success.

OCCMSI is structured to enable educators and other professionals at the school to gain access to learning-related resources during the nonschool hours. It emphasizes connections between schools and both family and community resources for learning, healthy development, and success in school. Strategic partnerships formed to solidify these connections, particularly those designed to increase engaged academic learning time.

**Barriers to Learning**

Alongside educators' limited influence over students' out-of-school time is their limited influence over other individual, peer, family, and community factors known to constrain and prevent academic learning. These "nonacademic barriers to learning" (for example, Adelman & Taylor, 2005) are known as developmental risk factors (Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001). Risk factors include emotional and behavioral problems, unmet basic needs for good nutrition, involvement with antisocial peers, unstable housing, inadequate family supports, and family conflict and related instabilities (Doll & Lyon, 1998; Early & Vonk, 2001; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001). These nonacademic barriers constrain optimal student success. Together they serve as reminders of the interdependence among academic learning and achievement, social development, and positive health and mental health.

Given these complexities, it is clear that schools simply are not equipped or prepared to address all student nonacademic barriers. Although individual schools and school districts employ counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses to address some of these nonacademic barriers, the majority of schools' student support services are like walled-in school improvement models. They focus primarily on direct service responsibilities designed in response to academic deficiencies. Academic and behavioral interventions and counseling are the norm, and other factors underlying student achievement are only touched on the surface. These interventions are necessary, but insufficient, in relation to growing student and family needs and demands (for example, Adelman & Taylor, 2005; Flaspohler, Anderson-Butcher, Paternite, Weist, & Wandersman, 2006). School- and community-based resources must be mobilized in support of all students, particularly those experiencing more extensive nonacademic barriers to school success.

As in the case of family and community resources for learning during the nonschool hours, OCCMSI also facilitates strategic, school-community partnerships aimed at addressing nonacademic barriers to learning. Partnerships
OCCMSI facilitates expanded school improvement planning through strategic partnerships among schools, families, and community agencies, as well as collaborative processes involving all of the adults who serve young people.

Involving health and social service agencies (for example, Adelman & Taylor, 2005; Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, & Midle, 2006) are critical to successful expanded school improvement approaches.

THE OHIO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT

OCCMSI was developed cooperatively by leaders from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the authors of this article (who represent the College of Social Work at the Ohio State University). Given new NCLB mandates and incentives, key leadership at ODE made priorities of two key pathways to improvement within its departmental strategic plan. First, students would receive high-quality instruction aligned with academic content standards. Second, students would enjoy optimal conditions for learning, a pathway expressed colloquially as “getting the conditions right for learning.”

As ODE’s leaders became increasingly aware of the limitations of conventional walled-in school improvement planning and its focus on the first pathway, they invited the development of OCCMSI. The second pathway, “getting the conditions right for learning,” received short shrift at ODE and, in turn, in districts and individual schools throughout Ohio.

ODE thus set the stage for an expanded school improvement model, especially one that would provide a coherent, comprehensive, and research–supported structure that would unite both improvement pathways. In other words, this model was structured to unite the conventional academic learning and instruction pathway with the pathway structured to “get the conditions right for learning.” OCCMSI is the product of this developmental process (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2004).

OCCMSI: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING PROCESS

OCCMSI facilitates expanded school improvement planning through strategic partnerships among schools, families, and community agencies, as well as collaborative processes involving all of the adults who serve young people. As previewed at the outset, OCCMSI is structured to benefit from the strengths of conventional, walled-in school improvement planning and to compensate for this model’s inherent constraints and weaknesses.

The OCCMSI logic model is presented in Figure 1. Like all useful logic models, this one offers both process components and content-related priorities. More specifically, the OCCMSI’s planning “process” is a priority and includes partnership building, needs and resources assessments, collaborative infrastructures, initiative and program evaluation, and continuous improvement planning. It also emphasizes programs and services in five content domains known to affect student achievement and healthy development: academic intervention and enrichment supports, youth development programs, family engagement and support strategies, health and social services, and community partnerships.

Planning Process Priorities

Research on conventional school improvement models indicates that planning processes often proceed without the benefit of good data, relevant research, and rational–logic decision-making models. This kind of haphazard, variable, and inconsistent planning often yields a “crazy quilt” patchwork of programs, services, and strategies at schools. It is important to note that these programs, services, and strategies are not always matched to students and family needs because no planning process facilitates the required intervention logic.

OCCMSI responds to this need. For starters, it is structured to enable educators and their partners to move from the far left of the model—the identification of local needs, gaps, and untapped resources—to the identification of research–supported programs and services that best respond to both school and student needs. This model’s emphasis on local needs is indicative of its process.
Figure 1: Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement

Conditions and Resource Assessment Process

Program and Service Strategies

Accountabilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effort</th>
<th>Immediate/Intermediate Outcomes</th>
<th>Long-Term Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Academic Learning
- Curriculum alignment
- Supplemental services
- After-school enrichment
- Others...

Youth Development
- Service learning activities
- Prevention curriculum
- After-school programs
- Others...

Parent/Family Engagement and Support
- Parent/teacher organization
- Family resource center
- Others...

Health and Social Services
- Learning supports
- Referrals for services
- Others...

Community Partnerships
- Business investment in school
- Neighborhood block watch
- Ohio Reads volunteers
- Others...

Effective Academic and Instructional Outcomes

Getting The Conditions Right

Individual and Peer Outcomes

Parent and Family Outcomes

School Outcomes

Community Outcomes

Well-being Outcomes

All children and youth succeed in school and are prepared for a successful transition to adulthood

Evaluation and Feedback/Continuous Improvement

contributions. It requires local planners to get good data and make solid, local decisions on the basis of these data. In other words, OCCMSI is not a rigid model that preempts local needs and resources assessments.

In addition, this logic model identifies the relevant components for meeting needs, maximizing resources, and closing gaps. Although a more complete discussion of these content components follows later, here it is important to emphasize that OCCMSI provides a framework designed to promote coherence, comprehensiveness, and integration.

OCCMSI’s process contributions continue as the reader progresses from the middle of the logic model to the right-hand side. Here, evaluation-driven learning and improvement protocols for data-based planning are priorities. In due recognition of the time it takes to implement complex change and, in turn, document the achievement of wholesale, desirable outcomes, this OCCMSI logic model structures processes aimed at progress indicators, short-term outcomes, and long-term outcomes. In other words, like a good theory of change, OCCMSI structures a process whereby local school planners figure out how to get from “here” (their originating point) to “there” (an improved or ideal state).

When OCCMSI is viewed as a process-oriented theory change, planning processes can proceed in another way. Instead of the more conventional left-to-right planning, educators may also work from right to left. They may start with the twin aims for the model (success in school and the transition into productive adult citizenship) and then backward map to learn about the planning processes and structures needed to achieve these twin aims. Salient details follow.

**Highlighting OCCMSI’s Key Process Contributions to Improvement Planning**

Thanks to NCLB, most schools are learning to rely on data-driven decision-making processes and structures. Decision making in walled-in improvement models is focused on academic learning goals and instructional strategies for achieving them. The aim for these planning processes is to establish data-based improvement priorities, especially in core academic content areas (for example, reading and math) and involving targeted groups of students, especially underperforming students. The kinds of data collected are determined by the district leaders, principals, and representative teachers. Significantly, the planning process, the data collection, and the data-based decision-making structures tend to be walled in. Educators and other school-based, internal stakeholders do all of this planning and decision making.

OCCMSI calls for an expanded planning process, one that builds from existing school improvement processes. OCCMSI’s processes are expanded in four ways.

First, the OCCMSI framework encourages the exploration of both academic and nonacademic barriers and needs that impede student achievement and school success. Second, it emphasizes the measurement of both school and nonacademic barriers and needs. Third, the OCCMSI uses expanded school improvement teams that allow for the buy-in and input from a variety of school and community stakeholders in the planning process. Fourth, because OCCMSI involves family and community stakeholders in improvement planning, schools gain the capacities to meet multiple needs and solve interconnected problems—in short, to effect complex changes. This problem-solving capacity is in stark contrast to linear, industrial-age problem-solving characteristics of walled-in school improvement models. This complex problem-solving capacity, gained through school–family–community partnership processes, is the key, now missing, component for “getting the conditions right for learning.” A few OCCMSI process milestones are provided below.

**“Building the Table.”** This process involves expanding existing site-based teams and establishing, over time, districtwide teams (Adelman & Taylor, 2005). The “table” or expanded site-based team is built by identifying and recruiting stakeholders from multiple backgrounds who have a role to play in supporting student achievement and healthy development—and who bring histories of working successfully with others. “Table members” represent school, family,
and community perspective and may include district- and building-level leaders, teachers and supportive services staff, parents and residents, community-based mental health professionals, juvenile justice and local law enforcement personnel, and other community partners who might potentially be involved in addressing barriers to learning.

Needs/Conditions and Resources Assessment. Together, stakeholders bring and examine key data on academic achievement as well as other data related to priority nonacademic barriers evident within the school community. These data might include individual, schoolwide, peer, family, or community indicators that impede student achievement and healthy development. These data also identify current school and community practices, strategies, and resources available along the prevention, early intervention, diagnosis, and intervention continuum (including those that are tapped, underused, and untapped).

Gap Analysis. A gap analysis is conducted once data about needs/conditions and resources are well understood. This analysis allows for the exploration of resources that are needed but are currently unavailable and untapped. In addition, this analysis examines available programs, services, and resources that lack sufficient quality, quantity, and potency to address the most pressing barriers to academic and school success. Teams use this process to identify specific improvement priorities. These priorities, consisting of the most important academic and nonacademic barriers, comprise the initial improvement agenda.

Resource/Program Development and Implementation. Once top priorities are established, development of new resources, interventions, and partnerships to address identified gaps and conditions is needed. The work often includes the enhancement of current programs, services, and strategies already aimed at addressing the identified need. The main focus here is on the integration of evidence-based practice principles and programs into classroom and program designs, as well as ensuring that programs and services are culturally responsive and respectful of diversity.

Partnership, Collaborative Leadership, and Infrastructure Development. To manage the multiple pathways and processes emerging, the OCCMSI requires that multiple tasks, activities, and processes within the school and community happen simultaneously in systematic, coherent, and integrative ways. Collaboration and collaborative leadership structures are fundamental necessities in allowing this process to occur. This collaboration starts with new, improved relationships among all the people working at the school, and it encompasses new and improved working relationships with other key people and organizations in the surrounding community (that is, leaders from youth development organizations, faith-based organizations, businesses, higher education, and so forth). Collaborative leadership infrastructures that distribute power, authority, and responsibility across the table or group also are necessary. Team members collaborate, and their organizations develop formal partnerships in support of this new way of doing business. OCCMSI also relies on intermediary people and organizations who facilitate the linkages, interrelationships, and partnerships among people, organizations, priorities, strategies, and initiatives.

Evaluation-Driven Learning, Improvement, and Continuous Feedback. OCCMSI also sets as a priority the development of evaluation-driven learning and improvement capacities that allow schools and their community partners to explore process and outcome data about effects and outcomes. Evaluation occurs at multiple levels, schoolwide in relation to core achievement data, but also program-specific in relation to an identified strategy's targeted outcome (for example, social worker-led group on anger management measures anger and problem-solving indicators). These data are monitored regularly and become a centrality to the school and district continuous improvement planning process. New data also may need to be collected to ensure accountabilities are met within the school and community.

The OCCMSI enables local leaders to determine how best to manage the change-as-improvement process. For people preferring linear approaches to change, OCCMSI makes
this possible. For people preferring nonlinear, yet coherent and integrated change-as-improvement, OCCMSI's complex logic model structures these processes.

Most schools and districts would manage both linear and nonlinear change processes. OCCMSI provides a congenial structure for this kind of tailored, complex change approach.

**OCCMSI CONTRIBUTIONS THROUGH FIVE CONTENT COMPONENTS**

OCCMSI promotes a data-based, intervention-oriented approach to improvement planning. It anticipates the need for five core content components, and it aligns and connects them. All five core content components are research-supported; all are known to impact student achievement, healthy development, and school success. The five components include academic learning, youth development, parent and family engagement and support, health and social services, and community partnerships.

**Academic Learning**

Academic learning is shorthand for several, inseparable components of powerful learning and development. It involves traditional school improvement priorities focused on the alignment of curriculum to instruction, the creation of standards-based accountabilities, and effective leadership. It also includes strategies such as quality teaching and instruction, student intervention and assistance, and academic enrichment. Significant improvements occur as a result of these strategies, as research documents important outcomes such as enhanced grades, proficiency scores, attendance, self-concept and self-esteem, school climate, as well as reductions in problem behaviors such as disruptive and aggressive behaviors, dropout, and truancy (Borman et al., 2002; Plucker et al., 2004; Slavin & Madden, 2001).

**Youth Development**

After-school programs, mentoring, peer counseling, social recreation, arts, sports, values education, service learning, community service, volunteerism, leadership development, extracurricular activities, conflict resolution, life skills programs, youth employment, career counseling/job skills training, academic enrichment, and prevention programming all fit under the umbrella name of "youth development." These programs address problems and risk factors and simultaneously build youths' strengths and assets (Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, & Midle, 2006; Lawson & Anderson-Butcher, 2001). Several outcomes have been noted in relation to youth development strategies, including improved grades, attendance, social competence, social skills, and engagement in school, as well as reduced substance use, aggressive behavior and violence, high-risk sexual behavior, and truancy (for example, Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Greenberg et al., 2003; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998).

**Parent and Family Engagement and Support**

Emergent research findings propose that parent and family engagement and support is critical to student achievement and overall healthy development (for example, Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kumpfer, 2003). Strategies involve traditional parent involvement activities such as parental volunteerism, fundraising, and engagement in their child's learning. Family engagement and support involves schools supporting families through referral and assistance, continuing education, parent-to-parent support, and other linkages to vital services in the school community. Benefits for students include enhanced student attendance and grades, engagement in school, and social competence. Families also benefit by experiencing enhanced family cohesion and attachment, perceptions of support, family management practices, and new knowledge.

**Health and Social Services**

Health, mental health, social, cultural, economic, and family barriers, individually and in various combinations, limit some students' learning, academic achievement, and success in school. Furthermore, they complicate the work of teachers, principals, and student support professionals. Health and social services are designed
to address and prevent these nonacademic barriers. They include school- and community-based resources such as mental health services, financial and housing assistance, child welfare supports, and dental and medical services. These support strategies assist in improving academic achievement, social competence, and school climate, and in reducing substance use, mental health barriers, and aggressive behaviors (for example, Hoagwood, & Erwin, 1997; Nabors & Reynolds, 2000; Weist, Paskewitz, Warner, & Flaherty, 1996). In addition, the coordination of these services is related to enhanced service integration and accessibility, as well as decreased costs and service duplication (for example, Greenberg et al., 2003).

Community Partnerships
Community partnerships and collaboration include formal arrangements schools can make with individuals, associations, private sector organizations, or public institutions to provide a program, service, or resource that will help support student achievement. These community partnerships are used to enhance both the programs and services offered at the school and to increase resources for both the schools and the community partners. Multiple benefits are known to result, such as improved academic achievement, improved school climate and safety, and enhanced opportunities for learning. The development of community partnerships reduces isolation among individuals and organizations, reduces student transience, and has benefits related to reducing class and school size (Chadwick, 2004; Hatch, 1998; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Keith, 1996).

IMPLICATIONS OF EXPANDED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FOR PRACTICE
By using the five core content components as a guide, OCCMSI was designed to help schools and communities take stock of programs, services, strategies, and initiatives currently operating in their neighborhoods and identify important needs, conditions, resources, and gaps through its planning, implementation, and evaluation process. It is structured to build on the strengths and successes of existing efforts and is driven by collaborative leadership, sustainability, and ongoing continuous improvement. School-family-community partnerships developed through OCCMSI help educators gain influence over more students' academic learning time and allow schools to address the nonacademic barriers that students often bring with them to school.

New models such as the OCCMSI are needed that expand the walls of school improvement. OCCMSI pilot work has confirmed that these types of efforts are complex and require attention to the multiplicity of factors influencing student achievement. Although multifaceted, readiness data among superintendents, school improvement specialists, educators, parents/caregivers, and various community partners indicate that expanded school improvement approaches designed to gain influence of out-of-school time and related nonacademic barriers to student learning are critical to school success (Anderson-Butcher, 2004; Flaspohler, Anderson-Butcher, Bean, Burke, & Paternite, 2008).

In addition, preliminary OCCMSI evaluation findings support key process and product innovations resulting from implementation (Lawson, 2004). Specifically, the OCCMSI has been piloted in 12 schools and districts representing diverse geographical regions and student populations. Several process improvements across multiple sites have been noted, including enhancements in data-driven decision-making processes; the expansion of school-family-community partnership “tables;” the development and expansion of new programs, services, and strategies; the incorporation of best practices and evidence-based strategies into programming; the generation of new, blended, and braided funding streams in support of school community priorities; and the better coordination of school- and community-based resources and supports (Anderson-Butcher, Lawson, Wade-Mdivanian,
& Bean, 2006). Each of these process improvements better prepare schools and their community partners to gain influence over the factors that often are outside the control of the regular school day, especially as family and community resources are engaged to address nonacademic barriers to learning that often impede student success. In addition, several sites documented significant changes in academic performance, parent or family involvement and engagement, and enhanced behavioral mental health pathways (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2006).

Expanded school improvement initiatives such as the OCCMSI, however, require significant coordination among individuals working inside and outside of the school, as priorities focus on the integration and alignment of school- and community-based resources and supports for learning. Changes in roles and responsibilities among key school and community stakeholders, particularly social workers working in and with schools, are necessary to support the implementation of these complex change efforts.

More specifically, these models necessitate the appointment of one key leader within a school community to serve in the role of coordinator, broker, facilitator, and systems-crosser (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2004; Anderson-Butcher & Ashton, 2004; Lawson, 2004). School social workers who work in tandem with district and school leaders are trained perfectly for these expanded roles. Examples of key roles are provided next.

In relation to the OCCMSI work in Ohio, many school social workers are serving as intermediaries—people who cross professional, organizational, and community boundaries and create mutually beneficial relationships and synergies. Called school–family–community coordinators, resource coordinators, and even assistant principals, social workers are especially instrumental in facilitating the process component of the OCCMSI. In this role, they are instrumental in mobilizing diverse stakeholders from across multiple systems through the convening of a table to generate buy-in, commitment, vision, and support.

In addition, school social workers lead community planning efforts involving extensive needs and resource assessments and gap analyses designed to identify top school improvement priorities and pathways. They develop partnerships, collaborative leadership systems, and infrastructures that support the complex school improvement model within their schools.

School social workers also develop strategies in partnership with their school and community stakeholders to support the content component of the OCCMSI. For instance, school social workers respond through indirect practice strategies where they encourage other school- and community-based providers to address specific needs identified within the planning process. They design and implement evidence-based direct practice strategies where they individually design programs and services in response to the various targeted priorities. They also are responsible for assessment and linkage roles as they coordinate health and social services and the learning support continuum.

These expanded responsibilities for school improvement planning are not structured at the expense of clinical practice with students and their families. Needs for clinical practice remain, especially social workers’ unique contributions to the most vulnerable client systems and their multiple needs. In brief, in expanded school improvement models, social workers’ roles and responsibilities are restructured, and so are those for other student support professionals (for example, Adelman & Taylor, 2005). Moreover, community-based social workers’ roles and responsibilities also tend to be restructured and more fully maximized through OCCMSI partnership priorities.

In essence, school social workers assume leadership from “the inside out,” whereas community-based social workers provide services, supports, and resources from “the outside in.” Fresh opportunities for the profession’s leadership inhere in these new structural arrangements.

It is important to note that these roles and responsibilities for social workers are consistent with their professional education and derive in part from what practicing school social workers already plan and do. Expanded school improvement models like the OCCMSI formalize and institutionalize these new roles, responsibilities,
relationships, and leadership opportunities. And this is another reason for the profession’s support and leadership for these models.

CONCLUSION

In general, the OCCMSI and other expanded school improvement initiatives allow educators’ influence over students’ academic learning time. They also assist in the development of programs and services, both school based and school linked (and community-based), which address nonacademic barriers to learning, healthy development, and success in school.

OCCMSI is such an exemplar model. Its five specific content areas guide expanded school improvement initiatives. These content areas encompass programs and service strategies related to academic learning, youth development, parent or family engagement and support, health and social services, and community partnerships. The strengthening and creation of these various strategies occurs within the OCCMSI school improvement planning process. For example, needs and resources assessments, gap analysis, strategic planning and implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement are critical components guiding the work.

With its focus on partnerships, the model will serve educators and other professionals at schools by providing them with much-needed assistance, supports, and resources. Notably, educators will no longer have to “do it all” or do it alone, as superintendents, school board members, teachers, school social workers, and others structure essential services, supports, and infrastructures that effectively address the most pressing nonacademic barriers facing students and their families. Sharing responsibilities and accountabilities would make the work of teaching and administering in schools more effective, especially as these priorities strengthen and expand existing school improvement initiatives.

Social workers have pivotal leadership roles to play in expanded school improvement models. School social workers serve as intermediaries; and, as such, they are instrumental in the development of school–family–community partnerships. School social workers’ new roles and responsibilities are made possible by restructured student support services and, at the same time, the development of new roles and responsibilities for community–based social workers whose work increasingly is connected to schools. These emergent opportunities for the profession promise to extend its leadership, offering better structures and processes for serving vulnerable children, youths, and families and their schools.

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**TRENDS & RESOURCES**

Trends & Resources presents current practice trend information accompanied by highlights of relevant books, curricula, films, and other practice aids for school social workers and their colleagues. This column is co-edited by an academic researcher and practitioner to help bridge the gap between the latest well-researched tools, current policy and practice issues, and the field. The journal does not accept unsolicited reviews for this column.