

EDUCATION WEEK

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Ed. Groups Urge 'Whole-Child' Approach to Counteract Poverty

Aim is to address barriers to success

By **Denisa R. Superville**

Two K-12 initiatives that are launching this week aim to capitalize on the mounting support for taking a more holistic approach to educating poor children, a shift away from the view that has heavily emphasized that schools alone can counteract the effects of poverty.

Expected to be unveiled this week, the first effort is a new project from Harvard University's Education **Redesign Lab** that is helping local city and school leaders link agencies responsible for children's services—such as mayor's offices, school systems, and social services agencies—to work together to address both in-school and out-of-school factors that affect student learning.

In the six cities that are participating—Oakland, Calif.; Louisville, Ky; Providence, R.I.; and Salem, Somerville, and Newton, Mass.— mayors will set up children's cabinets to coordinate the efforts.

The second initiative is a re-launch of a "**Broader, Bolder Approach to Education**," a group which first started in 2008 and has pushed for more comprehensive, "whole-child" strategies for educating students in poverty that was meant to be a counter-force to the "no-excuses" strategy, which tended to focus on reforms related to the teaching profession. Leaders of the group say there is new momentum for their policy agenda, including passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act which requires states and districts to judge schools' success on a broader set of metrics than test scores.

More Than Schooling

The Harvard project, "By All Means: Redesigning Education to Restore Opportunity," is headed by Paul Reville, the Education Redesign Lab's director and a former education secretary in Massachusetts. He asserts that while standards-based reforms have improved overall academic performance, many of the performance gaps between some student subgroups remain, and, in some cases, have widened.

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The idea was to think about the education of children as more than just schooling, said Reville, whose Education Redesign Lab is part of Harvard's Graduate School of Education.

"A basic, underlying belief of this initiative is ... schools alone, as currently conceived, are insufficient to do the job of educating all students for success," Reville said.

"That seems like a radical statement," he continued. "It isn't that we haven't made progress. But it is true that we are a long way from closing the achievement gaps that we set out very ambitiously to close at the onset of this education reform movement."

The program will focus on four key areas. The first is personalized learning, with a kind of individualized education plan that addresses in-school and out-of-school needs of students, while the second is the integration of social, emotional, and health services so schools can respond to issues that arise that may affect a child's ability to attend classes or pay attention when he or she gets there. The third area of emphasis is ensuring all students have access to enrichment activities when they are not in school, including after school and during the summer. A fourth area will be governance.

Without a comprehensive approach to address the range of challenges poor children face, the best education reforms will be futile, Reville said. He is also involved in the reboot of the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education, along with several other prominent figures in pre-K-12 policy and academia.

Elaine Weiss, the national coordinator of the Broader, Bolder group, said the re-launch was meant to shift the focus from calling attention to the "poverty-education connection, to emphasizing ... the specific policies and practices that would help mitigate those connections."

The group calls for policymakers and educators to focus on early-childhood experiences, including the expansion of high-quality pre-K and state birth-to-5 systems; after-school and summer learning opportunities, which, the organization argues should be treated as a vital part of students' education; and health and nutrition.

When it comes to in-school factors that need policy attention, the group calls for funding equity, improving teacher and principal quality, and more stringent accountability for charter schools.

'Comprehensive Agenda'

The Broader, Bolder group also urges policymakers to address racial segregation and concentrated poverty in communities by promoting integration efforts and to seek community input when making education decisions.

Weiss said many such efforts don't require additional funding, but a re-prioritization of how money is spent.

In announcing its re-newed campaign, the group will release case studies of communities that have taken a collaborative, comprehensive approach to educating children, including Vancouver, Wash., and East Durham, N.C.

"We need to see a comprehensive education agenda that really begins at birth, when kids start to learn," Weiss said, "and goes all the way through; that takes into account [the

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entire] day, and marries the best evidence of what works for all kids, and, especially, to mitigate poverty's effects, with critical input from folks on the ground in each community about what they need and what they can bring to the table."

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