

Disaffection, Disconnection and Deferred Dreams: Recession Poverty and Full-Service Schools

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Abstract

At the apex of the 1966 War on Poverty, the poverty rate was under 15%. In 2010 the same demographic was 15.1% with a significantly higher child poverty rate of 22%. Yet the national discourse is nearly absent any substantive discussion of poverty or of cities in which 87 million Americans are living. Following a dwindling national investment in children and an 'unraveling of the safety net' for low-income families, the Great Recession augmented social and economic distress already endemic to the urban poor. This article will examine the effects the recession has on schools and the ways schools and communities have responded.

Key words: Great Recession, poverty, full-service schools, community schools, collaboration, foreclosure

1. Introduction

Seven years ago people in places like Chicago and Detroit were assisting folks in the inner city who had little income. Today those same people are themselves in need of public help while looking for employment, but for jobs that are no longer needed, blue-collar, assembly line jobs that are never coming back. They bought homes during the housing boom of 2000-2006. But in 2007 the housing market collapsed and the seeming demise of the auto industry jobs, contributing to the Great Recession, provoked the dwindling disappearance of middle-class America, compounding as well as exacerbating existing levels of poverty and their attendant risk factors for involvement in anti-social behavior.

In 2011 there were more than 48 million Americans, 16.4 million of whom were children, living in poverty defined as a family of four earning a yearly income of \$23,000 (Gonzales, 2012). Daily 2712 American babies are born into poor situations; 2857 students drop out of high school; 1208 babies are born into underinsured homes; 67 infants do not see their first birthday; seven young people are killed by weapons and at least four children in the inner cities of Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Los Angeles and New York, where neighborhoods of persistent poverty have created an underclass, those who already recognize the face of 'absence', die due to neglect or abuse (Gibbons, 2011).

2. The Great Recession of 2007-2009

During the turn-of-the-century housing boom, families embraced the American Dream, an protestant work ethic which postured that through hard work, one could achieve success and prosperity, often idealized as owning a home with a white picket fence, a dog, having a family and a good neighborhood school.

So they bought homes in middle class neighborhoods. Should above-budget mortgages become prohibitive, families could sell their homes for at least the debted value. However, between 2005-2009 as confidence in consumer spending plummeted, the ‘bottom’ fell out of the real estate market and unemployment soared. Foreclosures on these mortgages doubled, affecting millions of the country’s once-stable families, the majority of whom were disproportionately African American and Hispanic (Kachura, 2011). Overall, those in the middle class were most affected by the Great Recession for they not only lost jobs and homes, but neighborhoods and social networks as well.

1.1 Foreclosures and the Unemployed.

Between the second quarter of 2007 and the first quarter of 2009, 2.7 million jobs nation-wide were lost (OCLC, 2011). By December of 2009, 6.1 million people were unemployed long-term, representing almost half of the total number of the jobless. Near the end of 2012, nearly five million people had already used their 99 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits and assistance. A report from the Blue Green Research Institute notes that this rate is precipitate and uncharacteristic of earlier similar phenomenon (Author, 2011).

Where the auto industry gave birth to the middle class, from 2007-2009 72,000 families in the Detroit area alone lost their homes as they lost their jobs (Hamel, 2013). What became a foreclosure epidemic that swept from the streets of Detroit to the rest of the country, affected property values as the tax base for an entire neighborhood eroded causing those who could move away to do so. City services declined or more often ceased and vast fields or tracts of new wasteland returned to their natural habitat—boarded-up, foreclosed homes were claimed by squatters who eventually relinquished space to drug dealers. Many houses fell victim to abandoned neighborhoods, whose school system was bankrupt and whose uneducated children will long bear testament to this preventable demise. In 2009, 36% of all Michigan young people lived in a home in which no one had a steady, full-time secure job (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011). And between 2007-2012 nation-wide more than 11.2 million properties were foreclosed upon (Carr & Anacker, 2012), thus losing family equity projected at more than \$7 trillion (Raskin, 2012).

3. Conceptual Framework

Much has been written concerning the recession and its economic impact on society and even though this paper uses an economic underpinning, the use of an ecological model will be more conceptually helpful. First, Figure 1 suggests the varied overlapping layers that the Great Recession has influenced. And although it does not pose causal relationships, per se, it does offer an interrelated view of the human reaction to the event. (See Figure 1)

Although the layering may appear closed in the figure, in fact, these contexts are interactive and interdependent, for the Great Recession affected all levels of societal functioning, some more dynamically than others. Low-income families were up to seven times more likely to experience income trauma than high-income families, for their savings became quickly depleted (Elliott, 2013). Students living in depleted-income homes still experience lower graduation rates and lower academic achievement; fewer students enroll in college and fewer children will eventually experience income stability. Further, city blocks continue to become socially disconnected and isolated, with families living in segregated, similar income neighborhoods.

4. Effects of Foreclosure on Students

Even though policymakers have paid serious attention to the economic and social repercussions of the Great Recession, they have essentially ignored the socio-emotional, physical, cultural and cognitive effects on children. Recent research suggests there is a viable connection between neighborhood foreclosures and the rate of physical abuse. For example, between 2000 and 2009 physical abuse increased 0.79 % per year and traumatic brain injury increased 3% in a study of thirty-eight hospitals from across the country, conducted by the Child’s Hospital of Philadelphia (Wood, 2012). Further research from the Brookings Institute state that more than 8 million U.S. children are adversely affected by foreclosure, with 2.3 million still residing in foreclosed homes and 6 million more living in owner-occupied homes at-risk-for-foreclosure (Isaacs, 2012).

Additionally, there are 3 million young people in rental housing, bringing the number of U.S. children caught in the foreclosure vortex to one-in-ten. The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth and First Focus note that one of the most crucial times of cognitive development is from birth to four-years-old.

In prolonged stress and upheaval the brain experiences delays in development and in motor skills that are irreparable (First Focus & NAEHYC, 2013). Many families move multiple times in search of affordable housing. This breaks the important connection between the child and the neighborhood-school. This instability is visible in government research that indicates third graders in this kind of situation characteristically repeat a grade. Additionally, K-8 schools with a ten percent mobility rate tended to serve students of color who were low-income lived in homes that were not their family's and had limited English proficiency (GAO, 2013).

Children caught in foreclosure settings are affected in four different ways:

1. Instability of living situations, ones in which families move multiple times, causes children to do less well in school (USGAO, 2013).
2. Personal negative interaction between parents and children is often characteristic of more unstable situations, for parents who live under multiple levels of stress (dire economic hardship and job loss) act out their frustration on their children. Children in turn interact negatively with peers and in the classroom.
3. Housing instability, lack of medication, frequent visits to the emergency room and mental distress are characteristic of a foreclosure syndrome.
4. Young people in these situations more often live in neighborhoods, which become infested with gangs, drugs and crime as they watch homes, vacated or boarded up thus fracturing the social connectedness of the neighborhood and reducing the tax base (Isaacs, 2012).

While there are those who find mixed impact of foreclosure on children, a substantially growing body of research (Rosengren, 2013) draws a direct correlation between foreclosure and lowered academic achievement (Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998).

5. Effects on Schools

During the Recession high poverty areas were the hardest hit in all sectors as compared to their medium poverty and affluent counterparts (Chakrabarti & Sutherland 2012). Drastic reductions in staff, supplies and resources were little match for the increased numbers of students in each class and excessively increased numbers of students in one building, as schools were forced to close and students grudgingly bused across town. Rather than walking several blocks to school, students spent up to three hours a day on busses to and from school. In many inner cities, no longer was there an ethos of the neighborhood school that bound the local community together. In Detroit, Philadelphia and Chicago rival gangs often found themselves sitting in the same classrooms and looking over their shoulders as they moved in the hallways between classes.

And those hardest hit by this loss of home and shuffling of schools? Predominantly African-American students, at least 50% who lived in poverty, followed by an increasing number of Hispanic students and families. Apart from the Great Recession, these were and still are families who are already vulnerable, already living in poverty.

Schools, then, have become inundated with the number of referrals teachers make to support staff regarding students whom they know need additional services. But schools that are already understaffed are unable to keep pace with the upsurge in the numbers and the deepening in severity of need concerning students and families. Schools become the stop-gap between the child-family and the loss of place in the world. But alone schools cannot meet the nonacademic challenges for which school administrators and teaching faculty are not trained. If schools are to be a safety net for children and families, they must advocate for them by collaborating with those professionals whose expertise schools do not possess.

6. Through Collaboration

A full-service community school is staffed by dynamic teachers who see every child as a child-of-hope rather than a child-at-risk and in poverty, teachers who see the family as experts, teachers whose conversation is free from blame and deficit thinking. The community school joins district commitment and resources with local health and human service agencies, businesses, philanthropic groups and foundation grants. In so doing, it becomes a 'full service community school' both in philosophy and in structure, one that collaboratively provides a wide range of seamless services that mitigate nonacademic barriers and free students for academic and social accomplishment, one whose service provision is on the neighborhood campus itself. This is a school that is the hub of the community, often open far beyond the 'regular' teaching day or school year, a school for the entire family. In New Boston it's called the New Boston Project.

In Oakland Unified School District it is “full-service community schools”. In Allentown, Pennsylvania’s Roosevelt Elementary School, in Sacramento’s Harmon Johnson Elementary School, Twin Rivers United School District, and in Cincinnati’s Oyler School, they are community-learning centers. And in Jacksonville, Florida under the aegis of the United Way they are full-service schools.

6.1 Full-Service Schools (FSS)—United Way of Northeast Florida (UWNEFL)

Duval County’s Jacksonville, a city of 822,883 people who have a median household income of \$46,312, is a mixture of 55% white, (down from 75.8% in 1970), 30% black (above state average), 8% Hispanic, 4% Asian and 3% mixed race. Like Detroit and other U.S. post-WWII urban centers, Jacksonville experienced the urban sprawl that left lower income families in the city center. Because this desiccated the city’s tax base, funding for schools in addition to city services and infrastructure were negatively affected. 1960’s Jacksonville suffered both city official corruption scandals and the loss of all fifteen of its schools’ accreditation, further victimizing city residents and sending a call for government reform. The largest U.S. city in land mass consolidated its government, lowered taxes and invested in economic development.

What happened during the Great Recession in the rest of the country happened in Duval county: jobs were lost, people became underemployed and others were unqualified for the available jobs. Families were overextended in their credit, had little to no savings and lost their homes to foreclosure. Although Jacksonville’s crime rate in all categories is significantly higher than the national average, with the easing of the recession, data suggest the number of aggravated crimes began to decrease (City-Data, 2013). About 10% of Jacksonville families and 13% of the total population live below the poverty line. In Health Zone 1, the urban core of Jacksonville, a place where 100% of the citizens live in vulnerable neighborhoods and 40% of the children live below poverty, walking the streets to school and ‘playing out in the yard’ are stark reminders of the cruel lack of care our country seems to have for its young.

But what sets Jacksonville, Florida distinctly apart from other urban cities with similar demographics is its commitment to volunteerism, to family and community engagement, to its schools, to collaboration and to advocacy.

6.2 Removing Non-Academic Barriers

The Full-Service Schools (FSS) of Jacksonville is a neighborhood-based, collaborative partnership administratively led by the United Way of Northeast Florida. It focuses on providing therapeutic, social and health services to students and families through its three main target goals: health, income and education. Keto Porter, the Director of the Full-Service Schools program states, “Our focus is to remove whatever barriers might prevent a child from coming to school prepared to learn” (Porter, 2013). And speaking from an informed and viable systems perspective, Melanie Patz, Vice President of Community Impact for United Way contends, “If you don’t have a goal or a larger vision, then budgeting or health management don’t mean a lot. It has to be tied to a larger vision that is meaningful to the individual and to their perception, not what the community thinks should be important to the individual” (Patz, 2013). And that larger vision needed to be sustainable. So the United Way became a community impact organization with focused strategic imperatives, values, goals and relationships that helped broker resources and activities rooted in sustainable research-based effective practice. They had to mobilize resources and stakeholders, engage neighborhoods and individuals from all communities (faith-based, business, private, philanthropic) and ferret out and address the root causes of non-academic as well as academic barriers, particularly around issues of mental health.

Developed in 1991, the FSS Initiative of Jacksonville is available to 57,000 students, ages pre-school to seventeen years old, in Duval County located in eighty-five feeder schools (elementary, middle school and high school) at eight different locations. It is a network of counseling, family therapy, behavior management, medical services, legal consultation, mentoring, tutoring and volunteering. FSS provides therapists, psychologists, nurses, behaviorists, substance abuse counselors, targeted case managers and other professionals as needed at each of its sites. From 2005 to 2009 at the height of the Recession, referrals for FSS mental health counseling and social services rose from 2856 to 3966. In 2013 such services were referred in 3287 cases. And from 2005 to 2012 the total number of people served through FSS rose from 26,684 to 52,080. The outcomes? 93% of the students who completed treatment plans exhibited a marked increase in overall functioning while 94% of parents/caregivers and non-parent referral sources indicated they witnessed improvement in their child’s behavior (United Way, Northeast Florida, 2013).

6.3 Partners

It is worthy to list the partners involved in this work in order to see the breadth and depth of collaboration and community involvement. Table 1 lists the Full Service Schools partners and service collaborators. (See Table 1)

Full Service Schools funders include a variety of community groups to Duval County Health Department, the County Public Schools, Jacksonville Children's Commission, and the United Way of Northeast Florida. The programs that they fund are listed in part in Table 2: (See Table 2)

⊕*Further Discussion: Success by Six.* *Success by Six* began in six centers that have a four out of five star rating. The program's goal is to have *Success by Six* in all 450 sites. (See Table 3)

⊕*Further Discussion. Achievers for Life.* *Achievers for Life* developed and funded by the United Way, provides services to help young people graduate on time. (See Table 4.)

⊕*Further Discussion: Gateway Health Systems.* With revenues from the county, city, state and federal governments, Juvenile Justice, Medicaid, local business, private and individual donations, DCF and other funds, Gateway provides treatment and habilitative services for young people and adults.

The Full-Service Schools Initiative is comprehensive in that it addresses an encompassing continuum of barriers as presented in Table 5.

⊕*Further Discussion. Full Service Schools of Jacksonville.* From 2009-2012, 75,000 families were served through Neighborhood Grants provided to schools, teachers and community-based organizations. These provided reading materials used as incentives for student attendance, summer camp activities, tutoring, social services for students in abusive situations, bullying prevention materials, mentors, and after-school activities to prevent pregnancy, trained therapists and psychological services.

Among the other programs which the United Way provides are: *Believing in Girls*, *Reading Pals*, *Born Learning Workshops* and *Empowering Effective Teachers*. Additionally they offer over forty-five workshops for parents, families and the community. They serve 183 schools, and 125,000 students of 900,000 residents in 918-square miles. The extent of their commitment to families and youth goes far beyond the hoped for and is exceeded only by their faith in the power of collaboration. Their position is holistic and ecological, for it places the child and the family at the center of their efforts. Their community awareness seems actualized through their leveraging of volunteerism and mobilization. And because of this Patz notes there is still much to be done. There are 49,000 school-aged children identified as homeless, 75% of them due to the foreclosures and attendant economic distress caused by the Great Recession.

7. Community and Public Policy Recommendations

United Way of Northeast Florida has fashioned 'community' both as a place and as political construction, for change must also come at the policy level. With regard to the detrimental effects of foreclosures and changing schools on students, they encourage policymakers to create more neighborhood stability, principals and counselors to offer financial counseling services, school practitioners to be mindful of the McKinley-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Actualizing the notion that their generative community work can affect and engage citizens and practitioners as well as policymakers, the United Way of Northeast Florida focuses on advocacy and community awareness by suggesting increased support in banking services, specific housing needs, sliding scales to assist in moving from subsidized housing, state and federal supports, career academies, examination of criminal records that impact credit assistance and implementation of integrated financial service delivery centers that improve financial stability. These are all policies designed to do battle with inequality and inequity, with marginalization and disadvantage, policies that speak of identity and belonging, of space and of mind, of a community that goes beyond care to action.

8. Conclusion

The concept of the neighborhood school is endemic to the full-service community school movement as seen in Jacksonville.

Despite the foreclosures and the fragility caused by the Recession, Jacksonville has created an interconnected, interrelated embracing community which seeks only the common good, a good born of the starkest of adversity rethought against the backdrop of a country which speaks the words of equality and practices the politics of separation and denial, a country which has yet to determine if the common good is worthy to be prized beyond the sum of the individual good, a country which prizes individuality above justice for all. United Way and the Full Service School Initiative have begun to reconceptualize that which is intended of the notion of ‘community’. Because poverty is socially constructed it is not intractable. So they work with a fervor that speaks of both the commonality of survival and of a community for health and for hope. And as with Eliezer Shore we would say, “The greatness of community is that it provides man with a context for his life. Before we can know God, we must come to know ourselves. Without a sense of identity, a person cannot be whole; it is community that provides man with his name. The social relationships, the responsibilities, the larger values all help us know who we are” (Shore, 1993).

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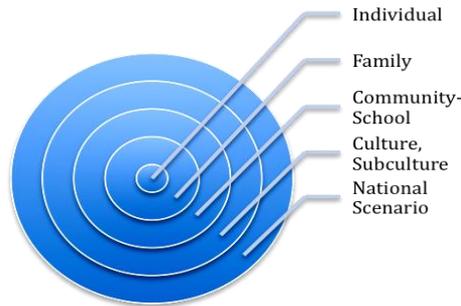
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Figure 1. Contextual Societal Layers



Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Florida
Child Guidance Center
Daniel, Inc.
Duval County Public Schools
Duval County Health Department
Family Foundations
Gateway Community Services
Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida
Mental Health Resource Center
Northwest Behavioral Health Services
St. Vincent’s Foundation/Ronald McDonald Care Mobile
UF/Shands Child Protection Team
Youth Crisis Center
Hubbard House, Inc.
Family Support Services
Hope Haven Children’s Clinic
Jacksonville Area Legal Aid

Table 1. Full Service Schools Partners and Service Collaborators

Table 2. United Way of Northeast Florida, Services Linked to Schools-Success by Six

Program	Description	Discussion	Availability	Outcomes
Success by Six	<p>*Two-year, full-day early learning education and care grants for 3-year old children, to working families making too much money and therefore do not qualify for state subsidies; financial incentive system</p> <p>*United Way, The Early Learning Coalition of Duval, Early Learning Coalition of Clay, Nassau, Baker and Bradford partnership</p>	<p>*Targeted 6th grade because it is most difficult transition—from elementary to middle school</p> <p>*Provide family & student intervention coaches⊕</p>	<p>*In 73 of 450 sites</p> <p>*Begun in 2007, 476 preschoolers grant recipients</p> <p>*1946 children participated</p>	<p>*After two years-42% improvement in those with delayed expressive vocabulary</p> <p>*After two years-19% improvement in those ready for school (United Way, Jacksonville, Florida, “Success by 6,” (United Way, 2013). http://www.uwnefl.org/documents/unitedway-strategicplan.pdf</p>
Achievers for Life	<p>*Drop-out prevention initiative focused on 6th graders at-risk for academic failure</p> <p>*One-on-one weekly mentoring & counseling</p> <p>*Family support services</p> <p>*Parent training to help principals increase family engagement in school</p> <p>*Community partners: Communities in Schools of Jacksonville, Duval County Public Schools, Jewish Family and Community Services and Learning to Finish Collaborative</p>	<p>*Because one-in - three students fails to graduate on time</p> <p>*Households headed by h.s. graduate makes ten times more money in lifetime</p> <p>*Begun in 2007-2,860 students and families participated⊕</p>	<p>*155 students and families served during first implementation year; 339 students in four middle schools</p>	<p>*School absences decreased by 13% between 5th-6th grades</p> <p>*AFL student GPA improved 12%</p> <p>*11% increase in promotion</p> <p>*Average promotion rate for all AFL students 96%</p>

Table 3. Achievers for Life

	Description	Discussion	Availability	Outcomes
Gateway Community Services	*Substance abuse, alcoholism, & related mental health treatment & habilitation services for students 12-17 years old *Intervention: one time a week for 6 weeks; kids just starting to experiment *Outpatient: one time a week for 12 weeks; teenagers	*In partnership with Duval County Schools so students continued ed. *Begun in 2005 *Help in long-term recovery *Assistive preventative strategies for relapse⊕	*Became gender-focused to provide more specialized services	*516 adolescents in detox; 34 in intervention; 250 in outpatient; 81 in residential (UWNEF)

Table 4. Gateway Community Services

	Description	Discussion	Availability	Outcomes
Full Service Schools	*School-based, neighborhood-governed collaboration designed to remove academic and nonacademic barriers to success in school for all children	*Led by United Way who brokers services and resources; brings together stakeholders; service partners: Child Guidance Center, Duval County Public Schools, Gateway Community Services, Family Support Services, UF/Shands Child Protection Team, St. Vincent's Foundation/Mobile Health, Youth Crisis Center, Family Foundations, Jacksonville Area Legal Aid, Hubbard House, Big Brothers, Big Sisters NEFL, Duval County Health Dept., Lutheran Social Services of NEFL *Promotes health of students, families, neighborhoods and communities⊕	*All services are free and are site-specific *Common services include: behavioral help for kids, individual and family counseling, mentoring, parenting classes, truancy support, after-school activities, basic needs assistance and free mental health resources for children in Duval County; includes 34 full-time mental health therapists	*In 2012 36,000 people were serviced *96% parents indicate improvement in children *Students served experienced 52% reduction in behavioral referrals ; *those who receive mental health services: *20% improvement in attendance *32% increase in language arts and math grades *Students less likely to take remedial classes *Half as likely to be retained twice (UWNEF)

Table 5. Full-Service Schools Initiative