



Case Study: Sustaining Our Community Schools

Background: 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. By 2006-7, CAS had developed 21 community schools located in 14 buildings in three 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 is 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:* Its full-service approach is designed to address the multiple needs of children and families;
- *Coherence:* Joint planning and decision-making involve the major partners (school, CAS and parents) and intentionally seek to integrate all aspects of the community school, particularly the school-day academic program and all of the extended-day programs offered (before- and after-school enrichment; holiday and summer programs);
- *Commitment:* CAS and its partner schools make a long-term commitment to work together with and on behalf of students and their families.

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. Current evaluation efforts include examination of academic and behavioral outcomes of middle school students in six CAS community schools.

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 the current year (FY 2006-7), the funding is approximately 59% public and 41% private. In addition to assessing where the funding comes from, we analyze and report how the funding is allocated. For FY 2006-7, the operating budget for CAS's 21 community schools is approximately \$14 million, which includes: approximately \$10 million for the extended-day, summer camp, teen, parent and adult education components; \$2.4 million for health services (medical, dental and mental health); and Early Head Start and Head Start programs operated by CAS at three of these sites, underwritten by Federal grants totaling approximately \$1.5 million.

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 another 21st Century CLC grant in 2004, which provides partial support for our six middle-level community schools. This four-and-one-half-year grant totals \$900,000 per year.

A second major step was the award of a five-year New York State Advantage grant of \$145,000 per year for after-school programs in two of our community schools, and an Advantage grant of \$250,000 per year for a third community school after-school program. Also on the public side, CAS has received a grant from another New York State source, the state Department of Education's Extended-Day/Violence Prevention program, of \$140,000 per year for one community school, PS 50. Small state grants have underwritten specific additions to the core work (i.e., substance abuse prevention, mental health services). In addition, on the public side, Medicaid partially supports our medical, dental and mental health services.

Another major funding source has been the Soros Foundation's After-School Corporation program, which for several years underwrote substantial parts of the after-school program in 11 of the CAS community schools. This funding represents a mix of public and private dollars. On the private side, CAS has enjoyed steady financial support from a wide variety of foundations, corporations and individuals. Community schools have turned out to be easy for donors to understand, and site visits to the schools have helped to translate their conceptual understanding into financial commitments.

More recently, CAS competed successfully to receive city funding for after-school and summer enrichment programs in our community schools, and we received grants totaling \$3.3 million annually. This funding comes through the city's Department of Youth and Community Development (Out-of-School Time initiative).

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 14 years that CAS has operated community schools. Perhaps most significant is 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 that is 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.

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 A Community School*), videos and other support materials that serve multiple purposes, including public relations. Most recently, 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 director of public relations 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; 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 7,000 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 21 currently, we have built strong internal systems in the Community Schools division by creating new supervisory and support positions that include a Director of Community Schools (who provides overall direction, guidance and support to the division), two Assistant Directors (who supervise the Community School Directors at the 21 sites), a Community Schools Budget Director (who oversees the budget development process and the day-to-day fiscal operations) and a Community Schools Education Coordinator (who provides resources, coaching and mentoring to the sites on their after-school, summer and parent involvement programs). The Community Schools division, in turn, is able to rely on the strong internal systems of CAS including the Development, Fiscal, Human Resources and Public Relations departments, which are all 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. Community Schools represents one of the five permanent service divisions of CAS and accounts for about one-fifth of the agency's \$90 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 Quality Assurance Department carries primary responsibility for the agency's public funding, but the Community Schools central team works in close partnership with both Departments, sharing responsibility and working actively as part of the fundraising 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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