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**SCHOOLS UNITING NEIGHBORHOODS:
SUSTAINABILITY AND RACIAL EQUITY IN A
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS INITIATIVE**

by
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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR
OF ARTS**

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ABSTRACT

Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN), a collaborative initiative in Multnomah County, Oregon, combines the increasingly popular community school model with an innovative organizational structure to further two key goals: sustainability as an initiative and furthering racial equity. This thesis situates SUN within the context of American public education reform and existing literature on the positive outcomes, organizational structures, and leadership components of community schools. Building on past reviews of SUN and its outcomes, I use results from qualitative interviews with key stakeholders to provide insight into how its organizational structure contributes to the goals of sustainability and racial equity. I discuss the current state of SUN, future directions, and the relevancy of findings to other community schools initiatives and more generally, public education reform efforts.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholarly examinations of innovations in public education usually focus on our nation's largest urban centers, such as New York City, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco (Dryfoos et al; Fehrer et al; Lubell; Superville). Schools in these dense urban areas face pressures associated with widespread poverty, demographic changes, and racial disparities that present multi-faceted challenges to school success. Innovative school reform models could contribute in a variety of communities' efforts to help schools adapt to increasing pressures. This case study focuses on a county in Oregon whose public schools face similar pressures as those in often-studied urban centers and which has sought to address the growing needs of its students and their families through integrating services with school-sites. In this effort, Multnomah County, Oregon, employed an internationally popular community school model and made important innovations. The resulting Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative adds to the history of public education reform, private-public collaborations, and the development of community schools to create a sustainable initiative that addresses issues of racial equity.

The development of community schools is a strategy of public education reform that has recently increased substantially in popularity, both in the U.S. and abroad. The Coalition for Community Schools (CCS), an alliance of national, state, and local organizations that advocates for community schools as a strategy to reform traditional public schools, defines a community school as follows:

...the hub of its neighborhood, uniting families, educators and community partners to provide all students with top-quality academics, enrichment, health and social services, and opportunities to succeed in school and in life ("Community School Standards" 2).

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act recognized and provided a definition of a community school on the federal level as a school that:

(A) participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships; and (B) provides access to such services in school to students, families, and the community, such as access during the school year (including before- and after-school hours and weekends), as well as during the summer.

In the academic literature, the term “community school” has risen to the top in recent years, but a variety of other terms have been used to refer to similar programs that aim to offer wrap-around services through schools to address the diverse needs of students. Full-service school, community learning center, family resource center, youth service center, and school-based youth service program are other common terms (Dryfoos; Min et al.). The use of the term “hub” to describe community schools is also common in the existing literature, as community schools aim to coordinate and streamline the delivery of services to families and communities.

Community schools are gaining recognition for their potential as an education reform strategy to address the multifaceted challenges facing students and their families in our modern context. As a model, they have the potential to integrate disparate initiatives and services into a comprehensive, centralized delivery location through diverse partnerships (Heers et al. 1018). Providing a “one-stop shop” for families in need increases accessibility and utilization of services as well as the potential to build community-centered schools. Adaptability is a key component of this model, providing schools the flexibility to form partnerships and offer resources that most align with the needs and assets of their communities. School reform initiatives based on this model have demonstrated positive

outcomes in academic achievement and family stability for the past several decades (Dryfoos et al.; Fehrer et al.; Furrer et al.; Galindo et al.; Lubell; Superville). The history of evidence-based success and potential for application in diverse contexts make community schools initiatives worthy candidates for further scholarly review.

The SUN community schools initiative has employed the community school model with success for nearly twenty years, utilizing an innovative organizational and leadership structure that enables it to serve the needs of diverse constituents across a broad geographic area (Jacobson). SUN is situated in Multnomah County, a northwest Oregon county that includes Portland, the largest city in the state. A rapidly growing and highly mobile population has included increasing levels of diversity and a relatively large population of immigrants and refugees. Population growth, along with widespread poverty distributed disproportionately along racial and ethnic lines, has put pressure on public schools and social service providers. The first eight SUN community schools opened in 1999, and today there are 86 community schools across six school districts in Multnomah County. The system-level initiative draws on the extensive collaboration of many diverse partners and stakeholders, including the County, the City of Portland, school districts and school-level staff, and local nonprofits and community-based organizations. Every year, SUN community schools serve thousands of students and families, and frequent evaluations demonstrate their positive effects on school attendance, academic performance, and family and community stability.

The unique organizational structure of SUN makes it an apt subject for study in the field of Organizational Studies to explore how its structural components enable it to successfully carry out its mission. Past literature has documented the features of SUN's

organizational and leadership structure that enable its system-level positive impact (Iverson; Jacobson; Hall), its successful growth process (“Portland/Multnomah...”; Samuels), and its positive effects on school success and family stability (Furrer et al.; Hall; Hamman and Hall; *SUN Community Schools Evaluation...*). This case study builds on past scholarship by highlighting how SUN’s organizational structure situates Multnomah County in a management role that advances two key components: sustainability of the initiative and furthering racial equity in the county. These two themes, sustainability and racial equity, arose organically as I synthesized my research with content from my interviews with stakeholders and educational leaders involved in SUN. Through exploration of these aspects I also provide insight into the current state and potential future directions of the SUN initiative. SUN has been intentional in promoting sustainability and racial equity, and I explore the methods, actions, and structures that have made both possible.

Both sustainability and racial equity are important and relevant themes for community schools and modern education reform efforts. With historical fluctuation of education reform theories and efforts, initiatives that are sustainable and can weather political change are important to examine. Long-term, stable initiatives will have the most impact and potential for creating lasting social change. Similarly, public institutions must learn to grapple successfully with issues of race in a nation with growing diversity, disparities, and division. Racial equity can be addressed in part by creating institutions that better reflect the constituents they serve and dismantling institutionalized inequities. The ways that SUN has encompassed and addressed sustainability and racial equity provide lessons for other initiatives.

This study places SUN within its historical and current context to explore its present successes and challenges, seeking to illuminate components, strategies, and lessons that are applicable to other initiatives. First, in Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the various conceptions of public education and changing role of public schools in the twentieth century, tracing the origins and the development of the community school model. Further exploration of prominent manifestations of community schools in recent times leads us in Chapter 2 to a closer exploration of the case of the SUN initiative, its setting, and its organizational components. In Chapter 3, I explain my sources and data collection process, which featured interviews with eleven educational leaders in a variety of roles within SUN. I report in Chapter 4 and 5 the results of these interviews, organized around the themes of sustainability and racial equity. A discussion of my findings in Chapter 6 explores the current state of the SUN initiative and elucidates key lessons, suggesting future directions for community schools initiatives and other public education reform efforts. In the concluding chapter, I review how SUN's organizational structure has contributed to its longevity and equity work and the implications of this case for other community schools and public education reform initiatives.

By bringing the themes of sustainability and racial equity to the forefront, I seek to demonstrate how SUN's organizational structure has enabled broader impact of the initiative on Multnomah County beyond the positive effects of school-level provision of services and enrichment. Public education reform requires more than better curriculum, enrichment opportunities, and social services; it also needs effective administration of long-lasting structures to address entrenched societal disparities and opportunity gaps. It is my sincere hope that this case study will highlight this important initiative and the ways it

is at the forefront of successful education reform that mobilizes a diverse array of resources to better serve and empower students, families, and communities.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of public schools in America has evolved substantially the last century, and many academics, theorists, educators, and reformers have sought to re-conceptualize the relationship between public schools, their students, and their communities. Traditionally, the role of public schools has been limited to intellectual instruction, with strict separations between schools and community life. Under this viewpoint, education reform focuses on teacher development, new teaching methods, curriculum, and the like (Dryfoos; Owens). However, as innovations in community development and social service delivery have developed, schools have increasingly been looked to as a site with vast potential for making a broader social impact. Tensions between these two schools of thoughts have shaped debates about school reform in the modern era. The American public education system has been influenced by developments in society and culture, particularly the increasing diversity and urbanization of the twentieth century and cannot be extricated from its historical context (Fass; Owens). Throughout the twentieth century, examples of efforts to increase community engagement, integrate health and social services, and transform the role of public schools have surfaced to address societal changes and new challenges. Community schools are a culmination of this evolution as a model that has gained popularity and influence in education reform circles in recent years.

Historical development

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, schools in the U.S. transitioned from private entities operated by churches, families, or community groups into public institutions supported by local taxes (Jazzar and Algozzine 53). This transition was a result

of evolution of thought about the role of schooling, which had previously been reserved mostly for children of the wealthy. Advocates such as Horace Mann supported “free, public, common, and universal education” as necessary to develop a civilized, democratic citizenry and society (2-3). However, it took most of the nineteenth century before states began to implement effective, compulsory education laws (Fass 41). Still, most children attended sporadically, and completion of secondary education was not the norm. The early twentieth century brought the advent of laws and practices, including child labor laws that increased the universality of public education (43). From 1890 to 1940, the proportion of children ages five to seventeen attending school grew from 44% to 74% (38). Education reformers throughout this period examined the role of education and public schooling, seeking to adapt it to social concerns and societal changes.

The twin forces of mass immigration and industrialization shaped the changing role of schooling in the early twentieth century and reforms sought to address the rapid change, cultural diversity, and other challenges facing American society. Industrialization changed the structure and makeup of cities, creating concerns about the ability of work and the family unit to facilitate social cohesion (Fass 17-20). Waves of immigration and the concentration of newly-arrived populations in urban centers intensified these concerns. From 1860 to 1890, 13.5 million immigrants arrived in the U.S., and from 1900 to 1930, an additional 19 million arrived in the country (16). Awareness grew over time that most of the poor in American cities were immigrants, and that much of the working class was impoverished (22). Social reformers began to envision a broader role for schools to address the apparent loss of influence of social institutions such as work and the family, the economic and social challenges faced by immigrants, and the lack of social services to

support them (Owens 41; Fass 20). Schools were to become the new locus of socialization and consolidation of American society in an environment of dramatic demographic change.

This backdrop set the stage for the emergence of progressive thinking, which articulated the social concerns of the time through the lens of school reform. Academics trace the beginning of progressivism to the 1870s, and it grew substantially in prominence in the early twentieth century (Owens 41). Progressive reformers envisioned a role for schools that was much more than the teaching of basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic. Schools would be *the* place of socialization for American's children, with schooling designed to prepare them for life as democratic citizens, rather than industrial workers. In schools, immigrant children would be integrated into American culture, given the tools they needed to navigate society while simultaneously consolidating the dominant culture. Reformers advocated for new methods of teaching that were less formal, group- and child-centered, and curriculum that focused on the real world in which children lived rather than abstract concepts (39-41). This was strongly in contrast with the traditional viewpoint on education, which saw the primary purpose of schooling as passing on an accumulated body of knowledge to students and emphasized formal instructional methods such as drill and memorization (39). Tension between traditional and progressive educational thought has continued throughout the past century, waxing and waning over time and influencing different types of educational reform efforts. Progressivism's broad consideration of the role of schools in society created the conceptual underpinnings for social service reforms that would lead to early efforts resembling community schools.

Philosopher, education reformer, and prolific author John Dewey was a leading progressive thinker and profoundly influenced theorizing about the role of public schools

in society in the early twentieth century. Dewey is recognized as “the most renowned American educator of the twentieth century” and was a prolific author on such subjects as philosophy, psychology, education, law, and politics (Apple and Teitelbaum 177). According to Apple and Teitelbaum (2001), he spearheaded early progressive thinking with an interest in the role of schools in furthering democracy and democratic ideals in all spheres of life. In *The School and Society*, originally published in 1899, Dewey argued that education reform should be looked at through a broader societal lens, rather than a traditionally individualistic standpoint (3-4). He cited the rapid and profound changes the industrial revolution was bringing to society as a motivating force for reexamining the role of education (*The School and Society* 5). The relationship between schools and society was important to Dewey, and he saw the need for more community-based, interactive curriculum to better prepare students to engage in communities and build a stronger society.

Dewey’s 1902 essay, “The School as Social Center”, has been cited in the literature as a foundational early text for the community school concept. In this essay, he asserted that “...the school, as a place of instruction for children, is not performing its full function...it needs also to operate as a center of life for all ages and classes” (73). In Dewey’s view, schools as social centers would support the continuous learning and growth of the entire population, strengthening society as a whole. This idea was rooted in his conceptions of citizenship and democracy in his broader philosophizing; a shifting understanding of the time was the intertwined nature of society and politics, requiring a broader definition of citizenship to include “all the relationships of all sorts that are involved in membership in a community” (Dewey 75). Public schools could promote

“common sympathies and a common understanding” that were necessary for solving political problems rather than relying on explicitly political means (75). In a society that was rapidly changing due to immigration and the industrial revolution, Dewey envisioned the school as an institution to equip individuals to deal with this change and to understand their place in the world, helping to create a cohesive society. Dewey was much less concerned with practical steps to implementation of his philosophy, but in this essay suggested incorporating educational opportunities for the wider community outside of the school day, including culturally-enriching recreational activities. While he did not seem to consider the role that public schools might play in alleviating poverty and social service delivery, Dewey’s theorizing on the role of schools presented one of the early visions of schools as centers of their communities.

The implementation of many of the ideas of Dewey and other progressive thinkers manifested in early settlement houses. Settlement houses were sites in crowded immigrant neighborhoods where middle-class residents sought to address the poverty of their neighbors through health and social services (Reiff et al.). The literature cites settlement houses as the earliest concrete manifestation of community-based social service centers, a concept that underlays modern community schools (Lubell 5; Dryfoos 20; Follett 240). The most well-known American settlement house was the Hull House in Chicago, founded in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr, early pioneers in social work (Reiff et al.; Lubell 5; Noddings 183). Centers like the Hull House had a variety of offerings, such as day care, kindergarten, educational offerings like English classes, arts and physical education, parenting classes, libraries, and meeting facilities. Addams and her compatriots were concerned with the situation of immigrants, hoping to welcome them and help them

adjust to the U.S. but also seeking to educate the young to appreciate their heritage (Noddings 182).

Settlement houses represent one response to the concerns of progressive social reformers about immigrants and socialization, but they were not located at schools even though they incorporated educational offerings. However, at the Hull House, the programs and teaching methods that Addams and her teachers utilized made them “living examples of John Dewey’s progressive education” because they designed them “with the needs and interests of their students in mind” (Noddings 184). In fact, Dewey was a friend of Addams and an early supporter of the Hull House. He cited the Hull House and other settlement houses as exemplifying the type of societal work that he believed should occur in “every public school” (Dewey, “The School as Social Center” 84). As compulsory school attendance and child labor laws put many children in school regularly for the first time, advocates such as Jane Addams called for the government to improve the facilities and offerings of schools, paralleling the innovations in social service provision of settlement houses (Dryfoos 20). In this era, theorists like Dewey were beginning to connect the practices of social service providers with their vision for a broader role of public schools as centers of community.

Another influential thinker of this era, Mary Parker Follett, expressed similar ideas to Dewey about the relationship between schools, society, and democracy. A social worker and early pioneer in organizational theory and behavior, Follett articulated concepts that underpin modern community schools, including community engagement, the relationship between community units and government, and a focus on geographic localization through neighborhood groups. Her influential theories and ideas helped further the movement

towards community-based institutions to address social challenges and changed conceptions of organization and management, providing further conceptual underpinnings for early community schools.

In *The New State, Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government*, first published in 1918, Follett proposed organized neighborhood groups as the basic units of a reimagined political system that would more effectively express the needs and desires of the people through popular government. She summed up her vision of neighborhood groups as a method for the people to, “express their daily life, to bring to the surface the needs, desires, and aspirations of that life, that these needs should become the substance of politics, and that these neighborhood groups should become the recognized political unit” (192). She argued that neighborhood groups are superior to the selective groupings that we create as individuals because they are more diverse, and thus better sites for learning and personal growth, incorporating an argument against segregated neighborhoods and ghettos in urban centers (195-196). She suggested that rather than agencies offering welfare services to those in need, neighborhood associations or community-organized centers had the potential to empower people and create personal responsibility by involving them in their neighborhood (235-236). The resulting individual and community empowerment would form the basis of a new relationship between the people and local governments. Follett articulated this shift from the current system of politicians creating plans and then explaining them to the people to a process that would recognize and incorporate the contributions of the people themselves (233). Follett’s vision expanded the purpose of these neighborhood entities beyond providers of welfare to vehicles for community and individual empowerment in the political process.

Follett's political visions were based on broad theorizing about the relationship between the individual and society, yet many aspects of her discussion of community organizations addressed the innovations in social work and services of the time. Like Dewey, Follett cited early settlement houses as the building ground of these innovations. She was focused on the overlapping movements for community centers and neighborhood associations that sought to "mobilize community forces and get these forces expressed in our social and political life" (205). Manifestations of these movements organized resources and community activities in the neighborhood, often through physical community centers. Follett traced how these neighborhood activities had located into public school buildings in some instances, creating school centers that are "for many reasons the best form of community organization" because of their ability to leverage existing facilities and resources (205). For Follett, school and community centers were important ways to address the needs of the people and improve civil society by creating and strengthening neighborhoods as physical units. These initiatives continued to aim at the integration and socialization of new arrivals to the U.S., with schooling taking on an increasingly central role.

Following the Progressive Era's settlement houses and emerging community centers, the relationship between schools and social services continued to evolve, accompanied by continued debates between progressive and traditional thinkers. In her foundational book about the integration of health and social services with schools, *Full-Service Schools*, researcher Joy Dryfoos traces the origins of in-school health clinics and their development into broader service offerings. Dryfoos repeatedly describes the evolution of social services in schools as a "pendulum", explaining the fluctuation: "In

periods of poverty, unrest, and disadvantage, service provision in schools has risen. In periods of relative affluence and in the absence of new immigrant populations, provision has been limited” (41). Especially for health services, tensions with the private sector have influenced the relationships between service providers and schools when private providers viewed school services as competition (41). After the Progressive Era, health services that had begun to be provided through schools were attacked as ‘encroaching socialism’ (26-27). The period between the World Wars represented an overall diminishing in the provision of health and social services in schools yet theorizing about the role that schools could play in their communities continued.

During the Depression, the idea of the “community school”, incorporating aspects of the earlier concepts of settlement houses, school centers, and neighborhood associations, gained increased attention, leading to further evolution of the role of schools in their communities. The term “community school” referred to a school “in which both the curriculum and the ancillary activities were designed to interact with the needs of the community” (Dryfoos 29). Instead of a focus on the provision health or social services, these schools created additional recreational and educational opportunities for youth and adults, often through after-school programs or community service programs during the school day. An often-cited example of this period was the Flint Community Schools initiative in Michigan, funded by the Charles Mott Foundation in the early 1930s (Dryfoos 30; Lubell 5). The initiative encompassed fifty schools that at first offered after-school programs and summer recreation and later incorporated health and nutrition services and adult education (Dryfoos 30). Dryfoos asserts that during this period, what emerged was the use of the school as a shared facility for the provision of various services, rather than

community schools as the agents of broader social change that thinkers Dewey and Follett envisioned (30). However, this innovation still represents an important point in the development of modern community schools as a concrete example of a systemic initiative that layered more traditional health and social services with educational and community enrichment components.

Forerunners to current school service integration models surfaced throughout the twentieth century, but their success continued to fluctuate due to push back from the private sector and government. The 1950s brought backlash against progressivism in education, including rightful critique of ‘tracking’ practices which funneled many students into vocational programs instead of academic tracks, reinforcing racial and ethnic disparities in educational opportunity (Owens; Jazzar and Algozzine). In 1957, the success of the Soviet Union at launching the Sputnik satellite ahead of the U.S. made American schools the targets of increased criticism, taking the blame for the national embarrassment. Political leaders argued for making schooling more demanding as an important strategy for future national security and restoring the international status of the country (Owens 43).

Throughout much of the twentieth century, social and educational reformers seeking to create aspects of community schools in American public schools have been subject to the cycles of political and societal opinion. Heading into the 1960s, new social critics were concerned about societal inequities, particularly in urban centers, which were exacerbated by changes in immigration policy that allowed record numbers of Latin American and Asian immigrants to come to the United States (Fass; Owens). President

Johnson's "War on Poverty" in the mid-1960s led to the emergence of important federal efforts at increasing social service supports for children and families such as Head Start (Dryfoos 35). However, many efforts at integrating services with schools, particularly in the health sector, were rolled back during the Nixon era (36). In 1983, the Reagan administration published the inflammatory document *The Nation at Risk*, which was highly critical of American public schools as a threat to national security (Owens; Jazzar and Algozzine). This sparked new and prolonged debate about the role of public schools, teaching methods, curriculum, and more. In the late twentieth century, this pendulum that Dryfoos described would swing back to an environment more open to the development of community school models.

Advancements in education reform and developmental psychology as well as growing social crises in urban areas led to the "fourth generation" of community school efforts in the early 1990s (Lubell 5; Dryfoos 42). A wave of national models emerged, including Beacons in New York City; Communities in Schools in Arlington, Virginia; United Way's Bridges to Success, pioneered in Indianapolis; Schools of the Twenty-First Century, created by Edward Zigler of Yale; and University-Assisted Schools led by the University of Pennsylvania (Lubell; Dryfoos). An important federal effort is the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, which was created in the mid-1990s to offer grants to support community-oriented supplemental academic and recreational programs outside of school hours (Lubell 5). The National Center for Community Education in Flint, Michigan, which was founded in 1965 with support from the Mott Foundation, helped train early recipients of the 21st Century grants (Blank "Reaching Out..." 245). The growth of pioneer programs integrating services with public schools

throughout the twentieth century set the foundation for the development of concrete community school models in the late 1990s and early twenty-first century.

Children's Aid Society community school model

In 1990 in New York City, the Children's Aid Society (CAS) began developing what would become today's leading community school model. After two years of planning and building collaborative relationships with local education authorities, CAS implemented its first community school in 1992, and a decade later operated a total of ten community schools (Dryfoos et al. v-vi). Today, CAS continues to manage twenty-four community schools in New York City, including one charter school operated exclusively by CAS (Children's Aid). CAS's community school model has been adapted to thousands of sites nationally and internationally and is cited as the leading model in much of the literature on community schools. In 1994, CAS founded the National Technical Assistance Center for Community Schools, now the National Center for Community Schools (NCCS), in response to widespread interest in their community schools and a flood of requests for help implementing new programs (Lubell 6). CAS community schools have also been the subjects of numerous long-term, rigorous studies to evaluate the efficacy of the model, generating a substantial body of literature demonstrating the positive impacts of community schools (Clark and Grimaldi; Lubell). In many ways, the CAS community school model has been profoundly influential on the proliferation of the many community schools initiatives that exist today.

CAS built on its history of community-centered anti-poverty work among profoundly challenged and under-resourced populations to bring the vision of schools as a

“one-stop shop” for education, social services, and health services to life. Founded in 1853, CAS is one of the largest and oldest child and family social-welfare agencies in the U.S. (Coltoff 8). CAS had a long history of operating community centers in low income areas and providing specific programs on a contracted basis (Moses 14; Coltoff 8). In the late 1980s, CAS, like many others, became concerned about the plight of public schools “unable to respond to the growing problems of poverty, homelessness, physical and mental illness, and violence” in urban areas (Coltoff 8). CAS staff identified Washington Heights as a community with profound need, with the largest youth population in Manhattan, incredibly overcrowded schools, rapidly changing racial demographics, and no established network of social services (9). Their vision for how to impact this community through public schools would be codified in Dryfoos’ *Full-Service Schools* a few years later.

Like CAS and many others, Dryfoos recognized the increasingly layered and interconnected challenges facing children and families in the inner city, affecting their ability to succeed in school. She identified public schools as the “one central institution in the community with enough viability and strength to organize comprehensive delivery systems” for badly needed social services, calling for collaborative partnerships that would transform schools into hubs of the community (Dryfoos). By developing partnerships with the New York Department of Education and the local school district, CAS had begun to do just that in Washington Heights. Very quickly, CAS and the public schools experienced positive results, “...able not only to deliver effective programs and services but also to transform the institution formerly known as the school into one that is multidimensional, vibrant, and alive,” a true “community school” (Moses 23).

CAS's community school model is based on a 'Developmental Triangle' (Figure 1) that conceptualizes its three-pronged approach to strengthening schools through integrated services. The child is placed at the center, surrounded by the family and community. These concentric circles demonstrate CAS's perspective on "supporting families and strengthening communities as primary ways of boosting student achievement" (Lubell 22). The three central components of the model enclose the circles as the legs of the triangle: a core instructional program, expanded learning opportunities, and comprehensive support services.

Figure 1: CAS Developmental Triangle



Source: Lubell (2011), *Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action*

The inclusion of the core instructional program in the triangle highlights that while streamlining service delivery is one aspect of community schools, a primary goal is strengthening curriculum and activities during the school day to directly address educational under-achievement. Expanded learning opportunities include before- and after-school programming directed at students, but also enrichment activities for the whole

community. Finally, comprehensive support services entail a full range of health, mental health, and social services designed to remove barriers to learning and development (Lubell; Dryfoos et al.). Managing the corners of the triangle to integrate the variety of offerings helps ensure “a coherent and integrated set of services for children and their families” (Lubell 1). CAS’s Developmental Triangle is a useful model for understanding the different aspects of community schools and how they combine to improve outcomes for students and support them and their families.

CAS also identifies four key capacities of community schools that serve as the “philosophical backbone” of the Developmental Triangle (Lubell 23). The four capacities are *comprehensiveness*, *collaboration*, *coherence*, and *commitment*. The NCCS uses these capacities as a framework for training emerging community school partners to develop their programs. *Comprehensiveness* describes the need to address the needs of the “whole child” beyond academic supports and should include periodic needs assessments and resource inventories to assure that the range of partnerships and resources offered is appropriate. The NCSS defines *collaboration* as “the structured involvement of all stakeholders through outreach, relationship-building, and shared leadership” (Lubell 23). Collaborators must align their work through shared vision, goals, and standards to have *coherence* within the community school. Finally, community schools are complex, and all parties must be *committed* to sustaining the community school, and willing to make permanent changes in organizational practice to further this goal (Lubell). These four capacities shape the types of programs community schools offer, the partnerships they make, and their entire organizational structure.

CAS community schools are also an original example of the ‘lead agency model’, which has become one of the most common and popular organizational structures for community schools initiatives. In this model, a single ‘lead agency’, usually a local nonprofit or social service agency, contracts directly with the school or district to manage all aspects of the community school. It is essential that the lead agency have sufficient organizational capacity to direct such a complex and interconnected initiative as a community school. While this role can be a strain on the resources of a smaller organization, there are many benefits to establishing one organization with the responsibility for coordinating the process. The lead agency has a full-time presence in the school, providing the staffing and organization that the community school needs to function, in close partnership with the school’s administration. The lead agency may bring in additional partners to increase and improve service offerings, such as medical professionals to staff an in-school health clinic or culturally-specific organizations to engage demographics of the community which may have language or cultural barriers (Negrón). A key staff member provided by the lead agency is the community school coordinator (CSC)¹, who “manages the community part of the community school”, organizing and supervising the services offered, programs outside of school hours, and the use of the facilities by community groups (Moses 18). The CSC should be in close partnership with the school principal to ensure the supplemental programming and services are coherent with educational activities during the school day (18). The lead agency model utilized by CAS has proven to be an effective way to manage a community school,

¹ CAS uses the term “community school director” in their materials, but here and throughout the rest of this work I use “community school coordinator” (CSC) in agreement with materials promoted nationally by the Coalition for Community Schools.

providing one point of contact for school administrators and clearly defined roles for partner organizations.

While CAS's community school model has been effective and influential on education reform efforts worldwide, the organization has always emphasized that emulators of their community schools must adapt, not replicate, their model. The NCCS advocates for entities seeking to implement community schools to consider the demographics of their community, identify the most pressing needs, and highlight existing community resources. The most effective community school will address the specific conditions facing its community, draw on existing capacities and resources, and tailor its programs and services to its students and families. CAS and many adaptations have focused on crowded, diverse urban environments, but the same kinds of needs may exist in rural areas as well, and there have been successful adaptations that address the needs of rural communities (Chu-Zhu). One of the key strengths of community schools is the flexibility of authorities to implement initiatives in the ways that make the most sense for their context. Janice Chu-Zhu, who is now the Senior Director of National Capacity Building at the NCCS, noted in 2005 that, "the wide range of adaptations in the very diverse settings bears witness to the central ideas of responsiveness to local need and the integration of local resources around public schools serving as the hubs of their communities" (204), which continues to be true today.

CAS was deeply involved in the founding of the national Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) in 1997, creating a vehicle for the promotion of the community school model across the country. At an education reform conference that year, a session about the community school concept received little attention, leading proponents of community

schools to reconsider how to further their efforts and gain recognition. The chief operating officer of CAS, C. Warren Moses, Joy Dryfoos, and Ira Harkavy, the Director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Community Partnerships (which originated the model of community schools that were 'university-assisted'), decided to hold a community school forum at Fordham University to build awareness (Blank, "Reaching Out..." 244). Unexpected levels of interest in the forum led them to form the Coalition of Community Schools with support from the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington D.C. The CCS was conceived as "a coalition *for*, not *of*, community schools" to promote "broad institutional and policy change" nationwide (Blank, "Reaching Out..." 246). The CCS sought to be a coalition made up of networks of community schools and organizations around the country, making the exception for one individual, Joy Dryfoos, as a primary advocate for community schools (246). Today, the CCS continues to advocate for community schools through a broad alliance with national, state, and local organizations and is a resource for leading literature in the field.

Supporting justifications for community schools

As initiatives resembling CAS's community schools have proliferated nationally and internationally, a variety of supporting justifications for community schools have emerged in academic literature. These supports range from empirical and qualitative studies of community school programs to conceptual theorizing about the role of public schools that builds on twentieth-century antecedents. There has been an increasing amount of literature about community schools in recent years, but overall literature remains scarce, particularly empirical, quantitative studies. Meanwhile, several key theories have emerged

that support the concept of community schools, two of which include social capital and the “whole child” approach. Finally, community schools have been connected to broader concepts of collective impact and community development in some academic literature, illustrating an increasing openness to a changing role for public schools that goes far beyond purely educational instruction.

There are many challenges to evaluating community schools, and while a variety of correlational studies on aspects of community schools are encouraging, empirical evidence on their effectiveness is sparse. Accurate evaluation of multi-component programs like community schools is difficult because it is challenging to determine which components of the program are contributing to the impact and how much. Many community schools are located in urban environments where mobility of families is high, adding difficulty to tracking long-term effects of community school programs (Dryfoos et al.). CAS community schools have been the subject of several multi-year studies that repeatedly demonstrated steady academic achievement and higher rates of school attendance, among other positive outcomes (Lubell). The literature generally supports that aspects of community schools have positive associations with academic achievement, especially parental involvement. One study showed that parental involvement is a better predictor of academic success than family income and socioeconomic status, suggesting that efforts by community schools to increase parental engagement will have a positive effect on educational achievement (Heers et al. 1029). Several studies have shown that involvement of the community and external organizations in schools has a positive association with academic achievement (1027). In a group of community schools in New

York, English proficiency of students rose by 5.7% and math proficiency rose by 1.8% in the first year (Superville 49).

Besides academic achievement, absenteeism is another common metric used in the literature to evaluate community schools. The existing literature also suggests positive correlations between community school programs and decreasing absenteeism (Honda and Liu 42). In the same group of community schools in New York, chronic absenteeism declined 3.5% compared to 1% decline citywide (Superville 49). In the first several years of a community schools initiative in the Oakland Unified School District, participating in the after-school programs was associated with a 0.7% increase in school attendance rate overall and a 4% decrease in likelihood of being chronically absent (Fehrer et al. 26). Overall, the existing literature is encouraging, but more research, particularly empirical studies, would further demonstrate the effectiveness of community schools in achieving desired outcomes.

One of the main theories underlying the community school approach is the belief that the well-being and basic needs of students must be addressed before children can learn and obtain educational success. Often referred to as a “comprehensive” or “whole child” approach, this rationale for community schools argues that students facing socioeconomic or other challenges need support beyond academics to succeed (Superville 47; Heers et al 1018). At the basis of this theory are psychological concepts like Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which asserts that lower level needs like food, health, safety, and emotional belonging must be met before humans can achieve higher-level functioning, including learning and academic success (Min et al. 32). In community schools, this theory also includes the understanding that inequality is often caused by status within political, social,

and economic systems rather than by characteristics of individual children or families (Heers et al. 1017). Community schools aim to coordinate comprehensive assistance that helps address the needs of students and families with the belief that this will eventually result in improved educational outcomes (Galindo et al. 141S). The full-service model certainly increases ease of access for families facing multiple socioeconomic challenges.

A second key theory supporting the community school model is the concept of social capital. A study linking the community school model to social capital defines it as “the network of connections between people that facilitates mutually advantageous social cooperation” (Galindo et al. 141S). These networks give people access to resources of information, support, and connection that can aid in success and upward mobility (Min et al. 30). Most of the literature on social capital focuses on the advantages of social capital for a mostly white middle class and has not fully examined the possible ways that schools may build social capital for underserved students (Galindo et al. 144S). Literature that applies the concept of social capital to schools argues that community schools can generate social capital for students through partnerships with external organizations and engagement of families and communities, improving educational outcomes and life success (Galindo et al.; Heers et al.; Min et al). In addition to creating accessible resource networks for students, community schools can leverage existing capital in neighborhoods, such as cultural and linguistic diversity, to increase intragroup social capital for all involved (Heers et al. 1024). The notion that community schools can increase social capital for marginalized students and families is a key rationale supporting the community school model.

An influential article introducing the concept of collective impact provides additional support for collaborative efforts to make social change. Kania and Kramer

(2011) defined collective impact as, “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (36). They assert that nonprofits and their funders usually operate on the principle of “isolated impact”, oriented towards single-organization solutions to social problems with the hope that effective organizations will be able to grow or replicate their efforts (38). While some types of problems may be solvable by one or a few organizations, many social problems require system-level transformation to create lasting change (39). Kania and Kramer cite public education reform as one such issue, requiring changes to a complex, multi-level system with many diverse stakeholders (36). While they do not specifically address community schools, such initiatives are well-described by their arguments about collective impact. Community schools initiatives generally seek to improve a variety of conditions that affect public education, including curricular instruction itself, through cross-sector collaborations of many partners.

Kania and Kramer propose five conditions of collective success, which are also key for community schools. A *common agenda* and *shared measurement systems* allow organizations to implement a joint solution to solving a common problem with agreed-upon methods to measure their progress (39-40). *Mutually reinforcing activities*, in which partners do what they do best in a coordinated way that supports other partners, describes how community schools leverage different partnerships and collaborations to offer a variety of effective programs. *Continuous communication* is essential in all collaborations to develop trust and enable effective partnership. Finally, Kania and Kramer argue that it is essential that collective impact initiatives have *backbone support organizations* that provide staffing and infrastructure, which is the role of the lead agency in the CAS

community school model (40). The concept of collective impact and ensuing calls for broad cross-sector coordination to address large-scale social problems supports community schools as a possible source of this type of change.

In his dissertation in Education Policy, now-Deputy Director of the Coalition for Community Schools Reuben Jacobson connected the concept of collective impact to education-focused community change initiatives (CCIs). Academics define CCIs as system-level partnerships targeting a specific community (based on geographic area) employing comprehensive approaches to addressing community issues such as poverty (Jacobson 20). These types of initiatives embody Kania and Kramer's concept of collective impact although defined slightly differently. Jacobson asserts that community schools initiatives are one prevalent type of CCI, particularly when they build networks of multiple schools across districts or cities (14). He employs a primary case study of SUN in Multnomah County as an example of such an initiative because it seeks to affect widespread change in schools and the lives of families across an entire county. Collective impact and CCIs are examples of current trends in thought about the role of public schools and their relationships with other organizations and their communities.

Exploring community schools today

Many examples of community schools exist today, and the model continues to spread in popularity. In 2016, there were an estimated 5,000 community schools in the U.S., serving approximately 5.1 million students (Heers et al. 1020-1021). Educational programs that highly resemble a community school model exist internationally as well, in Scotland, Sweden, England, and the Netherlands (Heers et al. 1020). In the U.S., there are

community schools across the nation (Honda and Liu 42). In Chicago, an initiative by the Polk Bros. Foundation began with three community schools, setting the stage for the city's Campaign for Community Schools. The campaign created 20 community schools in 2003, with a nonprofit partner acting as the lead agency for each school (Blank, "How..." 63). In Evansville, Indiana, the district works with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program to implement its community schools (Blank, "How..." 64). In 2012, Oakland United School District (OUSD) in California began the process of becoming a community school district as part of a "district strategy to redress...systemic inequality" (Fehrer et al. 2). By the 2016-2017 school year, one third of OUSD students attended community schools (1). These are just a few examples. It is difficult to track or even count all the community schools in America because of the inherent flexibility of the model, but in 2016 the CCS began compiling a "Community Schools Directory" to facilitate collaboration and connection ("Preliminary...").

While the manifestation of each community school is different to adapt to its specific context, modern community schools share major elements. Most of the recent literature on community schools notes three to four defining features, which include some of the following: collaboration with partnership organizations, family and community engagement, offering extracurricular activities and extended learning opportunities, and providing health and social services. Community schools often are accessible to the public for extended hours, including evenings and weekends (Blank, "How..." 62; Min et al. 43). Partnership organizations can include public or private health and social agencies, universities and colleges, community groups like neighborhood associations, faith-based institutions, and youth development organizations (Blank, "How..."). A 2016 survey of

274 community schools across the country by the CCS identified common activities and program offerings. Nearly all schools surveyed offered at least one service in each of the following categories: community engagement, such as housing information or immigrant services accessible to the community; family engagement, such as parenting education; youth development; expanded learning opportunities, such as before- or after-school programs; engaging instruction, such as service or project-based learning; health and social services; and early childhood development (“Preliminary...”). The variety of service and support options for community schools are immense and vary from site-to-site.

The literature also shows key similarities in the organizational structure and function of today’s community schools. The lead agency model developed by CAS dominates the field, where a nonprofit or social service agency takes on the role of managing and providing supporting infrastructure for the community school. In some communities, school districts themselves provide the staffing and services for their community schools. Other examples include a city government, a Chamber of Commerce, and in Portland, the Multnomah County authorities (Honda and Liu 43).

Most community schools rely on a community school coordinator (CSC), another feature popularized by CAS. The CSC’s role is to be a “coherence-builder between the many people, programs, and practices that constitute the community school’s work at the site level” (Fehrer et al. 15). The CSC is part of whatever leadership teams help manage and implement the community school programs, and is responsible for communicating between staff and partners, assessing community needs and assets, evaluating progress and outcomes, and overall making sure the community school functions smoothly (“Community School Standards”). A key ally of the CSC is the school’s principal

(Superville 50). As the highest authority on-site, the principal must have a trusting relationship with the CSC and share their vision and goals for the community school to function effectively (“Community School Standards”). At each community school, the CSC and the principal are the key actors that lead, implement, manage, and evaluate the community school programs.

In 2017, the CCS published their Community School Standards, a collection of best practices for community schools. The CCS formulated the Standards in collaboration with regional and national community school supporters and practitioners. The Standards outline factors related to the efficacy and long-term success of community schools, and “are designed to engage and support the community schools movement as a standards-driven, evidence-based strategy to promote equity and education excellence for each and every child” (“Community School Standards”). There are separate standards for both community school sites and system-level community schools initiatives, designed to be used in conjunction. An accompanying assessment tool can be used in evaluation, but the CCS emphasizes that “creating a community school is a developmental process” and schools should be flexible in application. The Standards encompass a broad range of components necessary for effective, sustainable community schools, including leadership, supporting infrastructure, incorporation of diverse stakeholders, the use of data for evaluation, financing, supportive public policy, human resources and important roles such as the CSC and principal, the types of resources offered by community schools, and efforts for continual improvement. The creation of the Standards is an important milestone in the community schools movement because they help to create a common language and framework for understanding, implementing, and improving community schools.

Case study overview

Over the past several decades, community schools have proven to be an evidence-based, popular trend in U.S. education. However, given the historically contentious field of American education reform, it is essential for reformers and researchers to examine what community schools initiatives will need to succeed and sustain themselves in the modern era. Otherwise, community schools will become yet another trend in education reform that fails to weather political and ideological shifts. Additionally, innovators and reformers are raising the importance of making sustained, system-level efforts to effectively address societal issues more than ever before. As one model with strong potential to address disparities in wealth and educational attainment in a systemic way, community schools take on new significance. Frameworks like the 2017 CCS Standards have helped define aspects that contribute to effective community schools initiatives. Examining existing initiatives that exhibit valuable characteristics will provide significant insights into how community schools can successfully address the greatest challenges facing students and families to create lasting change.

This examination leads us to Schools Uniting Neighborhoods, a community schools initiative with an innovative organizational structure that has promoted sustainability and the ability to effectively serve a racially and ethnically diverse body of stakeholders. SUN has been examined by leading community school scholars at the CCS and elsewhere, and merits further analysis in the current historical moment. SUN has effectively operated for twenty years through broad cross-sector collaboration and has continuously sought self-improvement to address new and evolving challenges. Through a holistic process drawing on interviews of educational leaders involved in SUN, I have identified two aspects of SUN

that are particularly instructive for research and analysis: sustainability and racial equity. SUN's unique organizational structure as well as specific actions by leaders and stakeholders have furthered these components. Exploring the initiative is instructive for the future of SUN and other community schools initiatives.

To have a lasting impact and endure the political winds of American education reform, community schools initiatives must develop methods for ensuring their sustainability. The 2017 CCS Community School Standards define sustainability:

Durability of community schools grows out of an infrastructure that supports a collaborative system based on a long-term vision, continually measures progress against a clear set of benchmarks, and develops the ability to finance the functions of community schools. To ensure continuation and deepening of the work, community schools marshal the capacity to capture and retain the political support of key sectors of the community—parents and residents, voters, taxpayers, and policymakers.

The six aspects of sustainability (infrastructure, a collaborative system, long-term vision, evaluation, funding, and political and community support) are essential for maintaining community schools over the long-term. SUN's existence and growth over a twenty-year period attests to its sustainability, but I seek to understand how the organizational structure and leadership of SUN have contributed to long-term success for the initiative. I will use these six aspects as a framework to examine how SUN facilitates its own sustainability.

The vast and systemic inequalities based on race in America have been one of the most contentious topics increasing in prominence in recent years and is a particularly relevant topic for education reformers. From its beginning, SUN has actively considered how to handle issues of diversity and dismantle disparities, implementing concrete changes to improve inequities. I call this work 'racial equity' because this term encompasses the intention of these efforts to remove barriers, increase responsiveness, and provide equal

opportunity to people of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Much of the literature on community schools fails to directly address racial disparities and equity or provides only a nod in this direction. For example, in the book about the early years of the CAS Community Schools by Dryfoos and collaborators, there is only a brief mention about a collaboration with a local organization, Alianza Dominicana, to create an after-school program that targeted the Dominican population (Moses 16). This is not to say that other community schools initiatives have not considered or addressed racial equity and the needs of their diverse populations, but that this subject is underemphasized in the literature. The CCS Community School Standards incorporate some discussion of racial disparities and the need for culturally and linguistically relevant services at school sites but does little to directly address issues of equity and how they may be incorporated on the system-level. In an interview with the author, Jacobson asserted that the involvement of culturally-based organization and services in community schools should have greater recognition. SUN's incorporation of a racial equity lens and culturally-responsive services deserves exploration to highlight how these important aspects contribute to community schools.

SUN seeks to be responsive to the needs of its diverse constituents and has articulated a specific commitment to racial equity. Jacobson's dissertation, the most thorough recent examination of SUN, recognized how an equity perspective influenced motivations for beginning SUN and its organizational evolution, but did not detail specific aspects. Recent developments in Multnomah County's diversity and equity initiatives have further emphasized the importance of a racial equity lens to the SUN initiative. Most importantly, SUN community schools are facilitated by collaboration with a variety of culturally-specific and culturally-responsive nonprofit organizations. The County

differentiates between these two types of services in its partnerships. Culturally-responsive services “honor and align with the beliefs, practices, culture and linguist needs of diverse consumer/client populations”, while culturally-specific services are “provided for specific populations based on their particular needs” by organizations that typically have “a majority of members/clients from a particular community and a “culturally focused organizational identity and environment”. A similar definition of culturally-responsive organizations is included in the CCS Community School Standards as a guideline. All providers in Multnomah County are expected to be culturally-responsive, but only some combine this orientation with a specific focus on a particular population (Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity). This method of partnership with nonprofit organizations furthers racial equity by increasing the relevance of SUN services to diverse constituents. I will further examine how SUN facilitates racial equity in this work by focusing on the effects of culturally-specific organizations on the initiative and how they have contributed to collaboration, leadership, and changes in organizational structure.

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the setting and history of the SUN initiative, as well as the ways the SUN community schools relate to the popular CAS model. The chapter looks at SUN’s organizational structure closely to explain how it is different from other community schools initiatives, setting the groundwork for examining the effects of the role of Multnomah County on the initiative. From there, I detail my sources and how I have utilized their data in my research. Interviews with SUN practitioners provided a window into the current state of the initiative and helped me distill the two themes of sustainability and racial equity as key areas facilitated and affected by SUN’s unique organizational structure. Following the discussion of my research methods,

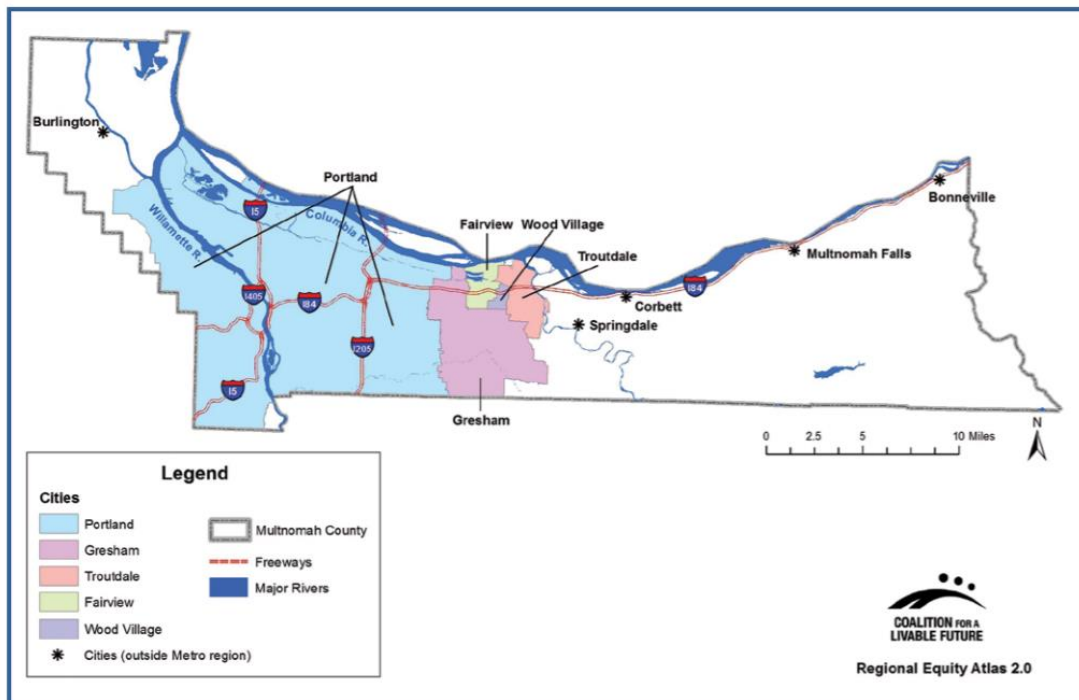
I examine the results from these interviews, organized around the two themes to highlight how SUN's organizational structure, particularly the County's role, has helped the initiative address the components of sustainability and racial equity. Finally, I will analyze and interpret these results, noting the consequences for SUN and how they may be relevant for other initiatives. Community schools are one way for public education reforms to address the environmental challenges faced by schools and their students, and SUN's success in creating a long-lasting initiative that combats societal disparities merits this analysis.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND—Schools Uniting Neighborhoods

The context and development of the SUN initiative is important for understanding its current state. In this chapter, I provide background about the setting and environment for SUN, particularly the geographic and demographic features that SUN addresses and navigates. The initiative is situated within the overlapping entities of Multnomah County, several cities, and six school districts. The demographic features of its environment shape the issues and disparities that SUN has sought to address. An exploration of the origins and development of SUN provides the necessary context for the current historical moment. Finally, I outline SUN's organizational structure and model and how it relates to the prominent CAS model for community schools. The inherent flexibility of community schools to adapt to their environments makes it particularly important to understand the characteristics of SUN within its specific geographic and demographic context.

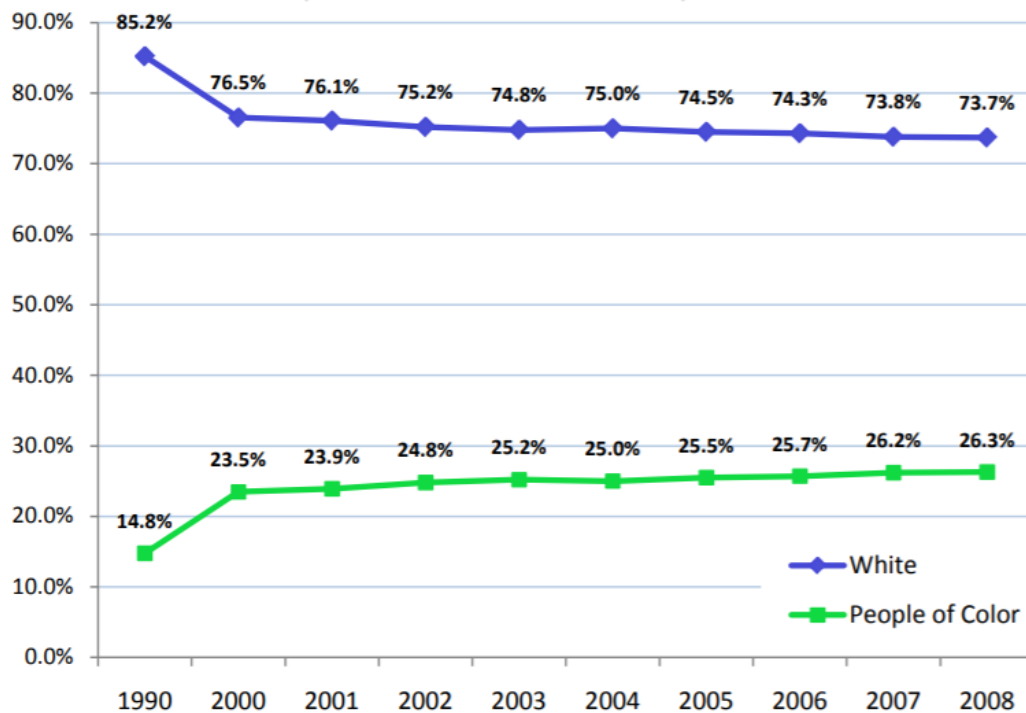
Multnomah County

Multnomah County is a diverse and populous county in northern Oregon, bordering Washington. Multnomah is the smallest county in Oregon at about 465 square miles but is the most populous, with an estimated 2016 population of 799,796 (U.S. Census). The county encompasses six incorporated cities including Portland, Gresham, Fairview, Maywood Park, Troutdale, and Wood Village. Portland is the largest city in Oregon, and most of Multnomah County's population is concentrated in the Portland metro area surrounding the Willamette River. The easternmost and westernmost areas of the county are mainly rural with low population density and are not incorporated into SUN, and thus not a focus of this case study (Hastie et al.).

Figure 2: Multnomah County Map

Source: Smock (2014), *Poverty in Multnomah County*

While primarily white, Multnomah County has experienced increasing racial and ethnic diversity over the last several decades and is more diverse than the state of Oregon in general. Oregon is one of the least diverse states, and Portland is the least diverse of the fifty largest cities in the country, but there has been rapid growth of the minority population, especially in the Portland metro area (Kaylor). The non-white population of Multnomah County has grown steadily in the last several decades (Figure 3).

Figure 3: White and Non-White Populations of Multnomah County, 1990-2008

Source: Curry-Stevens et al. (2010), *Communities of Color in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile*

By 2016 estimates, the non-white population has almost doubled since 1990 to about 29.4% (U.S. Census). This steady increase is coupled with a high level of diversity. Hispanic/Latino is the largest group, followed by Asian, Black/African American, and multiracial populations. In 2016, Multnomah County was about 70% white, while Oregon as a state was about 76% white. Hispanic or Latino is about 11.4% of Multnomah County's population, with Asians at 7.5% and Black/African Americans at 5.8% (U.S. Census). Within the generalized ethnic groups surveyed by the U.S. Census, there is considerable diversity due to immigration patterns.

Multnomah County is home to a significant number of immigrants and refugees, increasing the degree and complexity of racial and ethnic dynamics. There has been rapid growth in the number of immigrants coming to the Portland area; by 2000 53% of the

immigrant population had arrived since 1990 and one-third had arrived since 1995 (Lotspeich et al). In 2016 about 14% of the residents of Multnomah County were foreign born (U.S. Census). Latin American immigrants make up the largest group, followed closely by Asian immigrants. Immigrants in Multnomah County include a significant number of refugees, of which more than 60,000 have arrived in the area since 1975. The majority of refugees are from the former Soviet Union and Vietnam (*MultCo Global*). In more recent years, there has been an influx of refugees from Somalia, Iraq, Cuba, Burma, Bhutan, and Iran (Graves). Today, an estimated 20% of residents speak a language other than English as their primary language, with the most common languages spoken being Spanish, Vietnamese, Chinese, and Russian (U.S. Census; Lotspeich et al.). The County collaborates with interpreters to serve residents in over 100 languages, demonstrating the level of diversity in the region (*MultCo Global*).²

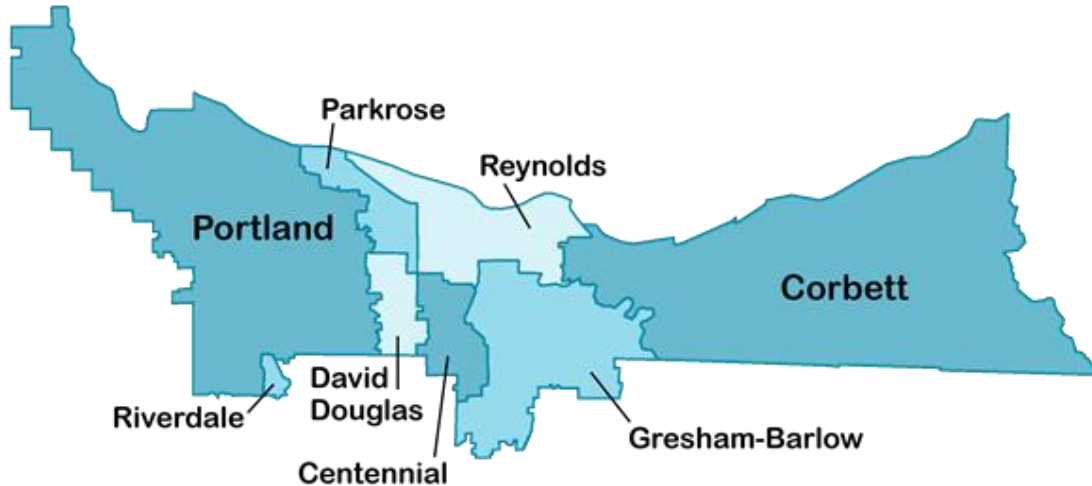
School districts

Multnomah County contains eight public school districts, of which six are incorporated into SUN. Riverdale and Corbett school districts are in the less-populated areas of the county and are not incorporated into SUN because of their small size and lower levels of poverty and diversity. The six districts in the Portland metro area are Centennial, David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose, Portland Public, and Reynolds. Portland Public is the largest school district in the state, with approximately 47,800 students. While the other five school districts in SUN are considerably smaller, they still face size pressures. For example, David Douglas High School, the only high school in the district, is the largest

² Further information and data, including graphs and maps, can be found at: <https://multco.us/global/demographics>

high school in the state with over 3,000 students, followed closely by Reynolds High School (Oregon State Report Cards 2016-17). About 20% of Multnomah County's population was under the age of 18 in 2016. Of the students enrolled in school, about 90% utilize public schools (U.S. Census).

Figure 4: Map of Multnomah County School Districts

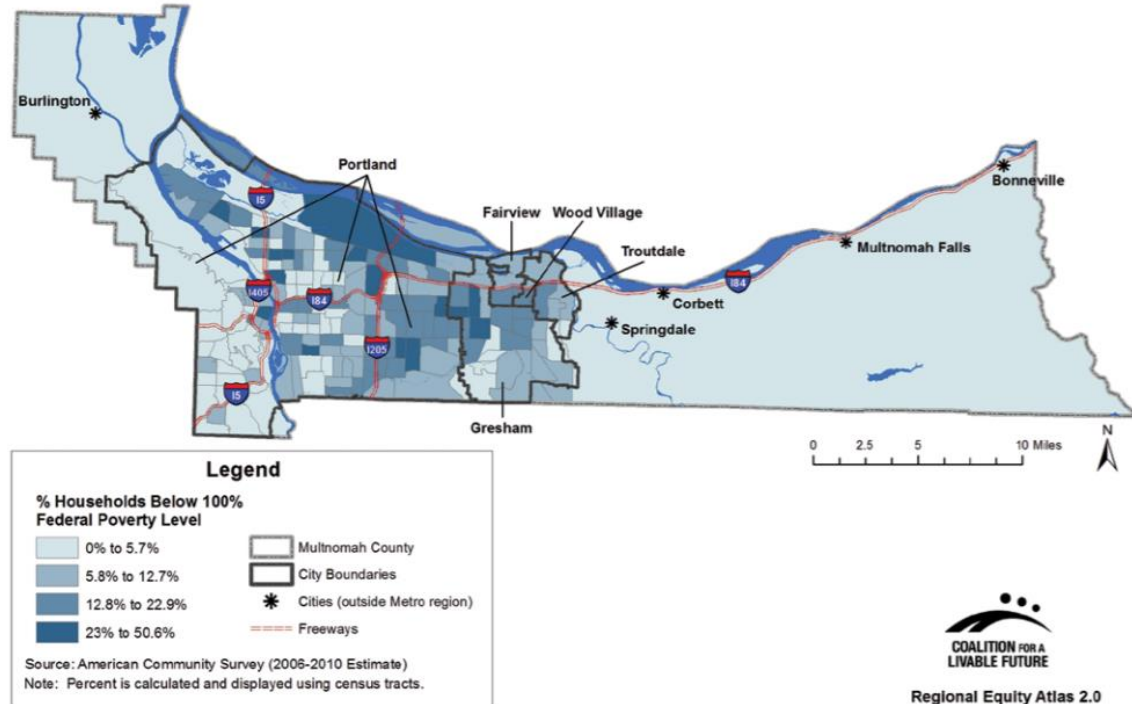


Source: Multnomah Education Service District (2018)

The school districts in Multnomah County face differing rates of poverty among their students. In the state of Oregon, 13.4% of people of all ages live in poverty by federal qualifications, but for those ages five to seventeen this percentage is 15.8%. In Multnomah County, overall federal poverty rates for all ages are at 14.2%, and for ages five to seventeen it is considerably higher than state rates at 18%. Portland and Gresham-Barlow school districts have comparable poverty rates for their students, but the other four districts have poverty rates higher than county and state rates. David Douglas and Reynolds students are the most economically disadvantaged at rates of about 26%, followed by Centennial at about 24% and Parkrose at 20% (Oregon State Report Cards 2016-17). These federal

statistics align with geographic expectations, with districts in north, south, and outer east Portland being the most economically disadvantaged:

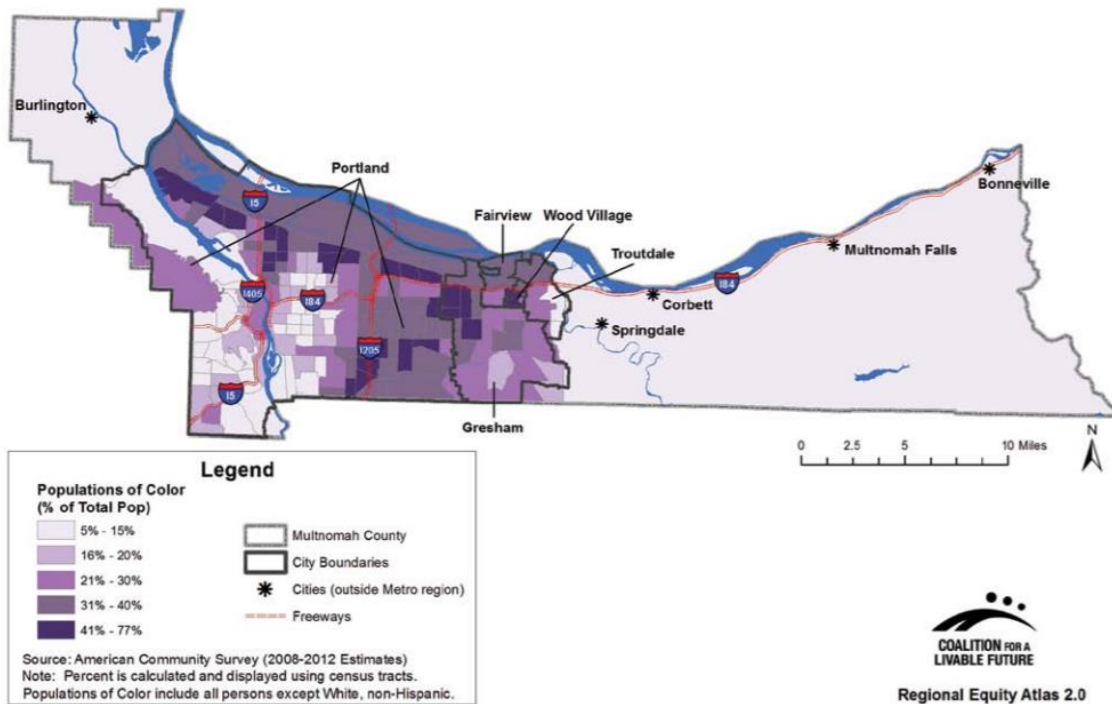
Figure 5: Geographic Distribution of Poverty, 2006-2010 Estimate



Source: Smock (2014), *Poverty in Multnomah County*

The districts have different ethnic and racial makeups, but each have higher rates of diversity among their student population than the county. Reynolds is a majority-minority school district, with white students making up only 30-35% of school populations and Hispanic/Latinos as the largest group at about 40% of students. Currently, Portland and Gresham-Barlow have percentages of white students around 55-60%, and students in Centennial and David Douglas are about 40% white. Parkrose and David Douglas have the highest proportions of Black/African American students, at about 15% and 11% of their student populations, respectively. Centennial and Parkrose also have the most notable populations of Asian students, at around 13% (Oregon State Report Cards 2016-17). This is reflected in the geographic distribution of populations of color:

Figure 6: Geographic Distribution of Populations of Color, 2008-2012 Estimate



Source: Smock (2014), *Poverty in Multnomah County*

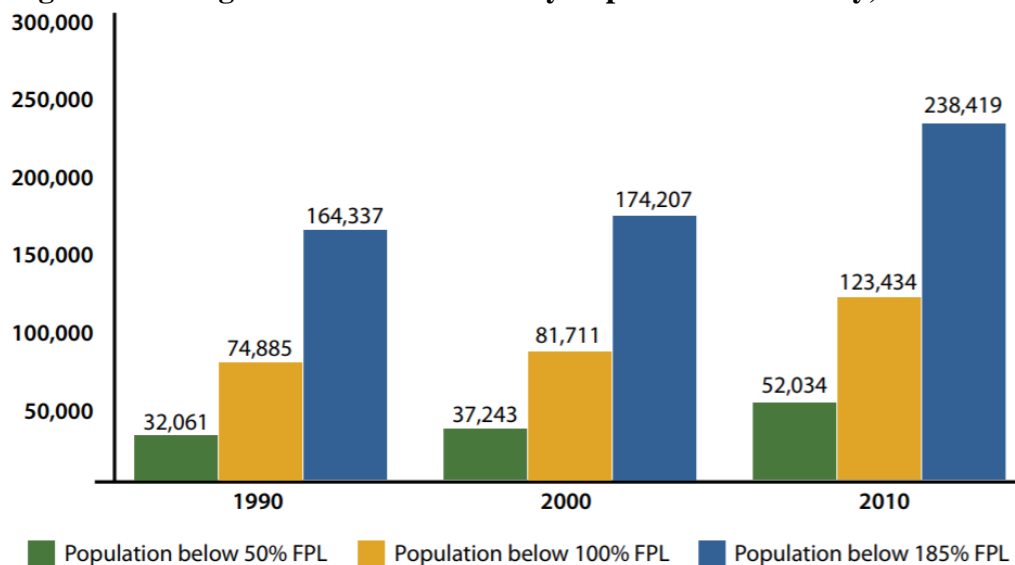
Racial and ethnic demographics of the SUN school districts show considerably higher rates of diversity among the school-age population than Multnomah County. This likely reflects the increased density of diverse populations in the Portland metro area, the greater likelihood that students of color will enroll in public schools, and the presence of an older population that is made up of mostly white residents. Although the students of these districts are diverse, teachers are about 90% white, except in Portland Public, which has a rate closer to 80% (Oregon State Report Cards 2016-17).

Disparities in poverty by race and ethnicity

A 2014 report commissioned by Multnomah County details the problem of poverty in the county. The report asserts that official accounts of poverty based on the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) vastly undercount economic disadvantage, citing widespread

criticism of the FPL as outdated for current economic conditions (Smock 6). The report includes an additional measure of poverty, the Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS), which defines households living in poverty as those unable to meet basic needs without income supports such as public housing and food banks (Smock 7). Compared to Oregon, Multnomah County is more highly educated and has a higher median and per capita income, but it also has a higher rate of poverty than the state (Smock 10). At the time of the report, 36% of Multnomah County residents lived below the SSS, with 17% at or below the FPL. 7% lived in deep poverty, defined as at or below 50% of the FPL (Smock 11). Poverty in the county has increased since 1990, growing at more than twice the rate of population growth. From 1990 to 2010, the county population grew by 26%, while the growth in the FPL poverty rate was 62% (Smock 12).

Figure 7: Change in Multnomah County Population in Poverty, 1990-2010



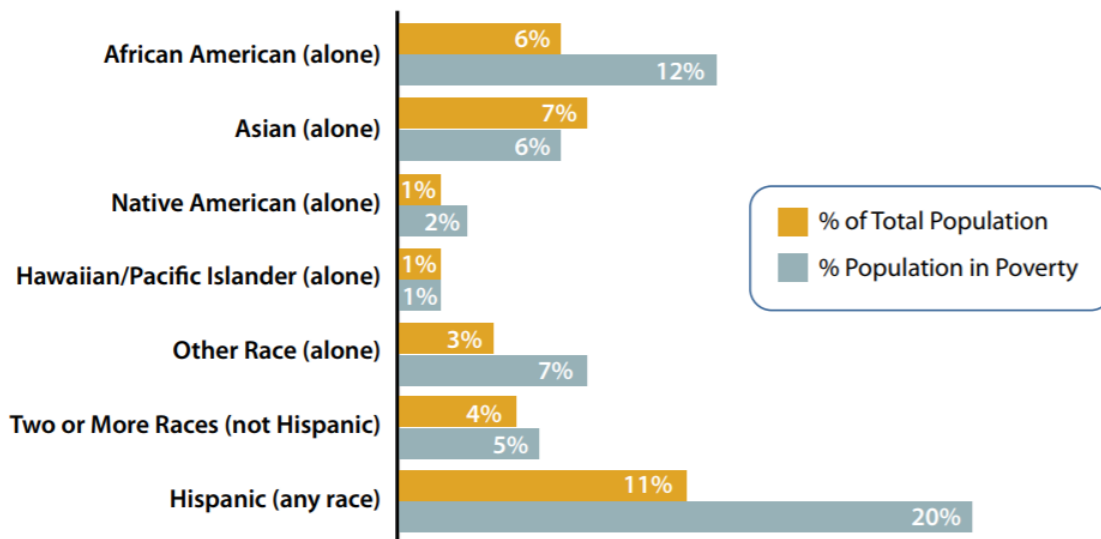
Source: Smock (2014), *Poverty in Multnomah County*

This severe deepening of poverty in the county is linked to an increasing wage gap, a decline in availability of family-wage jobs, high levels of unemployment, and cuts to safety-net programs (Smock 13-16). While economic conditions have improved somewhat

as the country has recovered from the Great Recession in 2008, indicated by a 2016 estimate of the FPL rate in Multnomah County of 14.2%, poverty and economic challenge continue to be severe.

The report also demonstrates that there is acute overrepresentation of communities of color in poverty in Multnomah County (Figure 8). About one-third of the population is non-white, but 44% of people in poverty are people of color (Smock 17). The disparities are highest for Black/African Americans, Native Americans, and Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders; over one-third of the county's populations of these groups are living in poverty (Smock 18). Asian/Pacific Islanders (API), African, and Slavic immigrants and refugees are also particularly challenged by poverty and unemployment, and more recent arrivals to the United States tend to experience higher rates of poverty (Smock 20-22).

Figure 8: Overrepresentation of Communities of Color in Poverty

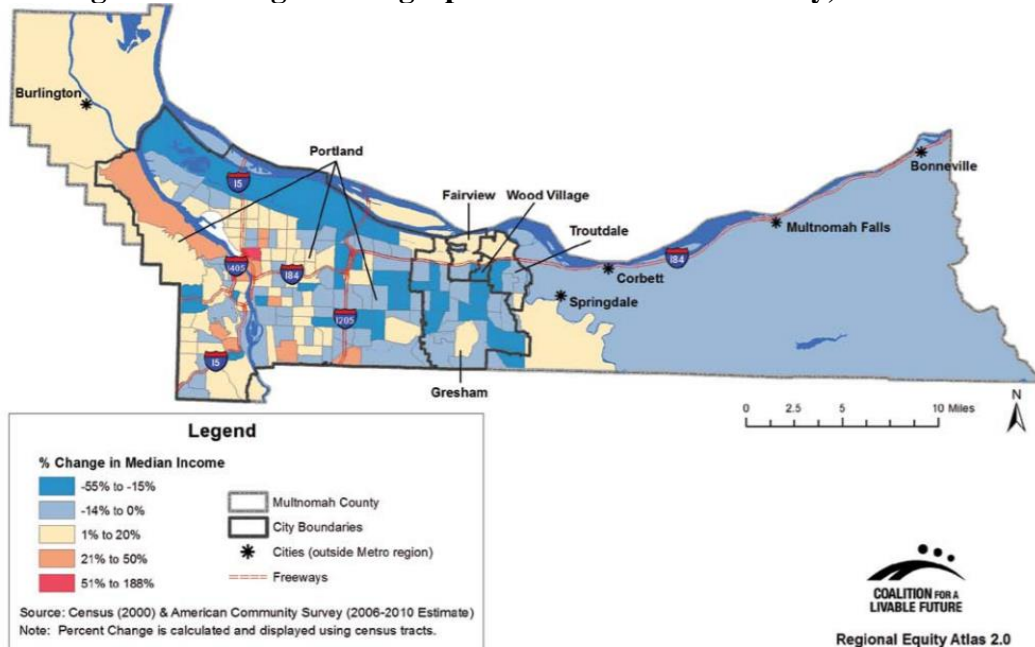


Source: Smock (2014), *Poverty in Multnomah County*

Children, especially children of color, are also more likely to be in poverty. As noted earlier, about 20% of the population is under 18, but 28% of the population living in poverty is under 18, and 33% of children of color are in poverty. This situation is worst for

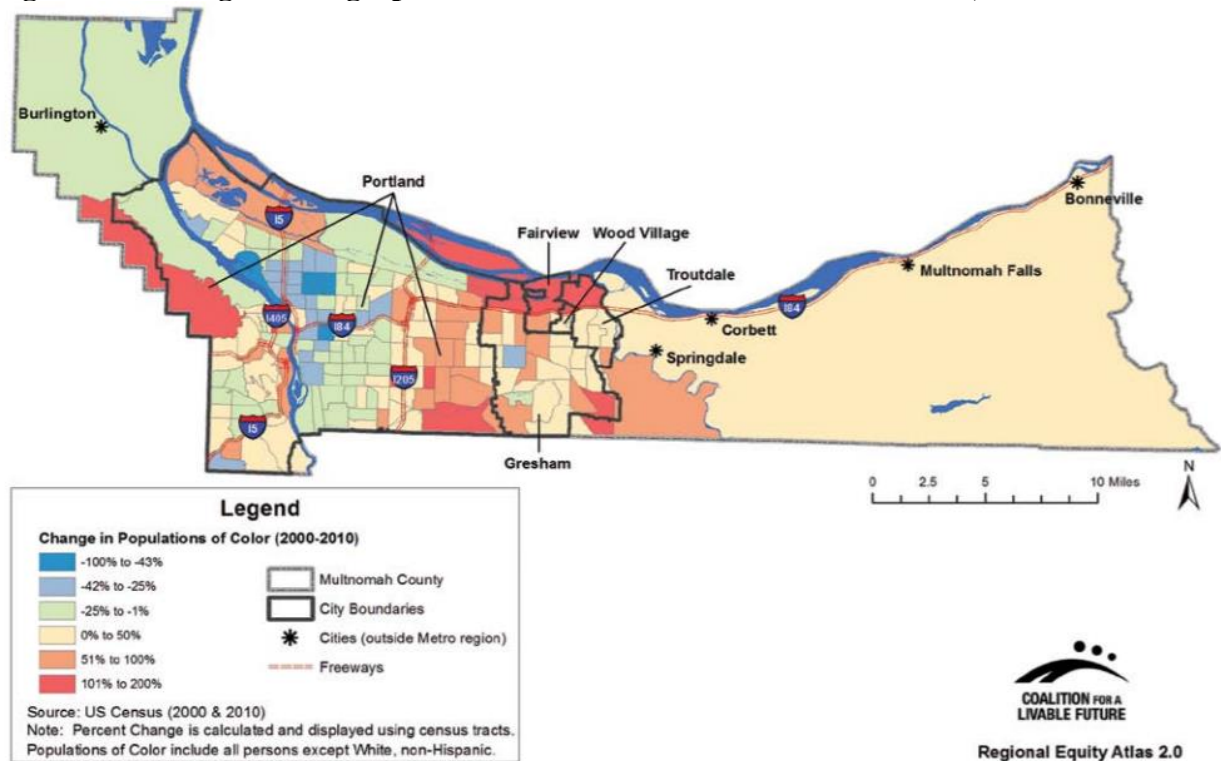
Black/African American children, of which over half live in poverty (Smock 25). As poverty in the county has increased, rates of poverty for communities of color and children have been increasing disproportionately. From 1990 to 2010, when the poverty rate grew by 62%, the white population in poverty in Multnomah County increased by 25% while the population of communities of color in poverty increased by 127% (Smock 19). During this same period, the population under eighteen increased by 7%, but the population under age 18 living in poverty increased by 35%, with the largest growth in poverty occurring from 2000 to 2010, likely due to economic dynamics surrounding the Great Recession.

These racial disparities are reflected in the changing geography of poverty in Multnomah County, particularly in Portland. Generally, levels of poverty increase on the east side of the Willamette River and heading eastward in Portland. West and central east Portland are the least affected, with about 13% of their population in poverty, while outer east Portland is the most affected with 23% of its population living in poverty. Additionally, the distribution of poverty has been shifting dramatically eastward since 1990 as low-income populations move away from downtown Portland in the face of rising housing costs and other forces of gentrification (Figure 9). The report notes that “high poverty schools exist in all parts of the county but are concentrated in north/northeast Portland and outer east Portland” (Smock 31).

Figure 9: Change in Geographic Distribution of Poverty, 2000-2010

Source: Smock (2014), *Poverty in Multnomah County*

As communities of color are disproportionately likely to be low-income, this eastward shift has affected the geographic distribution of communities of color. Displacement had concentrated populations of color in outer east, north, and northeast Portland and Gresham (Figure 10), and communities continue to face high rates of mobility (Smock). The eastern school districts (Centennial, David Douglas, Gresham-Barlow, Parkrose, and Reynolds) average a mobility rate for their students of 16% compared to a rate of about 12.6% for Portland Public (Oregon Report Cards 2016-17).

Figure 10: Change in Geographic Distribution of Communities of Color, 2000-2010

Source: Smock (2014), *Poverty in Multnomah County*

The rapidly changing demographics of poverty, race, and ethnicity present a challenging context for social service provision in Multnomah County. Worsening poverty over the past several decades as well as shifting geographic distributions of poverty and communities of color have increased the challenge of providing services where they are needed most and services that are culturally-accessible. A considerable asset to people of color in Multnomah County has been the development of a variety of robust, culturally-specific nonprofit organizations that target their services to specific racial and ethnic groups. These include organizations such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), founded in 1976, which now includes departments targeted at Asian, African, and Slavic immigrants; Self-Enhancement, Inc. (SEI), founded in 1981, to empower African American youth and their families; and Latino Network, founded in 1996

to provide resources for the growing Latino community in Multnomah County (*IRCO; Latino; Self*). In 2001 organizations representing African, African American, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Slavic communities formed the Coalition for Communities of Color (CCC) to facilitate collective racial justice efforts in the county (*Coalition*). Other social service nonprofits, such as Metropolitan Family Service (MFS) and Impact NW, seek to utilize a culturally-responsive model of service to better serve the diverse populations present in Multnomah County. The County has intentionally developed understanding, policies, and guidelines addressing cultural diversity and racial equity to improve their efforts to combat poverty in the region (*Multnomah*). In Multnomah County, SUN has evolved as a strategy to combat increasing poverty and racial/ethnic disparities in the public education system and in communities throughout the county. The demographic and geographic context helps us understand why SUN has developed the way it has, including with whom governmental and educational leaders have chosen to collaborate.

Historical development of SUN

The SUN initiative originated during a time of rapid change and increasing need that led school districts, the City of Portland, and the county government to question how to best address the challenges facing their populations. In the late 1990s, these community leaders recognized the need for a new approach amid “shrinking budgets, a significant racial achievement gap, growing poverty, a severe shortage of affordable housing, and an increase of the number of children being left unsupervised during out-of-school hours” (Hall 15). A County employee indicated during an interview that the SUN initiative began at the “grass-tops” but soon built on and incorporated existing assets and input from the

“grassroots”. School districts realized they did not have the capacity to address the inter-related barriers blocking students from school success and approached the city and county governments for help. Multnomah County chair Beverly Stein, County Commissioner Diane Linn, and City Commissioner Jim Francesconi initiated discussions about how to better align the array of anti-poverty, social service, and community support efforts in the county (Jacobson 72). In 1998, an ad hoc committee, including members and staff from an existing Community Building Initiative and After School Cabinet, explored their options centered around a two-fold goal: to “support education and school success” and to “improve the way resources for students and families were delivered by developing a school-based delivery model” (Hall 15; Jacobson 71). As part of their research, committee members visited the CAS community schools (“Portland/Multnomah...”). Staff also cultivated support from the community and political leaders throughout their year of exploration and preparation.

By 1999, Multnomah County and its partners began implementing a model they named Schools Uniting Neighborhoods or SUN Schools. The community school model they chose built on thirteen existing community school programs operated by the Portland Bureau of Parks and Recreation. However, these sites mostly focused on before- and after-school activities, recreation, and community education. The newly designed SUN initiative sought to implement a more comprehensive model that would be planned and implemented collaboratively by schools, families, and community partners. Many examples of partnerships between schools, social service providers, and community-based organizations existed in Portland, but they were fragmented and unaligned. The partners involved in SUN took a system-level perspective from the very beginning, seeking to create

a system that “used the school as an organizing principle for services and made services equitable throughout the entire county” (Iverson 81). The initiative launched in the Portland Public and Gresham-Barlow school districts with eight schools and \$1 million in funding (Iverson 84). During the initial phases, schools had to apply to join the initiative and demonstrate community support and involvement in the application process (Iverson 84). The ad hoc committee that had developed the idea for SUN became what is now known as the Sponsors Group, incorporating partners that contributed cash and/or in-kind funding such as school districts, the City of Portland, and the County (Jacobson 71).

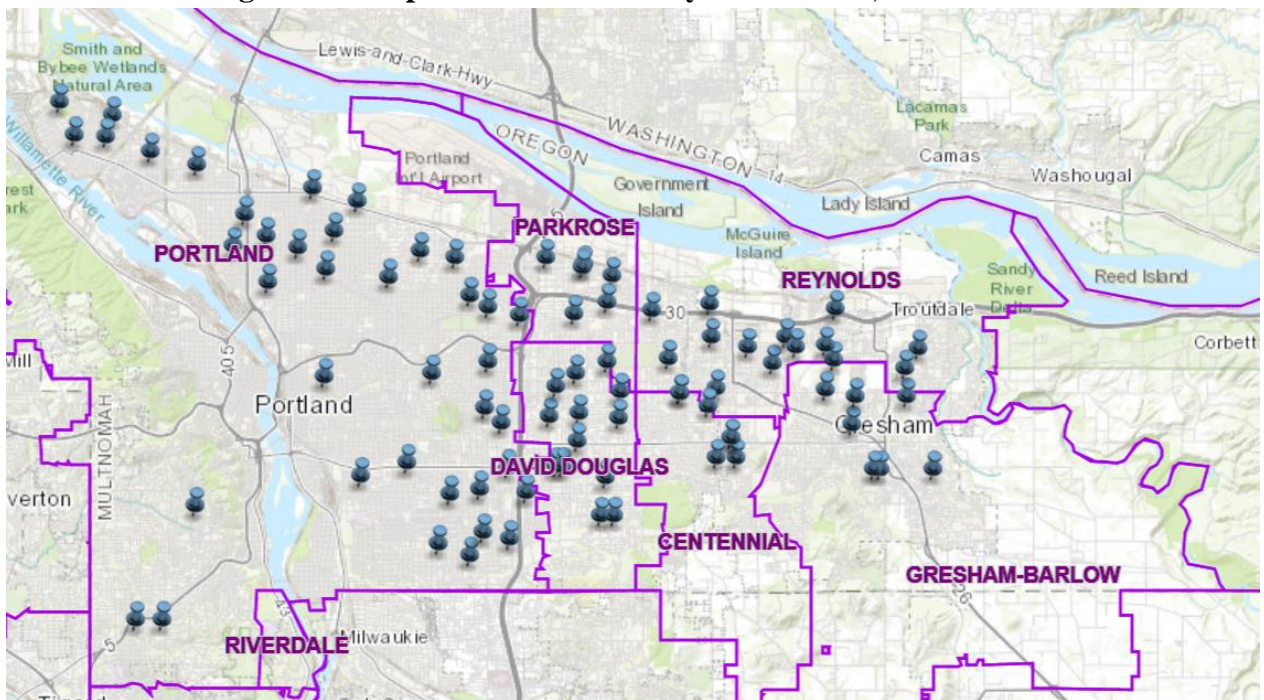
The SUN community schools initiative grew successfully in the beginning years of the new century. In 2000, SUN was added as an ongoing line item in City and County budgets, helping ensure sustainable funding for years to come. In these early years SUN also relied on 21st Century Community Learning Center federal grants and Safe Schools federal grants to launch new sites (“Portland/Multnomah...”). In 2002, voters passed the Portland Children’s Levy, a five-year, \$8.5 million levy that enabled SUN to continue to grow (Moyer-Wade; “Portland/Multnomah...”). Beginning in 2003, the County and its partners developed the School-Age Policy Framework, a county policy which sought to further align social services with school sites and the community school programs. Now known as the SUN Service System, this reorganization helped fold existing social services into a comprehensive system utilizing a school-based delivery model to supplement community school programs. During this time the thirteen existing community schools operated by the Portland Bureau of Parks and Recreation were aligned with the SUN model, resulting in a total of 46 sites across six districts (“Portland/Multnomah...”).

SUN weathered political and financial challenges as it grew. In 2006, some County authorities threatened to cut the SUN budget by \$1.7 million (Samuels). Advocacy and testimony by parents, students, and community members averted this proposed budget cut and led to further solidifying of SUN within political structures (“Portland/Multnomah...”). The School-Age Services Task Force was created at this time to examine the SUN initiative and increase its effectiveness. In response to concerns of community partners and stakeholders that they were underrepresented in SUN leadership structures, the task force recommended that leaders create the SUN Coordinating Council. The Coordinating Council incorporated representatives from nonprofit partners, school districts, the County, and the City, and offered a structure to give input and feedback to the Sponsors Group, which directly controlled funding (Jacobson 71). During this period school districts also began contributing to the SUN community schools core funding pool in order to expand the number of SUN sites. In 2007, the CCS awarded SUN a Community Schools National Award for Excellence and in 2008 Multnomah County hosted the National Community Schools Forum (*SUN Community Schools Timeline*). The SUN initiative has used evaluation to demonstrate positive results and to hone and improve its programs since the beginning. For example, a study on the 2008-2009 school year, when SUN had over 50 community school sites, showed that high school students who participated in thirty or more days of extended-day programming attended more days of school and earned more credits than their peers, significantly improving their odds of graduation (Furrer et al.). SUN’s political popularity was further demonstrated in 2011, when the City of Portland incorporated it into the Portland Plan, the City’s roadmap for the

next thirty years (Hall 17). At this time, SUN had over sixty sites and served over 20,000 children and adults (“Portland/Multnomah...”)

Today, SUN community schools represent an extensive system with a proven track record of positive outcomes that continues to grow. During the 2015-2016 school year, 85 SUN community schools across six districts served approximately 24,800 youth, two-thirds of which identified as students of color. Students who attended SUN activities for thirty or more days had an average school attendance rate of 92.6% compared to district averages of 81.1% and had improved academic performance and class participation, among other positive outcomes (*SUN Community Schools Evaluation*). The next year saw the addition of another SUN site, bringing the total to 86.

Figure 11: Map of SUN Community School Sites, 2018



Source: Multnomah County, 2018

All of David Douglas’s thirteen schools are SUN community schools, and the other smaller districts in the county are nearing the same goal. Over half of Portland Public’s schools are

SUN community schools. Nine different partners serve as lead agencies operating the community school sites, with many more partner organizations aligned to provide specific services. The SUN initiative has “survived changes in City and County leadership, in school superintendents, potential budget cuts, and downturns in the economy, yet still managed to grow” throughout the past two decades (Samuels). Deputy Director of the CCS, Reuben Jacobson, said in an interview that SUN is a national leader in thinking and organization, and that many other initiatives are seeking to replicate aspects of the SUN model.

SUN community school model

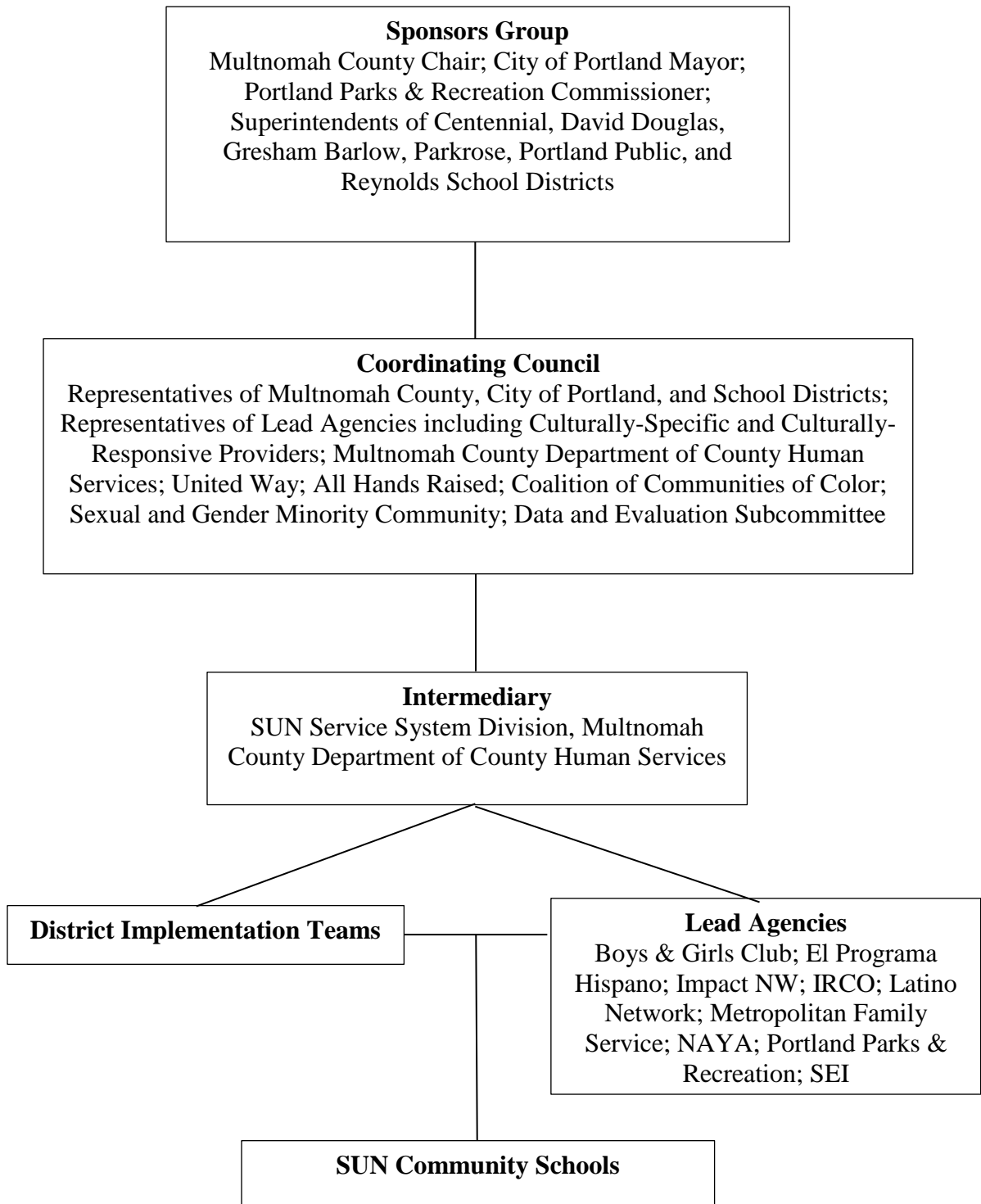
The SUN community schools operate using a variation on the ‘lead agency model’ developed by CAS. Similar to the CAS community schools, a lead agency manages and implements the community school programming at each school site. This organization employs the CSC and any other school-level staff, working with the principal and other school staff to select candidates. The lead agency also coordinates and partners with other organizations to provide additional services and programs (Hamman and Hall 9). SUN categorizes the programs they provide similarly to the CAS developmental triangle, with academics, extended-day activities, and social and health services as the three main components that seek to engage and involve youth, families, and the community (8). The after-school program is the most visible aspect of the SUN community schools, with a variety of programs including recreational, academic support, academic enrichment, mentoring, leadership, adult education, and cultural. In-class instruction is strengthened in academic-focused after-school activities, which at some schools are also taught by the

student's teachers. Health and social services include food pantries, school-based health clinics, poverty assistance, case management services, and other supports. The offerings at each school are flexible and adaptable to the community and are developed with community involvement in needs and resources assessments.

Unlike the CAS community school model, the SUN community schools situate the lead agencies within a larger framework facilitated by Multnomah County. This framework enables SUN to span six districts and encompass multiple nonprofit partners. Rather than each lead agency developing the capacity to manage all aspects of their partnerships, the County convenes and supports all the collaborators. The role of the County resembles the 'backbone support organization' proposed by Kania and Kramer in their article about collective impact, which the SUN collaborators have utilized to conceptualize and frame their initiative. SUN uses the term 'managing partner', "which indicates that the County has responsibilities that were more like other 'partners' than just coordinating the leadership and administering the school-based strategy", including providing foundational funding for the initiative (Jacobson 93-94). However, Jacobson uses the term 'intermediary' to describe the County's role, which I will use as well. This is consistent with language used by the CCS in the recent Community School Standards, which SUN is using to shape the initiative. As the intermediary, the County is responsible for administration of the entire Sun Service System, which includes staffing leadership groups, providing technical support, assisting acquisition of funding, supervising partners through MOUs and contracts, managing evaluation and accountability, communicating between partners, providing training for CSCs and other staff, developing supportive policy, and anything else SUN needs on the system-level to function effectively (94). The County's

role as intermediary provides a level of consistency across the SUN initiative while allowing for flexibility and adaptability at each site.

The following organizational chart outlines the leadership structure of the SUN initiative. The Sponsors Group is the top leadership component, with representatives from Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and the six school districts. It is supported by the Coordinating Council, which combines representatives from the Sponsors Group with representatives from the lead agencies as well as relevant organizations such as United Way and the CCC. Staff of the SUN Service System Division manage the intermediary aspect of the County's role, coordinating with District Implementation Teams and lead agencies to implement the SUN community schools. The placement of the SUN Service System Division in the center of the organizational chart represents the centralized role the County plays as intermediary for the initiative, facilitating aspects of the initiative at all levels.

Figure 12: SUN Initiative Organizational Chart

Source: Adapted from Jacobson (2016) and Multnomah County SUN Service System materials (2016)

The SUN community school model is innovative in its use of the County as intermediary. Other examples of similarly structured initiatives have emerged, such as in Kent County, Michigan beginning in 2005 (Lubell 43-44). However, SUN is the oldest and most extensive initiative of this structure. There are many benefits to this model. Conceptualizing such a collaboration on a broad level from the beginning is rare, but this has enabled SUN to be a systemic partnership from the beginning, increasing its impact. The geographic area of Multnomah County has encouraged growth and a system-level mindset. The County as intermediary has considerable capacity as an organization, allowing SUN to effectively leverage existing resources rather than starting from scratch. Multnomah County's role in facilitating SUN has influenced all aspects of the initiative and demonstrated an effective innovation on the more traditional lead agency model for community schools.

Understanding SUN's environment, historical development, and organizational structure provides a foundation for the exploration of the initiative's efficacy. The intersecting forces of poverty and racial diversity create the complex environment in which SUN operates and the challenges it seeks to address for public school students. Beyond looking at the features of SUN's organizational structure, the goals of this case study involve a closer look at what this organizational structure is able to achieve for the initiative. My research findings, including interviews with SUN practitioners, illuminate how SUN's unique organizational structure has helped it achieve success in the areas of sustainability and racial equity, as well as creating some challenges. The next chapter details sources and research methods before moving on to results from the research and discussion of their implications in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

I first became aware of SUN during the summer of 2018 when I had an internship with the Oregon chapter of the national education policy advocacy organization Stand for Children. This internship helped me become familiar with political and social dynamics around education in the Portland metro area and its demographic and geographic features. I became well-acquainted with the different school districts, education-related nonprofit organizations, and their relationships and collaborations. During this internship, I had the opportunity to speak with staff of several different organizations involved in SUN and tour Earl Boyles Elementary School, a SUN community school in David Douglas. However, during this time, I did not have a topic for my thesis in mind nor an awareness of the concepts underlying community schools. While the knowledge I gained during my summer internship gave me foundational understanding and contextual background and helped me decide to focus on SUN community schools for my thesis, it did not provide direct sources of information that I reference in my research.

An appreciable amount of written material on the SUN initiative exists, though most dates from the first decade of the initiative. The richest source of material are the reports and updates about SUN published by Multnomah County itself, many of which are publicly available on the County's website. One such report was published in 2003, written by Marjory Hamman and Diana Hall, at the completion of a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which provides useful context and information about the early growth of the SUN system (Hamann, Marjory, and Diana Hall. *Schools Uniting Neighborhoods: Successful Collaboration in an Environment of Constant Change*. Report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003.). The most recent material on the County website on SUN dates

from the 2010-2011 school year. For context on county and school district demographics, I also relied on public sources such as reports commissioned by the County and the yearly ‘report cards’ required of each school and school district by the Department of Education. The CCS has featured the SUN initiative in several of its reports, most notably in a 2011 guide about the process of ‘scaling up’ community schools initiatives. SUN has also been featured in a variety of news articles throughout the past twenty years. In terms of literature published in journals, few articles exist. Sources I obtained included an article by Dianne Iverson (2005), former education policy director for the office of the Multnomah County Chair; an empirical study on SUN outcomes for high school students by Furrer et al. (2012); and an article by current SUN Program Supervisor Diana Hall (2012). Data from these types of sources is mainly featured in the overview and history of the SUN initiative, most useful for providing general understanding of SUN and its environment.

A key source for my research was the 2016 dissertation by Reuben Jacobson that examines SUN as one of its foundational case studies. Jacobson also spoke with me in his capacity as the Deputy Director of the CCS. Jacobson’s case study of SUN details the origins of the initiative and the organizational, financial, political, and leadership structures that allow it to operate. He places this study in the context of his broader knowledge of community schools, CCIs, and public education. To construct the SUN case study, Jacobson relied on interviews with key stakeholders, in-person observations, and a school site visit. He interviewed 17 stakeholders, including one superintendent, three County staff, five site coordinators, and eight individuals on the school and community levels, as well as observing meetings of leadership groups and visiting one of the SUN community schools. Jacobson also relied on many of the same sources I utilized, including the

Hamman and Hall report, the CCS scaling up guide, sources created by Multnomah County itself, and news articles. Jacobson's dissertation was an invaluable source for my research given the extensive information and analysis it provides, and it is the most recent and thorough examination of SUN on a systemic level.

Jacobson and other scholars have documented and explored the collaborative organizational structure of SUN, its ability to manage growth, and the positive outcomes of SUN community schools. Jacobson's recent and thorough look at SUN as a collective impact initiative detailed what organizational features, including leadership, funding, and political climate, have allowed it to exist, function, and succeed. As a researcher, I was intrigued the more I learned about SUN and saw that there was more to analyze about the impact of SUN's organizational structure on its outcomes and function. I sought to look at SUN in the current moment, as the initiative has undergone some significant changes since Jacobson's study, including a redistribution of site contracts and leadership restructuring. I also hoped to illuminate how the organizational structure affects the initiative, including areas in which SUN is notably successful and/or are less common in other community schools initiatives. Building on previous scholarship in this way required me to gather information from current SUN constituents.

I interviewed eleven stakeholders at different levels in the SUN system, including staff of the County, partner organizations, school districts, and schools. Interviews were conducted over the phone, lasting 30 to 45 minutes, except for one longer in-person meeting with County staff in January 2018. I interviewed two County staff that help manage the SUN program and communicated throughout the research process for additional information and fact-checking help. Of the nine lead agencies that operate SUN

community schools, I was able to interview representatives from three organizations. On the district level, I interviewed representatives from two of the six school districts. Finally, I interviewed four principals and assistant principals at the high school, middle school, and elementary school levels. As per the requirements of the Scripps College Institutional Review Board, the identity of all interviewees and their organizational affiliations are kept confidential. SUN is a particularly broad collaboration of organizations and entities, and limitations of time and resources meant I could not interview individuals from every institution. However, the diversity of my sample provided sufficient information and a variety of viewpoints for this discussion.

I asked all interviewees similar questions, focusing on the relationship between County management and collaborators because of the uniqueness of SUN's organizational structure and the role of the County as intermediary for the initiative. I adapted questions to highlight aspects of each interviewee's unique role. Sample questions included:

1. What is your role within your organization, and how is it related to SUN?
2. What has been your experience working with the SUN initiative?
3. What has been effective about the collaboration in SUN?
4. How could collaboration be improved?
5. How has the involvement of culturally-specific organizations affected SUN?
6. What are the benefits of managing SUN at the county level? Challenges?
7. What are the biggest challenges facing SUN? What does it need to be sustained?

Interview questions were used to prompt discussion, but ample flexibility was given for interviewees to discuss topics important to them. Conversations developed organically, and I found most interviewees to be open and expressive about their experiences with SUN community schools.

After completing all eleven interviews, I reviewed my notes to identify common topics and themes. I combined the subjects that came to the surface with my existing

understanding of SUN's unique and successful qualities while looking at how the organizational structure influenced these areas of interest. Throughout this process I found that the common topics that most or all my interviewees discussed could be organized around the themes of sustainability and racial equity. My research had made me aware of SUN's status as a positive example of sustainability for community schools and education reform initiatives and its uncommon focus on addressing racial disparities and incorporating culturally-accessible services. My questions about collaboration and the role of the County in interview questions yielded many comments about how the organizational structure of SUN contributes or detracts from the longevity of the initiative and its ability to grapple with issues of race and ethnicity. The holistic identification of themes from broad interview questions allowed me to pinpoint topics and issues most at the forefront of the experiences of SUN stakeholders at the current moment. I have used these themes, sustainability and racial equity, to organize both my results and discussion chapters to better illustrate how both are affected and addressed by SUN given its organizational structure and leadership model.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS—A Focus on Sustainability

The results of my interviews regarding the longevity of SUN revolved around actions, structures, and strategies that have enabled the initiative to sustain itself over twenty years while simultaneously undergoing an impressive expansion. The definition of sustainability from the 2017 CCS Standards for community schools and its six components (infrastructure, a collaborative system, long-term vision, evaluation, funding, and political and community support) provide a useful framework for understanding the key factors that have contributed to the sustainability of SUN (see page 35 for full definition). Comments from my interviews are supplemented with information from Jacobson's investigation and other sources to provide relevant context. My results highlight how the role of the County contributes to sustainability, particularly the centralization or decentralization of certain aspects. Interviewees also discussed some limitations and challenges to sustaining the initiative and how they are affected by the expansive organizational structure of SUN.

Infrastructure

My interviewees indicated that SUN has been strengthened by the existing capacity and expertise of Multnomah County in areas such as service provision, communications, policy, and law. As intermediary, the County coordinates and manages SUN, but it also contributes a significant amount of resources. Adding the County's history of collaborations with outside organizations, the County's involvement greatly increased the array of partners and resources available to SUN collaborators. Interviewees also indicated that the County's role has given SUN more stability of staffing and resources. In the beginning of the initiative, the County provided existing infrastructure on a broad level that

has been further aligned and strengthened around SUN over time. While other entities could have developed the needed capacity, the County's role as intermediary for SUN leveraged existing capacity and integrated the initiative with local government structures. This stable, strong infrastructure is an essential foundation for a sustainable system-level collaboration.

Many interviewees indicated that the County's role strengthens SUN's infrastructure by acting as an authoritative, objective intermediary. Situating the management of SUN at the county level gave it the institutional leverage to work on the system level and a clear geographic and organizational span of influence. County-level SUN leaders can advocate for and reinforce contracts and MOUs as well as mediate between schools, districts, and partner organizations. Several interviewees noted how helpful it is when County staff work as an objective third party to convene partner organizations. Some voiced an opinion that working with the County in a central position creates a less nimble infrastructure that deals with more bureaucracy, but overall the ability of the County to bring diverse partners to the table was cited as important to the success of the initiative. A level of consistency and equity is achieved across the entire county because of the centralized, authoritative nature of the County's role.

A collaborative system

The shared leadership model that SUN utilizes is inherently collaborative and essential to helping sustain the initiative. Jacobson notes that "leaders...created structures that were designed to sustain, deepen, and scale the strategy across the county" from the early days of the initiative (80). Leadership structures have evolved throughout the last

twenty years to better reflect the role of partner organizations and the addition of new partners to the table. Many of my interviewees emphasized relationship-building as central to collaboration with the many partners involved in SUN. They recognized the time and attention it takes to build the relationships that sustain a system-level collaboration. They hope that SUN is or is becoming core to the mission of every partner, rather than being just another program. Sustaining such a broad collaboration of many different types of entities has been enabled by this focus on relationship-building and the facilitating role of the County in leadership structures.

The collaborative leadership structures that govern SUN convene representatives from partner organizations and seek to give all major stakeholders a voice in leadership processes. One interviewee described the leadership groups as having a ‘hologram’ structure: the whole makeup of SUN is reflected by the representatives in the shared leadership structures. County staff support leadership groups with materials, staffing, technical support, and County representatives serve in the groups. However, the process within these structures seeks to be collaborative and not dominated by the County; for example, leadership groups collectively designate group facilitators. Leadership structures have evolved over time into two main leadership groups: the Sponsors Group and the Coordinating Council. These groups have continually been examined for effectiveness and restructured as needed to improve SUN as a collaborative system.

The Sponsors Group is made up of leaders of organizations that directly contribute financially to the core programs of the SUN Service System. At the beginning of the SUN initiative, the Sponsors Group was the only governing body. The members of the Sponsors Group consisted of “directors and heads of organizations with decision-making authority

for their institutions” whose financial commitment to SUN “signified shared ownership” (Jacobson 84). Its membership and oversight has remained largely similar over time but it now receives and considers input and recommendation from other leadership groups, mainly the Coordinating Council. As of fall 2016, members included the Multnomah County Chair, the City of Portland Mayor, the Portland Parks and Recreation Commissioner, and the superintendents of the six school districts involved in SUN. The group currently meets once a quarter, providing oversight to the initiative and facilitating joint decision-making among funders, especially with regards to funding and policy. The Sponsors Group is essential for establishing and maintaining shared vision, policy, and resources for SUN which are necessary to sustain the initiative.

The Coordinating Council was created to increase stakeholder representation in collaborative leadership of SUN, increasing a sense of shared ownership and buy-in from partners. In the early years of the initiative, the Sponsors Group, SUN’s only governing body, “lacked representation from the nonprofit community, parents, educators, and youth”, calling into question the extent of community engagement (Jacobson 85). When the School-Age Task Force suggested creating the Coordinating Council in 2007, they sought to “share ownership and responsibility so that it wasn’t viewed as a county-dominated effort” because “there was a perception at the time that the county...was taking actions without the input of key stakeholders” (87-88). The Coordinating Council increased the role of all nonprofit partners. Its role is to give feedback and input to the Sponsors Group as well as facilitate service alignment and assessment of the effectiveness of programs. The Council meets once a month, and members include representatives from the sponsoring organizations, the Multnomah County Department of Human Services, school

districts, nonprofit lead agencies, Coalition of Communities of Color, the local United Way, the Portland Children's Levy, and others. The creation and operation of the Council increases collaborative leadership and facilitates stakeholder buy-in and shared ownership, increasing SUN's sustainability as an initiative.

In addition to shared leadership structures, interviewees described how initiative-level trainings and meetings of sub-groups facilitate collaboration in SUN. County staff convene different members for frequent trainings and meetings that help increase consistency and coordination across the system. All CSCs attend trainings about every other month with the County. A variety of other subgroups meet regularly, including supervisors of the nonprofit lead agencies and liaisons from each school district to coordinate among themselves and provide input to their representatives on the Coordinating Council. Meetings on the system-level also bring together CSCs, principals, and district staff a few times a year. While my interviews focused on system-level collaboration, interviewees indicated that on the school level, similar meetings regularly bring together SUN staff and supervisors with teachers, principals, and school staff to facilitate collaboration. These structures and processes indicate the commitment of all partners and stakeholders to making SUN a collaborative system to increase its effectiveness and sustainability.

Long-term vision

A long-term vision to create and maintain a community schools initiative is necessary for sustainability. County staff that I interviewed voiced the long-term vision for SUN most explicitly. For Multnomah County, SUN is not just another program, but a key

anti-poverty strategy to align and improve service provision and address issues of equity. This perspective is indicated in actions taken by the County and the City of Portland, such as incorporating SUN as a line item in budgets and into the thirty-year Portland Plan. SUN is an integral strategy that they want to sustain and rely on. Early relationship-building and sharing successes helped the County, City, and other partners to realize that SUN was a strategy they wanted to prioritize. District staff said in interviews that they appreciated the expansion of SUN and wanted more of their schools to become SUN community schools, indicating that they view SUN as a long-term effort. Jacobson discussed varying understanding and sometimes lukewarm opinions of SUN among district superintendents, suggesting weaker long-term vision and buy-in from some stakeholders. Generally, all my interviewees agreed on the bottom line of helping and supporting kids and families, and recognized SUN as a stable system that has proven its effectiveness as a method of coordinating and delivering services.

Evaluation and accountability

Part of the County's role as intermediary is managing evaluation processes for SUN, creating a centralized accountability process that increases consistency across the initiative. Several of my interviewees noted that having the evaluation processes situated at the county level was a positive benefit of the way SUN is organized. The County is responsible for setting targets and metrics, managing data collection systems, and keeping partners accountable. SUN's leadership groups use evaluation to inform their progress and future directions. Recently, the County implemented a new data collection system for use at school site. Interviews indicated that there have been some challenges in implementing

the new data collection system, but in time it should increase evaluation accuracy, consistency, and breadth. Interviewees also indicated some challenges with evaluation and expectations that come from the County given the level of difference between different schools and districts.

Funding

All interviewees mentioned funding as the biggest challenge facing SUN, unsurprising in a state (and country) that has faced repeated budget shortfalls and cuts to public education funding. Given the scale of the societal problems that the SUN collaborators seek to combat, it is near impossible to have enough funding; as one interviewee put it, there is infinite need but scarce resources. However, funding was one of the original problems that led to the creation of SUN to more efficiently and effectively use limited funding and resources (Jacobson 106). SUN was designed to align existing County, City, and school district resources for greater impact. Funders understand the way that aligning their resources improves effectiveness, increasing the incentive for sustaining the SUN initiative.

Unlike grants from public or private funders, the County is committed to supplying a base level of funding to SUN every year. The City of Portland has made a similar commitment. The County has been the largest contributor of resources since the beginning of SUN, providing stable, long-term funding. Funding sources for SUN have been diversified over time, but the most funding still comes from the County. While the SUN collaborators would still like to see more funding in general, the reliable funding from the County is key to the sustainability of the initiative. Without the County's support, it is

unlikely that the City and school districts would be able to provide enough funding to support SUN on its current broad scale (Jacobson 111).

In addition to the reliable funding from Multnomah County, SUN leaders have intentionally diversified funding sources over time through collaboration in shared leadership structures to increase sustainability of funding. Jacobson notes that “diversifying the funding was an intentional decision that created greater investment of partner organizations in the endeavor”, increasing stakeholder buy-in (110). School districts now contribute finances directly to the SUN community schools, when in the early years they only contributed in-kind resources (Jacobson 108). Contributing direct funding demonstrates institutional commitment to the initiative. SUN has accessed many additional sources of funding over time, including grants from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Oregon State Department of Human Services, 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, Safe Schools grants, and the Portland Children’s Levy. Diversified funding sources increases the initiative’s ability to weather funding changes. Shared leadership structures, particularly the Sponsors Group, bring funders together and allow them to deal with budget issues collaboratively, rather than entities deciding budgets separately and causing other partners to scramble to make ends meet. Jacobson cites an example when some schools were losing funding because of grants running out, and the Coordinating Council worked through the issue to make recommendations to the Sponsors Group that would prevent losing those community school sites (111).

Political and community support

As an initiative begun by politicians on the county government level, SUN leaders understood the importance of political support from the beginning and intentionally built political buy-in and supportive policies until SUN was ingrained into the strategy of collaborators. Leaders knew that “creating a broad base of political support” ensured that SUN would be “durable” and “difficult to disband” (Jacobson 115). My interviewees noted that the role of the County in creating and facilitating SUN makes it more visible and easier to achieve buy-in from City authorities, County authorities, superintendents, and policy-makers. They spoke about the intentionality that has gone into building champions across all levels of the initiative, but especially among political authorities. SUN has also become incorporated into county and city policy to make it *the* strategy for supporting school success, allowing it to weather changes in political leadership (Jacobson 115). SUN has become ingrained in the political culture in Multnomah County. Former director of the Multnomah County Department of Community and Family Services, Lorenzo Poe, said in 2011:

It has become a model that in the City of Portland and in Multnomah County, you cannot run for public office unless you embrace SUN as a model. You cannot run for school board unless you clearly articulate your support of SUN as a model and how it in fact supports the academic achievement of students. When you run for office, I can guarantee you that there’s a number of organizations that ask every candidate the same series of questions, and it all centers around that (“Portland/Multnomah...”).

Through the intentional work of advocates, SUN has become politically “bullet proof” and embedded in the strategy of the County, City, and school districts (Jacobson 116).

SUN’s design has helped build a broad base of community support. When SUN was started at the ‘grass tops’, political leaders knew they needed to integrate grassroots

support for the success of the initiative. Partnering with local nonprofit organizations to operate the SUN community schools and including them in leadership structures facilitated this grassroots support (Jacobson 114). Community-based nonprofits already had connections with families and were better situated than the County to build and expand these relationships, increasing community knowledge of and buy-in to SUN. One key way that Multnomah County and the SUN initiative have built community support has been through an increasing emphasis on racial equity, empowerment, and culturally relevant services through partnerships with nonprofits. A racial equity focus, explored in more depth later in this paper, has been a County strategy for increasing authentic engagement and support of the community on the school-level. County staff acknowledged in interviews that they are currently developing a more formal way to incorporate representation of parents, students, and community members in leadership structures, a needed change to improve community support for SUN and responsiveness of the initiative. However, it seems that in general, as SUN has expanded and more parents and students are exposed to community schools, community support has grown.

Limitations and challenges

Comments about the difficulties of the role of the CSC in SUN community schools featured prominently in my interviews with staff at nonprofit lead agencies and several principals. Interviewees described the CSC job as “overwhelming” and “unrealistic”, and said CSCs are “overworked” and have a high burnout and turnover rate. There is no end to what the CSC is expected to do, and SUN is unable to fund more than a few staff members at each site, depending on the size of the school. Interviewees cited the recent addition of

a new technology-based evaluation system by the County to enhance data collection as just one example of the responsibilities being piled on to the CSC role. The longer the tenure of a CSC, the more effective they will become in their role as they accumulate experience, build stronger relationships, and learn more through trainings. SUN is losing human capital regularly in the current model. One interviewee described how essential the CSC is to a successful community school, saying that the model seeks to make the school the hub of the community and the CSC is hub of all aspects of the community school. Given the importance of the CSC to the success and efficacy of community school programs and partnerships, the current state of the role within SUN presents a challenge to the sustainability of the initiative.

SUN has sources of both stable and diversified funding, yet comments from my interviews indicate that funding still feels scarce and can create sustainability challenges, of which the CSC role is an example. The way funding is structured, the salary for staffing comes out of the base budget for each SUN site, and what is left is the programming fund. Tight budgets mean CSC salaries are small, leading to less respect for the role, which is seen as a “stop on the way” rather than a long-term career option. One interviewee asserted that CSCs who are good at their jobs have the skills to get better-paying jobs, contributing to the high turnover rates.

The issues with the CSC role arise in part from the ‘height’ of the SUN initiative’s organizational structure: leaders and the intermediary body (the County) are at a considerable distance from those working on the ground to implement the initiative. Comments from interviewees suggested positive prospects for addressing these challenges, emphasizing the responsiveness of County staff. Many of the SUN leaders and County

staff began involvement in SUN at lower levels in the collaboration, some as CSCs themselves. This understanding among top officials of the nature of the on-the-ground work is a great aid to the administering of SUN and could help partners address challenges like those currently facing the CSC role. Unfortunately, government bureaucracy is not often nimble, and County staff may not have the power to make changes to aspects of SUN without initiative from higher-ups. While the County's role as intermediary has often been an essential reason for SUN's sustainability, there are some downsides to this organizational structure.

As the system grows larger, the barrier to expansion increases, especially when budgets are already tight. The vision for the expansion of SUN is ambitious, but several interviewees voiced concerns that continuing to grow would stretch financial and human resources thin. Comments from some interviewees indicated that they wished SUN would focus more on sustaining and strengthening the system they have, rather than continuing to grow. Of course, most of drive to add community schools comes from districts themselves, who see the positive effects of SUN at other schools and hope to serve more students and families.

Summary

Within the SUN community schools initiative, Multnomah County is uniquely situated to support a sustainable system. The County provides infrastructure and capacity for facilitating collaboration between a broad range of partners and has integrated SUN into its long-term strategy. As an objective intermediary authority, the County reinforces the strength of the initiative, convenes collaborators, and manages evaluation and

accountability for the initiative. Situating the management of SUN at the county level provides a stable funding source and facilitates political support. One method that has been prominent recently for increasing community support and efficacy of community schools is a focus on integrating racial equity and culturally relevant services into the system. As the next section explains, broad-based community support across diverse demographics can help facilitate sustainability, yet promoting racial equity comes with its own challenges as well.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS—Furthering Racial Equity

Before beginning my interviews with SUN collaborators, I was aware of the importance of diverse and culturally-specific services and organizations to the initiative. The extent to which SUN incorporates a focus on racial equity is fairly unique compared to other similar initiatives. I included an interview question focusing on this topic because I was curious about interviewees' perceptions of the effects culturally-specific organizations have had on the initiative. My interviewees were eager to share their thoughts on this topic and some brought it up on their own. They discussed how diverse organizations are included in SUN both as partners and in leadership structures. I've incorporated into their comments more background about how the County has led strategically in this area and has increased its focus on racial equity and diversity over time. A topic that came up frequently in interviews was the recent organizational restructuring of SUN, changing the distribution of partnerships with the aim of improving racial and cultural relevance of services. This event is clearly prominent in institutional memory but has not yet been reported on by researchers due to its recency. The comments from my interviewees highlight the successes of SUN's work on racial equity and benefits for the SUN community schools as well as challenges.

Partnering to enhance racial equity

Culturally-specific organizations have an integral role in the SUN initiative with representatives in leadership and operational structures and as the lead agencies for many of the SUN community schools. The Coalition for Communities of Color and the culturally-specific partner organizations are represented on the Coordinating Council and

communicate with County leaders regularly. As lead agencies, culturally-specific organizations currently operate about two-thirds of the community schools. IRCO operates the most sites (17 community schools), SEI operates 14 sites, and Latino Network and El Programa Hispano each operate 8 sites. The Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) operates 2 sites in Centennial School district. Even at the sites where they are not the lead partner, many of these organizations are involved to provide services for populations not represented by the lead partner. In addition to serving as lead partners for community school sites, many other nonprofits offering culturally-specific services are sub-contracted partners providing individual services at the school level. The integral involvement of these organizations and services furthers equity and effectiveness at all SUN community schools.

District and school staff said emphatically in interviews that the incorporation of culturally-specific services into SUN community schools is important and effective for serving students and their families. Community-based organizations can be responsive to the needs of specific populations in ways that school, districts, and other organizations cannot. Partnerships with cultural organizations provide diverse staff that the school would not be able to find or employ on its own. Interviewees said that for their students, SUN partnerships provide diverse role models when 90 to 95% of teachers are white. Having role models and culturally-relatable adults can increase the students' engagement in school and their sense of belonging, especially for students of immigrant and refugee populations. The specialized services that these nonprofit partners provide help schools provide the "wrap-around services" that families need. Interviewees also emphasized that culturally-specific staff are particularly important for family outreach, especially where language

barriers exist. Increasing family engagement is a core desired outcome for SUN, and interviewees asserted that culturally-specific staff and services are key for reaching parents and empowering them to have a voice in the education of their children.

Several interviewees also cited trainings that nonprofit partners provide to teachers and other school staff to help them engage with parents and students in a culturally-aware, respectful way. One example is a training by IRCO prior to parent-teacher conferences about Somali culture. Most Somali adults in Portland have had little to no contact with a formal education system, and cultural norms around physical contact and gender roles are very different from mainstream American culture. This training and many others enable the diverse populations that participate in the public school system to feel more comfortable, welcome, and understood inside the school building. Given the growing diversity and racial disparities in Multnomah County, culturally-specific and responsive services are an essential and integrated part of SUN community schools.

Increasing focus on racial equity over time

The collaboration and integration of culturally-specific organizations with SUN has increased throughout its evolution, coupled with an increasing understanding of and focus on racial equity at the county level. The intentions of early SUN leaders and County authorities were to address disparities and the challenges of diversity in the public education system in Multnomah County, but the leadership role and representation of communities of color and culturally-specific organizations has grown over time. The importance of racial equity and diversity in shaping school-level services has also increased. In the last 3 years, this focus has taken on an even bigger role as SUN became a

pilot site for implementing new perspectives and practices around diversity, equity, and empowerment.

As Jacobson noted in his dissertation, County leaders recognized disparities across the County and sought to address them when developing the SUN model. Jacobson asserts that “greater equity in the delivery of services...was a major motivation in seeking greater collaboration and coordination across service providers in Multnomah County” (75). When deciding on a model to facilitate this collaboration and alignment, leaders alighted on public schools as a place that marginalized populations already came into contact frequently, and “saw community schools as a way to include partners who were already embedded in the community and had relationships with minority and poor populations” (Jacobson 79). For schools to really be centers of the community, all sectors of the community needed to be able to access the community school services and buy-in to the model. Several of my interviewees noted the importance of working *with* instead of *for* marginalized individuals to facilitate self- and community-empowerment without taking a deficit-oriented view the population. One County employee said that SUN sought to give overlooked and marginalized folks the tools they need to empower their untapped potential, and even 20 years of SUN community schools has only just begun to tap this potential.

While an equity focus and the involvement of culturally-specific partners and services have been in place since the beginning of SUN, important steps have been taken to increase representation and involvement. In the second year of the initiative, County leadership began to intentionally pull out County employees from the community schools and sought to empower people from the community by having nonprofit partners employ the school-level staff. Over time, the representation of communities of color and the

relevant partner organizations has been increased in the Coordinating Council with specific seats designated. One County employee emphasized in an interview that the presence of these voices at the table has had a profound impact on what is discussed and has informed SUN's development. The increasing inclusion of representatives of communities of color in the leadership structures for SUN has been an important component of racial equity in the initiative.

In the past decade, Multnomah County has taken important steps to implement an equity lens across its programs and services, with SUN as a leading force and a pilot site. Multnomah County has developed its own Equity and Empowerment Lens with a Racial Justice Focus, based on national and international scholarship and practice, which it began implementing across departments in 2011. This lens originated out of work begun by the Multnomah County Health Department in 2008 to recognize and address disparities and inequities experienced by communities of color, immigrants, and refugees. Their pioneering work led the Board of County Commissioners to approve a plan to “develop and implement a tool that could be widely used throughout the county to more intentionally examine and address root causes of inequities”, resulting in the Equity and Empowerment Lens that “specifically highlights the importance of integrating racial justice principles and practices” (Balajee et al. 7). The Lens is a strategy and policy to improve the quality and effectiveness of the County's services, resource allocations, and investments (7-8). The Lens recognizes how institutionalized “policies, procedures and practices can perpetuate forms of oppression that are both hidden and overt” and calls for reorganization to institutionalize equity and racial justice instead (4). A *targeted universalist approach* “takes into account that overarching, ‘universal’ programs and policies do not often target

structurally disadvantaged groups”, indicating a need for approaches that directly address the needs of marginalized populations, especially communities of color, immigrants, and refugees (8-9).

The targeted universalist approach describes many of the ways that SUN has sought to incorporate culturally-specific services. In the process of implementing the Equity and Empowerment Lens in the county, SUN was the pilot site for applying the Lens to purchasing and contracting through a new Request for Proposals (RFP) process in 2015. Multnomah County is using the SUN RFP as the main example in recent recommendations for contracting culturally-specific and culturally-responsive services (Multnomah County Office of Diversity and Equity).

The 2015 re-designed RFP process for the SUN community schools led to significant changes in the distribution of lead partners, seeking to increase equity and cultural-relevancy across the initiative. In interviews, County staff shared the intentions behind the recent RFP. In the early phases of SUN, individual schools could have a large role in selecting their lead partner, but as the size of the SUN system grew, leadership saw that they could not use that process and maintain equity across the system. To renew contracts with their nonprofit partners, the County now periodically does an RFP process. While County staff already worked with all their partners to use culturally-responsive and trauma-informed perspectives in their services, the County sought to better represent the populations that SUN serves. When developing the 2015 RFP, the County examined demographics closely, focusing on the racial and ethnic makeup of children living in poverty across the county and how these intersections are likely to change in the future. Leaders developed racial and ethnic ‘regions’ based on their demographic examinations to

better match schools with lead agency partners. The new RFP led to over 25 schools changing their lead agency, going from about one-third to two-thirds of SUN sites operated by culturally-specific organizations. County staff prepared guiding documents and provided funding to facilitate the transition, also holding meetings with principals and both ingoing and outgoing staff at every SUN school. County SUN leaders believed the revised RFP process was essential to articulate their commitment to equity and racial justice.

Perceptions of 2015 RFP

The recent RFP came up organically in all my interviews and played a substantial role in the comments and perspectives of my interviewees. Despite now being in the second full year of the RFP, it is clearly still prominent in institutional memory. Through my conversations with principals, district staff, nonprofit partners, and County staff, I learned that the RFP transition was complex and at times tense, with varying results across the SUN system. Opinions about the transition varied widely, with some stakeholders supporting the intentions of the County, but perceiving the transition as poorly managed, and others believed it was a misguided decision to redesign the RFP process. The RFP has created some conflict among the partners involved in SUN, but it remains to be seen how the transition will affect the initiative in the long-term.

For nonprofit partner organizations, the RFP transition created challenges of capacity and changed relationship dynamics. One interviewee shared that usually the atmosphere among different partner organizations is very collaborative, but the RFP process introduced an air of competition. For the organizations that lost community school sites, it was a painful transition. County staff shared that some organizations no longer

wanted to work with the County after the RFP process, but that it seemed that most major partner organizations understood the intentions behind the County's decision, even while expressing the difficulty of losing sites. For culturally-specific organizations that gained lead partner status at a significant number of new sites, the RFP transition presented the challenge of rapidly building capacity. One interviewee described it as if "specialists suddenly became general practitioners". Relationships are key to the successful function of community schools, and organizations faced the need to build and manage an increasing number of relationships, often across more school districts than before. The reception of the changes caused by the 2015 RFP varied at different school sites, contributing to the challenging experience of nonprofit partner organizations.

School and district staff had varying opinions about and experiences of the transitions brought on by the recent RFP. Some interviewees felt strongly that the process ignored the voices of school staff, students, and families who had no say in the results of the process. The County's role as intermediary meant that it had the final say in all contracting and procurement. One interviewee described the process as "forced divorces and marriages", disregarding the relationships schools and lead agencies had intentionally built over the long-term. The resentment generated by the transition made building relationships with new partners difficult in some schools. There was discontinuity between systems and procedures developed by previous partners and the "learning curve" faced by organizations that gained a significant number of new sites. Another downside of the transition for some schools was a loss of integration and funding because of the way grants are coordinated. Many sites supplement SUN funding with grants such as the 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants, but because of the way the grants are written schools

were forced to separate this funding from SUN when the organizations involved changed. However, other interviewees noted that the transition was “seamless” at many sites, even at schools whose lead partners changed. It seemed that some sites were able to keep the same school-level staff in place because they simply transferred employment to the new lead agency.

Regardless of their opinion about the transition, most interviewees noted the positive effects of the increasing capacity and role of culturally-specific organizations to increase support for certain marginalized populations. County staff recognized the need for better communication and transition planning to improve future RFP processes. Overall, it seems that participation and effectiveness is down in some schools, but SUN will survive. All interviewees voiced their continued support for the SUN initiative and their desire to harness whatever resources are available to support their students and families.

Summary

Results from my interviews indicate that SUN’s collaboration with culturally-specific organizations and its work on racial equity has enhanced the initiative in many tangible ways such as improving services, increasing authentic engagement of students and families, and supporting teachers. Internal efforts by the County have influenced and been influenced by the work and organizational structure of SUN. Attempting to deconstruct institutionalized disparities is difficult work and managing the change it requires is similarly difficult. Reactions to the 2015 RFP illustrate some of the tensions even well-intentioned organizational change can create. However, the focus of SUN on empowerment and equity helps its community schools become more than just a way to provide social

services more efficiently. In the following section, discussion of interview results will explore how the themes of sustainability and racial equity intersect, what these results indicate about SUN's current state and future, and the relevance of these conclusions for other community schools initiatives.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

My research adds to previous investigations of SUN by reporting on the experience and perceptions of stakeholders of the state of collaboration, diversity, leadership, and challenges within the initiative at the current moment. Jacobson's dissertation provides extensive information about SUN's developmental, organizational, and leadership structures, and the historical content from other sources is rich as well. Building on these sources, I explore how SUN's organizational structure, specifically the role of Multnomah County, affects the initiative. I have organized information from interviews around two relevant themes that are in the forefront at the present: sustainability and racial equity. My findings indicate that the County's role as intermediary for SUN has been key to furthering longevity and fostering racial equity. The ways that SUN's organizational structure has allowed it to be successful in these areas, as well as challenges that have arisen, are relevant for other community school and education reform initiatives. At this time, addressing racial disparities is an area in which education reform efforts should seek to grow. Sustainability has always been important for all sorts of initiatives, and has been discussed in other examinations of SUN. However, a rapidly changing environment frequently requires new approaches to sustainability, and several key aspects of sustainability for community schools to address have recently been codified in the CCS Standards. The results from my interviews provide useful information about the current state of SUN, potential future directions and challenges, and the applicability of these aspects to other community schools initiatives.

The SUN community schools initiative is a complex effort facilitated through collaboration between many organizations. My results indicate that SUN has continued to

be effective in the current moment, although there are aspects that could be improved to increase effectiveness. SUN's successes in remaining a sustainable organization and fostering racial equity are particularly due to its organizational structure. The role of the County organization in SUN and the collaborative structures it has built and facilitated are essential to SUN's successes. Additionally, the strength of community-based nonprofits and their partnerships with the County and school districts through SUN are critical; SUN would not be able to serve and engage authentically with as many students and families without the key contributions and work of nonprofit partners. The challenges that SUN is currently facing can largely be attributed to the difficulties of maintaining such a 'tall' organizational structure. The distance of leadership from schools and staff working on-the-ground has created tension when lower-level constituents do not feel included in decision-making or disagree with changes made by leaders. Despite some challenges, commitment to SUN community schools among stakeholders is strong, and it is a proven method for addressing the needs of students and families in Multnomah County.

Sustainability

SUN has thus far survived leadership changes, political shifts, potential budget cuts, and increasing economic and demographic pressures, all the while strengthening and growing as an initiative. The long-term sustainability of SUN is a key strength of the initiative, which can largely be attributed to the role of Multnomah County as intermediary. The County's role in SUN provides the initiative with a strong and stable infrastructure that leverages capacity. Rather than building entirely new structures, SUN was conceived as a way to align existing resources, unlike many other community school models. SUN

was designed to be a sustainable strategy. The positioning of the County in SUN's infrastructure has also helped sustain the initiative by creating an intermediary to facilitate the collaboration of many diverse partners. Sustaining such a broad collaboration of many different types of entities has been enabled by a focus on relationship-building and the facilitating role of the County in leadership structures.

A long-term vision to create and maintain a community schools initiative is necessary for sustainability. The County's vision is influential given its centralized role as intermediary. It seems that a long-term vision for SUN is strongest on the county level (and similar for the City of Portland), and could be improved among other stakeholders. The County's role has also helped SUN use evaluation and accountability to track progress and improve effectiveness. However, the flexibility each school site has to adapt services to their community has made it difficult to create data collection methods, standards, and expectations that are relevant to all the community schools in such a broad system. Still, sustainability and improvement of the initiative has been facilitated by the frequent and continual evaluation based on centrally agreed-upon processes that increase consistency of understanding among partners and leaders.

Multnomah County's role as intermediary allows SUN to leverage a stable, sustainable funding source that would be harder to access for other models of community schools initiatives. Diversified funding sources and collaborative financial decision-making on top of the stable base funding from Multnomah County have allowed SUN to grow sustainably over twenty years. Another factor allowing SUN to be sustainable as an initiative has been broad-based political support built by County staff and community

leaders. Also, the intentionality of SUN leaders in building community support has contributed to the sustainability of the initiative.

SUN has exhibited sustainability throughout twenty years of growth, but as it continues to grow it may face additional limitations. To continue to grow an already-large system sustainably, Multnomah County and other SUN collaborators would need to leverage additional resources. SUN should be aware of possible changes in the availability of federal grants with the new administration and continue to utilize new funding sources as they become available, such as state-level ESSA funding. Continuing to grow would require increasing the capacity of partner organizations and likely bringing in new partners. In this case, continuing to intentionally manage relationships to build common understanding is a must.

SUN has successfully managed an impressive scaling up process while maintaining a sustainable system, so it seems likely that leaders will continue to intentionally balance the necessary capacities for growth and systemic sustainability. SUN leaders will need to continue to strengthen relationships between existing partners, especially when there is staff turnover. This will entail addressing the conflict created by the 2015 RFP, which is still generating strong feelings in the second year of its implementation. SUN leaders could include in this process building a stronger long-term vision among partners to better facilitate change processes in the future. Finally, for long-term success, SUN must address the challenging way the CSC role is currently formulated in its model. Both the CAS community school model and the CCS Standards treat the CSC role as a professional, high-level role requiring significant education, training, and experience. Currently, the CSC role in SUN does not reflect these recommendations as much as it could. SUN has demonstrated

that it is an effective way of leveraging resources to support kids and families, but comments from interviewees suggested that the sustainability and efficacy of SUN community schools could be improved in some ways, such as different funding allotments for school-level staffing.

Racial equity

SUN has explicitly recognized the need for community schools to address racial equity from the beginning and increasingly implemented policies to improve its effectiveness in this area, providing a positive example for other community schools initiatives. Responsiveness to the needs of diverse populations and cultures is a central component of the SUN community schools. Initiatives rooted in public systems and institutions have the potential to isolate families and marginalized communities which have had negative experiences with public schools and see governmental entities as untrustworthy or even dangerous. It is important to note that SUN was started by politicians and continues to be facilitated through public government. SUN has countered potentially isolating effects through extensive collaboration with community-based organizations representing diverse racial and ethnic communities. SUN has not been immune from the challenges of grappling with issues of race, culture, and systemic inequalities, but has developed innovative and forward-thinking ways to address racial equity and disparities. While communities of color in Multnomah County continue to deal with disparities, SUN exemplifies an initiative that seeks to achieve systemic social change by increasing equity and empowerment for all members of its community.

Multnomah County's role as intermediary for SUN has enabled the increased incorporation of racial equity efforts over time. This component of SUN community schools serves as a positive example for other community schools initiatives of how to more effectively serve diverse populations, increase system-level collective impact, and achieve more authentic engagement of students and families. However, one of SUN's biggest challenges at the moment is managing the changes that come as a part of its focus on racial equity. The Equity and Empowerment Lens originated in the County, so it seems from my interviews that the motivations for the 2015 RFP were not clear for some partners, or at least not agreed upon. When dealing with challenging moments of change, effective communication, shared vision, and common values become even more important. Still, SUN demonstrates the value of focusing on racial equity in education reform efforts like community schools. With diversity and disparities in America only increasing, the inclusion of racial equity principles into public government and schools becomes more and more important to achieve lasting social change.

Broader implications

I have asserted that aspects of the SUN initiative are useful as examples for other community schools and education reform efforts. However, there are limitations to the replicability of SUN in other areas, and only certain aspects may be most relevant for other initiatives to consider adopting. Given the flexibility of the community school model to different settings, there are specific characteristics of Multnomah County that have contributed to SUN's success which may not exist in other locations. Understanding the

unique contextual factors contributing to SUN's successes helps us draw the most relevant and applicable lessons from this case.

While SUN was developed to address the environmental challenges facing public schools in Multnomah County, such as widespread and deepening poverty and racial disparities, SUN's environment has several favorable characteristics that have contributed to the initiative's success. Multnomah County enjoys a relatively homogenous political landscape, and while SUN at times has faced political challenges, it has been insulated from tensions around education reform ideologies that may exist in a more polarized environment. The County's role in the SUN initiative is logical to collaborators partly due to geographic characteristics: Multnomah County is the sole entity that encompasses the entirety of the urban area while school districts and city borders have overlapping areas of influence. Additionally, SUN has benefitted immensely from a history of collaboration between the public and private sectors in Multnomah County and a number of strong, well-established community-based nonprofit organizations. The pressures associated with diversity and poverty that SUN faces are considerable, but less intense than similar challenges that social service providers and public schools deal with in other cities and urban centers. Finally, the work of SUN and the County on racial equity has generated less conflict than it would in a different political environment, although resulting actions and decisions have created some tensions. These characteristics of SUN's environment must be considered as limitations that other initiatives may face if trying to replicate aspects of this case.

Despite these limitations, education reformers can draw many lessons from the successes and challenges of SUN. SUN has exemplified sustainability for two decades,

repeatedly enhancing its model to promote longevity. The initiative is strong in the six components of sustainability that the CCS Standards highlight, largely due to the innovative design of its model. This framework was created to be relevant to all community schools initiatives and considering it through the lens of SUN enhances our understanding of its application. While a county-based model may not make sense for all initiatives, the method of using an intermediary organization, as well as increasing collaboration with public entities, has potential for application elsewhere. This type of structure allows initiatives to leverage existing capacity, funds, and efforts, as well as increasing coordination among all partners. For this type of model to be successful, effective collaborative leadership structures need to be in place and include representation from all stakeholders, which SUN does well. Overall, the intentionality of SUN leaders to design a sustainable initiative, build relationships, and lift up political and community champions is a particularly positive example for other reformers seeking to create long-lasting changes.

In our current political climate and with diversity in American forecasted to only increase, all public institutions need to address issues of race, culture, and structural disparities. SUN has dealt with racial equity explicitly and sought to knit it into the fabric of its initiative, rather than limiting this essential work to a single committee or department. County, City, and school district leaders in SUN have recognized where they are lacking in expertise and knowledge, seeking out integral partnerships with community-based organizations deeply in touch with the needs and assets of their communities. These organizations are incorporated into core leadership structures on equal standing with other partners. The resulting challenges are also instructive for other initiatives, including the importance of establishing clear communication and shared understanding of the purpose

behind new directions. The efforts of SUN to provide culturally-relevant services and address disparities has repeatedly put the needs of students and families at the center. Public education reformers can learn from the intentional work of SUN on racial equity as a central component to creating effective, sustainable reforms relevant for today's American society.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The SUN community schools initiative arose out of the efforts of local leaders to address the intersecting challenges created by poverty, diversity, and disparities affecting students and families. A dense urban population faced high levels of mobility and instability. Increasing diversity, including relatively large immigrant and refugee populations, contributed to disparities. These forces created challenges for public schools beyond low academic achievement. Leaders in Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and local school districts recognized the community school model as a possible method to address the needs of students and families. Taking a system-level perspective from the beginning, they sought to align a variety of isolated efforts, programs, and resources to increase their efficacy and impact. Over time, SUN has solidified into a broad-based system of community schools and services with support from many stakeholders. From the model and experience of SUN, other entities can draw important lessons that can contribute to building schools and systems that improve outcomes for students and their families.

The organizational structure of SUN is innovative in the way it situates the county government within the initiative. This unique model uses lead agencies to manage individual community schools but unites all collaborators under the mantle of Multnomah County, which provides staffing and infrastructure for the initiative. This organizational structure is an effective way of leveraging existing capacity and resources possessed by the County because of its role as intermediary for the initiative. Interviews with staff of SUN partner organizations indicated that the County's role is viewed as very beneficial for the initiative, despite occasional challenges. The County's facilitating role has enabled broader partnerships, better collaborative leadership, and frequent evaluation and improvement

efforts. The role of Multnomah County in the SUN initiative is an essential feature contributing to its success.

This case study has highlighted two important aspects of the SUN initiative and the organizational structures that facilitate and enable them both. With almost twenty years of operating community schools, SUN is an example of sustainability. The initiative has grown exponentially while maintaining long-term stability. The County's role as intermediary has been key to longevity, providing stable funding, management capacity, long-term vision, and expertise. Multnomah County has also leveraged partnerships with community-based organizations to facilitate more authentic connections with local communities. SUN has intentionally and increasingly emphasized cultural relevancy and racial equity, improving the efficacy of its services. Explicit emphasis on racial equity has not featured prominently in other literature about community schools, but SUN serves as an example of the ways a focus on racial equity can enhance community schools. Culturally-specific services are greatly appreciated by school personnel in the SUN system for increasing the engagement of diverse populations, which schools would not be able to achieve on their own. Although the recent RFP process created some tension among SUN collaborators, SUN is still an instructive example for other initiatives and public institutions seeking to incorporate racial equity into their work.

As a model, SUN's organizational structure and how it contributes to facilitating sustainability and racial equity using community schools is a useful example. The initiative has recognized challenges and limitations and addressed them successfully over many years. SUN has demonstrated intentional commitment to providing long-term support for students and families and integrating equity into the core of their work to begin to dismantle

institutional structures that perpetrate inequity. Future researchers may explore how other community schools initiatives may be doing similar work. SUN's organizational structure has been key to its sustainability and useful for other initiatives as an example, but this is not to suggest it is the only structure that community schools are using to create long-lasting initiatives. Lifting up the work of other initiatives to address racial disparities and enhance equity in their communities is also a task that other scholars can continue.

Community schools have become more popular in the past several decades and are an evidence-based model for improving educational outcomes. The SUN community schools initiative demonstrates the potential for this model to create long-lasting collective impact in diverse communities. However, community schools are just one vein of public education reform. Both community schools initiatives and other education reform efforts can draw from the case of SUN. Overall, the implications of organizational structure and how it affects outcomes is important for all reformers to note, especially when building collaborative partnerships. Understanding this broad-based initiative contributes to new perspectives on the possibilities of the role of public institutions, cross-sector collaboration, and education reform.

As populations grow and change, public schools in America face new and multifaceted challenges. They must adapt to continue to implement their core mission: to provide an equal opportunity for education to all students. Public schools are in need of flexible yet sustainable structures that serve their communities and create lasting impact. This includes the effective and efficient provision of social services that under-resourced students require to achieve academic success. Students will also be more successful if their families and communities are stable and supported. Public education continues to be a core

value of American democracy. As a society, we must continuously explore how to best provide schooling to our diverse and changing population, and consideration of the successes and challenges of SUN and similar models can contribute to the successful design of programs to meet these challenges.

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