Conclusion

We developed this implementation guide with your needs in mind. In the preceding chapters, we described and explained the Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement (OCCMSI).

Now that you have surveyed its components, it is time to return to the big picture. Figure 12.1 presents this model once again. You may wish to give it a second look, looking anew for how the parts fit together and appreciating how the whole model is greater than the sum of its parts.

The approach we described for school improvement in the preceding chapters is clearly anchored in this model. Each of the various components of the model reflects a best-practice philosophy. The relationships among the components – including how they fit and flow together and how assessment and evaluation are used – indicate a firm commitment to continuous improvement.

Important reminders

As you reflect on this model and its components, you may wish to keep in mind the following recommendations:

- You need to be sure all of the components of the model are addressed. Mindful that developing all of them and the relationship needed among them takes time, the sooner you get them all in place, the better. These components build on each other and connect in important ways. If you neglect or ignore one or more of the components and the relationships among them, you will lose some of the benefits this new model offers.

- Once you have tailored the model in response to local conditions, needs and opportunities, review it to make sure the pieces fit. It is especially important to work backwards from long-term outcomes to ensure that program pathways logically make a contribution to those outcomes.

- Do not lose sight of this model's main focus – school improvement. While it is true this model enables you and other partners to achieve multiple benefits for students and families, it also is true that, as indicated in chapter one, its main contribution to schools lies in its ability to get the conditions right for academic learning, instruction and achievement.

Back to basics: Relationships with existing school improvement initiatives

We have stated repeatedly this new model does not mean "out with the old, in with the new." To the contrary, this new model will not succeed unless the typical priorities for school improvement planning are strengthened. These priorities include standards-based, curriculum alignment; evidence-based teaching and learning strategies; positive school climates; effective school management; and evaluation-driven, continuous improvement efforts. Simply stated, school communities can not and should not lose sight of these priorities and the accountabilities established by the No Child Left Behind Act.

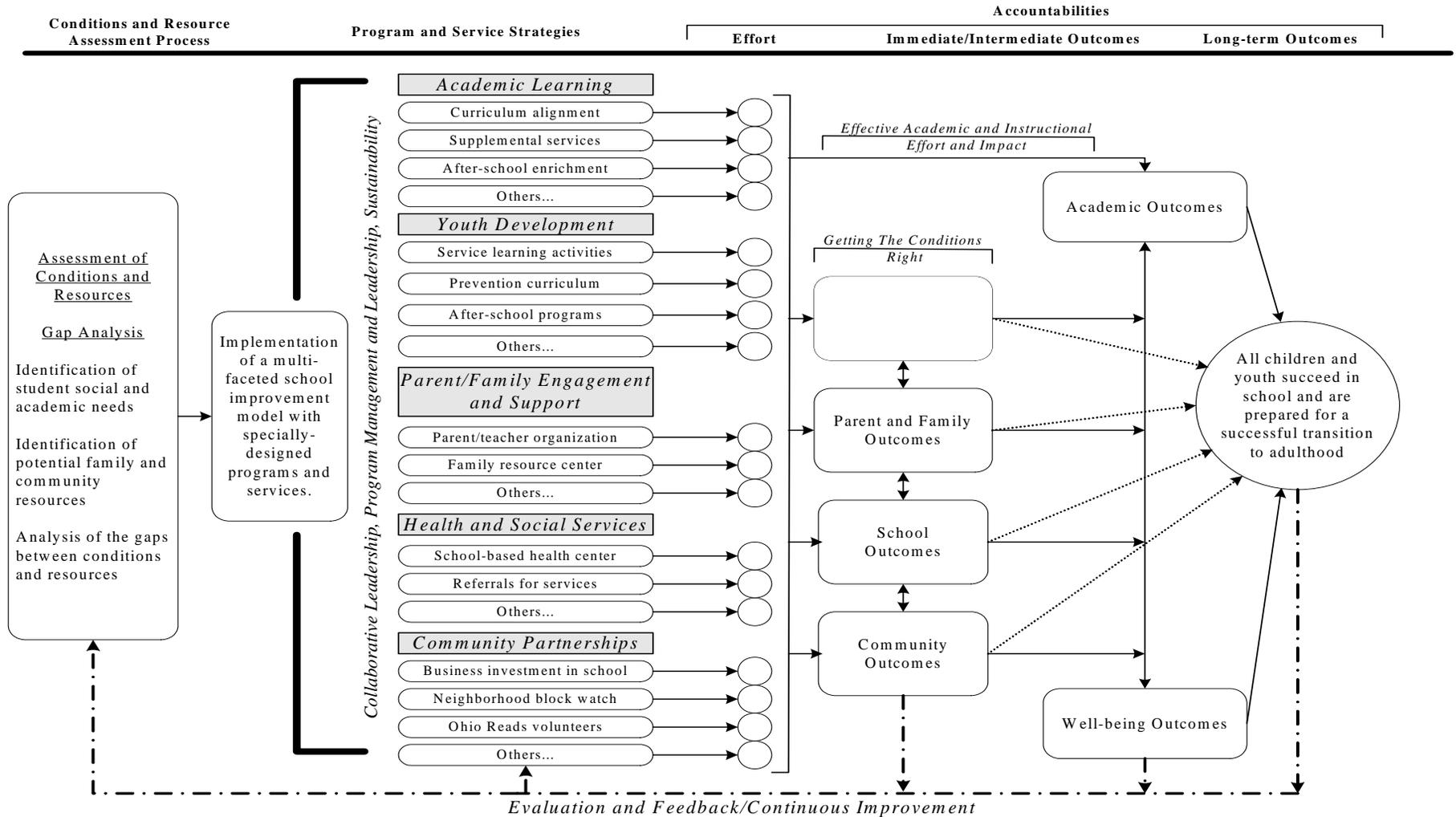## Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement

Figure 12.1: The Ohio Community Collaboration Model for School Improvement and Example Programs/Services

In this light, we have emphasized that this multi-faceted model is designed to enhance existing school improvement models. To reiterate, this new model is not a competitor. It enhances every model because it expands the boundaries of school improvement

In support of this claim, we have identified and described this model's five core components: youth development, family engagement and support, health and social services, community partnerships, and a comprehensive, unified approach to academic learning. While each is important, we also have emphasized the relations among them.

Moreover, we have identified and described this model's "drivers," i.e., the processes and mechanisms that make this model both dynamic and innovative. These drivers are collaborative leadership, program management and leadership, assessment, evaluation and sustainability.

Aiming to help you implement this model, we have provided research-supported design principles and strategies as well as improvement targets. We also have identified likely implementation barriers, along with some strategies you may use to address these barriers.

It is your model: Tailoring it for local conditions

In all such cases, we tried to strike a reasonable, effective balance. We tried to provide enough practical, research-supported information to guide you and enable you to get started; and, at the same time, we encouraged you to build on the strengths of existing local initiatives and develop new ones as needed.

In brief, we prioritized the choices you and other school community leaders must make. We also emphasized that you will adapt and tailor this model to fit your local school community's conditions, needs and opportunities. Aiming to help you make good choices and decisions, we have emphasized assessment, evaluation and their relationship.

Your local assessments, we have suggested, enable you to identify and describe local conditions, needs, untapped opportunities and gaps. You will use these assessment data when you implement and adapt the model. More specifically, you will adapt this multi-faceted improvement model, with its tailored programs and services, so it responds to your assessment data and fits your local school community context.

In this fundamental sense, it is your model because you will make the most important choices. As we have said throughout this guide, this is not a "one-size-fits all approach," which others are forcing you to adopt, a model that ignores your school community's uniqueness.

Furthermore, we emphasized evaluation because it is a practical necessity in today's accountability-rich environment. As important, when you embed evaluation in all of your design and implementation activities, you will get good information that enables you to make "in flight adjustments", learn and improve. In this way and in others, we linked evaluation to your needs and priorities for continuous improvement planning at both the school level and the district level.

Getting started: Recruiting others

In every chapter, we tried to hit hard five other important points. All are aimed at helping you get started, including your ability to recruit others as you help them understand what this model entails and offers.

The first point, you do not have to "start from scratch." Many of the programs, services, partnerships and activities we emphasized already exist in some form in your local school community. We tried to help you recognize that you have the opportunity to take advantage of work already underway.

Second, as you take advantage of untapped family and community resources for learning, academic achievement, and success in school, you also will gain new capacities to address non-academic barriers to learning. Many of these barriers are rooted in families, neighborhoods and community agencies. As you remove and prevent them, you will be ensuring that students come to school ready and able to learn.

Third, we encouraged you to take two additional steps. We tried to help you "connect the dots" – gain understanding of how these several initiatives fit together in a comprehensive, coherent model of school improvement (Lawson & Briar-Lawson, 1997). We also indicated how you might unify, integrate and sustain now-separate, even competing, programs, services and initiatives.

Fourth, this model takes into account school-related barriers to learning, healthy development and academic achievement, most of which stem from walled-in, or building-centered improvement models. As school-related barriers are removed and prevented, your school community will be able to achieve twin goals. In addition to ensuring that all children and youth come to school ready and able to learn, this model enables Ohio's schools to be ready for the learning, healthy development and academic achievement of all children and youth.

Fifth, the "whole" of this new school improvement model is greater than the sum of the parts. In fact, you will derive the most important, lasting benefits when the five core components (e.g., academic learning, youth development) and the other key drivers (e.g., collaborative leadership, evaluation) fit together so well that they generate a powerful synergy. To achieve this coherence and synergy, you will need to strike an effective balance between an often narrow focus on one or two key components and a broader focus on how all the parts fit together.

Collaboration leadership, partnerships and collaboration

Clearly, this is complex work. It is difficult, if not impossible, for one person to "do it all, alone." This is why collaborative leadership and strategic, solid community partnerships are mainstays in this new model. They are the mechanisms that enable people to assess, plan, implement, evaluate, learn and improve together.

These collaborative and partnership arrangements comprise a new way of doing the business of school improvement. For example, they make school improvement a family and community affair. More specifically, in this new model, families and community members from all walks of life assume joint responsibility and accountability for academic learning and achievement, success in school and a successful transition into productive adulthood. This distinctive advantage is inseparable from another.

Educators no longer must operate in stand-alone schools, work exclusively with walled-in improvement models, and labor without enough supports, assistance and resources. The work of educating, of working in Ohio's schools will become more rewarding, especially as more of Ohio's children succeed in school. The benefits to Ohio's school workforce, especially its teachers and principals, will spill over to Ohio's children.

This is what it will take to close the achievement gap, ensuring that all of Ohio's children succeed in school and are prepared for a successful transition to productive adulthood. Together we can make a difference. Now is the time to "get it together" – and to get started – together.