



Harvard Family  
Research Project



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## **Complementary Learning: Emerging Strategies, Evolving Ideas**

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The national conversation about how to better educate our children, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, has shifted. The focus on the achievement gap and growing debate about No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reauthorization have sparked increased recognition that schools alone cannot meet the learning needs of our country's children. As a result, at all levels—national, state, and local—there is intense and growing interest in identifying nonschool supports and opportunities that both complement learning in schools and collectively result in better developmental outcomes for children and youth.

In 2005, Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) introduced the *complementary learning* framework—the idea that a systemic approach to learning that intentionally integrates both school and nonschool supports can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed. In the last 3 years, we have seen a growing interest in and commitment to this approach, and, consequently, a new demand for information. Professionals from many backgrounds are asking similar questions: What does complementary learning look like in practice, and how can communities build it from the ground up?

On November 1–3, 2007, HFRP, in partnership with the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Programs in Professional Education, hosted *Closing the Achievement Gap: Linking Families, Schools, and Communities Through Complementary Learning*. Bringing together nearly 200 superintendents, principals, teachers, family liaisons, out-of-school time professionals, community leaders, and others, this institute provided an opportunity for diverse stakeholders from around the country to discuss innovative and comprehensive solutions for overcoming achievement gaps and preparing all children for success in school and life. Building on HFRP's 2006 institute about creating the components of complementary learning (out-of-school time, family involvement, and early childhood education), this institute focused on connecting all the pieces to build comprehensive systems of support.

The institute targeted two primary goals: a) to describe what complementary learning is and what it looks like in practice, and b) to explore strategies for building complementary learning, both in individual communities and in the field at large. To achieve these goals, the institute drew heavily on the experiences of four community initiatives that embody complementary learning—the SUN Service System in Multnomah County, Oregon; Alignment Nashville in Nashville, Tennessee; the Jacksonville Children's Commission in Jacksonville, Florida; and the Dallas Arts Learning Initiative in Dallas, Texas—through written profiles of their efforts, interactive sessions with their leaders and staff, and informal interactions. The institute also featured the voices of national experts and leaders from the fields of education, research, communications, and philanthropy, and drew on the rich experiences of the institute participants.

Over the course of 3 days, we at HFRP learned from the participants, and we watched them share with and learn from one another. Inviting honesty, we tackled tough questions, debated possible solutions, and shared past experiences. We witnessed “Aha!” moments and heard participants describe their new and revised plans for implementing complementary learning after returning home. Inspired by the learning that took place at the institute, we believe that others in the field can learn from the insights and ideas of our presenters, panelists, and participants. As such, the pages that follow offer a summary of what we learned at November's institute.

- First, we describe the growing demand for complementary learning and the current policy window for mainstreaming complementary learning approaches.
- Second, we highlight themes about strategies for building and sustaining complementary learning that emerged before and during the institute.
- Third, we look forward and point to next steps for the field.

In this document, we highlight both challenges and successes in the field—themes that are often two sides of the same coin. Organic and community-specific, complementary learning systems are constant works-in-progress. This spirit of innovation and continuous improvement is critical for complementary learning to take place and was an important part of the institute.

**Closing the Achievement Gap: Linking Families, Schools, and Communities  
Through Complementary Learning  
Harvard Family Research Project  
Harvard Graduate School of Education**

- November 1–3, 2007
- 156 participants from 29 states and one Canadian province
- 26 presenters
- 70% of participants represented schools or educational administration, 16% represented community organizations, and 4% each represented foundations and research organizations. The remaining 10% of participants represented after school programs and government offices.
- 24 teams of two or more people attended the institute.
- Prior to the institute, 69% of participants reported that they were already currently engaged in an effort to link multiple supports for learning and development (e.g., schools, families, out-of-school programs, health services, etc.).
- Prior to attending, participants’ major goals were to hear about strategies for building complementary learning (98%) and to learn about the research base for complementary learning (82%).
- After the institute, participants reported their primary accomplishments to be learning about the research base for complementary learning (88%) and gathering strategies for building complementary learning (71%).

## **The Current Context: A Policy Window for Complementary Learning**

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Throughout the institute, national experts and field leaders emphasized that we are at a critical nexus of challenge and possibility in the complementary learning field. We heard sobering statistics about the achievement gap from Harvard researcher Ron Ferguson and equally sobering stories from educators about the state of their schools and their students’ educational trajectories.

Chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (and now Massachusetts Secretary of Education) Paul Reville spoke of the gap between aspirations and attainment, both for young people who are striving for success and for educators who are striving for educational equity. His reminder that a child's educational opportunities are still determined largely by her zip code resonated with participants, many of whom work with children in the less privileged localities. All of these professionals spoke of children's needs—often unmet—for multiple supports and opportunities to learn and develop.

At the same time, we heard that, right now, we have the optimal chance of effecting systemic change in the way we educate our children. In other words, we have an opportunity to create complementary learning. Ferguson and Harvard's Karen Mapp framed the current context in John Kingdon's (1993) concept of a "policy window"—that is, an opening for real change when three factors converge: "A problem is recognized, a solution is available, and the political climate is right for change" (p. 93). Following this line of thought, policy experts, including Reville and former Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell, pointed to current political trends that create such an opening, including upcoming NCLB reauthorization and the 2008 presidential election. They emphasized that now is the time to take action at multiple levels to bring complementary learning to the mainstream. They also offered a warning: This window will close quickly, and we cannot afford to miss it.

### What is complementary learning?

Complementary learning is the idea that a systemic approach—which intentionally integrates both school and nonschool supports—can better ensure that all children have the skills they need to succeed in school and in life. A complementary learning approach provides and aligns these beneficial opportunities:

- Effective schools
- Supportive families and opportunities for family engagement
- Early childhood programs
- Out-of-school time activities (including sports, arts, mentoring programs, etc.)
- Health and social services
- Community-based institutions (including community centers, faith-based institutions, community and cultural institutions (such as museums and libraries)
- Colleges and universities

Whereas traditional family and child programs isolate services in separate silos, complementary learning approaches assure that multiple services are intentionally connected, in order to maximize efficiency and leverage resources, ensure consistency and smooth transitions, and create a web of opportunities so that no child falls through the cracks.

Complementary learning approaches range from simpler (e.g., linking schools with after school programs) to more complex (e.g., comprehensive initiatives that coordinate many learning supports). For examples of complementary learning, see [www.hfrp.org/complementary-learning](http://www.hfrp.org/complementary-learning).

What does it mean to create and mainstream complementary learning? As Heather Weiss, founder and director of HFRP described, it means a major shift in the understanding of what learning is, where it takes place, and who enables it. It means shifting from a view of learning as an act that happens exclusively in school to a view of learning as an ongoing process achieved through a variety of experiences and settings, times of the day and week, and stages of development. It means moving from a 19th- to a 21st-century view of learning.

To shape their own lives with agency and adaptability in this century, children and youth need a new set of skills that researchers Frank Levy and Richard Murnane (1996) aptly call “21st century skills.” These skills include the ability to use technology, excel at interpersonal

### Speakers at the Institute

The list below highlights the names and titles some of the featured presenters at the institute who are mentioned in this report.

- **Suzanne Bouffard:** Project Manager, Harvard Family Research Project
- **Dan Cardinali:** President, Communities in Schools
- **Margaret Caspe:** Survey Researcher, Mathematica Policy Research
- **Claire Crane:** Principal, Robert L. Ford School
- **Glenn Daly,** Director, Youth Development, Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services
- **Ron Ferguson:** Director of the Achievement Gap Initiative and Lecturer, Harvard University
- **Kris Kurtenbach:** Founding Partner, Collaborative Communications Group
- **Priscilla Little:** Associate Director, Harvard Family Research Project
- **Karen Mapp:** Lecturer, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- **Marge Petruska:** Senior Program Director, Office of Children, Youth and Families, The Heinz Endowments
- **Lorenzo Poe:** Senior Policy Advisor to the County Chairman and former School Board Chair, Multnomah County, Oregon
- **Bob Peterkin:** Director, Urban Superintendents Program, Harvard Graduate School of Education
- **Bill Purcell:** Dean, College of Public Service and Urban Affairs, Tennessee State University, and former Mayor of Nashville, TN
- **Paul Reville:** Massachusetts Secretary of Education and Chair of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
- **Heather Weiss:** Founder and Director, Harvard Family Research Project
- **Dennie Palmer Wolf:** Director of Opportunity and Accountability, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Brown University

communication, and solve complex problems. Young people also need to contend with and meet the challenges of new social forces and trends, such as globalization, the increasing diversity of the American population, and the increasingly collective nature of knowledge generation.

Children and youth cannot develop all of these skills within the confines of the traditional school day. An effective education today therefore must include strong families and opportunities

for family engagement; access to early childhood learning experiences; quality after school, weekend, and summer learning opportunities; community and cultural resources; and adequate physical and mental health services. Moreover, an effective education links all of these elements together in a way that promotes a comprehensive and holistic approach to learning. Making this vision a reality requires fostering a sense of shared responsibility and accountability among all of the stakeholders who educate and raise children. In Weiss's words: "The shift that needs to take place is a recognition that we're all responsible for learning—that it's a two-way street. To use the language of the Harlem Children's Zone in New York City, we need to create a 'conveyor belt' that begins at birth and carries children through post-secondary success."

Building these "conveyor belts" across contexts is pioneering work. There is significant evidence about the benefits of nonschool supports (e.g., family support, prekindergarten, out-of-school time) and emerging research about the benefits of connecting those supports. However, the knowledge base about comprehensive complementary learning systems is just emerging. Building this evidence base requires multiple stages—first, building knowledge of how complementary learning systems can be created and sustained and, then, building knowledge about how to evaluate the effects of these approaches.

Institute presenters and participants are at the vanguard of building this knowledge and serve a critical and ongoing role, not only for their communities but for the field. As we planned and facilitated the institute, we found the process of building knowledge about complementary learning to be mutually reinforcing: Participants learned new information from presenters and from each other, and we at HFRP learned from all of them—a critical step in our ongoing work to share knowledge with the field at large.

## **Building Complementary Learning: Emerging Themes**

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One of the major goals of the institute, both for participants and for HFRP, was to learn about the common elements and strategies that are needed to build and sustain complementary learning. Here, we present a set of fundamental themes that surfaced or were highlighted during the institute. These themes are not intended to be a comprehensive set of strategies but, rather, the initial brushstrokes of an emerging picture. In addition, the elements and strategies we offer here must be extrapolated and modified in ways appropriate to each community, because complementary learning systems are necessarily driven by the needs of their specific communities and feedback from stakeholders in those communities.

Some of the themes and challenges we describe are not unique to complementary learning; rather, they are essential to any collaborative effort. This reflects the fact that collaborative partnerships are core to the work of complementary learning. Lessons from past partnership-building efforts must be remembered while attending to new challenges posed by the comprehensive and sometimes complex nature of complementary learning initiatives. Given these new challenges, the institute also surfaced issues, insights, and strategies that are specific to complementary learning and that go beyond past discussions of simple partnership building.

## Establishing Strong Leadership

Identifying, building, and harnessing strong leadership was constantly invoked by presenters and the case study communities as one of the most essential elements for creating and sustaining complementary learning initiatives. All of the case study communities spoke about the fundamental involvement of a visionary and committed leader—whether a mayor, city counselor, school leader, or other—from the beginning of the process, and panelists underscored the importance of finding and building leadership.

But what does building and sustaining leadership really entail? Where do leaders come from, and how do they negotiate the tasks and challenges of complementary learning? As noted by Bob Peterkin, Director of the Urban Superintendents Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, many leaders are not trained to collaborate, yet they face the necessary and challenging task of fostering collaboration while making executive decisions and taking ultimate responsibility.

Our leadership discussions focused on two primary questions. First, should leadership come from the top down or from the ground up—that is, from institutional authorities or from the grassroots level? Many presenters spoke of the need for high-level leadership from the start (e.g., from a superintendent or a city council member), and all of the case study communities spoke of this as vitally important for getting their initiatives off the ground. However, several institute participants emphasized the benefits of the grassroots approach, including the opportunity to get buy-in from and ensure responsiveness to the community, and pointed to the success of community organizing efforts. Case study communities and presenters highlighted the fact that, even if they are not the leaders of the initiative, community members should be represented and included early and often.

Second, which agency, organization, or entity should take the lead in coordinating and overseeing the complementary learning effort? Should it be the school, a community organization, or an independent nonprofit organization? As we explored these questions with participants, the primary theme that emerged was that there are multiple good models of effective leadership—from schools, the business community, and city and county government, to name a few. There are benefits and challenges to each approach, and the effectiveness of each is driven in large part by the context and needs of the community. Highlighting diverse approaches from around the country, we encouraged participants to reflect on their own contexts and needs to explore leadership models best suited to their needs.<sup>1</sup>

At the crux of these leadership decisions are fundamental questions about the appropriate or ideal role for schools in complementary learning. Clearly, schools must play an integral role, because complementary learning initiatives aim to improve learning and educational outcomes. Institute experts agreed that, to be effective, complementary learning approaches must be seen as fundamental to the day-to-day work of educational institutions, not as “add-on” services. Karen Mapp asserted the necessity of making these systems part of the “instructional core,” which need to be “linked to learning”—that is, not as “engagement for engagement’s sake” but tied to and

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<sup>1</sup> Over time, we expect that themes will emerge about which kinds of leadership are most effective for certain kinds of communities.

targeting schools' core learning goals. In Paul Reville's words, complementary learning approaches should not and do not diminish instructional reforms but provide additional support that can help achieve educational goals. In this view, complementary learning, far from constituting an additional "enrichment activity," actually assists schools in achieving their academic goals for their students.

Clearly, then, schools need to be part of complementary learning efforts. But should they be the leaders, or play a supporting (but still integrated) role? Surfacing in nearly every session of the institute and comprising a 2-hour session devoted entirely to the issue, the overarching question was: What *is* the appropriate role for schools? Underscoring this question, Paul Reville reminded participants that there are "competing logic models" in the education arena—in other words, there exists widespread debate about whether and how nonschool supports should be integrated with schools.

We heard a range of perspectives on whether schools should take initiative and leadership for complementary learning. One perspective placed the responsibility on schools, citing the need to view complementary learning as necessary and built into the "fabric" of what schools do, as well as the political and community clout that schools carry. School and county leaders pointed out the powerful role of superintendents and school boards to effect change, as well as the fact that schools are ultimately held accountable for learning and have mechanisms for holding their staffs accountable. However, education experts like Paul Reville and Lorenzo Poe emphasized that schools should not be the only ones held accountable and that responsibility should be shared.

Another perspective held that community members, parents, or local governments should be the initiators of complementary learning. We heard from school and district administrators that schools are already overburdened and do not have the resources to lead complementary learning efforts. One school principal described a previous large-scale community partnership effort which she was forced to end because of her own exhaustion and burnout. In addition, we heard from community-based providers that school-led efforts often have to contend with bureaucratic "red tape," that other partners often find it "too easy to bow out" of school-led efforts, and that community members who have historically been marginalized may feel distrustful of school-led efforts. (For more on common challenges to incorporating schools in complementary learning, and strategies for address them, see sidebar below.)

As presenters and participants weighed these different approaches, the majority of attendees agreed on the need for shared responsibility in complementary learning initiatives. Making a commitment to shared responsibility means that all parties fulfill their own roles and expectations *and* acknowledge each others' strengths and contributions. Shared responsibility also means building leadership at all levels. Although one entity must ultimately be responsible for overseeing the initiative, successful initiatives build support and leadership throughout the system. For example, in Multnomah County, where leadership initially came from elected officials, the SUN Service System is overseen at the county level, but leadership is institutionalized throughout the system. Each entity—county, city, and schools—has a small cadre of leaders, who connect with each other and with other stakeholders from their entities. Similarly, the system has built-in leadership within all roles and functions of the system—at the policy level, at the service delivery level, and at each school site. The result is a highly organized and efficient system in which



communication flows in multiple directions, all parties feel ownership, and each level accomplishes its tasks effectively and in a way that is consistent with the whole.

Fundamental to the complementary learning framework is that there is no one solution or prescription for success. This is not to say, however, that there are no common lessons to be learned about effective leadership. As the field moves forward, we expect to learn more, both about effective leadership structures and about the essential abilities and characteristics of individual leaders.

### Leveraging Existing Efforts, Resources, and Partnerships

Regardless of their leadership models, complementary learning initiatives require a broad range of committed partners and resources. Where do these resources come from? Many complementary learning initiatives are designed to coordinate, leverage, and maximize existing efforts and resources, rather than building new systems from top to bottom. There are multiple reasons for this: a desire to capitalize on the existing strengths and good work of the community, a good faith effort to bring community stakeholders together, and, facing the constant challenge of limited resources, the need to maximize those that already exist. Efficiency, both financial and human, is a primary motivation for many of the complementary learning initiatives we are seeing around the country, including those featured at the institute. (For more information on the

#### Challenges to and Strategies for Integrating Complementary Learning and Schools

**School cultures have traditionally not welcomed or rewarded collaboration.** Accountability pressures can make collaborative efforts seem like an unwelcome distraction from academic goals, but complementary learning can be “built into” and systemically assist those goals. Emphasizing the need to change attitudes and build genuine trust, panelists maintained that partnerships can and should contribute to increased academic performance and accountability standards, by ensuring that students are ready and able to learn. Bob Peterkin called on participants to convey the values of complementary learning to principals and superintendents, including the increase in coherence and cost-savings, opportunities to build social capital and support families, and the opportunity for administrators to build expertise outside of their knowledge base. Further, he recommended building collaboration into school accountability systems. Similarly, Dan Cardinali recommended that principals whose schools are in need of improvement should be required to consider implementing integrated services. He also suggested relieving some of the burden on administrators by hiring a school site coordinator for nonacademic services and ensuring that this staff member is an integral part of the school improvement process.

**Most teachers and administrators are not formally trained to collaborate.** Few schools of education require courses or other training in collaboration, either with families and communities or with other schools. However, presenters pointed to some encouraging trends. Karen Mapp is working with states on building these topics into teacher accreditation standards, which she hopes will in turn drive course offerings at higher education institutions. In Lynn, Massachusetts, Principal Claire Crane built up an effective partnership with a local community college by offering her school as a “lab school” for teachers in training.

**Teachers' unions impose limitations on teachers' time and roles.** Responding to this often-voiced challenge, several presenters spoke of the need to present complementary learning as systemic to the work of schools. Paul Reville reiterated the need to tie complementary learning to current accountability concerns, which he believes drive many teachers' union decisions; data on the academic benefits of complementary learning can have a strong impact. Bob Peterkin urged administrators to be creative about building collaboration into teacher contracts. Several institute participants also suggested a more grassroots approach: Karen Mapp reminded participants of the importance of getting union leaders' feedback, and Bob Peterkin spoke of the positive impact of bringing teachers into students' communities to show them both needs and opportunities. A few institute participants pointed to the success of their communities' efforts to include teachers' unions in early and ongoing conversations about creating complementary learning.

**Some leaders can seem immovable.** Most participants could relate to the experience of facing a seemingly intractable and unsupportive leader, either in the school or the community. Lorenzo Poe encouraged optimism and recommended approaching leaders' most trusted advisors and friends, citing a successful example of reaching out to the mayor's wife. Claire Crane and Karen Mapp discussed the importance of grassroots support. Mapp pointed to "good old fashioned community organizing," and Crane cited an example of how, through services such as voter registration and ESL classes, her school helped parents develop into a political force in the city; these parents now have representation on city boards and clout in the community.

**Change proceeds at a slow pace.** Change can be a slow process, especially in large institutions such as schools. Bureaucracies pose common challenges. Karen Mapp encouraged participants to "start with the willing" and be willing to start small. Claire Crane suggested thinking of creating complementary learning initiatives as creating "layers," like tree rings, which grow over time by building on each other. During the final session of the institute, many participants underscored the need for patience, enthusiastically reminding each other of past successes and of the passion and possibility represented by the other institute participants.

motivation and strategies for increasing efficiency and maximizing resources, please see the *Complementary Learning in Action* series, described on page 16.)

Even with the goal of increasing efficiency, however, leveraging and growing resources and partnerships is not easy, and turf battles are common. Coordinating existing efforts often means asking organizations that have historically competed for service-delivery money to start sharing funding. Similarly, varying organizational missions, priorities, and responsibilities can cause tension. Given the resonance of these issues for participants, case study communities' strategies were of great interest and were highlighted throughout the institute.

One common strategy is building a process to find or establish a common mission among all partners. This strategy was the backbone of Alignment Nashville's success in getting off the ground. In early meetings, Alignment Nashville leaders asked all involved community representatives to leave their own organizational agendas at the door and to focus on creating and working toward a set of shared goals. Together, the group established a set of operating principles for their meetings and joint work. Now, if discussions get contentious, someone brings the

conversation back to the operating principles and to the core mission—a focus on children and youth, rather than on organizations’ or adults’ priorities.

Establishing a common mission and goals requires first listening to all individuals’ voices and perspectives. Alignment Nashville initially invited school representatives, community agencies, and parents to come together and share their concerns about school achievement and youth development issues. By inviting all parties to voice their challenges, Alignment Nashville built trust and created a conversation that naturally led to the next big discussion: What can we achieve as a community of people who share similar concerns? Several institute participants reminded the group that this process of listening must be an ongoing one, in which representatives’ individual voices contribute to the shared mission in an ongoing and evolving way over time.

Several presenters suggested an additional strategy of using data to resolve conflict. For example, representatives from Multnomah County shared how they collected information on the needs and desires of the community, schools, and families to inform leaders’ decisions. This has not only led to more community responsive initiatives, but has illustrated for the initiative members and partners why and how certain decisions were made, thereby diffusing tension.

One way to avoid turf battles before they begin is by working only with partners who are truly committed. For example, when prospective partners approach Alignment Nashville, they are asked to complete a proposal for how and where they think their contributions will fit in the system. On a similar note, Karen Mapp suggested that participants understand and apply the 20–60–20 rule—that is, in any given movement or initiative, 20% of stakeholders will be immediately ready for change; 60% must be shown how and why a change is beneficial before they will be on-board; and the remaining 20% will be extremely difficult to convince and hard to reach. Following from this rule, she encouraged participants to start with the willing—the first 20%—and work from there.

## Engaging Families

Families are a crucial part of complementary learning and play several roles, including consumer, contributor, and collaborator. Families help determine whether their children will participate in nonschool supports, act as teachers and mentors, contribute their ideas and skills, facilitate transitions and continuity among multiple settings and supports, and play many other critical roles.

Acknowledging these roles, presenters and participants alike highlighted the importance of getting and keeping families engaged. HFRP’s Suzanne Bouffard presented the research base on the influential role that parenting and family engagement play in school success, including evidence that family involvement is related to positive academic outcomes, such as higher grades, school attendance, and graduation. Panelists Margaret Caspe and Priscilla Little also presented research evidence of the benefits of linking families to the many settings in which children learn, including early childhood and out-of-school time programs.

Sharing stories and comments, participants made clear their interest in family involvement and the value they place on families’ potential contributions. However, many also reported that families are some of the most challenging stakeholders to reach, especially when there are cultural, educational, and linguistic differences between the parties. They highlighted several

specific challenges, including a lack of earmarked money for family support and involvement and the decreased policy emphasis on families and other nonschool supports since passage of NCLB. Below, we summarize strategies suggested by institute presenters and participants. (For more information and research-based resources, see HFRP's Family Involvement Network of Educators, described in the sidebar on page 12.)

Principal Claire Crane, from the Robert L. Ford School in Lynn, Massachusetts, spoke of engaging parents by surveying them about their own needs and desires and making a concerted effort to address those needs. For example, in response to parents' requests for GED classes, she established a night school program that has grown to incorporate increasingly advanced courses in response to parents' growing skills. Seeing a need for parents to have more voice in local politics and decision making, she has also conducted voter registration drives. This has spurred a larger movement that has built school parents into a political force in the community and has also brought parents into the fold of the school, encouraging and enabling them to be involved in learning at school and at home.

Jacksonville Children's Commission representatives, who have a long history of supporting and engaging families and whose offices include a family resource area, explained the benefits of maintaining a central location where families can access all of the information and resources they need to support their children's learning. They also recommended their successful strategies of engaging teachers who already have experience with family involvement and creating community-based family activities, such as festivals and fairs, which reach parents in their daily lives. Underlying all of these recommendations, they said, is the need to see family engagement as an ongoing process of growing relationships over time, and, with that in mind, they reminded participants to proceed with patience.

One of the ways Multnomah County's SUN Service System incorporated families is through site-based councils at every school that are parent-driven and responsive to the needs of that school, and that inform school decision making. Explaining the success of these efforts, SUN representatives emphasized the need for outreach to diverse and traditionally underinvolved families and warned against relying on existing parent-teacher organizations, which often represent families who are already the most involved.

Institute participants, too, had a range of innovative ideas to share. Representatives from the San Diego Unified School District described a program that places trained teachers as Parent Academic Liaisons (PALs) in high-need schools and shared their success in hiring translators and interpreters by brokering services at the district level. Attendees from the Woonsocket, Rhode Island, school district described a staff position called TIME (Teaching in Multiple Environments). Elementary school TIME teachers work a flex-time schedule, which includes a required 20% of time on family engagement efforts in addition to before or after school programming and other academic support for struggling students. Their work often includes partnerships with community agencies and organizations. Other strategies we heard about included the Rhode Island Parent Information Network's family-friendly walkthroughs in school buildings and recommendations from the Kentucky Commissioner's Parents Advisory Council to adopt and assess a set of family involvement standards tied to student learning.

## Family Involvement Resources from HFRP

### ***The Evaluation Exchange: Building the Future of Family Involvement***

This double issue of *The Evaluation Exchange* examines the current state of and future directions for the family involvement field in research, policy, and practice. Featuring innovative initiatives, new evaluation approaches and findings, and interviews with field leaders, the issue is designed to spark conversation about where the field is today and where it needs to go in the future.

[www.hfrp.org/EE-BuildingTheFuture](http://www.hfrp.org/EE-BuildingTheFuture)

### ***Family Involvement Makes a Difference***

Harvard Family Research Project's series, *Family Involvement Makes a Difference*, provides a thorough review of family involvement research and evaluation. This series of research briefs on family involvement and student outcomes makes the case that family involvement promotes school success for every child of every age. The briefs in the series focus on family involvement in early childhood, the elementary school years, and adolescence.

[www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference](http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/publications-series/family-involvement-makes-a-difference)

### **Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE)**

Join FINE and become part of a community of thousands of educators, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to strengthening family-school-community partnerships. As a FINE member, you will gain access to the latest and best information about family involvement, receive regular email updates about new resources, exchange ideas and insights with other FINE members, and learn about evaluation methods for continuous improvement. There is no cost to become a FINE member.

[www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators](http://www.hfrp.org/family-involvement/fine-family-involvement-network-of-educators)

### ***Focus on Families! How to Build and Support Family-Centered Practices in After School***

*Focus on Families!* is a critical resource for after school providers looking to create or expand family engagement in out-of-school time programs—a key complementary learning setting. The comprehensive, easy-to-read guide, produced by Harvard Family Research Project and Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet,) looks at the research base for why family engagement matters, concrete program strategies for engaging families, case studies of promising family engagement efforts, and an evaluation tool for improving family engagement practices.

[www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/focus-on-families!-how-to-build-and-support-family-centered-practices-in-after-school](http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/focus-on-families!-how-to-build-and-support-family-centered-practices-in-after-school)

## Building Communication Within Initiatives and in the Field at Large

Communication and networking are integral to complementary learning in at least three ways. First, internal communication is crucial to the construction and maintenance of complementary learning partnerships. Second, external communication, in the form of networking with community stakeholders, policymakers, and potential funders, is essential to the growth and success of an initiative. Third, effective communication to and networking with other stakeholders around the country builds knowledge and fosters the sharing and implementation of best practices.

From the internal perspective, strong communication channels and processes among partners are the backbone of successful complementary learning initiatives. In order to keep many individuals, organizations, and institutions engaged, focused, and effective, it is essential to have what Multnomah County representatives describe as a feedback loop, through which stakeholders at all levels can both share and gather information. This regular information sharing can build trust, facilitate a sense of common purpose, spark innovation, and identify and address problems early, before they become major setbacks. As a result, successful complementary learning initiatives often devote a large proportion of their time and energy to facilitating meetings and other communications. Diana Hall, Program Supervisor for the SUN Service System, explains that a core function of her job is facilitating communication through a highly effective system of regular meetings with staff at all levels, from administrators to direct service staff. Multnomah County's Lorenzo Poe, who is chairing a new Collaboration Council to further facilitate communication among stakeholders, points out that such ongoing communication is particularly necessary due to the turnover issues so common to education and related fields—not only among line staff, but also among administrators such as superintendents, whose average tenure in urban areas is only 3 years. Nodding in agreement in response to Poe's words, Jacksonville representatives agreed about the critical role of communication in the face of turnover.

Beyond internal communication, networking with elected officials, local businesses, and other local leaders is vital for building and maintaining political and public support. In some cases, such communication can mean the difference between a program's growth and deterioration, as was the case in Multnomah County. Based on their experiences, SUN Service System representatives suggest prioritizing networking on an ongoing basis, especially when there is political turnover, and identifying and communicating with influential community leaders. Sometimes this can require creativity, such as inviting influential leaders to spend a day experiencing the initiative or, in the face of unwelcoming or uninterested leaders, engaging a confidante or trusted friend of the influential party. In Multnomah's case, it also means engaging community members and the initiative's beneficiaries in communication campaigns. Other institute presenters also spoke of the power of collective community voice—for example, engaging large numbers of parents to contact local officials or utilizing what Karen Mapp calls “good old-fashioned community organizing.”

The third form of communication is networking among complementary learning initiatives and other national stakeholders. These stakeholders have much to learn from one another about how to create and sustain systemic efforts, both at an individual level and as a field. For complementary learning to move forward in both practice and policy, its supporters and stakeholders must create communities of practice, “groups of people who share a concern, set of problems, or passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). This institute represented one opportunity among HFRP's many ongoing efforts to build communities of practice, which we hope is only the beginning of broad national efforts to facilitate learning and growth. These growing communities of practice will play a vital role not only for their members, but for informing the broader public and policymakers and for moving the field forward on a national scale.

## Learning From and Building on Research and Evaluation

As underscored by presenters from many backgrounds, research and evaluation play multiple important roles in complementary learning. From needs assessments to outcomes evaluation, data can help define and refine complementary learning efforts, build knowledge in the field, and build an evidence-based case for policy.

One role of evaluation is clarifying goals, defining success, and driving innovation and improvement. For example, Multnomah representatives described how their early meetings with an external evaluator to determine indicators and select measures helped them gain clarity about what they hoped to achieve. These early efforts have evolved into an ongoing continuous improvement process that incorporates multiple types and levels of data, including test scores, attendance data, and student and teacher surveys to drive ongoing program development and improvement. Similarly, Alignment Nashville evaluator Carol Nixon described how the process of developing logic models is helping establish clarity about the initiative's goals and how she hopes the evaluation will play a long-term role in motivating and grounding stakeholders once the initial burst of excitement has subsided.

Data can also facilitate complementary learning by providing a mechanism to link the multiple components of a complementary learning system. Glenn Daly from the Massachusetts Office of Youth Development described how linking data tracking systems across sectors can build consistency and communication, and Bob Peterkin told the story of a juvenile court judge who required representatives from multiple social service agencies to share data in order to work together to increased collaboration and ensure that the child being served was not falling through any cracks.

Another important function of research and evaluation data is to build a knowledge base for the field at large. Glenn Daly and Kris Kurtenbach, a founding partner of Collaborative Communications Group, noted that continually collecting and sharing data with the field can lead to more understanding and implementation of best and promising practices. It can help build collective knowledge about how to begin and sustain complementary learning efforts, where to devote energy and resources to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, past pitfalls to avoid, and promising areas for the future.

Building on the communication theme above, data also plays a critical role in communicating the importance and benefits of complementary learning to policymakers, funders, and other influential leaders. Case study community representatives spoke of the powerful role of data on numbers served and outcomes in building continued support for their work. Marge Petruska, Senior Program Director for the Office of Children, Youth and Families at The Heinz Endowments, advocated for evaluation and data-driven decision making, explaining that policymakers and investors want to know what success looks like before an initiative begins and after it has been established.

## Moving Forward: Next Steps for Complementary Learning

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Reflecting on these emerging themes and evolving strategies makes it clear that building and sustaining complementary learning will require hard work and creativity at multiple levels, including social and educational policies, service provision and integration, and research and evaluation.

As we and institute participants began thinking about next steps, presenter Dennie Palmer Wolf emphasized the need to ground the complementary learning vision and emerging insights into implementation on the ground. Seizing the policy window, she reminded us, requires turning knowledge into on-the-ground practice, in addition to and as part of policy recommendations and changes. This is the daily work of the institute's case study communities and participants, and their passion, commitment, and innovative spirit—especially evident during the “next steps” portion of the institute—foretold of great possibility. These individuals and communities are the pioneers who will inform the emerging knowledge about building and sustaining complementary learning in its many diverse forms.

Moving forward, institute experts see a set of key tasks currently facing these practitioners, policymakers, and others in the field. Heather Weiss put forward an action agenda, which echoes many of the themes above and resonated with recommendations from other presenters:

- *Build existence proof.* Policymakers and practitioners need to learn from the experiences of communities and initiatives who are successfully implementing complementary learning. Building existence proof means demonstrating that complementary learning can and does happen—in Weiss's words, “that mortals can do this work”—and illustrates *how* it can happen.
- *Build, convey, and use the evidence base for complementary learning.* Extensive research describes the benefits of complementary learning's components (e.g., family involvement, out-of-school time programs), and evidence is accumulating about the benefits of connecting them to one another (e.g., intentional connections between out-of-school time programs and schools are associated with higher achievement). However, there has been little research to date on the value-added of connecting multiple supports into one comprehensive system. Such research is needed to understand whether and how complementary learning benefits children, youth, families, and communities. Dan Cardinali, President of Communities in Schools, recommended building a common core of data across sectors to help create this research base.
- *Promote networking and sharing of promising practices.* To be useful and useable, this emerging knowledge must be shared. Individuals and organizations working to build complementary learning must communicate with and learn from one another, in both formal and informal ways. We were encouraged by the networking trends we saw during the brief but intensive institute. For example, representatives from two communities in Florida found common ground in their evolving work and made plans to conduct site visits to each other's



communities. Representatives from a school district on the West Coast met an administrator from their state's department of education and began making plans to coordinate their efforts. Two geographically separated communities with community school initiatives reconnected with each other and continued a dialogue that had begun at another conference. As more communities implement complementary learning, we encourage them to share their ideas and insights in such one-on-one ways, as well as with the field in general.

- *Implement communication and advocacy strategies at all levels.* As noted above, communication serves multiple important functions. Institute experts stressed the importance of communicating to multiple audiences, including district, city, state, and national policymakers (both elected and appointed), the media, and the public—and tailoring those messages appropriately by understanding each stakeholder's motivations, concerns, and priorities. As a state-level education policymaker himself, Paul Reville called on institute participants to be “catalysts” in the field.
- *Foster effective, dynamic, and collective leadership.* Based on the institute's many conversations about leadership, it is clear that fostering leadership for complementary learning is crucial. As we heard, leadership is needed at multiple levels—for specific complementary learning initiatives and efforts and also for larger, field-building efforts in policy and research. As we and our colleagues in the field continue to learn about strategies for building such leadership, attention should be devoted to both building new leaders and supporting existing leaders.

As participants left the institute to embark on and continue these field-building steps, we were reminded that the heart of complementary learning is a focus on equity—that is, on ensuring that *all* children and youth have access to both the basic and enriched supports they need to be ready to enter, succeed in, and exit school. While complementary learning supports and systems are the norm for many middle class youth, their disadvantaged and ethnic minority peers are significantly less likely to have access to these opportunities. While acknowledging the sometimes contentious debate over universal versus targeted services, presenters and participants underscored the need to level the playing field and the potential role of complementary learning in closing achievement and opportunity gaps. Dennie Palmer Wolf framed this in the lens of social justice. Ron Ferguson referred to it as a “movement for excellence with equity.”

Regardless of terminology, the institute presenters and participants tackling these challenges are part of a growing national momentum for educating children in a more connected, comprehensive, and equitable way. In addition to HFRP, this movement includes organizations and individuals such as the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and its Smart Education Systems work, Edmund Gordon and the Educational Testing Service's Supplementary Education Task Force, the Coalition for Community Schools, Communities in Schools, and others. As we all continue to innovate and build knowledge, we look forward to learning from them, sharing their knowledge, and helping to facilitate the national dialogue about educating children from a holistic, whole-community perspective.

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### ***Complementary Learning in Action***

As complementary learning takes root across the country, *Complementary Learning in Action* shares innovative examples and lessons learned from those initiatives. This series documents the ways that diverse cities, counties, and states are employing complementary learning approaches to serve children across ages and across settings. It highlights key themes and emerging strategies to help build knowledge and inform others in the field.

#### **Alignment Nashville**

This case study illustrates how Alignment Nashville brings together diverse community members and organizations to leverage existing resources in support of Nashville's youth and the Metro Nashville Public Schools.

#### **Jacksonville Children's Commission**

This case study describes how the Jacksonville Children's Commission aims for a coordinated system of care from birth through adolescence.

#### **The SUN Service System**

This case study tells the story of Multnomah County's (Oregon) SUN Service System, an antipoverty and prevention effort that connects educational, social, health, and other services under one umbrella.

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