COMMUNITY SCHOOLS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF COMMUNITY SCHOOL COORDINATORS' EXPERIENCES

A Dissertation
Submitted to
the Temple University Graduate Board

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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May 2024

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ABSTRACT

Community schools have shown promising gains for students in the areas of student attendance, academic achievement, student behavior, and school climate. However, little scholarship has addressed the experiences of these schools and their stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic. To determine how community school programs were impacted by the pandemic, as well as how community school programs supported families during this time, this study utilized a phenomenological approach. Interviews were conducted with community school coordinators across a single network of community schools spanning several school districts. Based on coordinators' experiences, the pandemic represented a clear disruption to community schools for numerous reasons. School closures eliminated many in-person opportunities to connect and increased communication challenges between coordinators and other stakeholders within their programs. Certain organizational factors and changes related to the structure of the community school coordinator role during this time further detracted from the relationships that had previously been built within these programs. This made it difficult for coordinators to monitor families' needs and to leverage their community-based relationships to acquire resources to address those needs. Additionally, numerous community school services and programs that supported families were terminated during this time. All of these factors represented a threat to the social capital that had previously been developed in these schools. Yet, at the same time, certain structures within community school programs enabled

coordinators to continue leveraging the social capital that existed within their school communities. Coordinators discussed leaning heavily on their existing networks of community school coordinators and community partners to acquire resources to address families' changing needs. They also discussed working to develop new community partnerships to address families' needs. Therefore, while the pandemic increased challenges within community school programs, these programs continued to serve as a critical support to families during this time. This research contributes to the growing literature highlighting the value community school programs bring to their school communities and demonstrates the value of such programs during times of crisis.

This research is dedicated to the community school coordinators who participated in this study and demonstrated an inspiring commitment to serving their students and families, no matter the circumstances.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

School Reform as a Means of Addressing the Achievement Gap

The inequitable schooling experiences of students attending high-poverty, under-resourced schools and their more privileged counterparts are well documented. For decades, researchers have focused on the achievement gap between Black and Hispanic students and their White peers, as well as the achievement gap between students living in poverty and their more affluent peers (Reardon et al., 2015). Given these disparities, scholars have attempted to develop policies to narrow these achievement gaps. For years, attempts to address these inequities focused on improving the instruction occurring within the physical school building. The two most prominent categories for these reforms centered around high-stakes testing and accountability measures and school reform (Hursh, 2007). Despite attempts to improve students' test scores through these reforms, significant gaps still exist between minority students and their White counterparts, as well as between students living in poverty and their more advantaged peers (Paschall et al., 2018).

A growing number of scholars recognize that to improve the academic achievement of low-income and minority students, reform efforts must extend beyond the instruction that occurs within classrooms. Some suggest that instead of placing such a high emphasis on the achievement gap, opportunity gaps in education are more productive to consider. Irvine (2010) suggests that before school systems can hope to

improve students' academic outcomes through school-based reforms, other structural barriers, such as access to the Internet, affordable housing, healthcare, nutrition, and a number of other factors beyond the school building, are necessary to consider. Warren (2005) similarly states that schools alone cannot compensate for the effects of poverty and systemic racism in their communities. He suggests that school and community-based organizations must work collaboratively to meet families' social and economic needs. There is a growing recognition that the broader community can play a role in supporting the success of marginalized students.

Community Schools as a School Reform

Community schools largely emerged as an educational reform that recognized the roles individuals and organizations outside the school building could play in improving students' academic experiences. Community schools, also referred to as full-service community schools, are public schools that diverge from the traditional public school model in that they act as neighborhood hubs and provide a range of support services through community agencies and local businesses to help overcome the barriers that students face in achieving academic success (Dryfoos, 2005). By providing services to reduce or eliminate students' out-of-school challenges and address their social and emotional needs, proponents of these programs argue that students are better prepared to come to school ready to learn. If they are able to come to school and focus on learning, this will impact their overall schooling experiences and ultimately their academic performance (Daniel et al., 2019; Maier et al., 2017; Min et al., 2017). Community schools additionally provide opportunities for expanded learning, including individualized academic support, enrichment activities, and after-school, weekend, and

summer learning opportunities (Maier et al., 2017). They also seek to further integrate the ties between school and home by bringing families and community members into the school building and providing them with necessary services, as well as providing them opportunities to act as partners in decision-making processes concerning their children's education (Maier et al., 2017). Access to extended-learning opportunities and participation in family engagement opportunities have also been shown to increase students' attendance and achievement (Biag & Castrechini, 2016).

School districts across the United States have been recognizing the potential of community schools as an educational reform. As of 2019, there were approximately 5,000 community schools in operation in the United States (Sanders et al., 2019). They have also become a popular school reform in other countries including Scotland, England, Sweden, the Netherlands, Canada, and South Africa (Dyson & Raffo, 2007; Heers et al., 2016). In the U.S. context, community schools take a variety of different forms. For some, school districts take the lead in community school program implementation. For others, the agency responsible for program implementation is a nonprofit organization or a university (Holme et al., 2020). City governments also at times serve as the responsible party for program implementation (Duffy & McCarty, 2018). The programs community schools offer are also highly context-specific and depend on the needs of the school community. For instance, a community school with a high immigrant population might provide classes for adults learning English. Another community school might not have the same need for such a program.

In addition to the different programs and services offered, community school programs can also vary in their goals. For instance, Cincinnati Public Schools'

community learning centers, the district's version of community schools, aim to support student achievement while revitalizing neighborhoods and maximizing the community's return on its investment in public schools (Cincinnati Public Schools, n.d.). Based on this goal, student academic achievement is clearly central to the community school program's mission and purpose. Other community school programs, however, place little emphasis on academic achievement. For instance, Philadelphia's community schools, which operate as a partnership between the city government and the school district, make no mention of academic achievement in their short or long-term goals. The program's long-term goals include community schools becoming a resource hub for the community, improvements in student attendance rates, improvements in school and community climates, and improvements in students' and community members' mental and physical health (Duffy & McCarty, 2018). These are just two examples of the many different community school models that exist. These two examples show that even though their stated goals and outcomes are different, the work they pursue is similar. Both programs place an emphasis on strengthening ties between the school and the broader community and focus on increasing the health and quality of life of communities and their residents overall.

Despite all the different community school models and strategies for implementation, each community school program generally employs a full-time community school coordinator who works in collaboration with the school administration and staff to oversee the delivery of support services and programs for students and their families. The coordinator also generally works closely with the school's community partners, which are external agencies, businesses, nonprofits, or other organizations based

in the community that partner with the school to provide services and programs for students and families within the school community. Just as there is variation in the entity or organization responsible for implementing the community school program, the community school coordinator may be employed by a number of different entities (Mayger & Hochbein, 2019). This could be the school district, a university, a non-profit, or the city government. Even though community school coordinators may work for different organizations and have somewhat different roles, The National Center for Community Schools describes the community school coordinator as having four core responsibilities: joint planning with school staff, aligning supports and services to the core of the instructional program, recruiting and coordinating partners, and connecting community resources to documented needs (Mayger & Hochbein, 2019). Regardless of the specific ways this manifests in individual programs, the community school coordinator essentially serves as the glue that holds all aspects of the community school program together and works to align all program stakeholders in their pursuit of supporting students in the school.

Community school coordinators also represent an important resource for school principals, upon whom many of the coordinator's responsibilities might otherwise fall. Marzano and Waters (2005) document the 21 responsibilities of school leaders, among which are outreach, relationships, and resources. The responsibility of outreach refers to the leader's work as an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders, as well as their work to cultivate partnerships with external entities in the community. The responsibility of relationships refers to the extent to which a school leader demonstrates an awareness of the personal lives of teachers and staff. Though Marzano and Waters

(2005) do not discuss relationships with external community partners and the broader community in the context of this responsibility, these are also critical in the context of a community school program. Resources as a responsibility refers to the extent to which the leader provides the necessary materials to school staff in order for them to execute their duties.

Through their four core responsibilities, one can see how community school coordinators might reduce principals' workloads in some of the more community-facing aspects of their roles. By working to coordinate and recruit community partners and secure resources for the school community, community school coordinators ensure that principals have more time to devote to other aspects of their increasingly complex roles. This is particularly helpful to principals, as Wise (2015) suggests that a lack of time and having too many responsibilities are among the many challenges U.S. principals face. One should not overstate the role of community school coordinators in taking these overwhelming responsibilities from principals, as maintaining visibility among staff, students, families, and the broader community is also one of the leadership responsibilities Marzano and Waters (2005) outline for school leaders. Nonetheless, these coordinators can help to make the day-to-day responsibilities of community school principals more manageable.

More significant than taking some of the broader community-facing responsibilities from principals' already-full schedules, a growing literature has begun to examine the impact of community school programs on students' academic performance, attendance, and overall well-being. The results are promising, as studies have shown positive gains for students in each of these areas (e.g., Provinzano et al., 2020;

Sondergeld et al., 2020). Studies have also explored how this school model uniquely benefits students from marginalized backgrounds (McKinney de Royston et al., 2020; Meloche et al., 2020). As scholars suggested, involving stakeholders beyond the school building in meeting the out-of-school needs of students and their families has shown to be an effective strategy for improving low-income and minority students' educational experiences and outcomes.

Community Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Despite the progress made in community schools, the U.S. education system was completely upended by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In March 2020, schools across the country closed their doors, and students found themselves receiving an education from home. While some students quickly returned to in-person learning, others found themselves receiving remote or hybrid instruction well into the following school year (Camp & Zamarro, 2021). Though the pandemic has had a drastic impact on students across the country and the world, the virus has had perhaps the most significant impact on vulnerable, marginalized students (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020). Despite the evidence that community school programs were helping to address structural barriers students were facing and helping them make academic progress, it is worth exploring how the pandemic impacted this trajectory.

On the one hand, it is very likely that since the COVID-19 pandemic had such a tremendous impact on schools throughout the country, community school programs would have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, since COVID-19 increased the inequities and structural barriers that students in under-resourced urban schools faced, it is also worth investigating how community school programs and their

staff supported students and their families during this time. In fact, the Institute for Educational Leadership, The Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Coalition for Community Schools published a research agenda in which they called for greater research on the experiences of community schools during the pandemic, including the role of community school coordinators, to determine how these programs supported their school communities during this crisis (Institute for Educational Leadership et al., n.d.).

To date, little research has explored the impact of the pandemic on community school programs or how community school programs served as a resource to families during this time. Equally significant, little research has addressed the experiences of community school coordinators during the pandemic. Given the significant role that community school coordinators play in the day-to-day operations of community school programs, understanding how they experienced the pandemic is critical for fully understanding the impact of the pandemic on these programs. It is also critical for understanding the roles that community school coordinators played in facilitating their program's pandemic responses. Understanding coordinators' individual experiences may also serve to highlight the factors that both supported and constrained their abilities to address students' and families' needs during this time.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This research relies on social capital theory. Bourdieu (1985) defined the concept of social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (p. 248). Portes (1998) stated that Bourdieu's definition could be deconstructed into two elements: the social relationship that allows individuals to claim access to resources their associates possess and the amount and quality of those resources. Stated more simply, Lin and Smith (2001) conceptualized social capital as the resources embedded in social relations, which can be mobilized when an actor wants to increase the likelihood of success of a purposive action.

Social capital underlies community school coordinators' roles as they build and sustain relationships between school administrators, teachers, families, and members of the broader community (Dryfoos, 2005). Several studies have already highlighted the importance of relationships and social capital for the functioning of successful community school programs (FitzGerald & Quiñones, 2018; Galindo et al., 2017; Mayger & Hochbein, 2021). Community school coordinators leverage their school and community-based relationships and connections to generate resources, programs, and services for students and families in their school communities. Specifically, in the context of the pandemic, it is worth exploring how they leveraged their school and community-based relationships to generate the resources necessary to address families' changing

needs. It is also worth investigating how the pandemic impacted their existing relationships within their school and community, as well as how they used this time to develop new community-based connections to address families' needs.

When discussing social capital and other forms of capital, it is also necessary to recognize that actors operate in social fields. According to Hardy and Lingard (2008), fields are social sites in which actors engage with one another in a process of contest over the forms of capital that collectively constitute the field. The field itself limits and enables the activities of those influenced by them. Though different fields have different operating rules and standards, scholars argue that different fields can influence each other through cross-field effects. For instance, Hardy and Lingard (2008) provide evidence of how the policy field influences the field of education. It is worth considering the fields that influence community school coordinators' actions, as they operate both under the direction of their school community as well as the entity that oversees the community school program, whether that is a nonprofit, university, government agency, or another entity entirely. Therefore, the norms and standards within these fields should enable and constrain their actions as they attempt to secure resources for their school communities.

Literature Review

Introduction

Given that this study seeks to explore the experiences of community school coordinators during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the impact of the pandemic on community school programs overall, reviewing what is already known about these programs is critical. In addition, reviewing what is known about how schools have both been impacted by and have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic is essential. As a

result, the literature is broken down by first exploring what is known about how structural factors and non-instructional variables impact student learning. Following the discussion of the ways in which out-of-school factors can impact a child's educational trajectory, I discuss what the data tells us about how community schools, with their focus on addressing students' out-of-school barriers, have helped students improve their outcomes in terms of attendance, achievement, and other metrics. The discussion then turns to what the literature tells us about the leadership practices and roles that key stakeholders play in successful community school program implementation. Following this, the focus shifts to the structural challenges the pandemic exacerbated, as well as the ways in which school leaders have responded to the pandemic. Understanding both the literature on community schools and the COVID-19 pandemic sets the stage for a broader discussion of how community schools and their staff experienced the pandemic.

Non-instructional Influences on Students' Education

Community schools as an educational reform emerged due to the belief that broader community and structural factors could impact children's academic outcomes. Many studies have indeed documented how family characteristics, community factors, and structural barriers families experience impact students' educational outcomes. As previously mentioned, numerous studies have documented the gap in academic achievement between White and Black students, White and Hispanic students, and between students living in poverty and those not living in poverty. Paschall et al. (2018) used 14 biennial waves of data from 1986 to 2012 from a subset of the National Longitudinal Study of Youth to study the aforementioned achievement gaps in reading and mathematics. They found that these achievement gaps persist and that there is little

evidence that minority or economically disadvantaged students are consistently catching up to their White and non-poor peers. Beyond documenting the mere existence of academic achievement gaps between different demographic groups, studies have examined how family characteristics and the structural barriers families experience in their communities can contribute to these gaps in students' academic achievement and inequities in their schooling experiences.

Poverty. Jones et al. (2020) found that the poverty level of U.S. public high schools, based on the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch, was positively associated with students' feelings of persistent sadness and hopelessness, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, and violence victimization. Students living in poverty were more likely than more affluent students to experience violence on school property in addition to other forms of violence outside of school, such as sexual dating violence. The study also found that students attending schools with high levels of poverty were more likely not to go to school due to safety concerns. Additional studies have shown that threats of violence at school can contribute to fear of harm in school and increased levels of depression, which both have a negative impact on students' academic performance (Kim et al., 2020). This represents a clear example of the ways in which out-of-school factors can impact a child's education.

Food Insecurity. Studies have focused on the ways in which food insecurity adversely impacts children's educational trajectories. In a systematic review of the literature from the United States, Canada, and Australia between 1985 and 2016, Shankar et al. (2017) indicated that food insecurity during the preschool years was associated with externalizing and internalizing behaviors, as well as mental health symptoms, and less-

optimal self-control and interpersonal skills. For school-aged children, food insecurity was associated with poor academic performance, hyperactivity, inattention, increased aggression, attendance problems, and several other factors that would adversely impact a child's schooling experience. In adolescents, experiencing food insecurity was associated with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, school suspensions, substance abuse disorders, and difficulty getting along with others. Across all grade levels, food insecurity can be detrimental to students and can greatly hinder their functioning in school.

Student Health. Studies have additionally demonstrated the negative impact that poor student health can have on academic achievement. Senter et al. (2018) used data from K-8 schools in the Northeastern United States and found that having an asthma diagnosis was associated with worse performance on standardized tests across three academic years. Equally important, the students with the most significant asthma had significantly worse outcomes on their standardized test scores. Additionally, Crump et al. (2013) used data from the San Jose Unified School District in San Jose, California and found that chronic health conditions were independently associated with low performance on ELA and mathematics standardized tests irrespective of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or grade level.

In a literature review demonstrating the relationship between students' academic outcomes and chronic illness, Taras and Potts-Datema (2005) cited numerous articles documenting the association between illness and students' poor attendance and academic performance. Similarly, Lum et al. (2017) conducted a systematic meta-review to aggregate the available evidence about the impact of chronic illnesses on school experiences and academic outcomes. The findings related to academic achievement were

mixed, but they found the most consistent link between chronic illness and lower attendance rates. Taken together, these studies demonstrate the impact of health on students' school experiences. They also demonstrate the importance of providing students with access to necessary healthcare resources, as well as additional support at the school level.

Vision and Dental Health. Just as illness has been found to impact students' education, so too has vision and dental health. Basch (2011) found that low-income, minority youth were less likely to have eye conditions diagnosed than white children from higher-income families. The study also found that when they were diagnosed with vision problems, Black youth and youth living in poverty received fewer and less intensive services. Vision problems were shown to have a negative impact on students' academic achievement, as poor vision impacts sensory perception and cognition in several ways. Basch (2011) also suggested that poor vision could increase students' feelings of disconnectedness in school, as they might feel demoralized and disengaged due to academic struggles related to their vision challenges. This frustration might stem in part from the fact that vision-related academic challenges cannot be overcome by simply trying harder; rather, they must be addressed by timely and appropriate treatment, to which all children do not have access. Suggesting a similar connection between vision care and academic achievement, a randomized clinical trial conducted in Baltimore City Public Schools found that students in third through seventh grade who received eyeglasses through a school-based vision program achieved better reading scores after one year (Neitzel et al., 2021).

A study of students in North Carolina showed that children with poor oral health were more likely to miss school because of dental pain and that absences caused by pain were associated with poorer performance in school. It is equally critical to note that absences for routine care were not associated with poorer academic performance, and mediation analyses revealed oral health status was associated with academic performance independent of whether absences were due to pain (Jackson et al., 2011). These studies show the criticality of ensuring that all students have the necessary access to the appropriate vision and dental resources.

Trauma. Trauma was also found to have an adverse impact on students' educational trajectories. Larson et al. (2017) indicated that chronic exposure to childhood trauma increased the risk of developing a mental health disorder and increased the likelihood of students demonstrating poor academic performance. They also indicated that having access to mental health care services through school-based health centers has been shown to help students overcome typical barriers to care, and that having access to these services has been shown to increase students' attendance, improve their academic outcomes, and decrease the likelihood that they will drop out of school.

Housing Insecurity and Homelessness. Housing insecurity and homelessness were additional factors beyond the school building found to adversely affect students' educational experiences and ultimately their academic outcomes. Herbers et al. (2012) found that students experiencing homelessness or high residential mobility had the lowest average oral reading fluency scores in first grade when compared to students who were low income but more stably housed, as well as students who were neither low income nor experiencing housing insecurity. Additionally, their low achievement in first grade was

found to have independent negative implications for their later achievement in reading and math.

Technology. Numerous studies indicate that the digital resources students have access to both at home and in school impact their academic outcomes. Huang and Russell (2006) found that technology accessibility impacted fifth grade students' academic achievement in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, though their study was descriptive, and they acknowledged the results were complicated by other compounding factors. Judge (2005) also found that having access to a home computer, having a computer area in the classroom, and using software for literacy and mathematics were positively correlated with the academic achievement of African American children during kindergarten.

Family Involvement and Expectations. Though out-of-school factors can adversely impact a child's educational experiences, numerous studies have more optimistically emphasized factors beyond the classroom that positively impact students' academic experiences and outcomes. Yan and Lin (2005) found that high parental expectations for students' education increased students' performance in mathematics across all racial groups. They similarly found that positive parent-teenager relationships were associated with gains in mathematics achievement across all racial groups, except for Hispanic students. Studying the impact of Latino caregivers' participation in a family involvement program, O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) found significant improvements in the frequency of family-teacher contact, family involvement at school, and the quality of family-teacher relationships after participating in the program. At the end of two years, higher family participation in school significantly predicted students' effort, social skills,

work habits, and English Language Arts standardized test scores. The relationships between students and caregivers, as well as between caregivers and the school, have the potential to positively impact students' educational trajectories.

The Role of Community Schools. To summarize the literature in this section, out-of-school structural and family factors influence students' educational outcomes. As noted, community schools are a school reform strategy that seeks to provide students with the necessary wrap-around services to address the structural barriers hindering students' academic success. For instance, they might provide programming and resources to address food insecurity, access to mental health and healthcare resources, and resources to address whatever additional structural barriers exist in the community. They also seek to provide the necessary structures to support out-of-school factors that positively impact students' experiences and achievement, such as parental and community involvement. Therefore, community schools have the potential to mitigate the adverse effects of structural barriers on students' academic experiences and achievement, and they have the ability to foster the positive family and community factors that can improve students' educational outcomes.

Community Schools' Impacts on Students' Education

Empirical Impact of Community School Programs. A growing body of literature has begun to examine the extent to which community school programs have successfully improved students' educational outcomes by providing families with resources to address the structural barriers they face, as well as additional academic resources. To date, the results have been somewhat mixed. Some research has indicated a fair degree of skepticism about the impact of community school programs. For instance,

Whitehurst and Croft (2010) explored the impact of a charter school in New York City identified as a full-service community school and found that the school did not demonstrate higher academic gains than other charter schools that were not community schools. Cummings et al. (2011) similarly found that community schools might have improved outcomes for the most disadvantaged students to some degree, but they could not show that community schools improved academic outcomes for all students who attended such schools.

However, a growing number of studies have shown promising gains for students attending community schools. Several studies examining the impact of community school programs used mixed methods case study approaches to examine the impact of community school programming. These studies showed that after implementing community school programs, students' academic motivations and perceptions of their school climate improved, staff perceptions of school climate improved, and schools demonstrated gains on their state's academic report cards (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016; Anderson-Butcher et al., 2017). However, given the case study methodologies, these findings are not generalizable to all community schools, nor do they allow researchers to assert causality. As previously mentioned, community school programs can look vastly different depending on their implementation. Some school districts administer community school programs directly. Some city governments administer the programs. In other cases, non-profits or universities serve as the lead program administrators. It is also true that the programs offered through community schools depend very much on the community's specific needs, so it is difficult to make a blanket assertion about the impact of community school programs based on these studies.

More recent studies have compared the outcomes of students in community schools with students attending non-community schools in the same districts. These studies have found that students attending community schools had overall higher grades, GPAs, attendance rates, and fewer suspensions (Meloche et al., 2020; Provinzano et al., 2020; Sondergeld et al., 2020). Provinzano et al. (2020) and Sondergeld et al. (2020) used matched comparison groups that matched students based on race, English language learner status, special education status, free and reduced lunch status, and fifth-grade state standardized math and reading classification categories. Though these are strong methodological designs that enable the controlling of other variables that could be influencing the differences in results for the two groups, it is again worth noting that these studies focus on single school districts. Given the variation in community school programs, these results are not necessarily generalizable to other contexts. Additionally, Provinzano et al. (2020) called attention to the fact that much of the existing community school research focuses on the impact of community school programming on students' academic outcomes. They argue that community school programs' goals also focus on meeting students' social, emotional, and basic needs. Therefore, efforts to evaluate community schools should focus on these aspects as well. This seems especially true based on the impact that COVID-19 has had on public school students over the past several years.

Stakeholder Leadership Practices in Community Schools. In addition to the studies documenting the impact of community school programs on students' educational experiences and outcomes, there is also a growing literature exploring how the leadership practices and qualities of community school stakeholders contribute to the functioning of

successful community school programs. For example, Sanders (2019) emphasized how principals used relational leadership strategies and cross-boundary leadership to support the implementation of community school programs. Specifically, to promote the success of their community school programs, school leaders directly engaged with and were accessible to key stakeholders in the school and the broader community. They also facilitated stakeholder interaction to promote communication and collaboration. Finally, successful school leaders purposefully selected and worked to retain staff with strong relational skills, and they provided professional development opportunities to increase the staff's capacity to build collaborative relationships.

Mayger and Provinzano (2022) similarly examined the attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors that community school experts believed were necessary for principals to successfully lead community schools. They found that the necessary qualities for school leaders to successfully run community schools fell under four themes. Leaders must be predisposed to collaboration and therefore must possess the interpersonal and communication skills to work closely with a broad spectrum of leaders. They must have a full understanding of the basic components of the community school strategy, and they must work to implement the basic components of the strategy. Additionally, successful community school principals must make equity-based decisions and promote socially just outcomes. They must also have a commitment to reforming systems and striving to continuously learn and improve practices within their school community.

Galindo et al. (2017) looked beyond school leaders and focused on additional school assets that support the success of community school programs. They examined sources of social capital in full-service community schools. They distinguished between

three different types of social capital: bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and linking social capital. Bonding social capital refers to exclusive ties formed among members of homogenous networks. Bridging social capital refers to ties between people from different networks. Linking social capital is a form of bridging social capital that connects individuals across asymmetric power lines. Through their multiple case study approach, they identified principals in full-service community schools as sources of all three forms of social capital, as they fostered relationships within the building and used their connections to build partnerships with outside organizations. They additionally identified teachers as sources of bonding social capital through their connections with one another in the building, as well as their roles in supporting families' ties to the school. They identified teachers as important sources of bridging social capital, as they used their own community connections to generate resources for their schools. Finally, they identified community school coordinators as a source of bridging social capital, as they served as a source for connecting parents with resources and used their relationships within the community to gain resources for the school.

Other studies have focused exclusively on the unique role of the community school coordinator in ensuring the success of community school programs. For instance, FitzGerald and Quiñones (2018) focused on the role of the coordinator in leading and facilitating professional capital among multiple school and community stakeholders. Professional capital results from the combination of three types of capital: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. In their study, human capital refers to the talent and skills of individual educators or leaders. Social capital refers to the collective impact of a group of educators who collaborate. Decisional capital describes the expertise to make

sound educational judgements that develops over time. They found that the community school coordinators fostered this professional capital by serving as bridge builders who connected and promoted trusting relationships with multiple stakeholders, by serving as collaborators who fostered a sense of collective responsibility, and by serving as leaders who supported teachers, families, and community partners in making decisions about how to best support students' academic and social success.

Sanders et al. (2019) focused on community school coordinators as cross-boundary leaders who must forge trusting relationships with and among organizational actors within and outside of their organization. Coordinators were responsible for developing and maintaining meaningful connections between service providers, teachers, families, and local community members. They ensured that they actively listened to stakeholders within and outside of their school buildings in order to identify opportunities for collaboration, as well as challenges to collaboration. They also provided space for stakeholders to come together to discuss critical issues and brainstorm ideas to reach school goals. Equally important, when conflicts emerged between different stakeholders in the community school program, the community school coordinator was often instrumental in the conflict resolution process. They often attempted to serve as a bridge between the different stakeholders and reach a resolution before a school administrator had to become involved in the conflict.

Mayger and Hochbein (2019) further analyzed community school coordinators' roles as boundary-spanning individuals, as well as the pros and cons that came with their roles requiring them to interact with stakeholders across multiple organizations. They found that in community school programs where coordinators were employed by an

outside entity but worked within a school building, the coordinators simultaneously had multiple levels of support, but were also subjected to multiple levels of direction. They had to respond to the demands of their direct employer as well as the school's principal, which could create some level of tension. Being accountable to and supervised by different individuals within different organizations can be particularly challenging when their goals and priorities do not necessarily align. Because their roles spanned several different organizations, some of their colleagues were unsure of where the community school coordinator actually fit within their organization, even though their roles were clearly defined. This could serve to complicate coordinators' work with their colleagues to some extent, since their colleagues would not have a clear understanding of how their positions were structured or what their roles were.

Given the clear importance of both school leaders and community school coordinators in the functioning of community school programs, Mayger and Hochbein (2021) emphasized the importance of shared leadership between these two key stakeholders. Beyond just authorizing community school coordinators to act on the school's behalf, it was critical for principals to cultivate teachers' and parents' trust in the coordinator by naming them as a co-leader and publicly praising their competence and abilities. However, principals have the potential to fracture relationships between themselves and community partners if they delegate all aspects of the community school program to the coordinator. For instance, Mayger and Hochbein (2021) found that a community school principal damaged relationships with partners by not attending partner meetings and delegating that responsibility solely to the coordinator. Therefore, principals must be cautious about the extent to which they delegate tasks and

responsibilities. They must consider how their presence serves as a symbol of the school's commitments and priorities.

Each of these studies demonstrates the clear importance of school leaders, community school coordinators, and staff in promoting the work of community school programs. They help to shed light on how community school programs increase connections between different stakeholders and groups within the broader community. As mentioned, little scholarship on community schools has focused on these programs during the pandemic or on the experiences of staff within these schools during this time. It is critical to understand how these programs were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how these programs served as resources to families during this time. It is equally critical to explore the experiences of key stakeholders in these programs, especially community school coordinators, in order to understand their roles in facilitating their programs' specific responses to the pandemic.

COVID-19's Impact on Schools and Communities

School and Structural Challenges Related to COVID-19. The impact of COVID-19 is an area in which scholars are continuously learning more. Studies have highlighted the school-based and broader structural challenges the pandemic exacerbated. Some have highlighted the increased anxiety, stress, and workload of teachers navigating the switch between virtual, in-person, and hybrid learning (Gicheva, 2022; Pressley, 2021). Other studies have focused on the inequitable access to in-person learning between students living in the suburbs and their urban counterparts, as well as between White students and minority students, who were less likely to have access to in-person learning opportunities during the early stages of the pandemic (Camp & Zamarro, 2021;

Haderlein et al., 2021). Though this already represents a clear inequity, Haderlein et al. (2021) additionally found that lower-income families and Black families were less likely to have access to the Internet and technology to access remote instruction. However, the gaps between those who had access to technology and those who did not narrowed somewhat as the pandemic progressed.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, studies early on during the pandemic projected academic losses for students due to their time out of the classroom (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Indeed, as the pandemic progressed, studies began to demonstrate the harmful impact of the pandemic on students' academics. Fisher et al. (2022) found that middle and high school students attending school virtually or on a hybrid schedule were more likely to experience a decline in their grades than students attending in person. This is not only concerning because urban and minority students were more likely to experience virtual schooling than their more advantaged counterparts, but also because teachers may have been more lenient with grading during virtual schooling (Fisher et al., 2022). This means the learning loss could be even greater than suggested by this data. The results were no better for elementary students, as data from an oral reading fluency assessment indicated slower growth for elementary school students during the first 200 days of the 2020-2021 school year relative to years prior (Domingue et al., 2022). A review of the literature examining the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures on students' academic achievement found overall that younger students were more negatively impacted than older students, as younger students do not have the same capabilities for self-regulated learning as older students (Hammerstein et al., 2021).

Additional studies have focused on broader community concerns, such as increasing student mental health challenges (Pattison et al., 2021; Trinidad, 2021). In a study of high school students in Georgia, researchers found that about 25 percent of students worried about the pandemic and the resulting financial impact (Gazmararian et al., 2021). Perhaps more troublingly, they found that many students, especially girls and older students, experienced feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness. They also found that low SES students, who were already disproportionately impacted by the pandemic health-wise and financially, were more likely to worry about the pandemic and to feel mental health consequences (Gazmararian et al., 2021).

The pandemic also significantly increased food insecurity in communities across the country. During the stay-at-home order in Vermont in March and April 2020, researchers found nearly a 33 percent increase in household food insecurity (Niles et al., 2020). They found that individuals experiencing job losses had higher odds of experiencing food insecurity, and they found that many families used strategies such as eating less to cope with food access challenges. Researchers also projected that there would be 54 million food-insecure Americans in 2020, which was roughly 17 million more than in 2018. For children, they projected the food insecurity rate would increase to approximately 18 million, a figure up nearly seven million from 2018 (Gundersen et al., 2020). This figure is particularly troubling given that many food-insecure children rely upon their schools for meals (Whitesell & Fitch, 2022).

Other studies have focused broadly on the experiences of marginalized groups during this time, including the unique challenges faced by immigrant families during the pandemic (Lowenhaupt & Hopkins, 2020) and the racism experienced by Asian

Americans as a result of the pandemic (Wu & Nguyen, 2022). The pandemic has had a disproportionately large impact on the most vulnerable populations.

These studies show that COVID-19 exacerbated existing challenges schools and communities already faced, in addition to generating wholly new challenges. Marginalized communities already faced the most significant barriers to student learning, and the pandemic only widened these gaps. The most disruptive moments of the COVID-19 pandemic may have passed, but the impacts of this unforeseen crisis may be felt by school staff, students, and their families for years to come.

School Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Beyond highlighting the school-based and structural challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, some scholarship has focused on the leadership practices of principals striving to meet their school community's needs during this time. Many of these studies relied on interviews with principals, and given the unprecedented nature of the pandemic, some of them had flawed methodologies. For instance, McLeod and Dulsky (2021) stated that their interview protocol had a few standard questions, but the wording of the questions and follow-up questions, as well as the order in which questions were asked, varied according to the flow of the interview. Nonetheless, they found that organizational vision and institutional values guided principals' sensemaking and guided their critical decisions during the pandemic. They also tapped into their networks across other schools to guide their decision-making processes and to be more proactive.

Focusing on the experience of rural school principals, Hayes et al. (2021) demonstrated how principals exhibited caretaker leadership during the pandemic. They focused on the social-emotional well-being of teachers, provided social-emotional

support for students and families, remained a constant and calming presence within the community, and showed remarkable resilience. Studying principals in South Florida, Reyes-Guerra et al. (2021) examined the ways in which leaders drew upon practices such as practical and pragmatic communication, leading with flexibility, shifting priorities, and showing resilience. Additionally, they tapped into their building's in-house and community expertise, as well as their inter-school networks, in making critical decisions.

Weiner et al. (2021) explored how leadership practices and certain organizational conditions in schools, including the nature of accountability, the degree of professional autonomy, the professional culture, and teacher decision-making infrastructure, facilitated teachers' abilities to innovate, make mistakes, and learn during the early pandemic. They found that schools with high innovation and learning during the pandemic frequently referenced collective learning and shifted to meet evolving challenges. They also focused on effectiveness and driving improvement, as well as on collective accountability, collegiality, and care. Principals in these schools were empowered to engage in decision-making, and teachers were given the time and space to engage in collective decision-making and collaboration.

Overall, principals had to demonstrate greater flexibility than they would have under normal circumstances. They had to continuously shift to meet evolving challenges and tap into their existing social networks for advice and resources. Compared to their leadership under normal circumstances, they had to devote greater attention to the social-emotional well-being of their staff, students, and families, and they had to remain a calming and resilient presence for their communities.

Bridging a Gap in the Literature

From this review of the literature, one can see that community schools represent a promising educational reform with the potential to improve the academic outcomes of students in under-resourced, high-poverty schools. Structural barriers and a lack of access to appropriate community resources can hinder students' attendance and learning in school. By addressing these barriers and equipping students and their families with the appropriate wrap-around services, community schools have contributed to improvements in students' attendance, academic performance, behavior, and overall school culture. Studies make clear that stakeholder practices can impact the implementation and effectiveness of a community school program. Most significant in the research are the school principal and the community school coordinator. The literature highlights numerous practices and qualities that these educational leaders exemplify to achieve programmatic success.

One can also see how the COVID-19 pandemic represented a significant disruption to school systems, students, and their staff across the United States. While students attending under-resourced, high-poverty schools already faced a number of structural barriers that impacted their schooling experiences, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly heightened the structural challenges students and their families faced. In addition to layoffs, increasing food insecurity, and increasing mental health concerns, students and their families had to navigate learning from home, often without the appropriate access to necessary resources. The pandemic also significantly heightened challenges for school staff and administrators, who had to adjust to school closures, new methods of teaching, and increasing workloads during this uncertain time.

The literature details how principals have exemplified leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic to support their staff and school communities. However, little scholarship to date has focused specifically on community school principals' leadership practices. Perhaps more significantly, little research has explored the experiences of community school coordinators supporting their communities in the context of the pandemic. Given the centrality of the role of community school coordinators in community school operations, exploring their experiences during this time is critical for understanding how these programs were impacted by the pandemic overall. Exploring their experiences is also critical for understanding how these programs supported families during this time. Investigating the extent to which community schools were able to generate additional resources or divert resources to meet unexpected community needs during this time has the potential to demonstrate the value of community school programs, especially in the context of responding to unforeseen crises. Investigating whether the pandemic and the closure of schools might have hindered these programs and their stakeholders from providing the necessary supports to families during this time is also critical to explore. Based on these areas of need, the research questions for this study are as follows:

- How did community school coordinators experience the COVID-19 pandemic?
    - What resources did community school coordinators leverage during the pandemic?
    - How did community school coordinators manage the needs of their school while also balancing their own personal circumstances?

- What roles did community school coordinators play in facilitating their programs' pandemic responses?
- Based on coordinators' experiences, what factors supported or constrained their abilities to respond to community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological Approach

This study utilizes a phenomenological approach to answer the research questions. According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon or concept. The purpose of a phenomenological study is "to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). A specific phenomenon of interest is identified, and data is collected from people who experienced the phenomenon. A description of the essence of the experience for all the individuals is then developed (Creswell, 2013). Data collection for this methodology often involves in-depth and multiple interviews with participants. It is generally recommended that data be collected from five to 25 individuals who have experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For this study, I interviewed community school coordinators from a single network of community schools operating across several neighboring school districts in a Mid-Atlantic state.

Using a phenomenological approach enabled the community school coordinators from this network of community schools to explain how they experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. It enabled them to discuss how the pandemic impacted their specific community school program, their program offerings, and the broader school community. It also enabled them to provide greater insight into their specific roles in facilitating their program's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Community school coordinators

essentially serve as the glue that holds community school programs together, so understanding their roles in responding to community needs throughout the pandemic was essential for understanding how these programs operated during this time. Gaining an insight into their individual experiences was also critical in determining what factors supported and constrained community school coordinators' abilities to respond to emerging community needs during the pandemic. This research builds upon understandings of how community school programs support students' overall well-being and educational experiences, how COVID-19 has impacted community school programs and school systems more broadly, and the specific roles of community school coordinators in facilitating their programs' responses to unforeseen crises.

Research Setting and Participants

This study involved community school coordinators from a network of community schools operated by Building Stronger Communities (BSC), a non-profit based out of a Mid-Atlantic state. BSC operates community schools under a specific model with stated goals of increasing the percentage of students reading at grade level by the end of third grade, as well as achieving increases in reading and math proficiencies for students by the end of eighth grade. BSC has clearly outlined the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders affiliated with its community school model. Under BSC's model, community school coordinators are employed by a lead partner. The lead partner is a third-party entity whose vision matches that of BSC's specific community school model and goals. BSC provides the primary funding that supports the salary of the community school coordinator, and the lead partner contributes the remainder of the funds for the community school coordinator position.

Though several different lead partners employ community school coordinators, BSC works to ensure that its community school model is implemented with fidelity. BSC developed a two-page role description for community school coordinators that clearly defines what work community school coordinators should be performing in their schools, as well as tasks and responsibilities they are prohibited from performing. For instance, BSC specifies that among community school coordinators' primary responsibilities is the coordination of resources. Coordinators are responsible for recruiting, training, and coordinating all volunteers at the school site. They are also responsible for coordinating and distributing basic needs or ensuring that this function is being performed in the community school. Additionally, they are responsible for identifying and building relationships with key service providers needed to support students and their families. Their role description also specifies their role in maintaining data for the program and monitoring its implementation, participating in site team meetings, and participating in other school-based meetings to become integrated among the school staff. BSC specifies that coordinators are not to serve as substitute teachers, leaders in any parent-teacher associations, guidance counselors, direct service providers, assistant principals, primary translators of documents or all family interactions, logistics coordinators of after-school programs, or coordinators of field trips unrelated to their program's key priority areas. Though not the direct employer of community school coordinators, BSC orients community school coordinators to its community school model and provides ongoing technical assistance to coordinators to ensure that they are fulfilling their roles as outlined in their job description.

BSC additionally provides clearly defined role descriptions for principals in its community schools. Though the organization, of course, does not supervise principals, it outlines the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that principals should possess for BSC's community school programs to be effective. For instance, among the beliefs that principals should possess are the ideas that schools cannot do it alone, that parents are partners in education, and that all parents want their children to be successful. Concerning their attitudes, BSC states that principals should have a positive outlook, be passionate, be proactive, be people-focused, and hold high expectations for stakeholders within the community school program. Regarding their actions, the organization specifies that principals should be available to community school coordinators, understand expected goals and outcomes for whole-child student success, be solutions-oriented and open to new ideas, and be comfortable discussing and sharing data that emerges inside and outside of the school as a way to identify priorities and align resources. BSC also states that principals should advocate for their community school programs and be champions of their community school's work.

The organization also provides information on specific routines to be followed in their community schools, as well as various planning templates. Finally, BSC ensures that its staff members are included on site-based community school leadership teams. During the early phases of the community school program, BSC staff run the community school site-based leadership meetings. Therefore, although coordinators technically work for several different lead partners, BSC works diligently to ensure that the lead partners and community school coordinators follow the norms and procedures outlined in its organization's community school model.

According to BSC's website, the network currently oversees 33 community schools. The 33 schools are located across five nearby school districts. However, one of the five school districts, the Tiger Mountain School District, only possesses one community school within the network. The district's single community school became a community school during the 2022-2023 school year. Therefore, the Tiger Mountain School District was not part of BSC's community school network at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the district was not included in the study. The four school districts that possessed community schools at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic were included in the study.

Metropolitan School District, a school district located in a midsize city, possesses 15 of the community schools in the network. The school district serves approximately 16,000 students. Approximately 31 percent of students in the district are White, 10 percent are Black, and 55 percent of students are Hispanic or Latino. Approximately two percent are Asian, and two percent are two or more races. About 33 percent of families have incomes below the poverty level, and approximately 52 percent receive SNAP benefits. Consistent with the district's demographics, a majority of students in the district's community schools are Hispanic. Each community school is eligible for a schoolwide Title I program, and all the students in the school district receive free lunch (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.).

Eastside School District, a school district located in a small city, is home to nine community schools in the network. The school district has approximately 13,000 students. Approximately 62 percent of students in the district are White, seven percent are Black, and 24 percent are Hispanic or Latino. Four percent of students in the district

are Asian, and 2 percent are two or more races. Approximately 17 percent of families live below the poverty line, and about 24 percent receive SNAP benefits. Though the district is predominantly white overall, a closer look at the nine community schools in the district demonstrates vast inequities across the district. Each of the nine community schools is eligible for a schoolwide Title I program. The students in each of the community schools are predominantly Hispanic, and over 70 percent of students in each community school qualify for free or reduced lunch (NCES, n.d.).

Westtown School District, a school district located in a large suburb, possesses three of the network's community schools. The school district serves approximately 8,000 students. Approximately 69 percent of students are white, 10 percent are Black, and 15 percent are Hispanic or Latino. Approximately three percent of students are Asian, and three percent are two or more races. About ten percent of families live below the poverty line, and 18.1 percent receive SNAP benefits. Much like Eastside, the three community schools in the district present a different story from the overall school district. All three community schools are eligible for schoolwide Title I programs. Two out of three schools are predominantly Hispanic, and at least 80 percent of students in each community school qualify for free or reduced lunch (NCES, n.d.).

Finally, Pine Valley School District, a rural school district with approximately 2,800 students, possesses five of the community schools in the network. This is the only district in which every school is represented in the community school program. Approximately 90 percent of students in the school district are White, one percent are Black, and eight percent are Hispanic or Latino. About one percent are Asian, and one percent are two or more races. Approximately 12 percent of families live below the

poverty line, and about 22 percent of families receive SNAP benefits. Each school in the district is eligible for a schoolwide Title I program. Except for one school in which only about 34 percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, at least 40 percent of students in the other schools in the district qualify (NCES, n.d.).

Recruitment

I recruited community school coordinators from the four districts in BSC's network of community schools that possessed operating community schools at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic to participate in this study via email. Community school coordinators' emails were available on BSC's website. The emails sent to coordinators explained the study's purpose and asked whether or not they would be interested in participating (see Appendix A). I sent an additional reminder email to community school coordinators who did not respond within one week. In order to ensure a sufficient number of participants for the study, coordinators contacted to participate were given the opportunity to refer other coordinators from the BSC network who had since gone on to work in other positions or for other organizations for participation in the study. Upon expressing a willingness to participate in the study, I sent a brief email survey to community school coordinators (see Appendix B). The survey ascertained basic demographic information, as well as information about the coordinators' current and previous experience working in community schools.

Ultimately, eight coordinators agreed to participate in this study (see Table 1). Five were current community school coordinators in BSC's network of community schools. The other three participants were former community school coordinators in the network who had since gone on to work in other positions. The three coordinators who

were no longer employed as community school coordinators had all been working as community school coordinators when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Five of the coordinators worked in the Eastside School District. One of the coordinators worked in Westtown. Only two of the coordinators worked in the Metropolitan School District. Given that the Metropolitan School District possessed the greatest number of community schools within the BSC network, the fact that only two coordinators from this district agreed to participate in the study was notable. A majority of the coordinators who agreed to participate in this study were white women, and the majority possessed graduate degrees. The coordinators had served in their positions for as long as 13 years and as little as 1.5 years.

Table 1

Study Participants

Name	District	School	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Educational Attainment	Current CSC	Length of Time as a CSC
Carlie	Eastside	Bright Star Elementary	F	White/ Caucasian	35	Graduate Degree	Yes	10 years
Margaret	Eastside	Allen Elementary	F	White/ Caucasian	40	Graduate Degree	Yes	4.5 years
Edwin	Eastside	Murphy Elementary	M	Two or More Races	42	Graduate Degree	No	5.5 years
Rita	Eastside	Dougherty Elementary	F	Hispanic/ Latino	53	Graduate Degree	Yes	12 years
Patty	Eastside	Miller Middle School	F	White/ Caucasian	39	Graduate Degree	No	13 years
Jackie	Westtown	Shenandoah Elementary	F	White/ Caucasian	54	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	5 years
Michael	Metropolitan	Adams Elementary	M	White/ Caucasian	29	Graduate Degree	No	1.5 years
Jessica	Metropolitan	Southern Elementary	F	White/ Caucasian	31	Bachelor's Degree	Yes	3 years

I sent each participant an informed consent form that explained this research as well as the steps that would be taken to protect their confidentiality. I also provided each coordinator with the opportunity to set up a phone call if they had any additional questions before beginning the study.

Interviews

For this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with community school coordinators from BSC's network of community schools. I developed an interview protocol using Patton's (2015) ten interview principles (see Appendix C), giving careful attention to developing a protocol with clear, open-ended questions. As Bourke (2014) indicated, open-ended questions provide participants with the most meaningful opportunities to tell their stories and to encourage their voices to come through in the data. In an effort to ensure sufficient depth in respondents' answers, I incorporated probing questions into the protocol.

During the interviews, I paid attention not just to participants' verbal responses, but also their nonverbal behavior, as these behaviors can also be a significant source of information. These interviews were critical for developing an understanding of how community school coordinators experienced the pandemic, as well as the specific roles they played in facilitating their programs' responses to the pandemic. They also shed light on how their programs were impacted during this unforeseen crisis and how they served as a resource to families during this time.

Interviews were scheduled with each community school coordinator at their convenience. Seven coordinators participated in their interviews via Zoom. One coordinator opted to participate in her interview via phone. The interviews were audio-

recorded and transcribed using a transcription application. In addition to recording and transcribing the interviews, I took notes documenting the participants' body language, facial expressions, and other notable circumstantial observations. As previously mentioned, these can be additional sources of useful data.

Artifacts

In addition to the interviews conducted with community school coordinators, I also analyzed documents published by BSC. Since the creation of the community school programs, BSC has published documents explaining how the community school program operates within its district contexts, as well as information about specific stakeholder roles within the community school model, which served as valuable sources of information about the various community schools. These documents were publicly available on the organization's website.

I additionally reviewed various documents provided by community school coordinators themselves. Following each interview, I asked coordinators to provide any artifacts they could from their time working during the pandemic that they thought could contribute to this study. After mentioning this at the end of each interview, I sent each coordinator a follow-up email asking them to provide any artifacts. In the end, four of the eight coordinators provided artifacts for this study. Artifacts provided included personal notes from coordinators, flyers for community school events and programs, flyers for external opportunities within the broader community, videos from virtual programs, links to online community school content created during the pandemic, family needs surveys, and community school protocols created during the pandemic.

Finally, the state government provides school-level information through school progress reports on their publicly accessible website. The reports have information about each school's demographics, progress on state testing, and attendance. These were helpful sources of additional data about each community school. Taken together, these additional documents served as important sources of information for triangulating the data from interviews, which were all self-reported.

Data Analysis

I performed data analysis on the interview transcriptions, interviewer notes, and other reviewed documents by coding the data using the qualitative data analysis software application, Dedoose. In order to uncover, name, and develop concepts, my first step in the data analysis process involved conducting open coding. During this process, I broke down the data into discrete parts and examined them closely for similarities and differences (Babbie, 2007). I used inductive codes derived from participants' own responses, as well as deductive codes derived from the existing literature. For each code I developed during the open coding process, I maintained a definition in a master file. Following the open-coding process, I axially coded the data. According to Babbie (2007), axial coding seeks to identify the core concepts of the study. I identified analytical concepts using the codes developed through the axial coding process. During this time, I additionally continued to update the definitions in the master file, and I also wrote analytical memos based on the concepts developed during axial coding. Using the developed codes, I identified themes and patterns and developed a narrative to answer the research questions. A segment of my codebook, as well as identified axial codes and themes, can be seen below in Table 2.

Table 2

Codebook Sample

Code	Definition	Axial Code	Theme
Broader community support	Attempts to support broader members of the community during COVID-19, not just students and families directly associated with the school	Community schools serving as a critical pandemic support for the broader community, including students who attend non-community schools	CSCs shifting programming and developing new partnerships to meet changing community needs during pandemic (Leveraging social capital during pandemic)
Building relationships with community partners	Discussions of building relationships with community partners and other external stakeholders	CSC building broader connections in the community based on student/family needs	CSCs leveraging their relationships in the school and broader community to develop vibrant CS programs pre-pandemic
Building relationships with school staff	Discussions of building relationships with school staff, faculty, and administrators	CSCs building relationships with families and school staff IOT assess school community needs	CSCs leveraging their relationships in the school and broader community to develop vibrant CS programs pre-pandemic
Building relationships with students/families	Discussions about building relationships with students and their families	CSCs building relationships with families and school staff IOT assess school community needs	CSCs leveraging their relationships in the school and broader community to develop vibrant CS programs pre-pandemic
Building school pride	Attempts to build pride within the school community	CSC building broader connections in the community based on student/family needs	CSCs leveraging their relationships in the school and broader community to develop vibrant CS programs pre-pandemic
Burnout	Feelings of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress	Organizational factors leading to increased CSC stress and turnover during the pandemic, further harming relationships in the community	Pandemic disrupting programming, partnerships, and relationships (Threats to social capital)

Table 2 (continued)

Codebook Sample

Code	Definition	Axial Code	Theme
Challenges building/maintaining relationships	Factors that hindered the ability of community school stakeholders to build and maintain relationships with other stakeholders during the pandemic.	Harmed relationships with students, families, and community partners during the pandemic due to lack of in person touch points, communication challenges	Pandemic disrupting programming, partnerships, and relationships (Threats to social capital)
Challenges for working parents	Discussions of challenges experienced by working parents seeking to support their families during the pandemic	Loss of engagement in programs that were able to shift to virtual	Pandemic disrupting programming, partnerships, and relationships (Threats to social capital)
Communication challenges	Difficulties communicating with families and members of the community	Harmed relationships with students, families, and community partners during the pandemic due to lack of in person touch points, communication challenges	Pandemic disrupting programming, partnerships, and relationships (Threats to social capital)

Positionality

In discussing the research process, it is critical to acknowledge how one's identity and experiences shape the process. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument, as well as the primary means of data analysis. As Bourke (2014) states, the research is impacted by the researcher's beliefs, race, socio-economic status, and educational background. No matter how objective one attempts to be, true objectivity can never be achieved. As such, it is critical for qualitative researchers to recognize how their identities and experiences shape the lens through which they view their research.

Beyond recognizing one's identities and experiences, researchers should also understand whether they occupy the space of an insider or an outsider within a study. The insider perspective is referred to as an emic perspective, while the outsider perspective is referred to as an etic perspective (Holmes, 2020). Scholars debate whether the insider or outsider perspective is more advantageous in the research process. Though a researcher must consider whether they occupy the space of an insider or outsider based on their identities and experiences, it is worth considering that the insider or outsider perspective does not necessarily have to exist as a dichotomy, but can be seen as a continuum (Holmes, 2020). As such, it is possible for an individual to move back and forth between insider and outsider depending on the specific participants, the time, the location, and the topic they are discussing (Holmes, 2020).

In considering my identity and experiences throughout this study, I saw how I occupied both aspects of an insider and an outsider perspective. Pondering my childhood and educational experiences, I saw myself as an outsider. I am a White male who grew up in an affluent suburban setting. I attended public schools, though the schools I attended looked very different from the community schools operating under BSC. The community schools across these districts serve predominantly low-income, minority students. My schools, on the other hand, were predominantly White and attended by upper-middle-class students.

However, I began teaching in an under-resourced urban school district after graduating from college. The schools in which I have taught are more demographically like the schools in which BSC operates its community school programs. For a period of two years, I even taught in a community school in my school district. In this way, I

viewed my experiences as shifting towards somewhat of an insider perspective. Though I was not teaching in this school when schools shut down in March 2020, I began teaching at this school during the 2020-2021 school year, a time when the effects of the pandemic were still very much being felt. I had the opportunity to work with the community school coordinator, as well as numerous community partners providing services during this time. I additionally saw the dedication of the community school coordinator and community partners in working to address structural needs that were heightened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I witnessed first-hand the resources that the program provided students and became a believer in the power of community schools as an educational reform. Though I no longer teach at a community school, I still recognize the impact the programming had on students. However, as discussed, community schools and their programming can vary tremendously depending on the context. Therefore, throughout the research process, I continuously reflected on my experience within a single community school to consider how it might have shaped my interpretation and analysis of the information I learned about the community schools in another context.

Even with the recognition that I have had experience working in a community school in an under-resourced school district, I also must acknowledge the distance between my role and that of a community school coordinator. As a teacher, I never worked directly for the community school program. Therefore, a gap certainly existed in my knowledge about community school coordinators' roles within their school communities. Without having had the opportunity to experience the work of a community school coordinator, I once again saw myself swinging toward the outsider perspective in this study. Though I possessed some first-hand knowledge about community school

programs, there was much to be learned. As Holmes (2020) suggests, I occupied a shifting space on a continuum in which I brought both an insider and an outsider perspective to this study. I continuously considered how my identity and experiences impacted the lens through which I viewed my research. True objectivity may not be achievable in qualitative research, but I attempted to be cognizant of how my experiences and identities showed up in this research process.

Trustworthiness

Given the significant role that the qualitative researcher plays in collecting and analyzing their data, I carefully documented how I conducted, as well as how I analyzed and interpreted my data. I additionally documented my thinking processes throughout this research project (Mertens, 2020). There were several additional criteria that I addressed to ensure the quality of this research.

Credibility

Mertens (2020) explains credibility as the congruence between how respondents perceive social constructs and how their viewpoints are portrayed. In order to ensure the credibility of this study, I reached out to coordinators via email with questions about their responses as clarification was needed. These follow-up emails served as an informal means of member checking. Additionally, given that I collected data from interviews with coordinators across multiple schools and reviewed a variety of documents related to the community school programs, triangulation of the data served as a means of checking for consistency across the various data sources.

Transferability

The goal of qualitative research is not to produce generalizable results, but rather insights that might be transferable to other contexts. According to Mertens (2020), the burden of transferability is on the reader, who must consider the similarities and differences between the research sites and other contexts. As a result, I have attempted to provide a thick description of the contexts in which my research was taking place. The focus of this research on multiple community school coordinators across different school sites in a school district also aided in the transferability of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Participants in this study reviewed a consent form (see Appendix D). The form addressed who would and would not have access to the information disclosed in their interviews, as well as to the documents they provided. It also stated that the information collected would be utilized for a study that may one day be published. The participants were informed that by signing the consent form they agreed to participate in the study, and that they were able to withdraw their consent at any point. The document also outlined the steps that would be taken to protect their confidentiality. All data for this study was password protected and stored on a private computer. Pseudonyms were used for interview transcripts, and a separate document was maintained to connect the name used for the pseudonym with the actual participant in the study. In reporting the findings of this study, pseudonyms were utilized for all individuals and organizations mentioned. The only entities not given pseudonyms were large, national organizations that posed little risk of identifying the coordinator or any other organizations in the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

In the following chapter, I make a series of arguments using my data analysis. The evidence is presented as a narrative with four themes. The four themes in the narrative are as follows. First, to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted community school programs and community school coordinators' work, I discuss BSC's community schools before the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific emphasis on how coordinators used their presence in the school and community to build meaningful resource connections for students and families. Next, I discuss the numerous ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted community schools' programming. After discussing the challenges the pandemic created for community school coordinators and their programs, I shift the discussion to how these programs served as a critical support for their school communities during this time. Finally, as in-person instruction resumed full-time following the lockdown periods of the COVID-19 pandemic, I discuss how families experienced changing needs and how community schools rebuilt their programs to address those needs.

Community School Programs Prior to the Pandemic

The Community School Coordinator: A Consistent Presence Within the School Community

Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, community school coordinators highlighted their consistent presence within their school buildings. Whether during

morning admissions, dismissal, lunches, or various other moments throughout the day, community school coordinators mentioned their presence and availability within the school community at multiple points throughout the day. Though their presence at these seemingly mundane points throughout the day might seem trivial, these moments were critical for the coordinators to develop relationships with students and their families. While discussing her favorite part of her job, Margaret, a coordinator from the Eastside School District, stated:

> I really structured my professional and my personal life around serving kids, so to be able to be in one building and have a consistent presence in the building, and to be able to develop relationships with kids that are long lasting. I'm in a K-5 building. You know, so I can develop a relationship and…and watch a student learn and grow and develop our own relationship through 6 years, which is something that is really special and important to me, and I think something that makes me more effective in the work that I do day-to-day. So, just being able to have that consistent long…long-term relationship with kids is the best part for sure.

As she highlighted, just being present within the building throughout the day helped her develop strong and trusting relationships with students in the building, which in turn helped her develop a stronger understanding of how she could best serve them and their families.

Having those regular touch points, building relationships, and being available throughout the day served as ways for the community school coordinator to keep track of students' and families' needs within the school community. As Patty, a coordinator from Eastside, stated:

> I would do rounding, you know, into our lunches and make sure that the students knew who I was, and, you know, make sure we're staying connected with the families. If there's anything going on, if we're hearing from our teachers or guidance counselors, you know, that one of our students may be struggling, or mom lost their job, or things like that, then, you know, I would take that

> information, make a contact with the family to see, you know, how, if at all, we could support their needs.

Discussing how her time was spent during the day, Carlie, another coordinator from Eastside, similarly stated:

> So, a lot of time dedicated to…to, like, meetings and follow up with that, and then also trying to be very present with our students and families outside during drop off and pick up each day, helping with getting kids on and off the bus, addressing parents who may come with a specific need for clothes, food, housing, employment.

Having those in-person opportunities to touch base were critical in helping to connect students and their families with the necessary resources.

Equally important, coordinators discussed the importance of developing strong connections with school staff through their presence in the school building. The integration of the community school coordinator into the workings of the school became critical in developing those relationships. Margaret stated:

> So, in the…in the last two to three years, I would say I've become a lot more integrated in the school staff. Initially, I was kind of viewed as an…an outside service provider. So, I had support from administration, and that…she'd say, like, "Yep, I like that idea. You go ahead and do that. Like, go do your thing over there." But now, with…with our new principal, I'm much more integrated in, you know, the day-to-day workings of the team. I'm a part of the…kind of the core office team and involved a lot more…a lot more in the…the kind of inner workings of the school.

Since coordinators are not employees of the school buildings in which they work, they can be viewed as external service providers, as Margaret indicated. This could potentially hinder coordinators' abilities to develop trusting relationships with staff in their buildings and is another illustration of why the coordinators' consistent presence within the school buildings is critical. Their presence enables not only their integration with students and families, but also with staff in the building.

Coordinators discussed several reasons why building relationships with staff members in their building was critical. As Edwin, a coordinator from the Eastside School District, mentioned:

> My teachers were, like, my… my first group of teachers were, like, helping me, offering to stay for activities, offering to…to volunteer. Things like that. Are we thinking about them, like, the cheerleaders of the community school? It takes time to…to get those people that…the people you're gonna trust and the people are gonna trust you to do the things. So, you need…you need to…you need to be there. You need to have patience. And again, like, be flexible to…to trying to build those relationships, 'cause in the end, those relationships are gonna pay.

Teachers and other staff provide critical support for community school programs, so ensuring they are on board and have strong, trusting relationships with the coordinator is important. Additionally, other coordinators mentioned that they would at times hear from teachers about the issues students and their families were dealing with, so maintaining those open lines of communication with school staff were important for connecting with families and addressing their needs.

Relatedly, forming positive relationships with school administrators was critical for community school coordinators to succeed in their roles. Coordinators expressed the importance of regularly meeting with their principal, whether through more formal meetings or simply dropping by their office for check-ins. As Jackie, a coordinator from the Westtown School District, stated:

> So, when you're in that school…who…what my goal is, or what my job is, is whoever the principal is, whatever their goals and visions are for the school, that is my primary job and vision. So, with… meeting with…I meet with the school principal at least once a week to go over what's going on, what's needed, because, as you know, culture and climate in the school can change at the drop of a dime, just with a lot of various things that are going on.

As Jackie indicated, maintaining frequent contact with the principal is critical for understanding their vision for the school and being able to work collaboratively to meet their goals.

Others expressed the importance of maintaining frequent contact with administrators, especially in instances of administrator turnover. Patty stated:

> So, I was very adamant about the coordinator-principal relationship when I was in my work. Again, I was in a building throughout those 13 years where we actually saw a lot of turnover in the principal role, which made it, I think, very difficult to keep some of the community school work going, because you'd have somebody new coming in who may not know what that meant and, you know…So, I strongly pushed for regular, like, weekly check-in meetings with our administration. So, I, you know, whether it was one-on-one with our principal, or at times I was invited into, like, an admin meeting if there was already one established.

In this case, maintaining frequent and regular contact with the principal was critical for maintaining the community school agenda. For new principals who might not have ever worked in a community school and might not have been particularly familiar with the community school model, these frequent touch points served as a chance for the coordinator to educate the principal about the model and determine how to incorporate community school programming into the principal's vision for the school.

In general, maintaining regular touchpoints with school administration and working to develop those relationships was also critical from a purely operational standpoint. Rita, a coordinator from Eastside, stated:

> Usually I meet with them…with my principal, I meet…I meet weekly, and if I need some…if there is something pressing, I would just stop at, you know, at her office and knock at her door and get the information I need, because I can't move forward without her approval on certain things.

At times, dropping in on the principal was necessary to move a certain project or program forward. For these various reasons, maintaining regular contact with the principal and ensuring a positive working relationship was imperative for coordinators.

Reaching Out to the Broader Community

Just as their presence within the school throughout the day enabled them to build relationships with students, families, and school staff, coordinators discussed the importance of their presence in the broader community for developing relationships with community partners who could support students' success. For some, getting out into the community was simple. As Jackie stated:

> Really with my job, I'm very present outside of the school, because we are a walking community. I'm outside in the mornings and in the afternoon, so I am right in the thick of being able to talk to parents and different community members. So, that definitely helps me with trying to put a thumbprint on whatever…whatever the needs is. I…I work with barbers to provide free haircut programs, because your…your barber shop is also a great resource if you want to bring it in, like, reading materials, because that's…that's where a lot of our kids go. So, I try to pretty much pinpoint the places that are able to help work with me to encourage our kids. At the end of the day, we just want each and every one of our students to…to be successful and carry them through graduation and show them some things that…and choices that are available after they graduate high school.

Because of how her community was structured in Westtown, Jackie could walk to various businesses and develop working relationships with them. As indicated here, she brought resources into various businesses, knowing that students would spend time there. However, she also worked with organizations in the community to acquire resources and services that students and families could utilize within the school building or broader community. Therefore, there was a reciprocal relationship in which resources were shared between these external organizations and the coordinator, all in the interest of meeting students' and families' needs.

For other coordinators, developing and maintaining relationships with businesses and organizations within the local community might not have been quite as simple as walking down the street. However, several coordinators discussed attempting to bring community partners into the school building as often as possible. For instance, discussing his efforts to maintain one of his school's critical partnerships, Edwin stated:

> We're trying…always used to…to invite them to tour the building, just to…to go around, like, for…to check around how it's going…having these leadership meetings around…just to tell them what's happening, and then, like, ask for their feedback. What things they see…what things they want to…to see, like, happening. But it…I…I mean, like, those…those partners, we're like, always, like, basically, like, just great communication and checking on them all the time. And make them…making them, like, part of the process...Every three months, like, making new T-shirts that say, like, proud Murphy Manta Rays, and things like that. Every time we have someone visiting the building, "Here. You're a proud Murphy Manta Ray," kind of thing. Like, made them proud of where we were, what's happening in the building, and celebrating them because we were, like, doing great. And with that they…they were, like, just, like, always just happy to check with us…checking…happy to come to us.

By bringing them into the school, coordinators made attempts to make partners feel like they were part of the school community. They did this by bringing individual partners in at times, but a number of coordinators also discussed regularly having meetings that brought together all their school's community partners to collaborate and work towards meeting school goals. In doing so, they worked to develop a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being and success of students in the school.

In addition to bringing the community into the school building for informal visits and formal partner meetings, several coordinators made concerted efforts to travel to community partners' offices or spaces to share updates and build relationships. For example, just as Edwin discussed bringing a critical partner into the school building, he also stated, "They were inviting us…me and the principal…allowed us to go to their

workplace to talk with their employees… to tell them, like…they were saying, like, we support Murphy Elementary. This is what's happening at Murphy Elementary." His experiences make clear that regardless of whether the coordinator brought community members into the building or traveled to them to explain the great things happening at the school, working to have in-person connections played a role in building and maintaining relationships with community partners.

Whether bringing partners in or traveling to them, Jackie highlighted the value of face-to-face connections. Discussing how she built new community partnerships, she stated:

> I spend…I spend a decent amount of my time making phone calls. But more importantly, I invite as many people into our school to see the culture and climate in our school. For…I've gone to…I can't tell you…I've sat in the backroom of GIANT to talk to the store manager. I...I'm on…I'm…I'm very old school with the way I do things. I think you know, a…a conversation is…I will have a conversation tenfold before a text message or anything else. And when I…when I can do something in person, that is my, my preferred way to be perfectly honest with you.

In a world in which others can so easily be accessed via phone or email, coordinators still saw tremendous value in developing bonds through in-person connections. They suggested that in-person connection yielded stronger relationships than those cultivated via technology.

Whether interacting with students, families, staff, or community partners, being a regular presence within the community was critical for developing meaningful, trusting relationships with all stakeholders. Having the chance to develop those relationships, understand students' and families' needs, and understand what assets in the community could be brought in to help address those needs played a significant role in helping to turn community schools into supportive centers for students and families.

Supportive Centers for the School Community

Through the partnerships that coordinators worked to develop with the broader community and through their own initiatives at the school level, community school coordinators described thriving programs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Coordinators discussed providing support to students and their families in a variety of areas. As Rita described her school:

> To me, the community school is literally a physical space which is going to be the school. In this case, Dougherty Elementary. But it's also a set of partnerships, and the way that I described that to my families and partners is that it takes a village to raise a child. And they just have become part of that village, meaning they are going to be there to…they, they are going to be stakeholders of a movement or a…sort of, like, system that will provide adequate resources for students to empower students to become better learners, and to empower an entire community and give a voice to a community.

She touched on a central tenet of community schools. By building external partnerships with community partners who can provide resources to students and their families, students are better equipped to come to school and learn.

One way that coordinators supported students was through the provision of basic resources and other individualized resources. As Michael, a coordinator from the Metropolitan School District, described it:

> The community school is just kind of filling in gaps and kind of making, like, the public-school house more than just an academic center. It's…it's a place where you can get meals, you can get clothing, you can potentially get clothing washed, you can get, you know, mental health supports.

These represent just a few examples of the wrap-around services community schools were able to provide families. Other coordinators discussed assisting with employment resources, housing, and other necessary supports.

Beyond providing wrap-around services to ensure that students' needs outside school were met, coordinators also discussed services and programs designed to enrich students' experiences within their school buildings. Some coordinators described having partnerships that supported students academically during the school day. For instance, Jackie discussed a relationship she built with Senior Corps, a program run through the Corporation for National and Community Service. As she described it:

> This amazing relationship developed, to where I have had 26 individual students each and every week…26 students had a one-on-one mentor, and I…I called them almost their cheerleader because the students that we're choosing for this program are students who really are…are in need of just having someone to get check-ins and be like, "Hey, how'd you do on that test? Great job." So, that…that Senior Corps…I also had six other senior citizens placed. They would come every week and spend the day and go into different classrooms and help with reading in small groups. All of these amazing things.

This partnership supported students during the day not just with their academic skills, but also with a mentor who could show students that they had someone in their corner rooting for them.

In addition to programming during the school day, coordinators also discussed the thriving after-school programming in their school buildings. Several coordinators discussed the large number of after-school program providers coming into their buildings each day. Margaret stated that before the pandemic, her school was operating 15-20 different after-school programs. Edwin stated that before the pandemic, his school was operating 32 after-school programs. Some described after-school programs that came to the school to provide academic support. For instance, Jackie stated:

> So, before the pandemic, we had, like, a…so, we partner with Hightown College. So, we have after-school programming that went on throughout the school year and that was basically to assist the students with, you know, with their homework and then also provide like STEAM and STEM based activities as well, where we

> have students from Hightown College coming in Monday through Thursday. It's kind of like a…a sign up where students would have to sign up for this program.

Others even discussed programming that took students offsite. Discussing some of her school's more popular after-school programs, Patty stated:

> So, CultureQuest and the Cherry Factory is right in Eastside. Pre-pandemic that was an after-school program that was, like, always booming. We would have, you know…send, you know, 20-25 kids a day on a bus down for that program. Again, things kind of fizzled out and priorities changed a little bit for families as the pandemic came through. But…but some of those supplemental type programs I think were really, like, key for our students and families.

Whether on or off-site, the after-school programming represented a key opportunity for students to participate in academic support and enrichment opportunities, as well as the opportunity to explore other areas of interest.

Edwin discussed how having these after-school opportunities that engaged students' interests also served as an attendance support. He stated:

> So, I…I remember, like, I…I started trying to focus and create a lot of after school programs. With that…creating that…a lot of after school programs, we got the kids really engaged in the school and that helped with attendance.

Providing students with opportunities within the building that ignited their passions was a great way to encourage students to come to school every day.

Beyond just providing students with enriching opportunities that made them excited about coming to school, several community school coordinators discussed their focus on attendance programming prior to the pandemic. Edwin went on to state:

> Reducing the absenteeism with the…with the attendance campaign that we…we and Benjamin Franklin [Elementary School]…we…we both have a program from Crestville College…doing an attendance ambassador. Basically, we have someone…an intern working with us to work on the attendance campaign, and we both, like, just kill it. The first, like, 2 years, like, just reducing absences like…like, 50 percent right away. Going from, I don't know, like, 40, 45 kids with chronic absence to 10 kids with chronic absence, like, in the first…first year. It was just, like…like, crazy amazing.

These numbers show just how impactful having external support in the area of attendance was for students in these schools.

In addition to implementing programming to ensure that students were in school, coordinators discussed thriving family engagement programs prior to the start of the pandemic. Discussing a program she created at her school, Jackie stated:

> So, actually, the one thing that I created which worked amazing was…I created a lunch program, where what I did once a month was each student during their lunch period…it was obviously very planned because it was…it's a lot of moving piece…pieces. But each student was allowed to invite two people in to have lunch with them in the cafeteria. So those two people…and we pretty much over time, it was two people that were basically 18 or older…could be a parent, could be an auntie, a gram, an older sibling. Like, with the pretense of a lot of times with our families having multiple children, sometimes you don't have that time for that one-on-one connection or conversation just with one child. So, that lunch program that I created, really, our parent engagement probably increased by over 400 percent.

With that program bringing more family members into the school building, she additionally discussed how it helped her further develop connections with families and communicate with them about additional happenings in the school community. She stated:

> And because of that program, what then started happening was I used that as a platform to where I could say at each of the lunch periods if…whatever type of events we were doing here. I am with the microphone. I have all these parents and getting…you know, I'm getting to meet so many of our families. "Hey, guys, just so you know, we're gonna be having so and so going on." There was a lot of connections made.

This is yet another example that demonstrates the importance of bringing families into the school building in order to develop those relationships and keep families up to date on programming at the school.

With their programs thriving, one of the community schools within the BSC network received substantial recognition. As Edwin stated:

> We won recognition as a Title I school 2019…for closing the achievement gap. Basically, like, we did amazing in some test scores and just, like, creating all…everything around. And then, we got…we got a…a Blue Ribbon School 2020, right? For all the…everything we were doing. So, we were, like, top, the top, the top, the schools in the [region]. Like, the only school in the [region] with that. And one of seven schools in…in the state to get the Blue Ribbon School recognition.

He further discussed how BSC frequently brought new visitors into the school to see the amazing things happening. The United States Secretary of Education even visited the school to see the community school program at work.

Even if they did not receive quite the same level of recognition, other coordinators discussed the significant progress that had been made in their schools before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They discussed reductions in chronic absenteeism, increased family engagement, critical support for students' academics and social-emotional well-being, and resources to meet families' basic needs.

Summary

Maintaining a consistent presence within the school community was critical in helping coordinators build relationships with both internal and external stakeholders within their community school programs. Being available in the building throughout the day allowed coordinators to develop meaningful relationships with students and families, which helped them foster an understanding of their needs. Similarly, developing relationships with school staff also helped coordinators keep tabs on families' needs and helped them generate the necessary support needed to keep community school programming operating. By going out into the broader community and bringing

community members into the school building, coordinators were able to secure the necessary resources to address students' and families' documented needs. Whether through basic needs distribution, academic supports, attendance initiatives, after-school opportunities, or parent engagement programming, coordinators discussed the supportive community hubs they helped to develop through their connecting of students and families to resources in the broader community. Despite their great progress, the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic would throw their programs for a major curveball.

COVID-19 Pandemic Disruptions to Community School Programs

While community school coordinators discussed their schools' significant progress, much of that progress was halted when the COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly struck. Three coordinators specifically mentioned the pandemic halting the progress they had made within their school buildings. The reasons for the loss of progress within the school buildings were multifaceted.

Challenges Connecting With Students, Families, and Partners

When schools shut down in March 2020 and students began receiving their education virtually, community school coordinators lost the in-person touch points with students and families on which they had come to rely. As previously discussed, seeing students and families in person at school at various points throughout the day helped coordinators stay connected with families, maintain an awareness of their needs, and connect them with vital resources in the school and broader community. When schools closed, it became much harder for coordinators to keep track of their families. As Michael stated:

> So, I mean there was just so much that's slipping through the cracks, whether it be they don't have a working number to reach them, they don't have Internet to

> reach. I mean, it's just again, people making good faith efforts. But it was just hard to find people. It was hard to find people. It was hard to, you know…At least you could, you know, "I'll catch you tomorrow at school." Or I'll…you know, "Hey, mom, grandma, or dad." Whoever it may be. "Come in tomorrow here at the school building. This is where we'll meet. This is where we'll be." And we lost all of that.

Edwin similarly stated:

> So, when everybody got inside the houses…was, like, kind of hard trying to communicate with the…some of them. Then we…we lose track of a lot of our kids that we didn't know what…what was happening, how to get to them. We did some…some walks around the neighbors a couple of time to…trying to…to pass, like, flyers and things. But, yeah, I feel like that…that was one…one thing that we're not prepared for. Definitely. Like, how to reach out to those families, like, right away and…and know if they need any help.

Despite efforts to touch base with families via phone or computer, coordinators lost track of a number of students and families. Though efforts were taken to walk around neighborhoods and find families with whom they had lost contact, they were not always successful. Without having contact with families, it became increasingly challenging for coordinators to connect families with the necessary resources.

Coordinators also expressed challenges maintaining relationships with community partners during the COVID-19 lockdowns. As Patty stated:

> I definitely do feel like even though, you know, we tried to stay connected to our community partners, everyone was trying to manage, you know, what was going on. So, definitely not having those community partners in the building delayed some communication with them, and, you know, kind of pushed things a little…a little bit farther away that it…it may have even been difficult to get them back in the building, you know, when the time was right.

Having that loss of in-person contact and having partners managing their own personal and professional circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic served as a hindrance to community schools trying to maintain their partnerships. As needs arose, this made it

more difficult to call on those partners to provide resources and support to the school community.

Several coordinators also highlighted the unique challenges associated with their more elderly partners, who were at greater risk of illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussing the previously-mentioned Senior Corps program that had been providing academic support and mentorship opportunities for students, Jackie stated:

> So, long story short, after COVID, that program completely ended because, obviously, you know, it was also very, you know, more dangerous for our seniors to be out after even everything, you know…So that was probably, for myself, the biggest loss as far as a program that ever happened at Shenandoah.

Losing these partnerships and volunteers served as a blow to community school programs. Other coordinators even highlighted how difficult it was to get older volunteers and partners back into the buildings as in-person opportunities began to reemerge. Jessica, a community school coordinator from the Metropolitan School District, stated:

> You know, kids have lots of germs, and, you know, for them…a lot of our community partners…especially our…from our churches…they…they are older, and they have some health issues that they didn't want to put any more at risk than…that what they needed to. So even, like, drop off of donations…they would ask if we would meet them outside and have helpers help them, so they didn't have to come into school. Or, like, we would have to shift, like, our…like I said, we do like a Book-tacular event in October and Read Across America in March. A lot of them, we'd give them the option to volunteer virtually for those things.

Coordinators could maintain some level of connection with some of these partners through virtual means. However, due to the physical separation of the school and partners, those relationships became more distant and harder to draw upon as needed.

Jessica, who started in her position in 2021, also indicated how difficult it was to form meaningful relationships with her school's existing partners in an era of COVID restrictions. She stated:

> When I first met all our partners it was either virtually, or they all had masks on. So then, when I would meet them after…like, after we didn't have to wear masks anymore here, I'd be like, "Oh, Hi. I'm Jessica." And they're like, "Yeah, we know." And I'm like, "Embarrassing."

This once again shows the importance of in-person, unrestricted opportunities to connect for community school coordinators and their community partners. Behind a screen and a mask, it was much more difficult for coordinators to forge bonds with their partners, even if they did have the opportunity to connect in some form. Without having strong relationships, it becomes more difficult to leverage those partnerships for resources.

Program and Service Losses

Jackie's experience with Senior Corps began to touch on the program losses that community school coordinators experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most coordinators discussed at least one of their partnerships being terminated during the pandemic lockdowns. Some community partners across the community schools did not have the capacity to pivot to a virtual format. As Rita stated, "I needed to contact all my partners, and a lot of them were not prepared to do online after school programs, and that was not a priority." As alluded to here, other coordinators additionally stated that programs were canceled because there were higher priority areas during this chaotic time. Edwin similarly stated:

> With after school programs, we definitely…we…we lost all of that. We try, like, two or three virtual, but nothing we can do. So, well, we definitely, like…we didn't waste our time. We try a lot of things, but the same time it's like…is not the time. It's not the time for this. It's not the most important things. Let's try to focus on other things to trying to keep, like, building what we have.

The programming cuts these coordinators mentioned were not just limited to after-school programming. Coordinators discussed cuts to their daytime programming, including tutoring, mentoring, and other services occurring during school hours. As community needs began to change during the pandemic, coordinators shifted their programming focus to some of the most pressing concerns in the school community. Therefore, while some programs were able to continue in community schools, others were not.

In addition to the loss of programming for students before and after school, family engagement events and other parent workshops were lost during the pandemic. While numerous coordinators had discussed the progress their schools were making in terms of family engagement prior to the pandemic, coordinators could not bring students and families onsite for any programming during the early stages of the pandemic. Given how important these events were for keeping parents connected to the school, sharing information, and putting parents in contact with external resources, this certainly provided a challenge to community school coordinators.

Virtual Programming and Challenges With Engagement

To be sure, not every partnership was lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, and some partners were able to provide some virtual programming. However, feedback from the virtual programming was not always the greatest. Edwin stated:

> I…I remember we create, like, tutoring via Zoom, right? We have our tutors from Crestville College doing Zoom. And I have 5 tutors connected and one student. They were almost fighting for one student. So they were…we…we didn't know how to manage that. We didn't know how to engage the kids in a…in a Zoom. Yeah, that…those are, as I said, those are more, like, the educational challenge, like, that came with COVID.

Even if virtual community school programming was available, not every student could take part in it.

Michael emphasized the importance of recognizing the privilege of accessing virtual programming. He said:

> But there again, there's a certain privilege involved in reaching dance classes on Zoom if you're, you know…if so and so's family…you… they didn't get their device yet, and even if they got their device, they don't have Internet, they're not getting to the dance class on Zoom. So, it was…there were…there were good faith offerings made during that time. The best that people could. The best that the organizations could, given the abrupt and just unprecedented circumstance, but realistically, who's…who's able to log in? You know, if it's a…if it's a class for six-year-olds or for, you know, K, 1, 2 program, is the caregiver working three jobs around to log the kid on for the 2nd grade science program? Probably not, right?

There were very real obstacles that could prevent a student from being able to access programs, even if they were offered in a virtual format. As Michael highlighted, technology and Internet access were, of course, important components. However, even as districts rolled out support with Internet connectivity and electronic devices, having someone present to help younger students sign in and engage in the content was a hindrance.

Even for the students who were able to attend, the impact of virtual programming was not necessarily as significant as before. As Patty stated:

> So, we were doing things virtually, and it was not quite the same, to say the least. It didn't have the same impact. It didn't hit quite the same for our families and…and students. But we tried to keep things going and stay connected.

Understandably, a certain degree of burnout from engaging in online learning throughout the day certainly played a role here. As Jessica mentioned, "By the end of it, I'm sure you understand, people were sick of Zooming, of doing the online learning and all that good stuff." She was one of several who expressed challenges with keeping students engaged in a virtual format. Again, this highlights the value of in-person opportunities to connect

for students and families. These programs were not able to have the same impact through a screen.

Organizational Challenges and Coordinator Turnover During the Pandemic

Beyond the operational challenges posed to community school programs due to students receiving an education from home, certain organizational challenges further exacerbated the difficulties community school programs and their staff experienced during the pandemic. As discussed, the community school coordinators participating in this study were all housed within BSC's network of community schools. However, several lead partners served as the employers of the community school coordinators. One lead partner, Supportive School Communities (SSC), seemed to experience a unique set of challenges compared to the other lead partners. As Edwin stated:

> There's a lead partner who is in charge of a lot of community schools, especially in the Metropolitan School District. And they…they struggle a lot to keep the community schools in their job because they don't pay well. And they have a lot of things that the other community schools don't have to go through. And their organization in general is, I know, struggling a lot.

Edwin was not a SSC employee, but he was one of several coordinators employed by another lead partner who expressed concerns about the organization's challenges and their struggles to keep coordinators in their positions.

Though SSC did not only serve schools in the Metropolitan School District, it did serve as the lead partner for many schools in this district. Even though the Metropolitan School District had the highest number of community schools in the BSC network, it was difficult to recruit community school coordinators from this district for this study. This is potentially because of the high turnover in community school coordinators employed

through this lead partner. The few coordinators with SSC as a lead partner who participated in this study highlighted several challenges.

As mentioned, pay was one major struggle for coordinators working for SSC. Michael, who left his position to become a teacher, said:

> I loved being the guy who, like, I would come. I would help people. Like, I love being that for people, but honestly it was…I was making $37,000, you know? Like…and that is one of the cruelest things is, like, you know, they…in…for these nonprofits, like…and it's not their fault. Like it's…it's, you know, it's a…it's a whole, just screwy, screwy system. But they are just, like, exploiting people's love of people.

As many coordinators suggested, their positions pulled them in many different directions throughout the day. They worked incredibly hard to meet students' and families' needs. Despite loving some aspects of their positions, some coordinators working for SSC discussed how it was not a sustainable option for them to work for such little pay. Edwin mentioned that he knew other coordinators who had to work two jobs or could not afford childcare for their children. This forced some to seek out other positions.

The pay was not the only challenge coordinators working under SSC experienced. During COVID, Michael discussed the disconnect he felt between the coordinators on the ground and the organization's leadership. He stated:

> Supportive School Communities and Building Stronger Communities...I was probably a bit of a thorn in their side to be honest, because I would point out things that, you know…they sit in, like, this beautiful Building Stronger Communities office, you know, and they…they have all these, you know, these big ideas in these meetings, and they're often…you know, this organization leadership…they don't spend all that much time in these school buildings, so they get these really, like, cutesy ideas. And I just felt like a lot of times they were so, so out of touch.

Worth noting here is that Michael calls into question the leadership of not just SSC, but also BSC. He went on to state:

> Building Stronger Communities and Supportive School Communities. I mean, they're just, like…they're just, like, a…a, you know, they're…they're a business with…with a smile. They're a business who takes pictures of kids, and that's their business, you know? And so they really weren't up to task. They, as far as I knew last, 'cause I still keep up indirectly with people still working for Supportive School Communities and stuff just 'cause I'm kind of nosey, I guess. But my understanding is they still work remotely. Like, the leadership at Supportive School Communities, they still don't come into the office unless they have to decree something from, you know, like…So, I mean, you're talking about a disconnect there.

He implied the leaders in the organizations were not genuinely concerned about supporting the families in their school communities, nor were they present enough in the community to genuinely understand how to improve the lives of students and families.

Additionally, Margaret, who also had SSC as a lead partner, expressed difficulties working with the organization during the pandemic due to restrictions placed on her. While other coordinators with other lead partners in the Eastside School District expressed being able to access their school buildings during the height of the COVID lockdowns, Margaret stated:

> Yeah…so, our school district at a certain point had opened the buildings back up to limited staff. So, from the school district perspective, some of us could get back into the buildings to try to work on some things. But my employer at that point was not allowing me to go in and do any kind of work in the building, or any kind of in-person…kind of services or programs.

In this way, she felt the restrictions her lead partner placed on her were impacting her ability to be effective in her role. This further impacted her feelings of stress and created additional workplace challenges during an already chaotic time.

Lead partner aside, other coordinators expressed experiencing significant challenges and feelings of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic that led them to consider leaving their positions. For some, keeping their students and families at the center of their work was enough to keep them motivated and moving forward. However,

some expressed experiencing significant burnout due to putting their school community's needs before their own. For instance, Patty stated:

> During those years of the pandemic, I was like 110 miles per hour. I felt like I was sprinting every single day, and it, like, ended up coming to fruition and, like, hitting me like a brick wall the first year with…that we came back, then full-time after, you know, the shutdown year and then the hybrid year. And so I still loved that job. I loved what I did, but I also wasn't really taking care of myself…I don't know if it's a forever decision…I do very much so miss that position, and the work that I did, and the…the relationships that I had, and the community partnerships that were built, and…and all of that. But I need to do something for myself so that I could feel less stressed for a period of time, if that makes any sense.

Despite finding great purpose in her work supporting her school community, she recognized that, due to the seemingly non-stop job-related chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic, she needed a break, at least temporarily, from her position as a community school coordinator.

Though turnover in community school coordinators might have presented a challenge to schools within the BSC network before the pandemic, the pandemic only heightened this problem further. Having turnover in this role during the pandemic further hindered the coordinators' development of relationships with students, families, and community partners. As Edwin stated:

> I know since I start working, I…I saw schools, like, changing community school coordinator… some schools in the Metropolitan School District...every 3 months. New person, new person, new person. And it's impossible that you're gonna…gonna do a change in a school if you don't have someone for more than…realistically, for more than one year. Actually, because it takes a lot of time to build all these relationships.

By virtue of the need to establish meaningful relationships with all program stakeholders, a community school coordinator must remain in their position for a sufficient period of time. Without developing such relationships, gaining families' trust and gaining insights

into their personal needs becomes more difficult. Gaining support and buy-in from staff with regards to community school programming also becomes challenging. Finally, the lack of strong relationships makes it more difficult to leverage resources from community partners to address structural barriers families experience.

Community School Coordinator Role Change

Another hindrance for coordinators' striving to meet students' and families' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic was related to the structure of the community school coordinator position itself. Several of the longest-serving coordinators within BSC's network of community schools expressed how different their positions looked prior to and during the pandemic. Rita described her role prior to the pandemic as that of a strategic thinker. She explained:

> As a community school coordinator, I see my position as someone that is…I'm a strategic thinker, and the way that I work is that I supervise, I see the whole picture. I supervise that…that the different opportunities in the building, but I am not doing the work, because I need to be available to do, you know, to organize the work. I organize the work…the work, and I delegate. I do not…you won't see me doing an after-school program. You won't see me the day that we are doing an open house sitting at a table and giving pamphlets to my…my families. Why? Because on that day, I need to be free to be able to troubleshoot anything that is happening and making sure that things are in alignment with what we have planned.

As the community school coordinator, Rita was not the individual providing services. As she described it, she saw things "whole-picture." Therefore, she needed to have a broad understanding of the needs in the community and leverage her connections to meet the needs of those in the school community. As needs arose and circumstances changed, she was the one at the helm to determine how to change programming to meet students' and families' needs.

Once the pandemic struck, however, she and several other coordinators described a loss in their abilities to serve as strategic thinkers. Rita went on to explain:

> I became a doer because we didn't have enough people to do the work. So, instead of saying, "Okay, we need to get the families connected to Internet," or "We need to…to teach the families how to get connected, and I'm going to get these students from Madison University that I'm going to support this type of work," I became someone that was teaching them how to access the resources. I became the one…one who probably went and did a home visit and provided the Internet router because they didn't have it. So, I…I became, you know, I was more hands on the work. There was little…little time for strategic thinker…thinking, and little time to think about partners and meetings and presentations and managing a budget. It was more about getting the families access to the online education. That was at first the very, very first thing that we needed to do.

Needs during the pandemic changed so suddenly and unexpectedly that it did not matter what one's position was in the school community. As the "free-player" within the school community, the coordinator became someone who was called upon to help families with various needs, whether that was getting them hooked up to the Internet, providing necessities, or some other related need. Though schools were fortunate to have this individual in a flexible enough position that they could be an extra set of hands to assist families, it detracted from their abilities to think big picture.

Patty expressed a similar sentiment. Discussing how her role changed during the pandemic, she stated:

> But in the moment then we were taken back to that direct service, you know, which is kind of where we started. All hands on deck. It didn't really matter, you know, who you were, what you were, what your role was, but our families needed to be fed. So we were all there, you know, giving out food, kind of thing. So…so, I definitely think it did change for those…that period of time.

Again, though schools were fortunate to have the community school coordinators available to provide families with assistance, having them tied up providing for basic needs hindered their ability to seek out new partnerships and work with existing partners

to meet school goals. To be clear, they were still seeking out new relationships and partnerships during this time. However, they could not dedicate as much time to this "strategic thinking" aspect of their role, given their need to be on the ground providing services to families.

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic halted the progress within the BSC network of community schools for several reasons. For one thing, the lack of in-person touchpoints created challenges for connecting with all community school stakeholders. Coordinators lost track of a number of students and families without being able to communicate with them during the school day. They also struggled to consistently communicate with community partners, who could not be in the building and were busy managing their own personal and professional circumstances during this challenging time. Most coordinators expressed some programmatic loss due to the closure of school buildings, and some expressed challenges with attendance and engagement with virtual programs. Additionally, organizational challenges contributed to stress and turnover in community school coordinators' roles, which led to challenges maintaining the relationships needed to keep programs running efficiently. Finally, perceived changes in their roles due to the pandemic also impacted coordinators' abilities to think strategically and put many back in a direct service provider position, further hampering their abilities to meet the large-scale needs of the school community during this time.

Community School Programs as an Asset During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Community school programs were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Partnerships were lost, maintaining connections within the community was more

challenging, and community school coordinators were stretched thinner than before, impacting their abilities to perform their roles effectively. Even so, schools with community school programs in place before the pandemic could leverage resources in their school communities to meet families' ever-changing needs as they emerged.

Changing Needs in an Uncertain Time

To understand how community schools leveraged resources in their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, one must first understand how needs changed in these school communities during this time. As the pandemic shut schools down and students began receiving an education from home, Internet and computer access was an immediate concern for students and families. In addition to connecting students and families with the necessary resources to access virtual schooling, there was also the issue of ensuring students and their families were equipped to access different platforms for learning. This was a challenge, because many of these learning platforms were also new to coordinators. Rita stated:

> Yeah, it was…it was…it was a disaster. It was really difficult. I remember that on Monday…the next Monday I received a message from my principal saying that we needed to start using online. I didn't even know what Zoom was. I didn't know how to use it. I needed to create an account. And then we started to talk about moving things online, but obviously the families didn't have computers, didn't have Internet. We didn't have a way to teach them how to access these resources because we ourselves were learning how to use them. Our teachers didn't know how to teach online because they, you know…we have a good amount of teachers that have been here for a while, and they have their own way of teaching, and they were for sure not interested in learning how to teach online. So, that was a whole…a whole. Oh my God, it was crazy. It was just crazy. Very difficult time.

This was completely uncharted territory for everyone in the school community, and it required significant adjustment for all stakeholders.

Beyond the immediate necessity of preparing for virtual learning, coordinators expressed great concerns about families' access to basic needs during this time. Though many coordinators had discussed providing families with food resources before the start of the pandemic, numerous coordinators expressed how much more significant the need for food was within their school communities after the start of the pandemic. Though there were district efforts to get food out to families, multiple coordinators expressed the need to seek out additional food sources during this time. Food was not a concern just for the students who had come to rely on their schools for two meals per day. Several coordinators mentioned the rise in food insecurity among members of their communities who did not necessarily have children in the schools. Families and community members also required other basic items besides food. Coordinators discussed the need for clothing, diapers, and other necessities during this time as well. This is perhaps unsurprising, as coordinators discussed families losing jobs and their incomes due to businesses shutting down during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Coinciding with the rising food insecurity, several coordinators expressed concerns about housing insecurity during the pandemic. This relates to families' loss of income during this time, but also to the rising rents seen in the housing market as the COVID-19 pandemic progressed. For some, housing was an issue in their school communities before the pandemic, but the issue became more significant during the pandemic. Several coordinators expressed that the housing in their communities was becoming unattainable for families, and this was an additional area in which coordinators had to work to connect families with resources.

Though some families received stimulus checks from the federal government that could help meet their basic needs during the pandemic, Rita discussed the unique challenges her undocumented families experienced during this time. She stated:

> I also have a lot of undocumented families, and I just happen to have a list of them, which I use…so, only for personal, you know, personal support, like, reasons. I…I make sure that that list was available so that I could do home visits to those families, because those families were the families that could not work, did not get any support from the government, could not buy food anywhere. It was just…it was just so hard. I wanted to take special care of those ones.

These families would have been uniquely vulnerable before the pandemic. However, once the pandemic struck, they had little safety net on which to fall back. Therefore, paying close attention to their needs was particularly important.

Again, though these were areas in which coordinators had already been working, many saw the needs as much greater than before. Coordinators had to work diligently to leverage existing partners to meet students' and families' needs, and they additionally had to work to build new partnerships.

Preparing Families for Virtual Learning

While some coordinators indicated that connecting families to the Internet and providing devices to access virtual learning might have been a broader district-level concern, coordinators supported families through this transition. For example, the Metropolitan School District was not a one-to-one district before the start of the pandemic. As a result, when the pandemic struck, the district needed to provide computers to students so they could access virtual learning. Michael indicated that community school coordinators in the district were at the forefront of this distribution. They were given devices and a list of addresses and would travel door-to-door to ensure that students had the technology they would need to access virtual schooling.

Beyond the immediate need of ensuring access to computers, several coordinators discussed reaching out to individual families and determining which other barriers existed for families to engage in virtual learning. For instance, in the Eastside School District, many students had Chromebooks in school before the start of the pandemic. Nonetheless, Carlie, Patty, and Margaret reached out to families to determine who had access to the Internet and who did not. With that information, they helped provide families with information and additional support with Internet connection as needed.

While Internet and computer access were critical resources for students being able to access virtual learning, there was also the task of preparing students and families to navigate the various websites and platforms they would have to access, as well as inform them of best practices to ensure student success navigating schooling in this new setting. This was an area in which coordinators provided families with additional information and support. For instance, Margaret shared resources with families about how to access different platforms that would be used for virtual schooling, as well as additional online educational resources that families could use to supplement their synchronous instruction. She also shared information about students' virtual schooling schedules with families and helpful tips to support students with successfully engaging in online learning from home.

Leveraging Their Networks of Community School Coordinators

For additional resource needs, existing networks of community school coordinators became critical sources of support from which community school coordinators drew during the pandemic. BSC brings their community school coordinators together for a monthly meeting, and this became a critical area for coordinators to share resources and ideas and to support one another. Coordinators would also meet within

smaller networks that served as supports. For instance, coordinators discussed sharing resources and information with other coordinators from their school district. Others talked about the coordination that happened with other community schools who shared their lead partner. Whether discussing the whole BSC network or a subgroup within this network, coordinators became critical resources for one another.

Patty shared how critical the Eastside School District's network of coordinators was for her during the pandemic. She stated:

> So, the supervisor from Eastside would pull all of us coordinators together and we would, you know, discuss best practices or, "Hey, I have this partnership," or, you know, "We have this resource," or "This community partner is looking to make this donation. Does anybody have the need?" And so we all just kind of networked together, offered up different programs or services or donations that were being provided to us to see how we could, like, spread those amongst our network.

As students' and families' needs changed during this time, being able to leverage their networks and share resources was critical for getting families connected with whatever resources they needed. Also worth noting, coordinators in the Eastside School District particularly emphasized how much their district supported the community schools and worked to align resources within the schools. As Patty alluded to, the Eastside School District had a full-time supervisor within the district who oversaw the community school program. He would help to allocate resources within the district's community schools and connect coordinators with additional community partnerships. Other school districts within BSC's network of community schools did not necessarily employ full-time supervisors within the district who could provide this level of resource support.

Even if they did not necessarily have the same level of support at the district level, coordinators in the Metropolitan School District similarly expressed how critical the network of community schools in their district was for sharing resources. Jessica stated:

> The other Metropolitan schools…like, some of our schools will be, like, hosting a mobile food pantry, so they'll share that with us, and then we can share that with our families. But like, "Hey, you might have to drive five minutes up the road if you can, but there's fresh meat and produce and stuff that you could…for the taking. So go while there's stuff there." And that's always really nice to kind of share that across the schools and kind of work together in that aspect, so we're all not doing the same thing at once, and we can kind of play off one another.

Connecting families with resources and programs beyond their own community school was critical during the pandemic, a time in which so many families needed diverse resources.

A smaller subgroup of coordinators within Eastside's school district discussed a network they created before the start of the pandemic. The network, comprising the community schools on the northside of Eastside, was called the Northside Network. The coordinators used this network to communicate with their shared community partners as a collective, rather than as individual schools. This enabled them to hold certain large events at one school, rather than holding the same programs multiple times across multiple schools. This was a time saver for coordinators and community partners alike, and it helped them to work more efficiently. Much like the overall Eastside network, this Northside Network was also a critical source for resource sharing between the schools in this part of Eastside. Edwin explained:

> So, we were always, like, talking, sharing resources. Every time they need something from the pantry, they say, like, "I have a family. Come and pick whatever you want." Things like that. Every time I need something, I just go to see them, get stuff.

Margaret, discussing the criticality of the Northside Network, stated:

> I think the…the development of the Northside Network that I talked about, and really being able to, like, more consistently collaborate with colleagues and all of our community partners has been…it's been a really…a much more effective way to collaborate and share resources.

She further expressed how critical this support was during the pandemic as circumstances changed in the community. She stated that the network was critical for determining what resources were available in the broader community, connecting families with those resources, and equitably distributing resources between the schools in the Northside Network.

In addition to resource provision and information sharing, the community school coordinators' networks also supported novice coordinators. Discussing the entire BSC network of coordinators, Jessica, who began in her position in June 2021– a period in which the pandemic lockdowns had ended, but a time in which the impacts of the pandemic were still being felt–stated:

> Yes, it's been really nice, because we have definitely some seasoned coordinators there, which…they'll kind of give me their feedback, or they've been…we have some coordinators who've been doing it for 10 plus years. So, it's like, you know, someone will bring something up, and they're, like…they try to work through. Sometimes they'll be like, "Oh, why don't we just do this? And you guys can fill this out." And they're like, "No, no, we did this before. It didn't work." You know? It's…it's nice to see their expertise.

In this way, as she was adjusting to her role in a somewhat turbulent time, this network of coordinators was critical for her learning how to do her job and how to do it as effectively as possible.

Finally, as noted, the pandemic represented a great upheaval for community schools and the programs they could offer. Not to mention, it was an immensely stressful time for many on a personal level. Michael discussed how important the BSC network of community school coordinators was for emotional support during this time. He stated:

> Ah, it was huge. I mean, it was huge because everybody was just making it up as they went. It was, like, okay, well, now my office is my bedroom. I don't have as much touch points. People, you know, we're all worried about, you know, I know this kid relies on these weekly things. We…and I don't know where they're at. So, just that network for, like, the social-emotional toll, you know? The just genuine fear that I know I felt, and I know a lot of other people did at the beginning of COVID. Like, not knowing who am I going to lose, you know? What's this? What's the world going to look like? And, yeah, just having each other to, like, kind of vet through what can we still do? What is still possible in this role? Like, how, you know, like…so it was just huge.

Community school coordinators provided critical support to one another in so many different ways during this turbulent time. Whether troubleshooting programmatic issues, figuring out more efficient and equitable ways to allocate resources, or simply supporting one another during an incredibly difficult time, coordinator support was essential for other coordinators trying to make it through the pandemic.

Leveraging Connections Within the School and Broader Community

In addition to leveraging their fellow community school coordinators, some coordinators were able to develop new connections to meet families' needs through their existing partnerships and members of their school communities. For instance, Carlie discussed how new partnerships at times were developed through teachers within her school building. In discussing how she worked to develop new partnerships, she stated, "It happens a lot of different ways. Sometimes it happens actually through, like, our teachers. And they'll say, you know, 'I…through my personal community or this or that, I'd love to bring this partner in.'" This once again shows the importance of developing meaningful relationships with teachers in the school building, as these relationships can be critical in bringing new partnerships into the school community.

Sometimes their existing community partners would also connect community school coordinators with organizations or individuals within their own personal networks

who could provide additional support to the school community. Discussing her list of community partners, Margaret stated, “There were community partners on our list that could then recommend other people or organizations in the area that we could also reach out to.” Community schools were very fortunate to have these existing partnerships going into the pandemic, not only because they were a critical support to the schools during this time, but also because they could help the school develop relationships with new partners who could address newly emerging needs.

Seeking Out Their Own Partnerships

Aside from the existing relationships that coordinators could draw upon to garner the resources necessary to address families’ needs, there were times in which no connections could produce the necessary resources. In these instances, coordinators had to work independently to determine what was available in their community and how to access those resources. For some, this meant reaching out to former community partners who may have previously offered a service within the school, but had since stopped providing their services. At other times, they may have simply googled opportunities and programs in the area. Patty stated:

> I was kind of cold emailing at times like, “Hey, I’m so and so from, you know, Miller Middle School, and here’s what we’re looking to do.” And, you know, “Do you have any interest?” And…and 95 percent of the time I received a very warm response, you know? You know, “Yes, let’s have some conversation and get it going.” So, sometimes it was just reaching out via email.

Schools with community school coordinators were fortunate to have an individual whose position was flexible enough during the pandemic to be able to devote some time to seeking out these additional resources in their communities with which they did not necessarily have any connections. However, as noted, the pandemic detracted somewhat

from coordinators' abilities to operate in this capacity, as they were on the ground connecting families with resources.

Coordinators also discussed partnerships falling into their laps. Organizations within the community would at times approach the coordinator because they had a service they wanted to provide the school community. As Carlie discussed, "Sometimes it's people just approaching us. 'You're a community school.' You know, 'We…our organization wants to make a donation or work, you know, with your kids.' Great." Michael similarly discussed having individuals reach out to him due to the growing knowledge of the community schools in the region. He explained:

> It was like…or there would be people who would reach out just knowing, like…because there was enough emerging knowledge of community schools, and the model, and kind of where they were and what…what they were supposed to do, where people would email me, and kind of cold email me like, "Hey, I know you're a community school coordinator over at Allen Elementary School. We have this, that, and the third." So, a lot of it was, like…it was a combination of me frantically, you know, searching what's out there, you know? Then it would be word of mouth.

Though not all coordinators necessarily elaborated on how these external individuals and organizations discovered their programs and offered their support, the coordinators were fortunate that their programs were present enough in their communities to garner this level of support.

New Partnerships Developed During the Pandemic

By leveraging their connections from within their community school networks and the broader community to meet families' emerging needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their independent attempts to develop new partnerships within the community, numerous coordinators discussed new partnerships that began operating in their school communities during the pandemic. As mentioned, food became a much more

critical need for students and families across the community schools in this study. As a result, a number of coordinators discussed bringing in new partnerships for additional food resources. For example, Edwin discussed the relationship he developed with a local grocer during the pandemic to provide additional food resources. He stated:

> We got a call from a… from a…just, like, a random person from…I think was Paul's Produce. And they said, "Hey, I hear, you guys…you guys at Murphy Elementary, someone told me that you guys are doing food distribution there. I…I…this is my business. I have a lot of extra stuff. Can you guys come and pick it up?" We're like, "Sure." So we went in the…on the…on the truck of the…of the principal. We got there, and there was so much, like, lettuce, tomatoes, potatoes, like, name it… like, full of things. We didn't have space for us to ride the back…the truck back almost. But full of this stuff…we came back to the school, put tables, called the custodian, put a lot of tables outside, put everything outside…was almost like a farmer's market. And so, like, just calling families. "We have food." Boom. Families arrive right away, start taking everything out.

Other coordinators shared similar stories of connecting with local businesses for food resources. They discussed new partnerships with local restaurants, casinos, farms, and other businesses to provide additional food resources to families in the community.

Several coordinators discussed building new partnerships to assist families with the housing insecurity they were experiencing during the pandemic. Carlie discussed developing a relationship with a housing advocate through a local shelter, through which families were able to get assistance with landlord issues, get help with rental assistance, or get connected with other resources as they were facing the possibility of eviction or beginning the process of entering a shelter.

Coordinators also discussed building new relationships that enabled them to provide for other basic needs such as clothing. Jackie discussed how she formed a relationship with four new churches during the pandemic, through which she could acquire winter coats, sneakers, and other necessities. She discussed the sheer number of

partners she had developed within her community who were able to provide basic provisions. She stated, “I have a lot of partners and providers that want to…I don’t even think I have…I don’t even have to ask people to donate anymore. I have to almost turn people away sometimes, because it’s so much.” She also discussed forming a relationship with a local hospital, through which she was able to set up a vaccine clinic at her school. According to her estimate, her clinic administered over 300 vaccines. Her experience makes clear that, whatever the needs in the community were, new partnerships could be created and leveraged within the community to meet those needs.

Supporting the Broader Community During Challenging Times

With the resources they generated through their relationships with their network of community school coordinators and through their cultivation of partnerships within the broader community, coordinators were able to provide students and families with much-needed support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their efforts to bring in food resources, several coordinators discussed creating robust pantries. As mentioned, school districts were providing meals to students in order to ensure that students were receiving the meals that they would have received had school been in-person. However, several of these pantries provided food that extended well beyond what the district would have provided. Edwin discussed how, due to a refrigerator purchased for the school by a community partner, the school was able to provide dairy, meat, produce, and other fresh foods to community members. Due to these additions to his school’s meal distribution program, he stated that his school had the longest line of any of the district’s meal distribution sites.

Several coordinators expressed how they were able to use their abundant food resources to meet community members' needs who might not even be connected to the school. Coordinators at times used creative means to ensure that members of the broader community were aware of the resources available to them at the school. Edwin stated:

> We have one of those, like…like, libraries. Like, like, those boxes you put in the street, right? They have with books at the beginning, but as soon as COVID hit, we started putting food in there, so we make it, like, food. And a couple of days I…I was with the custodian just moving food just to replenish all of that thing. People was walking there and just grabbing food, and they were saying, "Oh, thank you so much for putting this here. Like, we…the…the pantry we usually go. It's closed, so we don't have anywhere to go." And say, "Well, we have a pantry here." And they didn't know.

In addition, he discussed placing signs around the community to publicize the pantry. He also discussed leveraging families' networks to spread the word. He recalled telling families, "Hey, if you have a neighbor that needs some food, send them here. Like, it doesn't have to be part of the…the school only." Connecting with members of the broader community might have been a challenge, but providing them with food resources was a critical support for many nonetheless.

Jackie expressed similar challenges about communicating with members of the broader community about the resources available to them within the community school. She similarly stated that her school's pantry was open to members of the broader community. However, not all members of the community knew this. She stated:

> I can't tell you how many elderly people I had tell me that they have a first grader at…at the school just because they were afraid because they didn't think if we found out that they didn't have any kids that we were going to close our door and not give them the food that they needed. So, as a community school, when you're talking about, like, what the goals are…to be the hub of the entire community…a lot of times that part of it is the hardest to get to. So, for COVID, as bad as it was, that really was able to help in the community know that they have a community school that…that is here for all of their needs.

In addition to bringing members of the broader community in for food resources, she discussed creating a program in her school in which community members–regardless of whether or not they had a child in the school–could come to the school building for clothing, shoes, hygiene products, and other basic essentials. The program was able to function due to support from volunteers from different community partners. She additionally stated that families were coming in from every school within the school district, demonstrating the value of the community school program for students and families.

Creative Program Delivery

Though community school coordinators indicated that their jobs largely shifted to focus on the provision of basic needs, they made creative attempts to maintain connection with students, families, and partners during the time in which they were all separated. Carlie discussed a creative literacy program in which her staff participated. She stated:

> Our staff recorded bedtime stories…so, recorded themselves reading a story on Flipgrid that we pushed out to our families. Oh, yeah, I can't...That our kids could, like, hear our teachers reading. And our parents and families…even to this day some remember this…were so appreciative of, like, the chance…something… like, their kids were looking forward to watching a different video every night. We had dozens of videos on there. It was really cool. And then we continued to use Flipgrid, for, like, our family engagement events, especially our literacy-based ones where our staff would, like, read a story that tied to the event. And our families just…they were grateful. It was something for the kids to look forward to. It was cool.

Especially during the beginning phases of the pandemic during which people were truly isolated in their homes and anxiety was high, this program helped keep students connected to the adults in their school building.

Edwin shared a similar story. His school had a yearly Read Across America event, in which volunteers and community partners came to read stories to the students.

Since many partners loved the program and were asking whether it would be occurring during the pandemic lockdown, the school had the volunteers record themselves reading a book and uploaded their videos on a virtual platform. Admittedly, unlike the other program mentioned, he expressed that few people viewed the videos. However, even if family and student engagement with the videos was not the highest, he expressed another key point. He stated, "But at least for the partners, they feel like they were doing their…their part, right? Like, you do your part, and doesn't matter if doesn't go, like, the way you want, but you try." Just as keeping the families and students connected to the school through programming during this time was critical, so too was providing partners the opportunity to maintain some level of connection with the school community.

Edwin discussed other attempts to keep students, families, and partners engaged and connected with the school as the pandemic progressed. As outside activities became more commonplace with masking and other attempts to maintain social distance, he discussed having service projects in the community such as mural painting and neighborhood cleanups. Students, families, and members of the broader community came to participate in these projects because they were an opportunity to get out of the house and connect with other community members. Though cleaning up trash in the neighborhood or painting a mural might not have been a pressing need in the community during this time, it kept all stakeholders within the school connected to the school community, and perhaps more importantly, to one another. Even if partners were not filling the same roles they had been filling within the community school before the pandemic, at least they were continuing to support the community in some way. For the

coordinators, keeping the partners engaged would ensure those bonds between the school and community still existed when the time came to return to school.

Summary

As school buildings closed and many aspects of society essentially came to a halt, many families' needs changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the disruptions in programming they experienced, coordinators worked diligently to connect students and families to the necessary resources. By leveraging their community school coordinator networks and their networks of community partners, as well as themselves seeking out new partnerships and opportunities in the community, coordinators were able to develop new connections and generate additional resources in an uncertain time. In addition to basic needs distribution, which became a significant part of their programming during this time, coordinators created a number of opportunities to keep students, families, and community partners engaged in the school community during an incredibly isolating time. These opportunities helped to foster a sense of community in a time during which maintaining some sense of connection was critical.

Return and Reset

Coordinators Rebuilding From the Ground Up

In the Metropolitan School District, students remained virtual from March 2020 through the following school year. In the Eastside School District and Westtown School District, students were virtual from March 2020 through the remainder of that school year. The following school year, students returned on a hybrid schedule, experiencing a combination of virtual and in-person learning. Several coordinators discussed how the

pandemic gave them time to think about their programming and what opportunities were truly important for students. Margaret stated:

> I mean, I think it definitely…it definitely helped me prioritize certain services and really take a look at what…what we were doing and why we were doing it…There was a lot of turnover in my position, specifically in this building. So, certain practices just continued, because that's the last…what the last person did. And the…you know, the school staff was kind of used to that, so that…having the pandemic happen and everything shutting down was a really convenient…I shouldn't say convenient about anything about the pandemic, but it was a great way to kind of just, like, stop all of that and really coming back in, taking a look at what was truly important, what was truly effective, what we're trying to accomplish with those events and services, and being able to prioritize a lot more effectively.

Coordinators had the chance to think about their programming, not only because the pandemic gave them time to reflect, but also because they had lost so much of their programming during the virtual phase of the pandemic.

Given that so much programming was disrupted due to the pandemic, as coordinators began to rethink their programming, coordinators had the chance rebuild their programs from the ground up. Jackie similarly stated:

> Now…it's now rebuilding. But we're seeing a lot of things that we never saw before because of the….I don't know if you want to say the repercussions of the pandemic or just children that are…were learning on the tablet for two years and not being in social settings, and…and these are things, elementary through…through high school. I know adults that have a problem that used to be able to talk in…in front of you know, 1,000 people to…to lead a, you know, a keynote speech, that since COVID has a hard time being able to speak in front of people anymore.

Indeed, a number of coordinators indicated that students were returning to their school buildings with different needs than before.

Changing Needs for Returning Students

As students returned to their school buildings full-time, numerous coordinators expressed concerns about students' and families' social-emotional skills deficits. Margaret stated:

> I think the biggest…our biggest hurdle coming out of it has to do with that relationship building and social skill development for kids, and sometimes for the grownups and their families. So, we've…we've tried to spend a lot of…we spent a lot of this past school year really just trying to re-establish those connections. Get people back into the building, you know? Like, kind of reteach kids how to interact with each other. Reteach parents how to interact with each other, how to interact with the school, and have engagement and interactions that were effective. Because we're…they were all really, really struggling with that.

Given that families were largely isolated from one another for such a lengthy period, it is perhaps unsurprising that these issues were arising. Many students struggled to relearn how to positively maintain those in-person connections.

Relatedly, many students were struggling to adjust to the behavioral expectations of being back in school five days per week. Edwin stated:

> We all assume that things were going to be normal, but it wasn't normal. Like, a lot of kids, for example…is not to blame the kids or the families, right? But you can't expect a student to behave in the right way, or the way you want to, after two years of no instruction when a student is in second grade. So basically that kid have never been in school, right? They're in second grade, and they never went to school. They were virtual, or they were, like, two…two days a week per year. Nobody can do that, right?

Not only did students have to adjust to resuming those in-person interactions, but they also had to rebuild their stamina for the school day. After a long time away from the building, several coordinators expressed challenges with reestablishing those behavioral norms and expectations within their school buildings.

Also related, numerous coordinators expressed that many students and their families were experiencing mental health challenges when they were coming back into the school building. As Rita stated:

> Almost everybody was affected by the pandemic, whether they had a family member that died, or a friend or mother, father, son, sibling. I myself was affected as well. So, we came back and we were not the same. We…we're still not the same.

Even if students did not experience a direct loss, the stress and anxiety of the pandemic wore on many students and their families. Without necessarily having the necessary mental health support during the lockdown periods, many came back experiencing significant challenges.

Attendance continued to be a major concern for many coordinators as students transitioned back into their school buildings full-time. Jessica expressed that a large part of the reason for this increased absenteeism as students returned was related to fears about illness. As she indicated:

> A lot of them, even if they had, like, the sniffles, they wouldn't send them, and there was no telling them otherwise. There's no telling them anything. Like, they're like, "Well, fine me. I'm not going to come." And I'm like, "Yes, but your kid is missing 80 days of school. Like, they…it can't be an every other day that they come here, kind of thing. Like, they need to learn." So, then they're mad that their grades are poor, and so trying to break down those barriers of, like, when do you actually not send your kids to school versus when you can send them to school. And then, you know, all that stuff that was kind of…because it just increased that heightened sense of fear that, you know, sure, you know, people don't want to hug anybody anymore. They don't want to shake hands. They don't want to come close to anybody. Like, God forbid you sneeze in public, you know? It's…it created…yeah, everybody was a little more aware of that stuff, which I don't think is a bad thing. People should have been washing their hands the whole time. But that was a huge barrier for our families.

This posed a very real challenge, because schools did not want sick students coming to school and infecting the other students. However, there was a delicate line to walk between balancing everyone's safety and ensuring that students were in school.

Not being consistently present in school, especially after having received a virtual education for such a long time, would naturally affect students' academic performance. As Jackie said:

> So…so, for me basically the challenges now are to…attendance is a very big challenge right now. I would say…and with attendance come…comes reading…your reading and your math. So, because of COVID, and the iPad, and the check in…or to be able to turn the…turn your screen off and not knowing what you're doing, if you're listening, if you're engaged.

Having been unable to really monitor whether kids were paying attention or engaged during their virtual schooling, being in school and being engaged in learning became critical for students when they returned. The academic impact of the pandemic was clear; if students were not coming to school, it would be more challenging to make up some of the ground they lost.

New Programming to Address New Concerns

Several coordinators discussed bringing in additional mental health resources to support students and their families as they returned to school following the pandemic lockdowns. They discussed bringing in additional resources for individual and group therapy, as well as resources for families in the community to receive therapy. As those in-person connections began to be rebuilt, coordinators discussed leveraging the power of those informal touchpoints to connect families with those resources. As Jessica stated:

> I feel like the past year or so our parents have opened up a little bit more, and I always try to make sure, you know, like, if we're…parents are just talking in general outside, like, we try to get more people in the conversation. I want them to hear what we're talking about, so they feel more comfortable, you know? "Hey,

> I'm having a hard time right now. Can I just come in and vent to you for 10 minutes?" "Sure." And whether…and I always ask them. I'm like, "You just want to vent, or do you want me to help you try to figure out a solution for it?" Because sometimes you don't always want a solution. You just want to complain to somebody. And that's fine, too. But we do try to, like I said, promote the resources around here that have family therapy, or that they can get their own individual therapy to, you know, help them work through their own traumas, and be better parents and stuff like that.

Parents in her community still had some reservations about receiving support for mental health. A certain stigma continued to exist within the school community. Therefore, getting as many parents involved in conversations about their struggles served as a helpful pathway for getting parents more open to the idea of receiving outside support in these areas.

In addition to connecting students and families with mental health services, coordinators discussed developing new social-emotional learning opportunities for students in the school building. Coordinators described their work with partners to increase the use of trauma-informed practices within school buildings, liven up schools' calm-down rooms, implement social-emotional learning lessons in classrooms, organize social-emotional learning days in their schools, and other opportunities. Social-emotional learning was an area in which many coordinators clearly devoted substantial resources as students returned to school.

Rita even discussed leveraging her lead partner, a local university, to pursue a certificate in Social-Emotional Learning during the pandemic, anticipating that this would be an area of substantial need returning from the pandemic. Based on her work towards this certificate, she was able to bring in new connections and programs that increased social-emotional learning opportunities for students. She stated:

> Based on that certificate, a lot of the projects that I needed to do for that program, I decided to make it a reality here in the school, and that's how I ended up having donations and partners involved that created the spaces for teachers to relax, for students to receive support learning strategy. So, it was…it was based on that that I was in a…I think in a better position that other community school coordinators that couldn't understand…I mean, heard about social-emotional needs and heard that people are traumatized, but they didn't have the tools or the know how…how to make it happen. So, with every project I needed to do for this year and a half, almost two years certificate, because I just did one class at a time, I was able to implement something in the school.

She created a zen zone for staff, zen zones in classrooms for students, and developed systems and strategies to help students cope with challenging emotions. She also brought in numerous clinics and healthcare providers to provide different types of therapy, as well as multi-tiered behavioral supports within the building.

Coordinators also worked to ensure that students were coming to school again through attendance initiatives. Some of that work involved sharing information with families about chronic absenteeism and the impact of frequent absences on students' educational trajectories. Some of that also involved holding lunch bunches with students who were frequently absent to troubleshoot their challenges coming to school and discuss the importance of being in school. Jackie worked to connect older students with alarm clocks and taught them to use the clocks to help them take accountability for being in school and on time every day. Coordinators also created individual and whole-classroom rewards related to student attendance to encourage students to come to school every day. Again, after having been out of their school buildings for extended periods, making sure that students were attending school on a regular basis was critical for beginning to help students develop the academic skills lost during the pandemic.

Summary

Students, staff, and families continued to experience the impacts of the pandemic as they returned to school full-time. While schools had primarily focused on basic needs distribution during the lockdown phases of the pandemic, there was a clear recognition that students' and families' needs had shifted as they came back into their school buildings. Since so much of their programming had been disrupted during the pandemic, coordinators had the opportunity to really rethink what programming they wanted to have in their schools as they began to rebuild. Coordinators focused much more on addressing students' and families' social-emotional well-being and mental health challenges. They also put a greater emphasis on supporting students' behavior in the school building, as well as creating programming to improve students' attendance. Ensuring that students are present in school and functioning appropriately in the classroom was and continues to be critical for helping them to make up some of the ground they lost academically during their virtual schooling.

Conclusion

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community school coordinators and the programs they oversaw was clear. Through their presence in the community and their attempts to build meaningful relationships with stakeholders within and outside the school building, coordinators described their schools as thriving community hubs with ample opportunities and resources for students and families prior to the pandemic. However, these community school programs experienced significant disruptions when the pandemic struck. The reasons for the disruptions were numerous. Ranging from challenges maintaining communication with community school stakeholders who were

no longer able to be in the school building to organizational challenges that led to increased turnover in community school coordinators, a number of factors contributed to a loss of programming and services for students and families in the community schools during this time.

Even though the pandemic created many challenges for coordinators and their community school programs, these programs continued to serve as a critical support for their school communities during this time. As many aspects of society shifted to a virtual format, families' needs largely began to change. Through their networks of community school coordinators and community partners, as well as through their attempts to reach out to new partners during this time, coordinators were able to bring in ample resources to address families' ever-changing needs.

Finally, as full-time in-person instruction resumed following the lockdown periods of the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinators discussed families' needs changing once again. Students had been out of the school and largely at home for an extended period, so concerns ranged from social-emotional functioning and mental health concerns to behavioral, academic, and attendance concerns. Since so much programming had been disrupted by the pandemic, coordinators highlighted having the chance to rebuild their programs from the ground up to meet families' changing needs. Tracking the changes in community school programming and community school coordinators' experiences from the pre-pandemic period, during the lockdown phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as students returned to school buildings shows how the pandemic impacted these programs and how the lingering impacts of the pandemic continue to be felt within these programs.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study is among the first to document the experiences of community school coordinators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a growing body of literature discussing how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted schools and students' education, little research has focused explicitly on community schools during the pandemic. Given their centrality in program operations, documenting coordinators' experiences is critical for understanding how these programs operated during this time. In order to gain an understanding of coordinators' experiences and how the pandemic impacted community school programs, as well as how community school programs served as a support to families during this time, the research questions for this study were as follows:

- How did community school coordinators experience the COVID-19 pandemic?
    - What resources did community school coordinators leverage during the pandemic?
    - How did community school coordinators manage the needs of their school while also balancing their own personal circumstances?
- What roles did community school coordinators play in facilitating their programs' pandemic responses?
- Based on coordinators' experiences, what factors supported or constrained their abilities to respond to community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Revisiting the Research Context

This research focused on the experiences of community school coordinators within the Building Stronger Communities (BSC) network of community schools. At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the community schools were located across four neighboring school districts in a Mid-Atlantic state. While the schools were located across four school districts, only coordinators from three of the school districts agreed to participate in this study. The community school coordinators came from the Metropolitan School District, the Eastside School District, and the Westtown School District.

The Metropolitan School District possesses the greatest number of community schools in BSC's network, with 15 community schools in the school district. The district is located in a midsize city, and it is a majority Hispanic school district. All the students in the school district receive free lunch. The Eastside School District, which possesses nine of BSC's community schools, is located in a small city. Though the Eastside School District is overall majority White, each of the community schools within the district is predominantly Hispanic, and over 70 percent of students in each community school qualify for free or reduced lunch. Therefore, clear inequities exist across the school district. The same is true for the Westtown School District, which is located in a suburban setting. While most students in the Westtown School District are White, two out of the three community schools in the district are majority Hispanic. Over 80 percent of students in each of the community schools in Westtown qualify for free or reduced lunch. Across all three school districts, each community school is eligible for a schoolwide Title I program (NCES, n.d.).

Therefore, while these three school districts are geographically close to one another, their overall districts differ in terms of their setting and demographic makeups. However, when focusing on the individual community schools themselves, the schools share more commonalities than the districts. The vast majority of the community schools across these three school districts are predominantly Hispanic, the majority of students across each school qualify for free or reduced lunch, and each community school is eligible for a schoolwide Title I program. While there may have been differential access to resources and support at the district level, it is still possible to collectively analyze the experiences of these community school coordinators, given the similarities between their individual school contexts.

Understanding Coordinators' Experiences Through the Lens of Social Capital

Coordinators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic are analyzed through the lens of social capital. As previously mentioned, social capital refers to the resources embedded in social relations, which can be mobilized when an actor wants to increase the likelihood of success of a purposive action (Lin & Smith, 2001). The existing literature already highlights the importance of social capital within community school programs, as a large part of community school coordinators' roles centers around them leveraging the social relationships within their school communities and within the broader community to generate resources to address students' and families' needs. Galindo et al. (2017) specifically refer to this development of connections between individuals from different organizations and communities to expand access to useful resources as bridging social capital. Due to the clear significance of bridging social capital in this research context,

the following discussion of social capital in BSC's community schools refers to bridging social capital unless otherwise specifically noted.

Based on coordinators' experiences before the COVID-19 pandemic, during the lockdown phases of the pandemic, and as students began to return to school, the presence of social capital within BSC's community schools was clear. In order to develop social capital, Fitzgerald and Quiñones (2018) highlighted the importance of developing trusting relationships in the school community with families, students, and staff. As they suggested, coordinators could do this by remaining a regular presence in the school community, maintaining frequent communication with staff and families, and being readily accessible to all stakeholders. This was very much the case with BSC's community school coordinators before the pandemic. Coordinators' responses clearly indicated that they regularly engaged with staff, students, and families throughout the school day and were readily available to families to address their questions and concerns. Developing these trusting relationships was essential for helping families feel a sense of comfort while sharing their needs with the coordinator and working collaboratively with the coordinator to find solutions to address those needs.

Developing trusting relationships within the school community is only one component necessary for turning community school programs into effective sources of social capital. Mayger and Hochbein (2021) emphasized the importance of developing social connections with outsiders and using those connections to acquire resources to address school communities' most pressing concerns. Galindo et al. (2017) similarly highlighted how community schools could leverage the resources of their surroundings to develop social capital within the school community. Just as coordinators remained a

regular presence in the school community in order to build relationships with staff and families, the same was true for their presence within the broader community. BSC's coordinators made clear attempts to get out into the community and develop connections with local businesses, nonprofits, and other external partners within their communities. Additionally, they sought to bring as many external partners as possible into the school building to showcase their school communities. They also held regular meetings with their community partners and other stakeholders to collaboratively plan how to best meet the school community's needs. Again, by regularly engaging with these external partners, maintaining frequent contact with them, and bringing them into the school community, coordinators worked with the members of the broader community to develop a shared sense of responsibility for meeting the needs of students and families within the school.

From their relationships with students, families, and staff and their cultivation of connections within the broader community, BSC's community schools became thriving sources of social capital prior to the pandemic. Coordinators were able to assess students' and families' needs within the school community and draw upon their relationships with members of the broader community to bring resources into the school to address those needs. Whether those needs related to families' basic needs, academic supports, or something entirely different, leveraging those supports was essential for working with families to address whatever challenges they may have been experiencing and for enhancing students' overall educational experiences. While they had turned their schools into vibrant sources of social capital prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinators' experiences made clear that the pandemic posed significant challenges to their abilities to leverage the social capital cultivated within their school buildings.

Threats to Social Capital During the Pandemic

The factors that constrained coordinators' abilities to respond to community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic are also analyzed through the lens of social capital. The constraints that hindered coordinators' abilities to draw upon the relationships they had cultivated prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, both within their school communities and in the broader community, are referred to as threats to social capital.

Galindo et al. (2017) discussed the existence of threats to social capital within community school programs. While they highlighted how community schools could serve as critical sources of social capital, they also noted that threats to social capital could hinder their abilities to develop and leverage relationships within their school community and in the broader community. For instance, in their case study of a racially diverse community school, they identified racial and ethnic tensions as a serious threat to the transformative potential of the community school model. They stated that racial and ethnic tensions within the school had the potential to trickle down to students and could impact student-to-student interactions and damage school climate. They also stated that these tensions could negatively impact families' participation in school activities and negatively impact families' interactions with one another, both of which would be detrimental to the development and expansion of social capital within the school community. While there are potentially numerous other threats to social capital within any given community school program, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique array of threats to the development and utilization of social capital within these community school programs.

As coordinators' responses made clear, prior to the pandemic, being physically present within their school communities and the broader community played a critical role in their understanding of families' needs, as well as their abilities to cultivate relationships beyond the school building with the potential to produce resources to address those needs. However, once the pandemic struck and in-person opportunities to connect became less frequent, coordinators highlighted how challenging it was to find and keep in touch with some of their families. Opportunities to reach them in person at times such as morning admission or dismissal were virtually nonexistent, and many families were nearly impossible to contact virtually due to inaccurate phone numbers, lack of consistent Internet access, or other personal reasons. Therefore, keeping track of some families and their needs was difficult for coordinators. Without knowing how to get in touch with certain families or discerning their needs, coordinators had a much more difficult time connecting families with the necessary resources to address structural barriers they faced during the pandemic.

Even for families with Internet access and readily available devices, there was still the issue of navigating virtual forms of communication. Coordinators' responses indicated the need to learn a variety of new platforms and new technologies. In addition to working with school staff to determine which platforms would best serve their students and families during this time, there was the issue of ensuring families knew how to access and navigate these various platforms. Therefore, even with the appropriate technology access, navigating the completely new world of virtual schooling came with a substantial learning curve that further served as a barrier to the social capital previously developed within these school buildings.

Beyond challenges communicating with families, coordinators highlighted how difficult it was for them to leverage their relationships with community partners during this time. Partners were occupied navigating their own circumstances during this difficult time. Additionally, the fact that they did not have those in-person touchpoints increased the distance between the community school coordinator and their partners. Many programs were lost entirely because partners did not have the capacity to pivot to a virtual format, and even those that were able to offer virtual programming largely did not experience the same levels of engagement. Shutting down schools and shifting all aspects of schooling to a virtual format threatened the social capital that had been developed in these school buildings prior to the pandemic because relationships became more distant during this time.

The challenges of maintaining relationships from a distance were further exacerbated by the tensions some coordinators experienced between their district's COVID-19 restrictions and those of their lead partner. For instance, while some coordinators in the Eastside School District could access their school buildings during the pandemic lockdowns, others within the Eastside School District could not due to their lead partner's COVID restrictions. Trying to program from a distance further increased the challenges of getting students and families the necessary resources during this time. Mayger and Hochbein (2019) discussed the boundary-spanning tensions experienced by community school coordinators whose roles span multiple organizations. Their multiple levels of accountability from different organizations with different rules and processes served as a hindrance as coordinators tried to address needs during this unprecedented time. These tensions had been documented in community schools before the pandemic,

and for some in BSC's network of community schools, it was clear that they posed a challenge during the pandemic.

The turnover in personnel that coordinators discussed during the pandemic also served as a threat to the social capital developed within these community school programs. As noted, the issue of coordinator turnover was most pronounced for coordinators within the Metropolitan School District, where most coordinators had Supportive School Communities (SSC) as a lead partner. Challenges specific to SSC such as low coordinator pay and the disconnect between organizational leadership and coordinators were major sources of turnover within this school district and lead partner. However, it is important to note that coordinators also cited challenges related to BSC as a source of professional frustration for them during the pandemic.

Also, coordinators across the other districts in BSC's network and from different lead partners left their positions due to the stress they experienced in their roles during the pandemic. Some coordinators highlighted how much harder they were working during the pandemic than they had in years prior, which contributed to feelings of burnout. Several coordinators discussed keeping their students and families at the heart of their work to keep themselves motivated during this challenging time. However, even though this way of thinking may have kept them moving forward to some degree, some acknowledged their failure to care for themselves during this time. Feeling as if they were not successfully managing their own personal circumstances only heightened the stress they felt during this time and led to more turnover in personnel.

As coordinators left their positions for various reasons during the pandemic, the existence of a revolving door of coordinators within school buildings threatened the

quality of the relationships within BSC's community school programs. As coordinators themselves indicated, building relationships strong enough from which to draw resources takes time and effort. Similarly, understanding the community and the needs of families within the community is a lengthy process. Simultaneously lacking a deep understanding of the community, as well as its needs and assets, and lacking meaningful relationships within the broader community could hinder the services and resources, or at least the quality thereof, available within school communities.

The role changes coordinators experienced during the pandemic could be seen as an additional threat to social capital within community school programs during the pandemic. The existing literature has already highlighted challenges coordinators experienced related to the tasks outlined in their job descriptions and the actual expectations of their day-to-day work within their school buildings (Mayger & Hochbein, 2019). Numerous coordinators within BSC's network had discussed engaging in tasks outside their clearly defined role descriptions due to needs within their school buildings. These challenges became more complicated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While some of the most experienced coordinators had been able to devote much of their time to strategic planning and thinking about how to utilize external community connections to meet students' and families' needs, they were thrust back into the roles of direct service providers during the pandemic. As a result, as needs in their communities changed, they were not necessarily able to devote adequate attention to thinking about how they could utilize their existing connections or develop new partnerships to meet families' needs. That is not to say that coordinators were not doing this at all, but the need for them to be on the ground directly supporting families detracted from their ability

to act in a strategic planning capacity. They could not devote as much time to cultivating relationships in the community and utilizing them to bring resources into the school community.

Overall, while coordinators had worked diligently to develop trusting relationships with all stakeholders in their school communities, the pandemic threatened these relationships and coordinators' abilities to draw upon them. Coordinators experienced challenges maintaining communication with families and community partners alike, and they struggled to recognize their families' needs. They also struggled to connect certain families to the necessary services and resources, as some partnerships were lost or became more distant due to the challenging circumstances that everyone was navigating. Challenges stemming from the significant turnover of coordinators and from changes to the structure of the community school coordinator role during the pandemic also threatened the development and utilization of social capital within BSC's community school network. These threats to social capital hindered coordinators' ability to draw upon the relationships within their school communities.

However, not all hope was lost. Community schools were, at the very least, fortunate to have existing networks of partners in place before the COVID-19 pandemic. While partnerships may have become more distant or difficult to draw upon, these schools at least had contacts and connections within the community who could continue providing some assistance.

Sources of Social Capital During the Pandemic

Even though BSC's community schools may have experienced a loss of social capital within their programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, the resources embedded in

the relationships they had developed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic still provided necessary support to community school coordinators during this time. The factors that supported their abilities to respond to community needs during the pandemic are also analyzed through the lens of social capital. These positive factors that enabled the coordinators to acquire the resources necessary to support their students and families during the pandemic can be referred to as sources of social capital.

As coordinators made clear, community needs during the pandemic shifted much more heavily to families' basic needs such as food, clothing, housing, and other basic essentials. While coordinators were navigating this increase in basic resource needs in their school communities and were navigating the challenges of keeping their community school programs functioning during this unprecedented time, numerous sources of social capital supported community school coordinators in their work. For example, coordinators discussed how critical the support of their networks of community school coordinators was. Through BSC, their districts, and their self-developed networks such as the Northside Network, coordinators had already been regularly meeting, sharing best practices, and sharing resources before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Having already developed a willingness to cooperate and collaborate prior to the pandemic served as a substantial support as all coordinators were navigating this uncertain time. Mayger and Hochbein (2021) discussed the propensity of group members to cooperate with one another as a critical element of a group's internal social capital, and this was clearly present among BSC's community school coordinators prior to the pandemic. Similarly, Galindo et al. (2017) referred to these strong ties formed among members of homogenous networks as bonding social capital. Whichever term one uses, the

development of strong, trusting relationships among BSC's community school coordinators made it easier for them to continue to share their resources, connect one another with necessary partnerships, and discuss how to continue programming during such a challenging time. Individual community school programs had a variety of resources to offer, but being able to draw from the partnerships and connections at other schools was a great support. If a coordinator's connections did not possess a resource or support that a family needed, it was entirely possible that another coordinator's community connections could provide that support.

Though existing community partners may not all have been able to continue offering the same programming as before, many still found some way to serve the school community. Whether that was through virtual programming, providing additional donations for families' basic needs such as food or clothing, or some other means of support, community schools were fortunate to have had these partnerships in place prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if some of their partners became more distant or could not continue offering their programs, their social networks also became sources of support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reaching out to community partners for additional connections within their own personal and professional networks was essential for meeting the basic resource needs of community schools during this time. Therefore, while social capital might have been hindered within existing community partnerships, it was not lost entirely, and those relationships that existed before the pandemic were still a helpful resource for coordinators during this time.

While their networks of coordinators and community partners continued to serve as sources of social capital by connecting coordinators with resources and additional

community connections that could meet families' needs during this time, coordinators' responses made clear that they continued to work to further develop social capital within their communities by seeking out new partnerships. Again, they may have been unable to do this through in-person connections, but they could do so through email, phone, and other means. Though their role may have looked different from before the lockdown, and they may not have been able to devote quite as much time to developing these new partnerships as they would have liked, having an individual to lead the community-facing aspect of the school continued to be a significant asset to the community schools as they sought to cultivate new relationships and partnerships to address changing community needs.

Community school coordinators' attempts to develop opportunities for the school community to remain connected also served as a support that helped maintain the existing social capital within the school community. Whether through virtual read-alouds or outdoor community service projects, simply providing the opportunity for different stakeholders within the community to come together was critical. It helped to ensure that, to the extent possible, relationships were not being completely severed. Even if these partners were not able to play the same role in the school community during virtual schooling, maintaining those relationships helped to ensure that when students came back into the building and circumstances became somewhat more typical, coordinators would be able to rebuild some of the resource connections that had existed with these partners.

As students returned to their school buildings full-time, coordinators noted continuously changing needs. While coordinators shifted largely to focusing on students' and families' basic needs during the lockdown phases of the COVID-19 pandemic,

coordinators worked to generate resources to address students' mental health, social-emotional learning opportunities, and attendance challenges within their school buildings as students returned to school. Coordinator responses indicate returning social capital, as coordinators have been able to reconnect with families in person and encourage their utilization of community-based resources and programs. Partners have also been able to return to the building and provide in-person programming to support students and families in the community. Coordinators have continued to develop new partnerships and relationships within the broader community to ensure that, whatever needs arise as students settle back into school, they have community-based connections to support with those needs. While students' needs may continue to change as time goes on, having a large network from which to draw upon will likely continue to support coordinators in their work.

Summary

As documented in the literature, community schools serve as critical sources of social capital. Community school coordinators within BSC's network of community schools cultivated much of this social capital as they worked diligently to foster relationships with students, families, staff, and external partners within their school communities. These relationships enabled them to identify student and family needs within the school community and to draw upon their external partnerships to connect families with resources to address their documented needs.

However, as the COVID-19 pandemic struck, the social capital developed within these community school programs faced a number of threats that hindered coordinators' abilities to further develop relationships within their school communities and to leverage

the resources possessed by partners within the broader community. Nonetheless, coordinators continued to use their existing networks of community school coordinators and community partners to acquire resources. They also developed new partnerships for students and families to meet their ever-changing needs. Even if their existing partnerships could not continue to provide the same level of support that they had before the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinators tried to keep stakeholders engaged within the school community. This helped to ensure that, even if they could not be together in the same building, some relationship between the school and the community was being maintained. As students returned to their school buildings, having worked to keep these relationships intact helped to ensure that these relationships would be able to pick up where they had previously left off before the pandemic.

All in all, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, during the lockdown phases of the pandemic, and as students began to return to school, coordinators played a central role in fostering social capital within their school communities. Though the pandemic threatened their ability to use community-based resources in numerous ways, coordinators still worked to leverage those relationships in any way they could. They also strived to sustain their existing relationships and build new partnerships throughout the various stages of the pandemic and beyond.

Changing Resources to Address Changing Needs

As coordinators' experiences during the pandemic made clear, their abilities to leverage the relationships within their communities to address families' needs were impacted by changing circumstances during this time. While this study highlights the constraints coordinators experienced in their roles and the supports that enabled them to

connect families with necessary resources during the pandemic, it is also worth highlighting how those resource needs changed during the pandemic lockdowns and as students began to return to school.

While this has already been touched on, it is worth emphasizing the changes in community needs that occurred during the pandemic and how the community school coordinator worked to ensure the necessary resources were available to meet those changing needs. Community school coordinators had clearly been focusing their programming in a variety of areas before the pandemic. Coordinators discussed in-school academic supports, attendance supports, after-school programming, family engagement opportunities, and basic needs provisions.

While coordinators may have attempted to maintain some degree of programming in other areas, especially through virtual opportunities, a number of them discussed how much more heavily their roles became about providing for families' basic needs during the lockdown phases of the pandemic. Given the significant disruptions to families' lives the pandemic brought on, many were struggling to access necessities such as food and clothing. Many families were experiencing job losses, illness, and other factors that may have prevented them from accessing basic resources during this time. While some were able to continue accessing basic needs due to governmental assistance during the time, undocumented families did not have that social safety net on which to fall back. For those families and families from other marginalized groups, support with necessities from community schools was essential.

As students returned to school, there was a clear shift in community school programming once more. While opportunities such as after-school programming and

other programs lost during the pandemic began to reemerge, coordinators emphasized a much greater shift towards programming focusing on meeting students' social-emotional learning needs and addressing students' mental health challenges. This shift largely aligns with the growing literature focusing on student mental health challenges that began to emerge due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Gazmararian et al., 2021; Pattison et al., 2021; Trinidad, 2021). They also indicated a returning focus on students' academics and attendance, as these continue to be major challenges for the community schools coming out of the pandemic. With students having been out of their school buildings for extended periods, coordinators indicated the importance of ensuring that students were coming to school regularly and making up the ground that may have been lost during virtual schooling.

The coordinator's role in managing these shifting resource needs cannot be overstated. While coordinators experienced challenges keeping track of families' individual needs and leveraging relationships with their existing community partners during the pandemic, they still worked to the best of their abilities to connect families with the appropriate resources and services, even as those needs changed over the various stages of the pandemic. Whether using their community connections, connections through other community school coordinators, or independently seeking out new partnerships to secure newly required resources, coordinators worked through the pandemic to provide families with what they needed to navigate pandemic-related challenges. They, of course, were not able to provide every family with every service that would have been beneficial to them, but many coordinators were able to get families

connected with essential resources during the lockdown phase of the pandemic and as students returned to their school buildings.

Supporting Community Schools in Times of Crisis

As noted in this study, community school coordinators work to build social capital within their school communities. However, unexpected crises can threaten coordinators' and other stakeholders' abilities to leverage social capital within their school communities. Yet, simultaneously, coordinators can still find ways to preserve and utilize the social capital that previously existed in their school communities to meet emerging needs that arise during these unexpected times of crisis. In this instance, the COVID-19 pandemic shut schools down for extended periods and thrust educators, students, and families into the unexpected world of virtual schooling. However, whether another virus, an environmental catastrophe, some form of political upheaval, or something entirely different occurs, one cannot say with certainty that students' presence in school buildings will not again be disrupted at some point in the future. Therefore, based on the experiences of coordinators within this single network of community schools, several recommendations are made to support coordinators' development and preservation of social capital within their school communities and to minimize threats to social capital during times of unexpected crises. The following section details those recommendations.

Fostering Coordinator Interaction Across Schools

As noted through coordinator interviews, existing networks of community school coordinators were valuable supports to coordinators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the sharing of best practices, sharing resources and connections, and simply

supporting one another through a difficult time, coordinators in BSC's networks were fortunate to have strong relationships in place before the start of the pandemic. Through their monthly network-wide community school coordinator meetings and their smaller coordinator networks, they had support systems to lean on during a difficult time. Had these networks not been in place before the pandemic, one cannot say whether community school coordinators would have been able to leverage one another's resources as effectively.

Though BSC's coordinators had regular meetings within their community school networks before the pandemic, the same may not necessarily be true for all coordinators within other networks of community schools. Therefore, to ensure that community school coordinators can draw upon these networks, ensuring opportunities to connect regularly with other coordinators is essential. This can be facilitated through a shared school district, the organization responsible for program implementation, or even through professional networks that enable coordinators to interact with other coordinators outside their immediate community school programs. In the event of a future crisis that requires coordinators to reach beyond the resources they have access to within their school's program, having relationships with other community school coordinators to draw upon can be essential.

Holding Regular Partner Meetings

In addition to informal touch points within and outside the school building, coordinators in BSC's network were having regular meetings with their school's community partners before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. These meetings, referred to as leadership team meetings, included not just community partners, but also

school staff, the community school's lead partner, and other stakeholders such as parents and caregivers. BSC specified in their community school guidelines that these meetings should take place at least monthly for emerging community schools. For community schools that were reaching maturity, BSC specified that these meetings could be scaled back. For instance, they specified that the meetings could occur bimonthly or quarterly. Having these meetings formalized within the structure of the community school program served as a great support for the development of effective community school programming within the BSC network of community schools.

These meetings served as a critical space for fostering collaboration among different community partners and other stakeholders within the community school program. Not only were these meetings critical for the community school coordinator to further develop relationships with their partners, but they were also essential for ensuring different partners and other stakeholders within the program had the chance to interact and collaborate.

While these meetings may have been a common experience before the start of the pandemic, some coordinators indicated that these meetings had not necessarily resumed in the post-pandemic space. For instance, Rita stated that her school had not engaged in regular partner meetings since students returned to the school building full-time. She said this was due to other priorities within the school community as students returned to school. This could also be related in part to the role changes that coordinators experienced during this time. In her view, she still had not gotten back into as strong a strategic planning place as prior to the pandemic, and she felt that she was still being seen as someone who could provide families with more direct support.

Sanders et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of fostering spaces for stakeholder collaboration in order to discuss critical issues and brainstorm ideas to achieve school goals. These spaces can be essential not only for continuing to foster relationships with and among stakeholders, but also for ensuring that no stakeholders become complacent in working towards the goals of the school community. Without taking the time to ensure that partners have the opportunity to come together, to share their opinions and bring in their individual expertise on issues facing the community, and to work to connect the school with their own resources or additional resources from their networks, the community school program might not reach its full transformative potential. Additionally, coordinators' discussions of their experiences made clear that the relationships between the coordinator and community partners became more distant during the pandemic. Coordinators should therefore be proactive in ensuring that they are restoring relationships to their pre-pandemic forms. Ensuring that regular partner meetings occur is a key means of fostering and rebuilding those relationships.

As coordinators rebuild their programs from the ground up following the pandemic, it is essential that they cultivate their partnerships, align their partners on school goals, and provide them the space to work collaboratively to meet students' needs, which have become increasingly complex over the past several years. Should a future crisis disrupt students' education, ensuring that strong relationships are in place will also be essential for generating the necessary resources to address whatever unexpected challenges may arise.

Enabling Coordinators to Act as Strategic Thinkers

One of the most significant challenges for some of the longest-serving coordinators in BSC's network of community schools was their inability to act strategically during the pandemic. Given the chaos and uncertainty thrust upon the schools by the pandemic, these coordinators indicated that they were operating much more reactively than proactively. Rather than planning and fostering new relationships with the potential to generate resources and programs to support families, they were themselves on the ground providing families with direct services.

As noted, just having an individual within the school community with a flexible enough role to support families with whatever their needs were was somewhat of a blessing to community schools during the pandemic. However, having the coordinator directly providing aid to families detracted somewhat from their abilities to perform the necessary functions of their role. According to the role description of community school coordinators provided by Building Stronger Communities, one of the coordinators' core responsibilities involves building relationships with key service providers needed to support students and their families. If the coordinator is on the ground providing food to families, helping families get connected to the Internet, or providing families with some other form of direct assistance, that is time that they are not able to devote to cultivating relationships with partners who can provide resources and services to meet the needs of members of the school community. Without operating in that strategic planning capacity, the model loses some of its power. The community's needs can be better served if the coordinator can identify and bring in partners who can provide critical resources and services, rather than having the coordinator directly providing these resources

themselves. Proactivity planning to meet community needs would better serve students and their families than reacting to needs as they present themselves.

In times of crisis, enabling the coordinator to continue operating in a strategic planning capacity is easier said than done. Numerous coordinators performed functions outside their direct role descriptions both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, several coordinators discussed engaging in activities explicitly prohibited in their role descriptions, such as covering classes. Several coordinators expressed a willingness to engage in these functions outside their roles to support the school community. For instance, Michael explained that in the context of an under-resourced Title I school, there are not necessarily enough resources or staff to support the work that must be done to support students and families, and he was therefore happy to support in any way he could. However, when coordinators are pushed and pulled in so many directions that it takes away from their effectiveness, further consideration should be given to how to better structure the day-to-day experiences of coordinators.

While several coordinators discussed willingly engaging in tasks outside their role at the direction of the principal, the coordinator and principal should work collaboratively to ensure that the coordinator has the time in their day to meaningfully collaborate with existing partners and to identify and develop relationships with new partners in the local community. This is where a healthy working relationship between the principal and coordinator can be essential. Sanders et al. (2019) highlighted how critical a trusting relationship between these two individuals was for successful community school program operations. Indeed, in BSC's network, coordinators highlighted how critical they felt that their relationships with their principals were for them to be successful in their roles.

Coordinators expressed the importance of regularly meeting with their principal for several reasons, including keeping community school programming operating. In some instances, especially in instances of principal turnover, the coordinator played a large part in orienting the principal to the community school model. Therefore, just as some coordinators have discussed orienting the principal to the model, they may also have to clarify their role within that model. In the case of BSC's community school coordinators, their roles, as well as the tasks and responsibilities they should be performing, are clearly defined. They may reference the document outlining their roles and responsibilities to ensure the tasks they perform are actually their responsibilities. Ensuring the appropriate degree of trust between the coordinator and principal, a willingness to openly communicate between the two, and a joint commitment to addressing challenges within the model is essential for ensuring coordinators can set appropriate boundaries that enable them to perform the required tasks of their position.

In the opening of a new community school within the context of a lead partner model, the lead partner or the organization responsible for program implementation–in this case BSC–could also help to orient principals to the community school model and clearly establish appropriate boundaries with principals early on. These organizations could work to ensure that principals clearly understand the documented responsibilities of community school coordinators, as well as tasks that should not fall upon coordinators. As Mayger and Provinzano (2022) noted, many principals leading community schools do not receive formal training related to leading community schools in their principal preparation programs. Some were fortunate to learn to lead community schools by first serving as an assistant principal in a community school, but for many their understanding

of how to lead a community school comes from national community school organizations and regional community-based organizations. Therefore, ensuring that organizations operating community school programs give school leaders the appropriate training around program implementation and stakeholders' roles within the model, as well as working to ensure leaders' buy-in to the community school model, is essential. Otherwise, they may come to view the community school coordinator as an extra body in the building to complete tasks that are often unmet in the school community due to their perception as the "free player" in the school.

Preventing Coordinator Turnover

Preventing coordinator turnover is essential for preserving the social capital within community school programs. Frequent turnover is harmful for coordinators in general, but such turnover can be particularly harmful in times of unexpected crises. Without having solid relationships in place during times in which unexpected needs arise, it may be challenging for coordinators to have strong enough relationships with families to understand their needs, and it might be difficult to acquire resources from partners to address those needs. Therefore, based on this study's findings, several recommendations are made to better support coordinators and prevent them from leaving their positions. The recommendations include increasing district-level support for community school coordinators, increasing shared accountability with organizational leaders, and increasing coordinator pay and other related benefits.

Increasing District Support. As briefly noted, coordinators within BSC's network of community schools had differing levels of support from their school districts. Coordinators within the Eastside School District particularly emphasized the criticality of

the support they received from their school district. The district employed a full-time supervisor of the community schools who brought community school coordinators together to share best practices, address challenges, and connect coordinators with additional resources. While coordinators from other districts could leverage their community school coordinator networks without having a dedicated individual at the district level fostering those connections, coordinators within the Metropolitan School District indicated feeling a lesser degree of support from their school district. They indicated that they did not have an individual dedicated to overseeing and advocating for the community schools within the school district, and some at times indicated not feeling supported by district officials.

The Eastside School District was located in a somewhat wealthier setting than the Metropolitan School District. While the community schools within Eastside experienced higher levels of poverty than the district overall, the district may have been able to use its higher level of resources to create the community school supervisor position. The Metropolitan School District, an overall lower-resourced district, may simply not have had the resources available to dedicate to such a position. Even so, it is worth noting that providing greater district-level support was something that several coordinators within Eastside brought up, and the coordinators in Eastside had overall much longer tenures within their positions than those within the Metropolitan School District.

Even without a full-time dedicated community school supervisor, school districts should consider how to better support their coordinators in their work. After all, in their descriptions of the role of principals within their community schools, BSC specifies that principals should champion the work of community schools and advocate for changes

needed to operationalize the work. Though they do not provide significant guidance on how this should be done, it is something principals should reflect on to better support their coordinators' work. The work they do in their schools is critical, and districts would be better served by dedicating resources to retaining them.

Increasing Shared Accountability With Organizational Leaders. Within the BSC network and certain lead partners, there was a clear feeling of a disconnect between organizational leadership and the work coordinators were doing on the ground. This sense of frustration was significant enough to contribute to at least one coordinator in this study deciding to leave his position. Therefore, organizational leaders should consider their roles within the community school model. Rather than being distant presences sitting in their offices and coming to school for what some perceived just to be optics, leaders must consider their commitment to the students and families they serve. Organizational leaders should be a more consistent presence within school buildings, regularly engage with families and other stakeholders within the school community, and they should demonstrate a true commitment to serving the school community.

Beyond being more regularly engaged within school buildings, organizational leaders should provide greater opportunities for coordinators to share how they could be better supported within their school communities. This could help to alleviate the sense of frustration coordinators felt in terms of the disconnect between themselves and organizational leadership. Believing that organizational leaders are not actually dedicated to improving lives within their school communities is certainly not going to encourage coordinators to remain in their positions. It is worth noting that not all coordinators

expressed this view of their organizational leadership. However, there were clearly coordinators who were very frustrated by organizational leaders.

Increasing Coordinator Pay and Related Benefits. Mayger and Hochbein (2019) highlighted the inconsistent compensation of community school coordinators within lead partner community school models, and that challenge was clearly present within BSC's community school program. As noted, BSC provided some level of funding for the community school coordinator position, but the lead partner in each community school was responsible for providing the remainder of the community school coordinator's salary. Therefore, though BSC provided a common role description for all community school coordinators, the fact that part of their compensation came through their lead partners led to disparities in pay and other benefits. While some expressed a degree of satisfaction with their compensation and other related benefits, such as the opportunity to pursue higher education, others experienced significant challenges in this area. As discussed, pay was a particular challenge for coordinators with SSC as a lead partner. Their low pay was a significant source of turnover for coordinators. Though some coordinators from SSC expressed satisfaction with their professional roles, it was not tenable for them to work for such little pay.

While increasing the salary of the community school coordinator is perhaps an obvious solution that would reduce the attrition of community school coordinators, these financial resources, of course, do not come out of thin air. However, in their study, Mayger and Hochbein (2019) noted that community school programs sometimes face a tension between expanding their programs to additional schools so that more children can receive services or dedicating additional funding resources to their existing community

schools. One coordinator indicated frustration with BSC's community school programming continuously expanding to new schools. If, rather than continuing to expand to new schools, BSC and their lead partners devoted more funding to their existing community school coordinators' salaries, BSC's community schools could potentially reduce their turnover to some degree. Mayger and Hochbein (2019) also suggested that state and federal policy makers could devote greater resources to fully funding community schools. As evidence has begun to suggest a positive impact of community school programs on students' academic performance and overall school experiences, they have proven worthy of greater funding. The programs may not reach their full potential without ensuring that each community school has the appropriate funding to maintain its staff.

Increasing Comfort Using Digital Resources

Coordinators' responses indicated a degree of discomfort in shifting aspects of their role to a virtual format. Virtual schooling was a phenomenon few had experienced before, and figuring out how to navigate different platforms to communicate with families and provide other services took time. As the pandemic progressed, coordinators indicated greater comfort in navigating these different online communication platforms. After an extended period of time utilizing these platforms, several coordinators suggested that using them almost began to feel normal. Though little research has documented the increasing comfort of coordinators utilizing these virtual platforms, evidence suggests that other individuals' comfort using technology has increased since the pandemic. For instance, Sonnenschein et al. (2023) indicated that parents' level of comfort supporting students with home learning using digital devices increased from before the pandemic to

after the pandemic. Additional research has highlighted teachers' increased comfort using different virtual platforms in their instruction due to the pandemic and has demonstrated that some teachers planned to continue using such platforms as students returned to school full-time (Santagata et al., 2023). Therefore, these other studies' findings align with coordinators' anecdotal responses; coordinators' comfort increased when forced to utilize more technology during the pandemic.

In the event of another global crisis requiring virtual schooling, the evidence suggests that teachers, students, families, and other stakeholders may be better prepared for the transition due to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, steps can be taken to ensure continued learning in this area. For example, the importance of coordinator interaction across schools and districts has already been noted. These opportunities to interact could be critical for supporting the use of different forms of technology. Just as coordinators provide one another with advice on best practices to support them in their roles and work, these spaces could be helpful for coordinators to share different technologies and platforms with which they are finding success. By continuously sharing their technological successes in their roles and helping other coordinators develop their competencies with these technologies, coordinators can ensure continued growth in this area.

Additionally, more formalized opportunities for professional learning can increase coordinators' technological competencies. Studies have argued that effective professional development can assist teachers with meaningfully integrating technology into their classrooms. Unlike workshop models for professional development, which involve teachers passively taking in information, Paulus et al. (2020) have argued that

professional learning communities can effectively increase technology integration in classrooms. They state that a plan for technology integration through professional learning communities should include the following steps: creating a shared vision that includes specific goals and performance outcomes, engaging in professional development and collaboration with colleagues to support the implementation of technology integration in the classroom, and providing teachers with ongoing support to maintain meaningful program implementation. All of these steps are facilitated through technology integration leaders, who support teacher-learners throughout the process.

While this research focuses on teacher technology integration, similar professional learning communities could be useful for community school coordinators. Within the context of a lead partner community school model, this could be spearheaded by individual lead partners or the organization that oversees community school programs, such as BSC. Directed by staff from these organizations or external partners, coordinators could work with technological support leaders to collaboratively set goals, integrate more technology into their practice, and ensure that they continuously improve their abilities to successfully integrate different technologies into their work. As this study makes clear, technology should not be seen as a replacement for the in-person aspects of community school programming, which have been demonstrated to be essential. Rather, increasing comfort with technology provides an additional means of enhancing the work coordinators do in person. Also, as noted, if coordinators find themselves operating virtually in the future, it would be helpful to have a greater toolkit to ensure a smoother transition.

Ensuring Continued Community Access to Devices and Internet

When students shifted to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, Internet access became a requirement for students to meaningfully participate in school. As a result, many school districts provided support with Internet access and devices during the pandemic (Irwin, 2021). Data from the Household Plus Survey (HPS) demonstrate that 50 percent of adults with children in the home enrolled at school were provided computers from their school district. Those with lower household incomes were more likely to report that their school district provided a computer for their students. A similar trend was seen in terms of districts paying for families' Internet access. Those with lower incomes were more likely to report that the school district paid for their Internet (Irwin, 2021). Providing this technological support was critical for helping to ensure that students, especially those who may not have been able to access virtual schooling with their families' resources, were able to continue to actively participate in school. Of course, virtual schooling came with many challenges related to student participation and engagement, but at least providing access to technology ensured some level of access.

While this level of assistance with technology and Internet access may have been provided due to the necessity of ensuring students could continue to receive an education during the COVID-19 lockdown, resources should continue to be dedicated to sustaining the investments made in supporting students and families during this time. If students and their families find themselves receiving an education from home at some point in the future, the transition to a virtual format would be much more easily implemented if students already had access to the Internet at home and devices to support their virtual

learning. If students already have these devices and are accustomed to using them, the learning curve associated with shifting to a virtual format could also be reduced to some extent. With Internet and device access already in place, coordinators could also potentially cut down on the number of families that they lose track of as students and their families are out of the school building. This could help to ensure that coordinators are better able to connect students and their families with the necessary resources, even if they cannot have in-person contact.

Summary

In times of crisis, community schools can be critical sources of support for students and their families. However, unexpected crises can threaten the abilities of coordinators within these schools to leverage the social capital developed in their school communities and beyond to meet families' needs. Based on coordinators' experiences within the BSC network of community schools, the recommendations below (see Table 3) serve to minimize the threats to social capital that can occur during sudden school closures, as was experienced during the pandemic. Certain structures already in place within the BSC network before the pandemic such as regular community partner meetings and regular community school coordinator meetings helped to ensure sufficient access to necessary resources for coordinators during the pandemic. Providing these regular opportunities to connect within other community school programs is critical for ensuring these networks are strong enough from which to draw resources.

Within BSC's network, there was a clear need for greater support of coordinators from all levels–-the school building, the school district, the lead partner, and BSC. Low pay, feeling unsupported, and the perceived disconnect between coordinators and

organizational leadership all contributed to coordinator turnover during the pandemic, which harmed the relationships embedded within the community school program. Additionally, the sense that coordinators were being pulled in too many directions to fill in gaps with basic needs further detracted from their ability to strategically plan, which is another issue with which coordinators' superiors must grapple.

Table 3

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations to Support Community Schools in Times of Crisis

● Foster coordinator interaction across community schools
● Hold regular meetings with community partners and other key stakeholders
● Provide coordinators with the time to act as strategic thinkers
● Prevent community school coordinator turnover
  ○ Increase school district support for coordinators
  ○ Increase shared accountability with organizational leaders
  ○ Increase coordinator pay and related benefits.
● Increase coordinators' comfort using digital resources
● Ensure continued community access to devices and Internet

Finally, district, state, and federal policies could ensure that students and families in community schools have a smoother transition to unexpected school closures in the future. Ensuring that families in need continue to receive assistance with Internet access and access to computers or other devices through their school districts would help to eliminate a daunting learning curve associated with a shift to virtual instruction. By

ensuring technology access and regularly engaging with these different forms of technology, students and families would be better prepared for a sudden shift to virtual instruction.

Limitations

This study generates useful knowledge for understanding how community school coordinators from a single regional network of community schools spanning several school districts experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, the roles they played in helping their school communities through this time, and how their programs were impacted during this time. Despite the ever-growing literature exploring how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the education system in the United States and globally, little research has focused on community schools during this time. Even so, this study is not without limitations.

First, only eight community school coordinators participated in this study. For phenomenological research, eight participants is an appropriate number to generate sufficient data to identify commonalities and differences in coordinators' experiences, especially when coupled with the artifact collection that accompanied the interviews. Nonetheless, a study with eight community school coordinators from a single regional network of community schools by no means provides data that can be generalized across other community school programs. As noted, community school programs take a variety of forms. BSC's network of community schools has a lead partner model, but other community school programs take different forms. Some are operated directly through school districts, while others are programs operated through city governments or

universities. The district contexts in which these programs operate also vary tremendously.

Even within the context of BSC's community school program, the participants in the study represented a largely homogeneous group. The majority of participants in this study were white women. Several participants in this study referenced how their racial and gender identities impacted their experiences working in community schools. Not enough information was necessarily reported to make any assertions in the findings of this research, but understanding diverse coordinators' experiences during this time is something worth exploring in future research. It is possible that coordinators' identities could have influenced their experiences as they navigated their roles during this time.

One significant limitation comes from the challenges associated with recruiting community school coordinators from the Metropolitan School District to participate in this study. As noted, this school district possesses a sizable portion of the community schools in BSC's regional network, and most of these schools have SSC as a lead partner. The few coordinators who worked for SSC, as well as several coordinators with other lead partners familiar with the organization, indicated that the coordinators working for SSC experienced some of the most substantial challenges and turnover within the community school network. Though I was able to glean insights from the few coordinators from SSC and the several others familiar with the organization, it would have been helpful to interview more coordinators from the Metropolitan School District and those who worked under SSC to have more data to confirm the challenges this organization and the school district faced. Nonetheless, due to the high turnover this

district experiences in community school coordinators, finding and contacting these former coordinators was a challenge.

Though not necessarily a limitation, it is also worth noting that no coordinators from the Pine Valley School District were interviewed for this study. Therefore, no understanding of coordinators' experiences within this district context can be reported. However, Pine Valley School District was the only rural district from BSC's network of community schools at the time of the pandemic, and the district is demographically quite different from the other community schools in BSC's network. Therefore, it may have been somewhat difficult to compare BSC's other community schools with those in the Pine Valley School District.

Opportunities for Future Research

This study centers around the experiences of community school coordinators from a single network of community schools that spans several school districts. Despite their critical role in community school program operations, coordinators represent just one piece of the community school puzzle. There are numerous additional stakeholders whose experiences during the pandemic are worth documenting. Additional case study or phenomenological research could include the experiences of teachers, community partners, families, and students associated with community school programs. Equally critical, the principal's significant role within community school program operations is well documented (Mayger & Hochbein, 2021; Mayger & Provinzano, 2022; Sanders, 2019). Understanding the experiences of community school principals during the COVID-19 pandemic would provide another critical insight into community school programs operating during this time.

As previously noted, the lead partner model represents only one model for community school program implementation. Various other community school models also exist, and it is worth exploring how coordinators and other stakeholders within different models of community schools experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. This study cites several challenges unique to the lead partner model, such as boundary-spanning tensions experienced by coordinators and issues related to coordinator compensation. Therefore, it may be worth comparing the experiences of coordinators operating within different models of community schools during the pandemic. For instance, it could be worth exploring the supports and challenges coordinators from community schools operated directly through a school district or a city government experienced compared to those from community schools with a lead partner model.

This study begins to touch on community school programs as students returned to their buildings following the pandemic lockdowns, but this is also an area in which further research is warranted. As the impacts of the pandemic continue to wear on, it is important to continue documenting how student and family needs within these programs continue to change. It is also critical to demonstrate how community school programs continue adapting to these changes within their school communities. It might be worth further exploring how community schools' community partnerships have changed before and after the pandemic due to changing needs within school communities.

While little academic data from standardized test scores may have been available during the COVID-19 pandemic, these data could be useful sources of information moving forward. As test scores and other data become more readily available in the years to come, it is worth investigating how community school students' scores compare with

matched groups of students attending non-community schools. This may help shed light on how students with access to community school resources fared compared to non-community school students coming out of the pandemic. These data could also help to clarify the extent to which the progress made in community schools was hindered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While there was evidence before the pandemic that community school programming was having an impact on student achievement in under-resourced public schools, it is possible that the effects of the pandemic detracted from that progress.

Overall, little scholarly research has explored the intersection of community schools and the COVID-19 pandemic. Though this study of community school coordinators' experiences is helpful for beginning to understand how they experienced the pandemic and how the pandemic impacted their programs, there is significantly more research that can be done in this area. Researchers should continue to devote attention to understanding different models of community schools and their various stakeholders' experiences during this unprecedented time.

Conclusion

This study begins to bridge a gap in the literature relating to both community schools overall and schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. A growing body of literature has begun to document the impact of community school programs on student achievement in high-poverty, under-resourced schools. The literature has also begun to analyze the leadership practices and qualities of key stakeholders in community school programs, such as the school principal and community school coordinator, that contribute to effective community school program operations. Meanwhile, following the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing body of literature has begun to examine the impact of the pandemic

on school systems, staff, students, and their families. Research has also begun to explore the structural challenges the pandemic exacerbated in communities throughout the country, especially in the most vulnerable communities. At the same time, research has also explored the leadership practices of administrators responding to the unexpected disruptions to their schools posed by the pandemic. This study bridges a gap between the literature on community schools and the literature on the COVID-19 pandemic by exploring the experiences of community school coordinators during the pandemic.

Based on coordinators' experiences from a single network of community schools, the pandemic represented a clear disruption to community school programs for numerous reasons. The unexpected closure of schools increased communication challenges between the coordinator and other stakeholders within the community school program. Certain organizational factors and changes related to the community school coordinator role during this time further detracted from the relationships that had previously been built within the school community. The growing distance between the coordinator and students, their families, and community partners made it difficult for coordinators to leverage the relationships they possessed and represented a clear threat to the social capital that had been developed within community schools before the pandemic. Coordinators lost track of certain families and struggled to connect them with necessary resources, and numerous programs that had previously supported students and their families within the school community were lost during this time.

While the pandemic made it more difficult for coordinators to utilize some of their relationships within the community and to connect some families with resources, certain structures within their programs enabled them to continue to leverage their

connections to some degree. Coordinators leaned heavily on their existing relationships with other community school coordinators from their network to generate additional resources for their individual community school programs. Even though certain community partners had stopped providing their usual programming during the pandemic, connections from partners' networks also served as an essential resource for coordinators striving to meet families' changing needs during this time. These relationships that were in place before the pandemic due to structures within BSC's community school model highlight how coordinators were able to continue to leverage the social capital that had been developed within their programs, despite the numerous threats their programs faced. As students returned to school full-time, coordinators discussed student and family needs continuously changing and have further discussed bringing in new community partnerships to address those needs, further highlighting the social capital within these community school programs. They emphasized working to connect students and families with social-emotional learning opportunities and mental health supports, as well as attendance and academic supports.

Overall, while the pandemic increased difficulties for community school programs, both in terms of the programming they could offer and their ability to connect families with the necessary resource supports, these programs served as a significant asset to families navigating this difficult time. As programming shifted largely to addressing families' basic resource needs during the lockdown phases of the pandemic, coordinators worked to ensure that many of their families and members of the broader community were connected to necessary resources. As students returned to school buildings full-time, coordinators worked to leverage their existing partnerships and to

develop new partnerships to meet families' changing needs once more. Being available to monitor students' and families' needs and working to acquire community-based resources to address those needs was critical for members of the school community.

This research contributes to the growing literature highlighting the value community school programs bring to their school communities. While much of the existing literature has highlighted the value of community school programs for improving students' academic and overall schooling experiences, this research identifies the value of these programs for school communities in times of crisis. BSC's community schools provided students, families, and members of the broader community with essential resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the community schools themselves experienced challenges during this time, their programs provided critical assistance to families during a time in which communities experienced substantial resource needs.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear [Name],

I am a teacher in Philadelphia and a doctoral student at Temple University, and I am conducting a research study on the experiences of community school coordinators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Little research has examined the experiences of community school coordinators during this time or the roles that they played in facilitating their program's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am looking forward to documenting coordinators' experiences during this time.

In order to select participants for the study, interested individuals will be asked to complete a brief survey gathering demographic information, as well as information about their experiences working in community schools. If invited to participate in the study, participants will partake in up to two interviews scheduled at their convenience. Steps will be taken to protect the confidentiality of all participants, schools, organizations, and other individuals discussed during the research process.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please respond to this email. You may also respond to this email with any additional questions before deciding if you would like to participate in this research study. If you would prefer, we may also set up a phone call to address any questions you may have.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!

Ryan Dinon
Ed.D. Candidate
Temple University
College of Education and Human Development

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Instructions

In order to obtain basic demographic information about the participants in the study, as well as information about their experience working in community schools, please briefly fill out this eight-question survey.

By completing this survey, you consent to allowing the researcher to utilize the information provided to select participants for this study.

Questions

1. What is your name?
    a. Open-ended response
2. What is your age?
    a. Open-ended response
3. How would you describe your gender identity?
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Other (with blank entry field for participant to self-identify)
4. What is your ethnic background?
    a. White/Caucasian
    b. Black/African-American
    c. Hispanic/Latino
    d. Asian
    e. Native American
    f. Two or more
    g. Other (with blank entry field for participant to self-identify)
5. What is the highest level of education you have attained?
    a. Less than a high school degree
    b. High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED).
    c. Some college but no degree
    d. Associate's degree
    e. Bachelor's degree
    f. Graduate degree
6. In which community school do you work?
    a. Open-ended response
7. How long have you served in your current role?
    a. Open-ended response
8. Other than your current role, have you had prior experience working in a community school?
    a. Open-ended response

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOL COORDINATORS

Warmup

1. How long have you been in your current position?
    a. What has been your favorite part of your job?
2. How did you come to your current position?
    a. Tell me a little bit about your experiences prior to this position.
    b. How did these experiences prepare you for your current role?
    c. What familiarity did you have with the school/community prior to taking this job?
3. How would you describe your role in the school community?
    a. How might you explain the community school program to someone who isn't familiar with the program?
    b. How would you explain your position within this program?

Guiding Questions

4. What did your job entail prior to the start of the pandemic?
    a. What did a typical day look like for you?
    b. What was your relationship with school staff, community partners, and other relevant stakeholders?
    c. How often would you meet with school staff/administrators and community partners?
    d. What did those meetings look like?
    e. Can you tell me more about some of your pre-pandemic experiences in your role?
5. What community school programming/partnerships existed prior to the start of the pandemic?
    a. Can you tell me more about some of the school's specific community partnerships?
    b. What programs/partnerships played the largest role in the community school program?
    c. Can you tell me a story about those partnerships?
6. What challenges did the pandemic create for the overall school community?
    a. What do you remember about the day schools closed?
    b. Can you tell me more about how the pandemic impacted your school community?
    c. What academic challenges did the pandemic create/exacerbate?
    d. What non-academic challenges did the pandemic create/exacerbate?

7. How did the pandemic impact your specific program (i.e., the community school program)?
    a. Can you share any specific examples?
    b. Can you talk a little bit about how you felt during this time?
8. How did the pandemic impact your relationships with community partners and school staff?
    a. Can you share any specific examples?
9. What changes had to be made to community school programming due to the pandemic?
    a. Can you give me an example?
    b. Could you tell me more about what specific changes individual community partners had to make?
    c. What new community partnerships or programs had to be created?
        i. How did you go about developing new partnerships/programs?
    d. What partnerships, if any, were disrupted?
    e. How were program offerings altered?
10. How did the community school program support the school's response to structural barriers exacerbated by the pandemic?
    a. What stories could you tell me about how the program supported students and families during this time?
    b. What specific role did you play during this time?
    c. Can you think of any other examples?
11. How did you work with school staff and other stakeholders to respond to pandemic-related challenges?
    a. Which stakeholders did you work most closely with to respond to challenges?
    b. How often did you meet with stakeholders to plan your responses to emerging challenges?
    c. What did those meetings look like?
12. What pandemic related challenges still exist for the community school program?
    a. Can you tell me more about some of the challenges that exist?
    b. Can you think of a specific example?
13. How does your program continue to support with pandemic-related challenges?

Reflection

14. Thinking about your time working during the pandemic, what successes are you most proud of?
15. What structures in your school/program most supported your response to the pandemic?
16. What structures in your school/program most hindered your response to the pandemic?

17. How has your understanding of the role of a community school coordinator changed since the pandemic?
    a. Based on your experiences during the pandemic, what do you now see as the most important qualities for a community school coordinator to possess?
18. What else should I know about the pandemic's impact on the community school program?
    a. Is there anything else you think I should know in general for this study?

APPENDIX D

RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that we believe most people need to decide whether to take part in this research. Later sections of this document will provide all relevant details.

What should I know about this research?

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don't take part, it won't be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won't be held against you
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of community school coordinators in public school districts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Discussing coordinators' experiences will help to demonstrate the ways in which community school programs were impacted by the pandemic, as well as the ways in which they served as a support for families during this time. Understanding individual coordinators' experiences will also clarify the roles community school coordinators played in facilitating their programs' pandemic responses. Understanding their differences in experiences may also shed light on factors that impacted community schools' abilities to effectively respond to families' pandemic-related needs.

How long will I be in this research?

Participants will be asked to participate in one or two interviews with the researcher. Participants will be in this research until they complete their interviews, which will be scheduled at their earliest convenience.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

Prior to being selected for this study, participants will fill out a brief survey. This survey may be used to select the study's participants based on demographic information and experience working in community schools, depending on the number of coordinators who express an interest in participating. Once participants are selected, they will participate in up to two interviews with the researcher. Interviews are expected to last between 30 and 60 minutes, and they will be held either via Zoom or in-person at an agreed upon

location. The interviews will be conversations used to gather information about community school coordinators' experiences working during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants, their schools, and any other institutions/organizations named during the interview process will be given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Interview responses will be used as the primary data source for this study. If participants have artifacts that may be relevant to the study (e.g., needs/asset assessments, newsletters sent to families, communications with the school community about events and other community school happenings, etc.), they may also share those with the researchers. Following the completion of their interviews, researchers may follow up with participants in order to check that the notes from each interview accurately reflect their positions.

Could being in this research hurt me?

Though pseudonyms will be used for all individuals, organizations, and institutions referenced in interview transcripts, survey data, and artifacts collected, it is still possible that a breach of confidentiality could occur and that individuals could be identified based on their answers to research questions. The researchers will take steps to prevent this from happening, but complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Will being in this research benefit me?

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from this research.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible for meeting with the researcher for your interviews.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

Your private information may be shared with individuals and organizations (if applicable) that conduct or watch over this research, including:

- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research
- Temple University

Although this is not the purpose of this research, we are required to report instances of child abuse and/or neglect to the relevant university and law enforcement agencies.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Data or specimens collected in this research might be de-identified and used for future research or distributed to another investigator for future research without your consent. Original audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed six months after the completion of this study.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or irb@temple.edu if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Can I be removed from this research without my approval?

The person in charge of this research can remove you from this research without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

- It is in your best interest
- You are unable to keep your scheduled appointments

We will tell you about any new information that may affect your health, welfare, or choice to stay in this research.

What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?

If you decide to leave this research, contact the research team at the email or phone number on the first page so that the investigator can remove your data from consideration in the study. Additionally, your decision to participate or to withdraw will be confidential and will not be shared with other participants. There will be no penalty for withdrawing consent for participation in this study.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

You will not be paid for taking part in this research.

Statement of consent:

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

Signature of adult capable of consent	Date
Printed name of subject	
Signature of person obtaining consent	Date
Printed name of person obtaining consent	