



Full-Service Community Schools CONSORTIUM

"The Full-Service Community Schools model is truly **the future of public education**, not just in North Dakota, but **across the nation.**"

ANNE WILLIAMSON

FIVE YEARS OF
CULTIVATING
CONNECTIONS



North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools



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When Ellendale Public School's middle and high school principal, Cindy Rall, looks back on what teaching used to be like, she has some pretty vivid memories: stocking winter clothes, buying essentials, and even washing clothes in her washing machine at home.

She loved teaching but knew her students needed more than she could provide in her classroom. Worse, she was blocked by time and resources.

Rall also saw that it wasn't just the basic needs that remained unmet. Many schools found that mobilizing essential enrichment and engagement programs was fraught with the same problems: everyone wanted the resource,

but no one had the time or capacity to coordinate it. At best, schools could fill holes as they saw them, but not before.

Ellendale Public School's elementary school principal, Allison Radermacher, agreed: "The process for addressing students' needs was reactionary instead of proactive." She, her peers, and her community all saw students suffer and struggle as needs remained underserved and unmet.

Identifying Needed Growth

Not all students come to school ready to learn. They face barriers like hunger, housing, or access to healthcare. Even when they're in school, they can encounter

barriers such as a lack of library resources or access to academic intervention. We must meet their needs, but no educator or family can do it alone.

While those barriers exist, resources are available to alleviate them. However, schools struggle to access those resources. Amanda Peterson, Director of Educational Improvement at the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), highlights the reason behind the struggle.

"It's really not a lack of resources—it's a lack of coordinated effort and the partnerships that are required to really bring all of those things together," Peterson explained.

Peterson is right. Just take Principal Rall's experience. She had a washing machine and was willing to help, but she didn't have the time or the capacity to coordinate herself as a resource. Further, working to provide her students with basic support needs pulled time away from Rall's primary role: educating the students in her classroom.

The struggle reaches beyond fundamental needs, too. Many schools struggle to connect to existing programs that will enrich students' lives and broaden their horizons because they don't have the time or resources to maintain those programs.

In 2018, the North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools (NDFSCS) Consortium was established to connect schools to one another and their surrounding community.

Born out of funding through the U.S. Department of Education, the NDFSCS Consortium was rooted in creating an ecosystem tailored to North Dakota educators, students, families, and communities. The hope for all Full-Service Community Schools was that by leveraging the school as a community hub, students could finally begin to overcome the barriers they'd faced for so long.

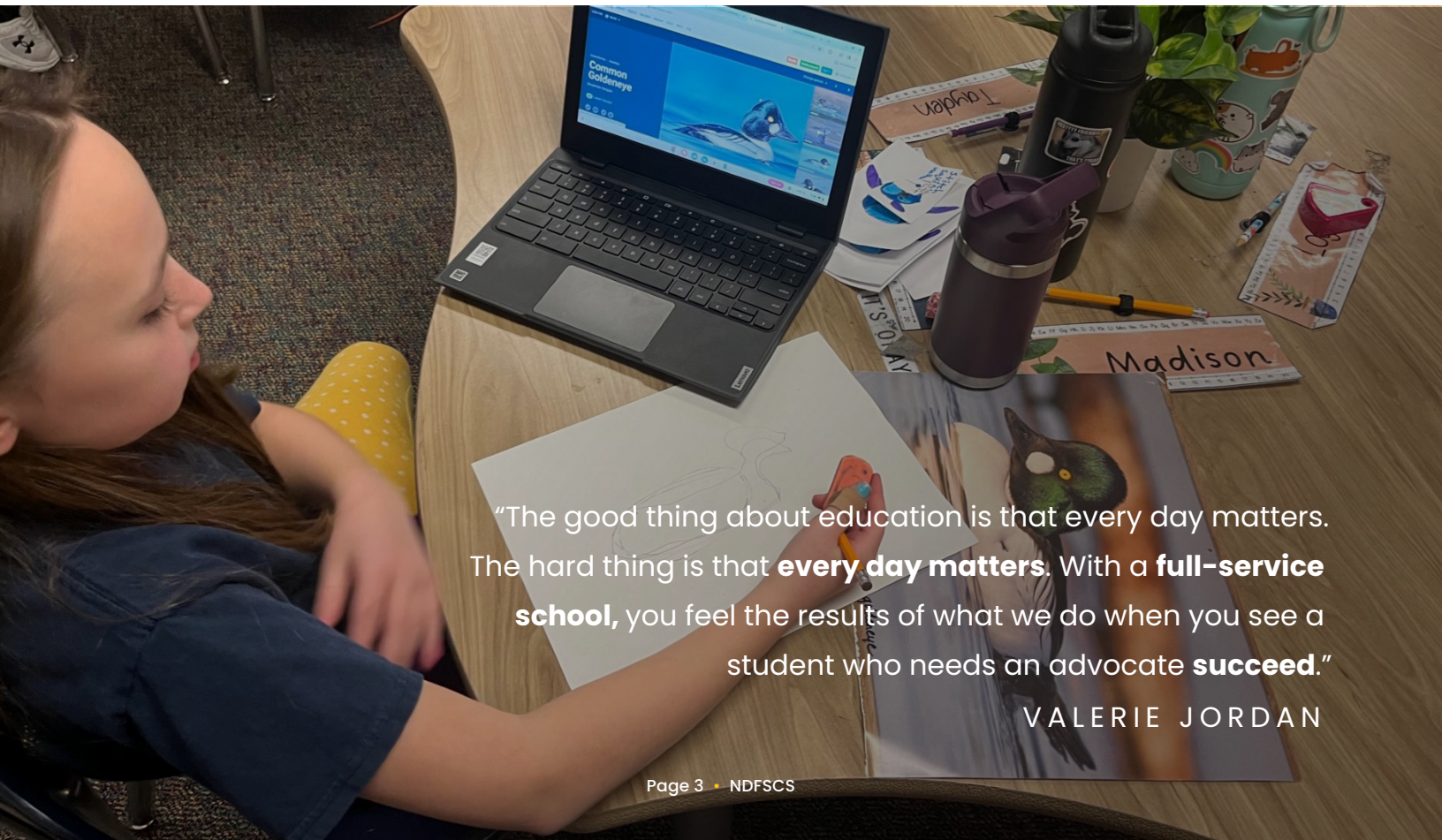
"We can't get to the learning in math if kids are hungry, or there's instability at home, or we have other concerns that are creating learning barriers," highlights Anne Williamson, the Integrated Student Support Services Chief of Staff at the NDFSCS Consortium.

In order to support students holistically, schools need a dedicated resource within the school to coordinate access to resources that will support

students' needs—both outside and inside of the classroom.

When schools partner with the NDFSCS Consortium, the first step is to staff a Site Coordinator, an onsite team member dedicated to extending the school's capacity through partnerships that support student and family needs. The ultimate goal? Increasing access to services inside and outside of the classroom by alleviating common access barriers such as time, transportation, and cost.

Dr. Cory Steiner, the superintendent of Northern Cass School District, put it well: "To me, a Full-Service Community School is really about a pipeline of robust services that meet learners in your community where they're at." And that's exactly what the NDFSCS Consortium works to accomplish.



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VALERIE JORDAN



Growing Toward Success

Initially, Williamson was part of a small team, working to navigate many unknowns the pilot schools faced when the NDFSCS Consortium began. She was in somewhat uncharted territory—true, the idea behind full-service community schools was sound, but nothing like this had been tried in North Dakota before. Yet, in five short years, the NDFSCS Consortium has grown

from three to 10 schools—all of whom are making a significant impact on their students, families, and communities. Williamson now leads a team of Site Coordinators statewide who serve each of those schools.

One of the key partners in supporting the expansion of the NDFSCS schools and programs is the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI). Through their support and endorsement of the Full-Service Community Schools approach, NDDPI helped the NDFSCS Consortium expand programming and reach more schools. Recently, the NDDPI identified North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools as a program that would receive priority when schools applied for the Stronger Connections Grant. Since the grant is an opportunity for high-needs schools to improve conditions for student learning by encouraging the implementation of evidence-based programs and practices that promote healthier learning environments and positive school climates, the NDDPI needed to prioritize programs that were proven to work.

“We have one shot to really get this out to schools and get programs in their hands that we know will have positive outcomes for students,” Robin Lang, the assistant director of Educational Improvement and Support at the NDDPI, said. Being recognized as one of the programs that could do the most good and positively impact students was proof that the NDFSCS Consortium was not just a good idea—it was a proven, successful program and approach to schooling.

Districts like Dickinson Public Schools implemented the full-service community school model through the funding opportunities provided by NDDPI. Dickinson Public Schools now represents three of the schools in the NDFSCS Consortium.

“It has been exhilarating to see the improvement and effectiveness of inter-agency coordination that has directly benefited Dickinson families,” said Richard Smith, the Behavioral Health Coordinator for Dickinson Public Schools.

More proof of the NDFSCS Consortium’s success came from some of the darkest times North Dakota—and the rest of the world—has ever faced: the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020.

When the pandemic forced schools to close their literal doors, questions and concerns swirled in the atmosphere. When the schools closed, how would they continue to provide the services the students desperately needed? If the school lunch was the only food a child would receive on a weekday, or if the school was the only spot a child could rely on for indoor heating during the winter, what would happen to those children when education became virtual?

While it certainly wasn’t easy, schools established as full-service community schools had an advantage: much of the needed programming was already in place. Further, they had a dedicated staff member, the Site Coordinator, to devote their workday to maintaining current relationships and establishing new connections.



Succeeding Through Connections

Those Site Coordinators make the full-service community school model successful. As the NDFSCS Consortium discovered how effective a dedicated Site Coordinator could be for a school, they developed a system to collaboratively hire, train, and support Site Coordinators as a state-wide consortium. Now, there is a tried and tested training curriculum, developed by the NDFSCS Consortium, to support

new Site Coordinators as they join their school's team. Since the NDFSCS Consortium handles the supervision of Site Coordinators, administration teams don't need to devote valuable time to managing another employee.

Most Site Coordinators are hired from the school's surrounding community, bringing dedicated time, expertise, and an understanding of local assets, resources, and needs. As the NDFSCS Consortium grew and learned, they found that hiring

Site Coordinators who knew the schools and the communities primed the new employee (and their school) for success. Community members hired as Site Coordinators knew what the school already had and what it desperately needed.

"If you can picture a school building with the doors wide open, I think of the Site Coordinator as the person standing in front, welcoming in the community, welcoming partnerships, and showing people how to navigate the school," said Amber Lockhart, Northern Cass's Site Coordinator. They serve as the foundation for the bridge from the community to the school.

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AMBER LOCKHART

Site Coordinators work to meet goals that align with the district's or school's strategic plan. Being a part of the NDFSCS Consortium helps connect Site Coordinators with official resources and partnerships that can help them reach those plan goals.

"The NDFSCS Consortium brings up the needs and the partners try to meet them," elaborated Sheila Freed, Avel eCARE's School Health Director.

Avel eCARE is one of the foundational partners of the NDFSCS Consortium. Designed to provide telehealth nursing services when gaps in school nursing exist, Avel eCARE helps keep students in school while managing health concerns from the acute to the chronic. Freed explains how:

"Even the smallest of schools can have an emergency and then have to wait a half hour to an hour for EMS to come. With eCARE, a skilled school nurse can direct care, creating a better outcome for students. It is literally life-saving."

Established partnerships like the one with Avel eCARE and their School Health and Behavioral Health Programs make the implementation process seamless for schools. By maintaining a network of connections with partners who provide services aligned with the community schools strategy, the NDFSCS

Consortium can ensure that Site Coordinators know what resources are available to them as gaps in service are identified.

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"It has been one of my favorite partnerships that we have," Freed continued. "The NDFSCS Consortium truly places the student in the center of the model of care. This is a valued, trusted consortium, not just in name but in practice."

Healthcare is not the only need that the NDFSCS Consortium helps schools meet. For schools that need more art education, many Site Coordinators connect with the North Dakota Arts Council (NDAC) to infuse creativity and art instruction into the curriculum. At Ellendale Public School, the

students' needs didn't stop at Principal Rall's washing machine. Before Site Coordinator Valerie Jordan joined the staff, Ellendale Public School students had no art instruction.

Thanks to Jordan's work to connect Ellendale Public School with the NDAC, they now have an artist-in-residence program where students can learn from a local artist who delivers art instruction directly to students while helping build the capacity of teachers to incorporate art enrichment into their lesson plans.

"I'm so proud of the work that we've done and the things that are in the school this year that had not been in the school before," Jordan said.

One school district identified the lack of a library as a key development area. Beth Houser, Site Coordinator for Cannon Ball Elementary and Solen High School, connected with the North Dakota State Library to get an on-site library up and running. Now, students can read and learn inside and outside the building thanks to the collection. Improving literacy rates within the district is a key priority and this was one of several implementation strategies for supporting reading at the school. Because Houser had the dedicated time and passion for partnership, the school now has access to thousands of books within their building that weren't there before.

Connecting to Support

What's more, members see the NDFSCS Consortium benefitting the Site Coordinators, too. When schools become Full-Service Community Schools, their Site Coordinators are not left adrift and alone, struggling to identify and implement resources. Through a community-of-practice approach, a statewide Site Coordinator Network was developed. The network has proven effective in helping Site Coordinators lift each other up through brainstorming and sharing knowledge, ideas, and opportunities.

And that's just scratching the surface of how schools benefit from becoming members of the NDFSCS Consortium. They notice changes that go beyond programming, changes that impact much more than the day-to-day functioning of the school.

"Schools will often see student engagement increase. We see

communities being more engaged in their schools," Williamson said. "We see families more engaged and feeling more welcome in schools that are really embracing this whole-child, whole-family health approach to education." ND Full-Service Community Schools are not just focused on student success, they take a thoughtful approach to ensuring programs and services reach family members as well. When families are safe, healthy, and engaged, students are more likely to succeed.

Supporting the Future

The work doesn't stop here. In just five years, the NDFSCS Consortium has proven its worth time and time again.

"I think that the Full-Service Community Schools model is truly the future of public education, not just in North Dakota, but across the nation," said Williamson.

But change takes time. We cannot hope to wake up tomorrow in a world where all schools are suddenly functioning as community hubs, empowering their students as whole people. There is still work to be done. Creating and maintaining these community schools empowers all children, even if they aren't directly benefiting yet. And, for the students who are already in those schools, the support they continue to receive affects them daily.

"The good thing about education is that every day matters," Ellendale Public School Site Coordinator Jordan said. "The hard thing is that every day matters. With a full-service community school, you feel the results of what we do when you see a student who needs an advocate succeed."

And succeed they do—with needs met, minds ready to learn, and clothes clean without needing to borrow Principal Rall's washing machine. ■





North Dakota Full-Service Community Schools (NDFSCS) enhance student success through a whole-child, whole-family approach with collaborative partnerships and comprehensive support services.

Contact us at nd.fscs@k12.nd.us to learn more.