

Schools need to provide better access to community services so all students can learn

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Laura Bronstein, dean of the College of Community and Public Affairs and professor of social work at Binghamton University. Credit: Jonathan Cohen/Binghamton University

All across the country, there are low-performing school districts, under-

achieving students and frustrated teachers, but current literature doesn't fully address the root of the problems.

"The public schools can function as community centers with the belief that unless you serve the whole child and the families in the community, children won't be able to achieve the way they need to—especially those in low-income communities," said Laura Bronstein, dean of the College of Community and Public Affairs and professor of social work at Binghamton University. "We are on the path to develop a system of community schools in Broome County."

In 2013, Broome County was designated as the fifth New York State Promise Zone. The program aims to create improved learning environments for schoolchildren in high-needs communities; it is a joint effort of Binghamton University, Broome-Tioga BOCES, the Broome County Mental Health Department and local school districts.

Bronstein's new book *School-Linked Services: Promoting Equity for Children, Families, and Communities*, which she co-authored with Susan Mason, re-thinks the relationship between public education and communities, and how schools can help break the cycle of poverty while promoting student and teacher success.

"While schools are driven by academics, students have challenges at home—hunger, neglect, abuse, a parent in prison—that affect learning," Bronstein said.

According to Bronstein, school is the best leverage point to addressing poverty. The book offers a holistic, evidence-based approach to closing America's achievement gap. School Linked Services draws from research, literature and evidence-based experiences to argue that school systems do not provide enough resources to promote mental and physical wellbeing—the supports required to help students learn. Without having

their basic needs met at school, children (especially those living in poverty) cannot excel in the classroom.

"Educators express that the biggest challenges in their jobs are that they have to address behavioral issues and cannot focus on learning," Bronstein said. "Schools are built to meet the academic needs of children primarily, but in order to level the playing field for youth from all backgrounds, partnerships between communities and schools are vital."

School-linked services are the partnerships based in schools and within communities, such as an on-site dentist office at a middle school, or a transportation system that allows families to access dental care during school days.

School-Linked Services

Promoting Equity for Children,
Families, and Communities



LAURA R. BRONSTEIN AND SUSAN E. MASON

FOREWORD BY JANE QUINN

School-Linked Services was published by the Columbia University Press in May 2016. Credit: Columbia University Press

The ultimate goal of community-school links is to improve the quality of life, but the paradigm has economic implications. For some schools that work to develop such links, the effort to create services can be time-consuming and relationships are often short-lived. In order to be successful, the integration of school-linked services needs to occur at all levels: policy, program and practice, Bronstein said. Schools that attend

to all of these and include integrated, coordinated services and programs are called community schools.

"The model is about looking at what's happening outside of the classroom that is affecting someone academically. The student is at the center, then the family and then the community. The student cannot be successful without the second two components working together," Bronstein said.

"Local economies need a workforce that is educated and invested in its community. Through school-linked services, we can help students reach their full potential and become contributing members of their communities," Bronstein said.

Access to better services - mental and health screenings; afterschool, early childhood and summer care; and programs for family engagement, leadership, etc. - can prevent physical and mental health problems and greater public costs later on. School-linked services can boost high-school graduation rates, increase family and community engagement, and form stronger relationships among all stakeholders. If schools could harness this, the results could transform a community.

"An integrated and holistic approach that adds health and social services and extended hours to public schooling's mandate makes sense for children in all settings: home, school and community," Bronstein points out in the book.

The breadth and depth of the services varies based on school-community need, Bronstein said. Each school should perform an individualized community needs assessment before implementing services.

"The [school](#)-linked services paradigm should be embraced by any professional whose role is delivering services to families, children and

communities—this includes educators, social workers, nurses, public health workers, physicians, counselors, psychologists, etc.," according to Bronstein and Mason.

School-Linked Services was published by the Columbia University Press in May 2016 with a foreword by Jane Quinn, and can be found online for purchase at the Columbia University Press.

Provided by Binghamton University

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