

**Close to Home:
Community Boarding Schools and
Disadvantaged Children and Youth**

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INTRODUCTION

What should be the options for poor children and youth whose healthy development and learning are not well supported by their school, community, or family circumstances, but who otherwise are not candidates for social services? One option that is gaining a small amount of attention is boarding schools that are located in inner city communities and reach out specifically to disadvantaged young people. These schools can offer a full day and evening of learning opportunities in a structured environment that provides a safe alternative to the street. We learned about these schools in the course of an exploratory study of the viability of boarding school as an option for disadvantaged children and youth. Our research leads us to believe that urban or community boarding schools represent a promising idea that deserves serious consideration as an addition to the array of school reform options.

The primary purpose of this research was to explore the range of boarding school options used by young people with social and economic disadvantages, to ascertain what we knew about outcomes for students attending such schools, and to develop an agenda for research to extend that knowledge.¹ Data were collected through interviews with policy experts, educators, child welfare and youth development professionals, and parents

¹ The project was funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

of children currently attending community boarding schools. We also made site visits to selected schools, examined the research literature for studies documenting the effectiveness of boarding schools for this population, and convened an advisory group of experts in education, child development, and public policy to guide our work and our thinking about this under-studied area.²

We learned that the options for boarding school for low-income children—particularly those without strong academic records—are very limited, and that schools located in the local community are scarcer still. (See Appendix A for details on boarding school options for disadvantaged students.) We also learned that if the school options for this population are few, the number of good studies on the effectiveness of boarding school are fewer still: Outside of a few studies of academically gifted minority children who attend elite boarding schools on scholarship (Perry and Kopperman, 1973; Wessman, 1972; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1991) there is no good research on outcomes.³ What literature there is primarily focuses on studies of therapeutic residential settings rather than educational ones. What might be the outcomes for “regular” low-income kids who attend ordinary boarding schools is a question that has neither been asked nor answered by serious research.

Defining and describing *normative* boarding schools serving a disadvantaged population—as distinguished from facilities that fill a therapeutic or protective

² Members of the advisory committee included Richard Barth, School of Social Work, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Anthony Bryk, Center for School Improvement/University of Chicago; Peter Edelman, Georgetown University Law Center; Patricia Graham, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University; William Lepley, Milton Hershey School; Joan Lipsitz, education consultant; Wendy Puriefoy, Public Education Network; Lee Schoor, Project on Effective Interventions, Harvard University; Ralph Smith, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

³ We also located a handful of studies of rural, reservation-dwelling Native American children attending Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, but for a variety of reasons, the generalizability of these studies to a population of disadvantaged urban children is doubtful.

function—is difficult. This difficulty led us to devise a new framework for thinking about boarding school that would overcome old assumptions about the meaning of out-of-home settings used primarily by low-income or minority children and youth. We also decided to conduct a small interview-based study of families already using community boarding schools in order to provide a concrete description of the children and families who had chosen this option and their reasons for doing so; this study also included interviews with educators and children’s services professionals.

This paper presents our findings in four sections. First, we will briefly describe what community boarding schools are. Second, we will present our conceptual framework for thinking about boarding schools. The third section addresses the question of which young people might benefit from community boarding schools and why, and presents findings from the interview study. The fourth section takes up the policy context for establishing community boarding schools and is followed by a brief conclusion.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY BOARDING SCHOOL?

A community boarding school is, very simply, a school with a boarding program that is located in or near the students’ home communities. Children live on campus during the week and return home on all or some weekends. Some proponents have called them “urban boarding schools,” emphasizing their location in distressed inner cities and their mission of offering young people in these areas a safe, structured, and supportive educational experience (Caldwell, 1989; Shane, 1989). We prefer the term *community boarding school* because it emphasizes the school’s connection to where the students ordinarily live and makes it clear that the school’s purpose is not to remove children from

familiar surroundings. Indeed, because community boarding schools are located near the family home, they encourage and facilitate parents' involvement with their children's education.

There are only a handful of such schools currently in operation, and they are based on different operational models. A couple are private day schools that enroll significant numbers of low-income children and have added on-campus living arrangements for those whose home and family circumstances suggest that boarding might be beneficial. Other schools have always been boarding schools. All but one of these schools are private schools; the lone public school is The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C. Unlike private schools, at which admission generally is offered only after school officials determine a student's eligibility, SEED is open to all school district residents. Therefore, SEED comes closest to our conception of a community boarding school.

Four years ago, the SEED School opened its doors in southwest Washington, D.C., an area that includes some of the District of Columbia's most distressed neighborhoods. Offering a college-preparatory curriculum in grades 7 through 12 and expressing the expectation that all graduates will attend college, SEED reaches out specifically to disadvantaged children, many of whom arrive with two to three-year academic delays. Students attend class and live on campus during the week and one weekend per month, returning home the other three weekends. SEED believes that even poor families and communities can contribute to children's learning and development, and the school actively encourages parental involvement.

The boarding program provides students with guidance and instruction in the acquisition of study habits and life and social skills, and offers enrichment activities in a safe and structured environment. SEED students also are afforded the opportunity to travel abroad over the summer, participate in the City Kids Wilderness program, and engage in service learning opportunities in the surrounding community. Early results in academic achievement are encouraging, and SEED students show lower levels of involvement with high-risk behavior as compared with high school students across the nation.

SEED takes new students only at the seventh-grade level. As the 2002-2003 school year opened, enrollment was 230 students, and the oldest cohort entered eleventh grade. When these students enter twelfth grade in the fall of 2003, the school will have reached its full capacity, enrolling 300 students. SEED anticipates its first graduating class the following June.

A brand new program in New York City, the Anchor program, represents another approach to community boarding: adding a dormitory to an existing urban day school to create a boarding program for some students. The idea for Anchor grew out of the experiences its founder, Barbara Welles, had with a scholarship and mentoring program for disadvantaged youth. Welles learned that some scholarship students were unable to take full advantage of the opportunity to attend a better school, even with the support of a mentor, because their home lives were not conducive to academic achievement. Funded by private donations, Anchor opened a pilot program in the fall of 2002 at Catherine McAuley High School, a Catholic girls' school in Brooklyn. A converted convent building adjacent to the campus houses the boarding program, which enrolled twenty

students in its first year; when it reaches full capacity, the dormitory will house sixty girls (www.achor-nyc.org). Welles plans to open similar programs at other city schools.

A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING ABOUT BOARDING SCHOOL

We did not begin our research thinking specifically in terms of community boarding schools; we began by looking more generally at what some people call “residential education.” However, we were focused on schools, not therapeutic settings or substitutes for foster care. We wanted to promote the development of educational options in low-income communities and affirm our belief that poor families and neighborhoods can contribute positively to children’s development and learning, instead of implying that the only avenue to success is escape. We initially were stymied by the legacy of this country’s long history of taking children away from poor—and therefore presumptively unfit—parents (Rothman, 1971; Hascii, 1997) and the shameful legacy of the Indian boarding schools, which were coercive attempts to separate Native children from their families and their culture (Fuchs and Havighurst 1973). This history cast suspicion on any initiatives that involve poor or minority children living away from home. Complicating matters are contemporary efforts to establish “residential academies” for foster care children whose proponents often use the rhetoric of education to describe the programs—but their opponents understand them as orphanages (Minneapolis Star Tribune, 2002a, 2002b). We didn’t want to appear to be supporting a movement to build orphanages, nor was our intention to extend the foster care system.

Was there a way to think about boarding school without appearing to discredit poor families and communities? We needed to develop a conceptual framework that

would accomplish two things: (1) assess and challenge the assumptions underlying the use of boarding schools by poor children; and (2) create a conceptual scheme that rested on a different set of assumptions about what boarding schools could be.

Challenging the Institution/Community Dichotomy

The nineteenth-century asylum-building movement's rationale was the need to create alternatives to purportedly harmful home and community environments (Rothman, 1971). Even today, it remains difficult to think about out-of-home living arrangements and sustaining family connections at the same time (Whittaker, 2000; Whittaker and Maluccio, 2002)⁴ The resulting institution-vs.-community debate posits the two settings as mutually exclusive—one is either “in the community,” which also implies “at home with the family,” or one is (purposely) separated from them.

In order to think about boarding school as a normative option for disadvantaged children, project staff had to transcend the institution-vs.-community dichotomy and develop an analytic frame that wasn't rooted in the assumption that residential means separation and removal. The starting point grew out of the example of community schools. These initiatives, such as the New York City Beacons, expand the hours and functions of local public schools by offering a range of supports and activities to children and their families, as well as providing a gathering place for community members to become acquainted and to act together on mutual concerns (Dryfoos 2000, Warren et al.,

⁴ Whittaker offers an example of the difficulty critics of group care have in understanding that residential settings need not be restrictive and unconnected to community: Taking Melton et al.'s comments about Project Re-ED, a residential program that strives to maintain family connections and sends children home on weekends, Whittaker notes that Melton and his coauthors dub it a “nonresidential residential program” because, although it offers residential services, it is not based on an institution-community dichotomy (2000).

1999). Drawing on both youth development and community development principles, community schools approach the full-day-of-school benefits of a boarding school because they keep the schools open in the evenings and on weekends. They do not understand themselves as separating the child from the community, but as supporting the child within it. Family and neighbors are welcome at school, and activities are available to them as well as to the children. Such efforts demonstrate the fact that a longer school day offering a more enveloping and supportive school-based environment does not necessarily imply severing a child's connections to family and community. We began to think that these programs might have more in common with boarding schools than either they or we had considered.⁵

Building on Extended School Days: A Continuum of Support

With the example of community schools in mind, we began to understand boarding schools as part of a continuum of school-connected supports for children and youth that begins not with other types of residential programs, but with *non-residential* school enrichments that provide before- and after-school programming. The continuum moves through successively more intensive and enveloping programs, such as local boarding schools, that allow students to return home on weekends, and ends with full-week boarding at a school distant from the family home. If the school-based enrichment

⁵ We must be candid here: In conversations we had with representatives of expanded-day school and youth development programs, most people thought of boarding schools—even those located in the community, like the SEED School—as vehicles for taking children away from “bad” families; they understood their own programs, in contrast, as strengthening or supporting families. This viewpoint was not universally held, but it surfaced often enough to demonstrate to us just how entrenched the institution-community dichotomy is and how difficult it can be to think in new ways about seemingly familiar programs.

programs extend the school day to include late afternoon and evening programs as a way to provide a safe and supportive environment for children, local boarding schools take the logical next step and add the overnight component. The key idea is to understand community boarding schools as related to community-based, non-residential educational options that engage family and community members in the learning and development of their children.

In this framework, community boarding schools represent a link between traditional boarding schools and non-residential expanded schools initiatives. They are a new institutional form that emerges when we recognize that *residential* and *community-based* are not mutually exclusive ideas. The idea is more revolutionary than it may appear: Community boarding schools are not simply a kinder and gentler version of old-style institutions where children are still “taken away,” just not very far. Instead, the availability of on-campus living acts as an affirmative support for children and families in the local community that is an option they may elect to use—or not. Which children and families might use such schools, and for what reasons, was the next question we sought to answer.

WHO MIGHT BENEFIT FROM COMMUNITY BOARDING SCHOOLS?

The new framework provided us with a way of thinking about community boarding schools. The next step was to get a clearer sense of which children and youth might benefit from such schools and what might prompt families to choose such schools. To accomplish this, we conducted two sets of interviews. One was with fourteen parents of sixteen children already attending a community boarding school. The other set of

interviews was with about two dozen educators and children's services professionals. These interviews were meant as a preliminary exploration only; we started by interviewing a very small sample of families who already had made the choice. We wanted to know why parents had made the decision to use a local boarding school and whether or not, and in what ways, they felt their children had benefited. Educators and children's services professionals were asked to reflect on children with whom they work and discuss how and whether the availability of a school like SEED School would be beneficial to those children. (See Appendix B.)

The families' comments confirmed some of our initial ideas—that a variety of children would attend for a variety of reasons, that the school was understood as a normative option, and that family relationships would not be diminished by having the children live at school for most of the week. Service professionals' reactions were more mixed; some of them work primarily with very disturbed children who need therapeutic settings. But others knew of well-functioning children whose families were troubled; these children, some believed, might benefit from the stability of attending a local boarding school.

The rest of this section summarizes the interview findings in three areas: the reasons for choosing boarding, families' comments about local versus distant boarding schools, and families' perceptions of the benefits to their children of boarding. Because this is a preliminary exploration of the topic, the findings presented here are meant primarily to suggest categories and themes, not constitute a definitive description of all families and children who elect to use community boarding schools and their reasons for doing so.

Reasons for Choosing Community Boarding

A Different Educational Option

It has long been known that children of poor families often are relegated to underfunded and poorly-performing schools (Kozol, 1991; National Research Council, 1993). A number of the families we spoke with expressed dissatisfaction with their children's schools and sought an alternative educational environment for them. Some of the children had been attending local public schools; others had enrolled in private schools that, for one reason or another, were not meeting their needs or expectations. Parents of good students wanted a stronger academic environment for their children. Parents of children who were struggling in school felt that their children's school was not responding adequately to their needs.

One of [my son's] teachers said to me, had I heard anything about this _____ school , and I said no, and she said it's a boarding school. And she said, now before you get upset about that, she said it's academic; she said [my son] would grow so much academically. He's a good student, you know, it will stretch him; it will make him grow.

[My son] is eleven now. He was having a tough time reading and trying to keep up with the rest of the class, so he was pretty much just going to school just to go to school. And, of course with twenty-seven children in the class, you just can't focus on just one child. . . . And what I found here (at the boarding school) was that there was . . . a lot more attention when it came to the students, smaller classes, the organizational development they provided.

My daughter, who is now in tenth grade here, when she was in sixth grade . . . she came home and informed us all that she attended an assembly at school in which information had been passed out for the possibility of attending a boarding school. That had been always what she wanted to do, go to boarding school.

Extra Support and Supervision

Most of the families we spoke with understood the importance of being involved with their children's schoolwork and providing them with adequate supervision. But poor families—especially those headed by single parents—often face the choice between working and caring for their children. Scott et al. (2001) found that welfare-reliant mothers facing the work requirements contained in the 1996 welfare reform legislation “worried a great deal” about losing the ability to supervise their children, fearing that if they are not around to monitor their kids, school performance and the children's overall well-being will suffer. Their fears are not unfounded: Research has shown that children with less adult supervision are more likely to be truant and to engage in risky behavior (Dwyer et al., 1990, cited in National Institute on Out of School Time, 2001). Because of the work requirements of welfare reform and increasing child care costs, today's young people have as many as 20 to 25 unsupervised hours each week (James et al., 1999, cited in National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2001). Long stretches of unstructured nonschool time are associated with early sexual activity, use of alcohol and drugs, and participation in crime and violent behavior (Richardson et al., 1989; Zill, 1995).

The families we spoke with echoed all these concerns. Families with limited economic resources and/or whose circumstances have been disrupted by divorce or other problems often find it very difficult to respond to the needs of growing children and adolescents, particularly if the kids have special problems or are growing up in a distressed community.

I think it [enrollment in boarding school] was a whole thing. It was academics. It was the fact that I was a single parent. It was that sometimes I had to work late, like at 9:00, or if I had a meeting, I couldn't pick him up on time, I would have to have somebody—the babysitter—pick him up. And then she wouldn't feed him. I was worried of my son in the street, ripping and running. I don't know what's going on with him, getting home late.

In the sixth grade—she's not a fast little girl, but the little girls she was hanging with [were] a little bit faster than she was, and that was my fear.

Beginning of that year [seventh grade]. . . he was a little disruptive. He was never physical; he didn't swear, and he never smoked his first cigarette. He never drank. He never did any of that. I was afraid that ultimately this behavior was going to lead to worse behavior. I was scared to death.

Well, I was having difficulties with . . . I have two older boys, and I was a single mom at the time, and I was having difficulties with them as far as getting their schoolwork completed, getting them to concentrate on school, and I was working full-time.

Just because I wanted them to have a more stable education, because at the time I moved from one place . . . [My sons] were born in California, and then . . . I moved back here because my family was here and they went to my old grammar school. Then I moved again; they went to another school. And then I figured this school (the boarding school)—even if I moved, they don't have to switch schools and lose friends. . . . I was feeling like a gypsy there for a while, moving them all around so.

That area [around student's former school] is just so rowdy. I'm like, "my child might be hurt down there." . . . [S]ome kids were complaining that they had gotten hurt and they needed to have zero tolerance of violence and stuff like this. . . . [A]nd then you have to ride the bus . . . it [is] not like you're just walking down the street to school or something like that. But when you have to ride the bus, that's a danger, too. [My daughter] is an only child, that makes me really worry, you know.

Because of the residual nature of U.S. social welfare, poor children living in low-income homes that are managing to get by may be the most difficult to see: They have not yet come to the attention of the authorities or social services professionals; they may not have reached the vaguely specified "at-risk" threshold. But when these children or

their families have even the sort of typical problems many middle-class families face—divorce, parents’ long working hours, not liking the public school, minor behavior problems—their options for addressing those problems are highly constrained. The availability of a local boarding school may help these families cope more effectively with challenging life circumstances and perhaps even avoid the need for more intrusive intervention down the road.

Stabilizing Children in Troubled Circumstances

Another group of children and youth who might benefit from attending community boarding schools are those living in families plagued by serious problems such as drug addiction, homelessness, or child abuse and neglect. We heard about these families from educators and social services professionals, and occasionally from the families themselves. We spoke with two grandmothers who had assumed legal custody of their grandsons and were now providing a stable home, but experiencing the stress of raising children—sometimes, behaviorally disordered children—in later life.

[My grandson] wanted to have his own way. . . . It was strange for me. Because my own children never thought they could have their own way. They tried, but they knew it wouldn’t work. But it’s a different thing with children today. They push to have their way. And that’s been hard for me. It was hard, and it was strange, and it was something I wasn’t used to.

A community boarding school administrator told us that his school enrolled about ten children in family foster care situations where the caretaker was older or terminally ill and not up to caring for the children 7 days a week. The availability of weekday boarding helped to stabilize these foster families by allowing the caretakers to continue to raise the children, which in turn provided the children with continuity in their home lives and their schooling.

The availability of on-campus living, in addition to benefiting children and youth like those described above, may have implications for other children currently in the social service system, particularly those in foster care who do not otherwise need a therapeutic placement. A growing literature on the educational experiences of children in foster care suggests that the frequent school transfers associated with being in care have a significant negative impact on attendance; these findings appear to be particularly true for adolescents (Conger and Rebeck, 2001). Child welfare professionals we interviewed also spoke of the frequent moves some children in foster care are obliged to make; one of them speculated on the potential benefit of a local boarding school for a child she knew:

So school was such a stabilizing force for this [foster care] child, and so if she had at least another school where even if she went to a number of foster homes . . . she had at least one stable school.

The community boarding school option may be particularly beneficial when it is the family, but not the child, who has troubles. But we want to be clear: The goal of community boarding schools is education, not social services. However these schools might be a useful option for children in turbulent circumstances as either an alternative or an adjunct to formal services.

Local vs. Distant Boarding School

When asked to talk about the decision process by which they came to choose a community boarding school, several families volunteered that the schools' proximity to home was an important consideration. Families saw a clear distinction between a more traditional boarding school, which they assumed would be far away, and the community boarding school. The schools being used by the interviewed families send children home

all or most weekends, and many parents cited having the children home on weekends as something that made them more accepting of boarding. A few volunteered that they would not consider a school so distant that weekend visits were precluded. Others expressed the belief that their children were too young to attend a full-week boarding program. Some parents liked the idea of being nearby “just in case,” but more simply missed their children too much to part with them full time.

I want [my sons] home on the weekend. That’s my time with them. They can’t go away seven days; I would go crazy. It’s hard enough being five days, but seven days, no.

Something happen, I can be there. I don’t have to get on a plane and fly across the country. . . .If she’s a teen-ager, that’s a different situation, but she’s young, you know. . . . She just turned thirteen, so that makes all the difference.

I didn’t go through all the trouble of making me the legal guardian and then just put [my grandson] off on somebody else. . . . We do something mostly every weekend.

It was a dream come true. I mean, one, your child can be in a boarding school, but she can still be in the city so if something happens, you’re still close.

Our conceptual framework posits a distinction between local and distant boarding schools; families perceive a similar distinction. We note that parents’ preferences for local boarding are expressed in terms of maintaining their relationships with and ongoing responsibility for their children. The parent-child relationship is not compromised by the children living at school during the week.

The Benefits of Community Boarding School

Boarding school was a novel idea for most of the parents we spoke with, and not a few acknowledged having initial misgivings about enrolling their children. However, a

number of these parents came to credit the boarding program with helping their children mature socially and be more independent and responsible in executing daily tasks.

Others liked the idea that the kids are off the streets and productively occupied after the bell rings. Not surprisingly, for a school-identified sample, parents unanimously expressed satisfaction with the schools and with their children's progress there.⁶

Oh, I think socially, he's gotten out of his shell because he's here with the kids, his peers, not just for the school day, but he's here with them during their social activities in the afternoon. He eats dinner with them; he lives with them. And before, he was very isolated socially, and now he seems to be integrating a lot better. . . . His grades are amazing now, and I don't know if that's because of that structured environment or if it's because of positive peer pressure, that he's got the highest GPA in his class.

I think [boarding is good] because it has given my son a moral responsibility, you know, he knows what is expected of a young man now, to get up in the morning and take care of his responsibilities. He has followed through with that.

There are quite a few things he gets. He gets to be off the street. That's a number with me. That's a number with me because there are so many things that could happen to teenagers these days on the street. And then he gets to be with teachers and people, and they all grow together. . . . I think children that have the opportunity to go here are very fortunately blessed.

The most important thing [my son and daughter] can receive from this school is a well-rounded education that lead them to college. . . . I have not finished college, and my kids from day one have always been instructed that you don't finish school until you finish college.

[I] had never even considered the fact that I would put him in a boarding school. Just never crossed my mind. But once he got here, he's an only child, once he got here, it just became clear to me that he's grown in a way he would not have grown had he not had this experience.

⁶ Because the schools helped us identify families who might be willing to be interviewed, we are aware that we likely spoke with the most satisfied parents. Therefore, their assessments of the benefits of boarding must be understood as suggestive of the possibilities, not an evaluation of most or all children's experiences.

Our admittedly preliminary exploration of families' reasons for choosing community boarding schools and what the benefits to children are suggests several reasons why these schools are a promising educational alternative for some children and families. First, a program located within the community that allows children to return home on weekends may be more attractive to families than distant boarding schools—particularly parents who have had little previous experience with overnight programs or whose children are younger. Second, there are a number of subgroups of children who are potential candidates for community boarding schools. These run the gamut from children whose families simply want a different educational option, to children whose behavior or academic performance suggests the need for more structure and attention, to those whose families find it difficult to adequately support their children's academic development. Third, boarding school is understood by families as a beneficial and normative alternative that does not diminish parent-child relationships and can support families in a broad range of circumstances.

THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT FOR COMMUNITY BOARDING SCHOOLS

In recent years, a number of state and local governments have begun to explore public funding for what often are termed “residential education” options for disadvantaged children and youth. Sometimes these efforts are led by public figures; more often, private individuals and groups develop a program for which they then seek policy support. Two predominant trends have developed. The first seeks to create places like SEED School, publicly funded community boarding schools in urban areas to serve as an educational option for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and stressed

neighborhoods. Advocates of these programs feel that the added structure and academic focus will allow students to develop their full academic potential and the corresponding positive life outcomes. Most of these efforts have used charter school legislation, but thus far only two have succeeded in opening schools. The two schools are the SEED Public Charter School of Washington, DC and the now-closed Samuel DeWitt Proctor Academy in West Trenton, NJ.⁷

The second and thus far more predominant effort works to create “residential academies” for children and youth who have experienced multiple foster care placements and/or older foster care children who do not wish to be adopted.⁸ Given the shortage of foster parents and the high cost of other placements for these children, such programs have generated interest. Several programs have opened or are planned in Minnesota; San Diego opened a school in the fall of 2001, and a number of private efforts are underway in various cities. These initiatives frequently use the rhetoric of education, but their proponents are motivated primarily by concerns about the inadequacy of the foster care system rather than the inadequacy of public schools. Moreover, when not supported by private sources, funding for the residential component of these programs comes from social services or foster care dollars. Because they can tap into an existing funding stream, these programs have sometimes found it easier than community boarding schools

⁷ Among the handful of existing urban or community boarding schools are those funded by private sources. Because they do not seek public funding, we will not include them in this discussion. In addition, there are a handful of residential charter schools that serve substance-abusing or mentally disturbed children and youth. The schools often are operated by social service agencies and have a therapeutic mission. Because of their significant therapeutic focus and the programmatic needs of their clients, we understand these facilities as more closely resembling social service programs than schools. Therefore, we will not include them in the present discussion. We note, however, that the use of charter school legislation as a tool to expand categorical service options illustrates the often-blurry boundaries between the various types of institutions that offer both educational and residential services.

⁸ Some schools indicate that their goal is to enroll a mix of children, including those in foster care and disadvantaged children from intact families.

do to get public funding for overnight services. Public education, with the exception of The SEED School, does not provide funds for boarding. From our perspective, the residential academies are best understood as therapeutic or child welfare programs, and thus are entirely different from community boarding schools. We will not discuss the policy issues surrounding their development except to note that their proponents' use of educational rhetoric makes it more difficult to advance a normative view of boarding school use by low-income youth.⁹

The Limits of Charter School Legislation

Efforts to develop publicly funded urban boarding schools have mostly turned to state charter school legislation for authorization and funding. Charter schools in general face a set of challenges including capital issues, management and governance issues, recruitment of qualified staff, curriculum development, and securing adequate funding. Charter boarding schools experience many of the issues faced by charter schools, with the added difficulty of finding a site and staff capable of operating the boarding program—and securing the additional dollars to fund it.

Two residential charter schools were founded during the late 1990s: The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, D.C. and the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Academy in West Trenton, New Jersey. The schools were founded on similar impulses and to carry out similar missions. Located in areas with stressed neighborhoods and schools, both were established to create educational opportunities for disadvantaged young people by

⁹ Indeed, some of the efforts to build residential academies in Minnesota have been met with controversy. Opponents of these initiatives understand them as orphanages, not as schools, despite proponents' use of educational language to describe the programs (Minneapolis Star Tribune, 2002a, 2002b; Ranum and Walker, 2002; Walsh, 2002).

offering a college-preparatory environment akin to that of a traditional boarding school. Any student from the district regardless of economic or educational background could enroll, and both schools used lotteries to select students if applications exceeded the number of available slots. The students at both schools were almost all minorities, came from single-parent households, and two-thirds or more qualified for federally subsidized school meal programs.

The development of the two schools followed a similar path. In each case, two people concerned with the problems faced by disadvantaged youth researched a variety of operational models. These individuals then formed 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundations which were intended to provide an infrastructure for administration and fundraising. The foundations were established to be capable of developing one or more separately incorporated schools as well as supporting a movement for this form of education. Both efforts decided to enroll students one grade at a time. This strategy allowed the founders to plan a 4- to 5-year period to build the community, culture, and systems necessary to reach full-scale operations. Proctor Academy failed after four years; SEED School remains open and growing, enrolling its fifth cohort of students during the 2002-2003 academic year. The differences in the policy context for each school suggest the reforms that would be needed to better support the development of community boarding schools using charter legislation.

The SEED School

SEED School founders were able to clear the major hurdle faced by school founders: securing adequate operating funds. Per-pupil costs for a boarding school are nearly three times that of a day school. Through careful negotiation and new legislation,

the school obtained additional funding of \$1.74 for each \$1.00 of basic charter funding to cover the expenses of providing a 24-hour environment. The additional funding also applies to the facilities allotment and special allocations. These adjustments bring funding from the District of Columbia to just over \$20,000 per student per year. Private fundraising covers the remaining costs. SEED founders so far are alone among would-be charter boarding school founders in their success in securing a per-pupil allotment of public dollars specifically for boarding schools. SEED founders also benefited from the District's 15-year charter term, which gave the school sufficient time to implement and refine the curriculum, train staff, and work through governance and management issues.¹⁰ The longer time frame is important: SEED Foundation staff and management found themselves engaged in school operations more extensively and for far longer than anticipated.

Samuel Dewitt Proctor Academy

In contrast to SEED, the founders of Samuel DeWitt Proctor Academy in West Trenton, N.J., were not able to work out such favorable policy circumstances. In February of 1997, the Proctor Academy received a 4-year charter for 140 students in grades seven to twelve and opened the following September. The New Jersey charter formula provided only about \$8,800 per student per year, which was below the local district level and had to be augmented by significant private fundraising. Despite forbearance on 2 years' rent by the state legislature, which lowered per student costs to \$14,400, the school was unable to raise sufficient funds to cover the difference.¹¹ As each student cohort entered, the financial strain increased. Program delivery and

¹⁰ The school's performance, however, is reviewed at 5-year intervals.

¹¹ Typical boarding school tuition is \$20,000 to \$30,000 per student per year.

activities suffered as a consequence. Finding qualified residential staff and coordinating communication among academic and residential faculty was difficult throughout the school's history, but especially during the early operations. The multiple stresses of operations in years one and two resulted in staff burnout and turnover that had an impact on students. Furthermore, the Proctor charter was for only 4 years. Therefore, school founders were forced to establish a program and demonstrate results in a much briefer time frame than were SEED founders.

Citing instability in management that caused withdrawal of students, seven interim or appointed heads in 4 years, poor test scores, unstable finances due to decreased enrollment, and the lack of an accountability plan, the state Department of Education placed Proctor on probation, and then, in the spring of 2001, declined to renew the charter. Although Proctor Academy suffered from management problems, it seems reasonable to assume that having adequate operating funds and a longer charter term would have increased the likelihood of its survival.

Discussion and Conclusion: Next Steps

Other individuals and groups around the country have attempted to use charter legislation to open public boarding schools, usually in urban areas and with the intention of serving disadvantaged students. However, none of these efforts has yet borne fruit, and the difficulty of securing the necessary operating funds to run a boarding school remains the most significant challenge. There appears to be recognition of the need for and potential benefit of local schools with boarding programs that can be used by disadvantaged children and youth. But recent efforts to establish such schools using

public funds indicate that existing policy tools are inadequate. The underlying problem may well be that public education in this country has not understood living at school as a way to strengthen its primary mission of providing academic services. As a result, school funding formulas rarely allow for the added costs of running a boarding program. It is, therefore, not surprising that residential schools intending to serve foster care children are, at present, being developed more quickly than are ordinary urban boarding schools.

Charter school legislation could be a useful policy vehicle for the creation of community boarding schools that are responsive to local needs and economically accessible to children and youth from poor families. However, the limited experience of charter boarding school founders and others who have tried unsuccessfully to establish such schools suggests the need for several changes in charter school policy. These needed policy changes include provisions for a special per-pupil allotment that covers the added costs of the boarding program, longer charter periods, and sufficient start-up funding to support the additional implementation tasks associated with developing both academic and boarding components.¹²

The dearth of research on outcomes for students who attend community boarding schools complicates the task of advocating for the necessary changes in policy. Without evidence of their benefits—assuming the model is effective—leveraging public and policy support is difficult, particularly during periods of economic constraint. If the development of community boarding schools is to move forward, it will be necessary to promote the establishment of and provide support to a sufficient number of such

¹² Charter school laws vary from state to state; some provide start-up money, and the length of charter terms varies, although many states allow only 4 or 5 years for a school to prove itself. Finally, other than Washington D.C., no state has established a funding formula to support the increased cost of a boarding school.

programs in order to assess effectiveness and costs; to support rigorous evaluations of their benefits to children, families, and communities; and to provide concrete examples of effective programs to cultivate public and policymaker support.

Community boarding schools will not suit every child, but the provision of around-the-clock learning and support in a normative environment has the potential to meet a broad range of needs and preferences for educational alternatives. Moreover, the emergence of this new institutional form—one that redefines our understandings about poor children and residential alternatives—suggests a fresh approach to providing disadvantaged children and youth with opportunities to learn and grow, one that should be added to the current array of educational reforms. We believe this option deserves serious consideration from policymakers, researchers, and the public.

APPENDIX A

BOARDING SCHOOL OPTIONS FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Early in the project, we tried to identify boarding schools that enroll significant numbers of disadvantaged students. For the purposes of this project, we defined *disadvantaged* to include children and youth from low-income families or those from racial/ethnic minority groups. In addition, we defined *school* to include only institutions whose mission is primarily educational. Because children need to be educated, many types of group residential settings for children include a schooling component even when the reason for the children's placement may be to receive treatment, punishment, or to provide an alternative home if the family home is unworkable. These settings are best understood as extensions of the categorical social service system, which was outside of our interest in normative educational options. Therefore, we excluded from our definition programs—even those calling themselves schools—that receive significant funding and referrals from the social service system, that have a therapeutic mission, that primarily take children pursuant to placement by the courts, or those from which exit is based on the actions of the courts or an assessment of clinical improvement. We also excluded programs such as Job Corps, which are targeted to older youth who dropped out of high school or who are seeking vocational training. Put plainly, we looked for boarding schools that enrolled large numbers of disadvantaged children who otherwise are “regular kids.”¹³

¹³ Our definition of “regular kids” includes those with educational delays or the sort of mild behavioral or emotional problems that can be addressed within the confines of a non-therapeutic school.

We soon learned that these criteria did not always lead to easy distinctions among boarding schools. The boundary, for example, between a therapeutic school for children with emotional or behavior problems and an “alternative” school for academic underachievers, whose frustrations in school sometimes erupt behaviorally, can be difficult to discern. The mission of one of the recently established residential academies in Minnesota is to enroll children whose home lives place them at risk of academic failure, but who have not yet entered the child welfare system. However, the program takes county dollars for residential services, which are activated only by a petition to and appearance before the juvenile court and necessitating the intervention of the categorical services system. Thus, the school’s philosophy meets our criteria, but its funding and enrollment requirements do not.

After several months of searching, we realized that the number of educationally oriented boarding schools that enroll large numbers of disadvantaged children who don’t have other significant problems is very small. Table 1 lists by name the eighteen schools we have been able to identify that are currently operating in the U.S. that meet the above criteria. The table also takes note of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, the state math and science academies, and traditional boarding schools.

Schools that we define as community boarding schools—urban location, students return home all or most weekends—appear in boldface. One additional school, Chinquapin School, is a unique case: Its female students commute daily; male students board during the week. Although many of Chinquapin’s students live in the Houston area, the school is located 25 miles outside of the city. Thus, Chinquapin serves an urban population, but not within the urban environment.

Schools That Select Students on the Basis of Disadvantage

The schools that appear in the far left-hand column are those that select students based on economic or social disadvantages. Several of these schools explicitly target children and youth from low-income families; that is, the schools make family income a major or primary criterion for admission.¹⁴ With the exception of the Scotland School—

Table 1. Boarding School Options for Disadvantaged Children and Youth

All Students Disadvantaged	Most/Many Students Disadvantaged	Some/Few Students Disadvantaged
<p><u>Economic disadvantage:</u> The Chinquapin School (Highlands, TX) Girard College (Philadelphia) Glenwood School (Glenwood, IL) Milton Hershey School (Hershey, PA) Scotland School (Scotland, PA) Catherine McAuley/Anchor (New York)</p> <p><u>Racial minority status:</u> Kamehameha Schools (Hawaii, various) Laurinburg Institute (Laurinburg, NC) Native American Preparatory (Rowe, NM) Pine Forge Academy (Pine Forge, PA) Piney Woods School (Piney Woods, MS) Redemption Christian Academy (Troy, NY) BIA/Tribal boarding schools (various)</p>	<p><u>Residential charter schools:</u> SEED School (Washington, D.C.)</p> <p><u>Private boarding schools:</u> Bootstrap Ranch (Belgrade, MT) CFS–School at Church Farm (Paoli, PA) Eagle Rock School (Estes Park, CO) St. Benedict’s Prep (Newark)</p>	<p><u>State residential math & science academies:</u> 12 states: AL, AR, IL, IN, LA, ME, MO, MS, NC, OK, SC, TX</p> <p><u>Traditional boarding schools</u></p>

¹⁴ The new boarding program at Catherine McAuley High School, which is run by Anchor, specifically targets disadvantaged students.

which serves veterans' children and is funded by the state veteran's department, local school districts, and the federal government—all of the above institutions are privately funded.¹⁵

Most of the other schools in the far left-hand column target students who are members of specific racial or ethnic minorities. Because the targeted groups are disproportionately poor, many of the students served by these institutions happen to come from low-income families. Kamehameha Schools provide primary and secondary education to children of Native Hawaiian ancestry. Native American Preparatory School (NAPS) is a small, private, philanthropic college-preparatory school serving students from thirty tribal nations. NAPS should not be confused with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, which are federally funded. The BIA operated twenty-eight boarding schools during the 2000-2001 school year; another twenty-three were operated by the tribes under BIA grants or contracts. Most are located on reservation grounds. Fourteen peripheral dormitories also were in operation during 2000-2001; all but one of these were under tribal control (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2001).

The remaining four schools in this group are the surviving historically black boarding schools formed as a response to segregation. With 300-plus students, Piney Woods is the largest of these. Although these schools do not make race a condition for admission, their mission and programs are geared toward the education of black students. All the black academies offer college-preparatory curricula.

¹⁵ An additional school not listed in the table is the Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Children's Home (ISSCH), a state-funded school. At the time of this study, ISSCH was in the process of shifting from a therapeutic/special education focus to a general education focus. New admission criteria are evolving; however, a site visit and interviews with school staff suggest that the majority of students are economically disadvantaged.

Schools That Make Themselves Comparatively Accessible to Disadvantaged Students

Schools in the middle column include those that, although they may intend to reach out to disadvantaged students, do not impose such a requirement as a condition for admission. These schools' recruitment and/or admissions procedures, costs or financial aid availability, and/or geographic location make them particularly accessible to students from low-income families. Some of these schools intend to serve a large proportion of disadvantaged students and, although they do not specifically make disadvantage an eligibility criterion, have student bodies that include a high percentage of disadvantaged students.

The SEED School, a charter school in Washington, D.C. is discussed extensively in the body of the paper; it is the only public school in this group. As a public school, it does not charge tuition or boarding fees. The four private boarding schools in this group represent a variety of models. CFS—The School at Church Farm and St. Benedict's Preparatory are private schools that endeavor to make themselves accessible to lower-income students. However their minimum charges likely put them out of reach of the poorest families. CFS is a boarding school with a small day school program; it asks parents to contribute a minimum of \$4,000 toward the school's annual costs of \$35,000 (www.cfschool.org).¹⁶ St. Benedict's is a day school that in fall 2000 added a dormitory for some of its students whose home lives suggest that boarding would be beneficial, although the dormitory is not restricted to disadvantaged students.

¹⁶ Even the wealthiest schools generally provide financial aid to no more than 30-35 percent of their students. There may be other schools that, like CFS, offer significant amounts of financial aid to most students, although we were unable to locate them or identify a comprehensive source for such information. Boarding school guides do typically furnish financial aid information; however, their listings do not include all boarding schools.

Two comparatively new private schools offer tuition-free education. Eagle Rock School and Bootstrap Ranch High School target high-school-age youth who are floundering academically and/or socially in the public schools and are in danger of dropping out. Students are not selected on the basis of economic disadvantage, although many would fall into that category.

Schools That Are Selectively Accessible to Disadvantaged Students

Two additional groups of schools offer limited accessibility to disadvantaged students either because they are highly competitive academically or because they are very expensive and offer only limited amounts of financial assistance—or both. The newer of these two options includes the public residential magnet schools, most of which specialize in math and science curricula. Approximately a dozen states have established these schools. As publicly funded institutions that do not charge tuition, these schools in theory are open to disadvantaged students.¹⁷ However, their admissions are academically competitive, which may have the effect of screening out disadvantaged students, who are more likely to have attended less-competitive public grade schools and to be less well-prepared.

Finally, traditional private boarding schools have long made scholarships and other forms of financial aid available to motivated and academically capable low-income and minority students, although the exact number of genuinely disadvantaged young people attending traditional boarding schools is unclear. The Association of Boarding

¹⁷ All the schools offer free tuition to state residents. However, only four of the twelve—Arkansas, Indiana, Missouri, and Oklahoma—also cover room and board or charge no additional fees. Three schools—Louisiana, Maine, and Texas—charge for room and board; these amounts range between approximately \$1,000 to \$3,700 per year. Other schools charge nothing for room and board, but do have an annual fee. These schools include Alabama, Illinois, and North Carolina; fee amounts range from about \$25 to nearly \$1,000. Only the Maine school is open to out-of-state residents; they are charged \$16,000 per year, which covers tuition and room and board (Stephens, 1998/1999).

Schools estimates that as many as 20 percent of students attending its member schools are receiving some form of financial assistance; the wealthiest schools may have as many as one-quarter to one-third of their students receiving some level of financial aid, although these awards also go to middle class families. Depending on the family's income, financial aid may fully cover tuition and room and board, or may offer the family a few thousand dollars toward annual costs that can run in excess of \$25,000. Only the wealthiest schools—and these also tend to be the most academically competitive—can afford to offer full scholarships to more than one or two students each year.

Although private boarding schools generally espouse an interest in having a “diverse” student population, whether the emphasis is on racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity or on economic diversity is difficult to ascertain; conversations with a limited number of admissions directors suggest that the emphasis tends to be on the former. In some cases, this emphasis may be a function of the limited availability of full-tuition scholarships—that is, schools need to enroll children whose parents can contribute toward costs.

Discussion

It is likely that some people in the field would disagree with our arrangement of schools in this table. The boundaries between the categories we constructed are often blurry. For example, the proportions of low-income students at both SEED and Piney Woods schools are probably comparable, and both schools serve mostly African American students. What gets Piney Woods placed in the left-hand column and SEED in the middle is that the former has an explicit history and mission of enrolling members of a historically disadvantaged minority, and SEED, although it intends to serve poor

children, legally must be open to all students of the Washington, D.C. school district. Our understanding, then, of the schools in the left-hand column is that they explicitly set out to enroll children with some sort of economic or social disadvantage and generally require such status for admission. In contrast, the schools in the middle, although they, too, often intend to serve the same populations, do not impose such status as a requirement.

However, even this distinction is less clear than it might seem: Private schools are free to define disadvantage as strictly or liberally as they choose, and they exercise full discretion over admissions. They may, for example, define as disadvantaged children of single parents earning modest incomes. Even publicly funded schools may be free to set admissions standards or, at a minimum, to shape outreach efforts and thereby influence the pool of applicants. Therefore, differences between students enrolled in these schools probably are explained better by differences in the individual school programs than by our classifications. That said, there is an important distinction behind the classification scheme, and that is whether a school is *for* disadvantaged children or whether it is simply *accessible* to them, along with non-disadvantaged children.

APPENDIX B

METHOD: INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

Interviews with Parents

In-person interviews were conducted with fourteen parents whose children currently are attending one of two community boarding schools; one parent in each school had two children enrolled, the others have one child enrolled. All but two parent interviews were recorded; summaries were prepared of the interviews with the parents who declined to be recorded.

We worked with two schools with which we had an existing relationship and who agreed to let us talk with their students' families. Parents were identified by school staff, who sent to each family a letter on school letterhead requesting their participation. The letter was drafted by project staff. Parents were paid \$20 for their time. The interviews were conducted during the autumn of 2001; all took place in a private room on the school campus, and each lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. Transcripts and interview summaries were analyzed using N'Vivo, a software program designed to support qualitative data analysis.

Parents were asked to discuss their reasons for choosing the school their child now attended, their initial perceptions of the school and thoughts about boarding school in general, and how their child has responded to the boarding school experience.

Educators and Children's Services Professionals

We interviewed more than two dozen informants with expertise in the areas of public education, youth development, child welfare, and children's services. These

individuals represent school administrators, program directors, government agency staff, members of the philanthropic community, and individuals affiliated with associations or umbrella groups. In addition, we interviewed a former foster child who is about to graduate from college and who talked with us about the challenges she faced getting an education. Informants initially were identified through conversations with colleagues familiar with the relevant program areas; additional informants were located by asking interviewees to suggest others with whom we should speak. Because our objective was to sketch a only a preliminary picture of which subgroups of children might be candidates for community boarding schools—not to obtain systematic quantitative estimates of such children—we did not attempt a formal sampling procedure. Instead, we sought knowledgeable individuals who could inform our thinking and provide descriptions of children and youth who might benefit from this type of educational option.

Seven informants were interviewed in person; the remainder were interviewed by phone. All in-person interviews and a few phone interviews were recorded and transcribed; notes were taken and summaries were prepared for the non-recorded phone interviews. The interviews were open ended and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Phone notes and transcripts were analyzed using N'Vivo.

Specific questions were tailored to each informant's area of expertise. However, the interviews were organized around several broad topic areas: the group or groups of children and youth with which the informant was familiar, information about the program the informant was affiliated with (if applicable) or the nature of the informant's involvement with children and youth, descriptions of young people who had unmet needs or who might otherwise benefit from a residential school option and why, and the

informant's sense of how families would react to the idea of sending their children to boarding school.

We conducted two “waves” of expert interviewing, talking with different groups of individuals. The first wave of interviews was conducted during the late summer of 2001 and included as informants mostly educators and people working in the area of youth development. The second set of interviews was conducted during the winter and spring of 2002; informants were individuals familiar with categorical children's services and the child welfare system. Although the questions to both groups were similar, the order of their presentation in the interview changed from the first to the second wave. During the first set of interviews, we posed questions about which children might benefit from a residential experience early in the interview. This approach sometimes elicited the subject's opposition to residential alternatives of any kind and made it difficult to bring the interview around to descriptions of children and their life circumstances. Individuals involved in youth development and other community-based initiatives that focus on normal development and promoting healthy families communities were understandably likely to react in this manner, voicing familiar concerns about institutions, taking children from their families, etc.

Because the idea of a residential school—particularly one located in a child's home community—was unlikely to be on most informants' radar screens (with the exception of a few of the educators), we decided not to open the second set of interviews with questions about residential schools. Instead, we began by asking the subject to describe the young people with whom he/she was familiar, some of the challenges those children faced, and only then did we raise the question of a residential school and ask the

informant to reflect on the children and youth just discussed and consider the school option in that context. This approach yielded better descriptions of children and youth who might benefit from attending a community boarding school. Interestingly, however, informants still found it difficult to think about a boarding school that was local and connected to the community, often questioning the interviewer about such a program in what appeared to be an attempt to categorize it according to the organization of the traditional service system.

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