

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLING

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ABSTRACT

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Despite the national standards for the implementation of full-service community schooling require the inclusion of youth participation in the decision-making and communication of these initiatives, few studies have solicited these key perspectives. The current study used focus groups to solicit youth perspectives on full-service community schooling initiatives being implemented in the schools they attended. Students were recruited from schools participating in the early years of a full-service community schooling initiative. Students were separated into focus groups based on the school they were recruited from. The questions I sought to answer through this study were: 1.) what does full-service community schooling mean to students; 2.) what characteristics of full-service community schooling do youth enjoy (and not enjoy); 3.) how, if at all, has full-service community schooling changed the lives of youth; and 4.) what factors salient to youth does full-service community schooling fail to address? Analyzing the transcripts from the focus group using Marshall and Rossman's (1995) interrater qualitative approach produced 35 themes grouped into ten analytical categories that were then further reduced into four higher order content groupings. I discuss the manner in which these findings elucidate how youth understand the scope, benefits, and issues with full-service community schooling. Furthermore, I discuss, the implications of these findings for the future practice of and research on youth voice in the planning and design of full-service community schooling.

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INTRODUCTION

Full-service community schooling is a strategy for the integrated development of schools and communities. This strategy focuses on aligning social services, community engagement, and youth participation to create more holistic learning environments that foster the aspirations of students, families, and communities (Coalition for Community Schools (CCS), 2018). Full-service community schooling theory, practice, and research focus on student factors that extend beyond academic accomplishment (CCS, 2018). For example, specific community schools may focus on factors related to the positive development of students within their communities (e.g., civic participation; Torney-Purta, 2002) whereas others may focus on factors that contribute to the collaboration between administrators and service providers (Massey, Armstrong, Boroughs, Henson, & McCash, 2005).

One of the goals of full-service community schooling is to identify and address the factors that are important to various groups of stakeholders involved in a school (e.g., students, parents, teachers; Ice, Thapa, & Cohen, 2015). Specifically, the national standards for full-service community schooling posit that student voice and participation are necessary components in ensuring the efficacy of these initiatives (CCS, 2018). However, in a recent review of the literature on the implementation of full-service community schooling, Heers, Van Klaveren, Groot, and Maassen van den Brink (2016), found no studies that incorporated youth perspectives in their decision-making or evaluation processes. Neglecting to include youth perspectives on full-service community schooling may hinder the capacity for researchers and practitioners to identify barriers and mechanisms that are salient to students. Research that values youth perspectives on full-service community schools is needed.

Full-Service Community Schooling

Full-service community schooling was developed to reform more traditional compulsory education settings into more holistic learning environments (Castrechini, & London, 2012). These reformed learning environments allow all stakeholders (e.g., students, parents, community members) to access educational and social services to improve conventional academic outcomes (e.g., attendance, academic achievement), as well as, more holistic outcomes (e.g., critical consciousness, self-esteem) (Castrechini, & London, 2012). Full-service community schooling attempts educational reform by aligning--within the school setting--services and resources necessary to youth and community health and well-being (Blank, Jacobson, Melaville, & Pearson, 2010). To guide this alignment, The Coalition of Community Schools--a national alliance of local, state, and federal education providers and stakeholders who provide the most widely used model of full-service community schooling--developed ten standards for achieving the goals of community school reformation at the initiative and site level (CCS, 2017; CCS, 2018). These standards focus on the development of integrated service infrastructures, implementation of student-centered educational programming, and meaningful engagement of stakeholders to achieve site and system level change (CCS, 2018). As a framework for attending to community and student needs through the targeted alignment of traditionally separate institutions, the national standards set forth by the Coalition of Community Schools have become increasingly popular among education practitioners and researchers in the United States (Gomez, Gonzales, Niebuhr, & Villarreal, 2012; Warren, 2005).

Engaging Alternative Perspectives in Full-Service Community School Programming

As defined by the national standards, full-service community schooling relies on engaging multiple stakeholders to provide insight on how community schools should be

structured and evaluated (CCS, 2018). These stakeholders include service providers, parents, community leaders, teachers, and students (Valli, Stefanski, & Jacobson, 2018). To drive this engagement in their specific sites, full-service community school practitioners are recommended to implement various participation, engagement, and outreach activities (e.g., listening sessions, community townhalls) (Sanders, 2016).

The national standards further specify that full-service community schools integrate insights from stakeholders who have often been kept out of the decision-making and research process, such as students and their families (CCS, 2018). The inclusion of these insights improves community schools' capacity to identify and address factors that are important to these stakeholders (Henderson, & Mapp, 2002). For example, researchers have found that educators who support parents' leadership in their children's school gain access to perspectives and relationships that can facilitate the development of a more holistic learning environment (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Building on this trend within the community school movement, some contemporary community school theorists have suggested that full-service community schooling should work towards the ideal of fully democratizing schools and the systems that surround them (Gardner, & Crockwell, 2006).

The national standards reflect an ideal of driving programming based on the insights of multiple stakeholders, especially those who represent groups that have been historically overlooked by community school practitioners. For example, Valli and colleagues (2018) highlighted the importance of families and parents in the coordination and function of full service community school. However, a recent review of full service community schools only briefly mentioned the role of youth-voice in decision-making in any contemporary research study (Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017). This gap in the literature is corroborated by another review of

the literature that showed that almost no studies included the solicitation of youth perspectives in the development and implementation of full-service community schooling programming (Heers et al., 2016). These findings are made only more problematic as the national standards lists soliciting youth perspectives as one of the core domains of implementation (CCS, 2018).

The limited consideration of youth perspectives by community school researchers and practitioners is not limited to community schooling, and--instead--seems to be a consequence of broader societal patterns of adultism, the preeminence of adult perspectives in centering problems and solutions. Adultism tends to permeate multiple domains of research and practice involving youth (e.g., policy, education; Kirshner, 2007; Kohfeldt et al., 2011). For example, a review of youth-focused community-based participatory research studies--an approach designed to empower youth decision-making in research and practice--found that youth perspectives were seldom incorporated in the design or leadership of projects (Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2013).

Youth Perspectives on Full-Service Community Schooling

Ignoring youth perspectives in full-service community schooling threatens community schools' capacity to address the needs of youth participants. The national standards' directive to drive programming in response to the perspectives of youth and other stakeholders is based on the premise that youth are uniquely positioned to provide insight into the workings of school and school-related systems. Specifically, youth may provide insight to blind spots and issues in programming that are missed by adults (Mitra, 2008). This information is crucial to developing a more holistic understanding of youth serving programs and can help support more effective implementation of education reform (Dolan, Christens, & Lin, 2015). Additionally, when youth are given the opportunity to speak on their experiences in systems where they have been historically excluded from, they may develop a stronger sense of commitment to improving their

development and the development of others in the system (Mitra, 2008). For example, a recent review of the literature on youth participatory action research showed that when youth perspectives informed programming, youth engagement in the programming rose (Callingham, 2013). Similarly, a systematic review of the literature showed that promoting greater youth participation in programming is positively associated with psychological well-being (e.g., self-esteem, hopefulness) and positive social behaviors (e.g., teamwork, self-efficacy; Morton, & Montgomery, 2012). In conclusion, it is important to solicit youth perspectives on the practices of full-service community schools to better inform future research and practice.

Current Study

In this study, we examined youth perspectives on full-service community schooling by analyzing transcripts from focus groups of youth who attend full-service community schools in a small Midwestern city. These transcripts were collected as part of a broader study to examine students' reactions to different participatory qualitative methods. Moreover, that study was part of an ongoing evaluation of the full-service community schooling initiative in that city's public schools. The questions that we hoped to answer through this analysis were:

1. What does full-service community schooling mean to students?
2. What characteristics of full-service community schooling do youth enjoy (and not enjoy)?
3. How, if at all, has full-service community schooling changed the lives of youth?
4. What factors salient to youth does full-service community schooling fail to address?

METHODS

Research Paradigm and Qualitative Approach

We were guided in our analysis by a youth-focused evaluation research paradigm informed by Checkoway and Richard-Schuster's (2003) description of the role of youth participation in community evaluation research. Namely, all analysts emphasized the role of youth as subject experts in evaluating full-service community schooling. Because we were interested in identifying consistent emergent themes in youth perspectives, we analyzed the data for this study following Marshall and Rossman's (1995) qualitative approach.

Context

The data for this study were collected as part of a larger academic-community partnership. Specifically, a research team housed in a large research university in the Midwestern U.S. was tasked with evaluating the implementation of the Children's Aid Society Community Schools Approach--a specific iteration of full-service community schooling--in a public-school district in a small Midwestern U.S. city. Through the Children's Aid Society Community Schools Approach, the district sought to improve student, family, and community member access to services and in turn, more successfully address their needs.

The Children's Aid Society Community Schools Approach was originally implemented into one school during the initiative's first year. During the second year, the initiative was expanded to a total of four schools. The initiative went district wide (11 schools in total) in its third year. Each school located in the district was restructured into a community hub where integrated supports were available to all community members during and after school hours. Services and supports instituted through this full-service community schooling approach targeted four main outcomes of interest: 1.) student attendance; 2.) third grade reading levels; 3.) grade

promotion/graduation rates; and 4.) community engagement. The data for this study were collected at the end of the first year of district-wide implementation from students attending middle- and high- schools.

Researcher Characteristics

A total of three researchers were involved in the proposed study. The primary researcher and secondary coder for this study, are graduate students. The primary researcher and secondary coder are both supervised by a doctoral level university-affiliated researcher. Both the secondary coder and the supervising researcher are contracted to evaluate the implementation of full-service community schooling in the district. The secondary coder and the supervising researcher oversaw the study during which these focus groups were conducted. The primary researcher and secondary coder were trained in the use of the interrater qualitative approach for the current study (Marshall, & Rossman, 1995). Through this training, the researchers identified their biases, the potential effect of these biases on the study, and practices to reduce this effect. The biases that were shared among all of the researchers involved are discussed in the following section.

Reflexivity

Through the process of assessing their biases, the researchers identified three sets of shared assumptions and interests regarding the current study. The first pertains to their shared belief in the fundamental importance of involving youth as much as possible when research pertains to youth's experiences. Collectively, these researchers' work is invested in the examination and assessment of youth-focused evaluation. All researchers hold that youth exist as experts on their lived experiences and on the systems that operate around them. For this reason, youth should be empowered to make decisions in these systems. This is particularly important in

the context of disenfranchised communities where youth operate at multiple intersections of marginality.

A second, related, set of assumptions pertains to how bodies are privileged based upon social constructions of youth, adults, and elders. Specifically, the researchers are critical of the presence of adultism, defined as by privileging adults and--concomitantly--marginalizing youth, by centering adult narratives in research and practice (DeJong, & Love, 2015). The researchers believe that youth are capable of speaking on all aspects of their lives (Gardner, & Crockwell, 2006). Furthermore, the researchers assert the essential role of youth perspectives in informing the development of full-service community schools.

The third set of shared assumptions pertains to the methods of analysis. The researchers believe that qualitative analysis is feasible and appropriate in the context of the current study. We believe that research teams can account for, and monitor their biases with the proper training and support. Similarly, we believe that--if adequately trained--socially-privileged researchers can understand and value the perspectives of marginalized youth, and support them in their efforts to achieve individual and communal goals.

Procedures

Ethical Issues Pertaining to Human Subjects

The Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University determined that the work leading to the generation of the data to be used in this study fell within IRB Review Exemption B1, which applies to research conducted in established educational settings, involving normal educational practices. Despite the exemption ruling, the evaluation employed a passive adult consent and active youth assent in accordance with the principles of beneficence and respect for individuals. Appendix A shows a copy of the consent form that was used during the original

study. Our subsequent use of these data for the current study was submitted separately for review and--as secondary analyses of already acquired data--was determined “Not Human Subjects Research.” The transcripts from the focus groups were de-identified and all information on the participants were kept separate from them for the present study.

Sampling

Participants came from the population of students attending schools where the Children’s Aid Society Community Schools Approach had been implemented. This sampling approach is best described as convenience sampling, which involves the selection of the most readily available participants for a study (Marshall, 1996). While convenience sampling is the least demanding on researchers with regards to time, money, and effort, it may result in poor quality data and the lack of intellectual credibility (Marshall, 1996). However, in the context of the larger evaluation, convenience sampling was done out of a desire for pragmatic validity (Hall, 2013).

Recruitment

Community School staff at four schools serving grades seven through twelve recruited students to participate in the study. Community School staff were asked to recruit approximately 20 students to participate in an activity designed to document their perspectives on full-service community schooling. There were no specific eligibility or ineligibility criteria for students willing to participate in the study. Community School staff distributed a flier (provided in Appendix B) to inform students and their parents about the opportunity to participate. Staff made it clear to students that participation in the activity was voluntary, and that refusing to participate would have no bearing on their—or their families’—relationship with the schools (including ability to receive services and supports). On the day research procedures occurred, students who

were eligible to participate were brought to a classroom by the Community School staff. Upon arrival, research staff described the purpose of the activities and explained an informed assent form to the youth. Youth that wished to participate in the activities signed the assent form. Only one youth declined participation. Using a randomization procedure, half of the students were assigned to participate in focus groups and half to a different form of qualitative group. All students who completed participation received a \$10 gift card to offset the costs of their time spent participation.

Participants

Using the sampling and recruitment procedures described above, we were able to hold four focus groups. The demographics of each focus group are summarized in Table 1. Sixteen students ($N = 13$) participated in the focus groups in total. Most students were African American (81.25%), and most were young women (68.80%). The average age across participants was 13.1 years ($SD = 1.84$).

Table 1.
Descriptives of Demographics for each Focus Group

	Group 1 ($N = 2$)	Group 2 ($N = 5$)	Group 3 ($N = 7$)	Group 4 ($N = 2$)	Overall ($N = 16$)
Grade range of school	K-6	3-6	9-12	K-8	
Average Age (SD)	12.50 (0.50)	15.40 (0.51)	12.14 (0.26)	11.00 (0.00)	13.10 (1.84)
Ethnicity					
African American	1	5	5	2	13
Multiracial	1	0	1	0	2
Indian	0	0	1	0	1
Gender					
Women	2	3	5	2	12

Data Collection Instruments and Technologies

Background Information Form

This form included items that request participants background information including race, gender, age, school, grade level, and GPA.

Focus Group Protocol

The focus group facilitators followed a semi-structured protocol (provided in Appendix C) designed by an independent expert asked to design a focus group that explored the concept of full-service community schooling and the emergent themes that arose as students shared their perceptions of them. Additionally, the expert was asked to adhere to existing standards for designing and reporting qualitative research (i.e., O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook, 2014; Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007). The focus group began by introducing students to the topics to be covered. Facilitators presented questions one at a time and allowed time for group discussion. The facilitators used flip charts or whiteboards to document the group discussions. Facilitators were trained to probe student responses to guide the discussion. Youth could leave at any time during the focus group protocol.

Once all students were present, the facilitators introduced themselves to the group. The facilitators then discussed the purpose, goals, and time commitment for the focus group. The facilitators then guided the students through the informed assent document. After students provided informed assent, they were asked to complete a pre-test that included the background information form and a number of surveys for evaluation purposes not related to the current study. The focus groups were conducted after youth had completed this pre-test. After the focus groups concluded, participants completed a post-test (that included surveys for other research purposes), and the facilitators led a debriefing conversation about how the discussion went.

Data Management and Analysis

The audio recordings from the focus groups were transcribed by a contracted transcription company, and the transcripts were stored in a secure and research-compliant location. The transcripts were uploaded to QSR International's NVivo 11 to aid in qualitative analysis following the interrater qualitative approach described by Marshall and Rossman (1995). The primary researcher and secondary rater coded the same set of transcripts. To check for interrater reliability, convergence estimates were calculated for the codes from each rater. All non-convergent findings were discussed by the full research team and codes were clarified accordingly. If estimates did not indicate convergence, coders re-examined the transcripts using the updated coding guides. This process was repeated until a convergence of greater than 90% was met. Once this occurred, the emergent patterns and themes found in the data were cross-checked by the supervising researcher.

Techniques to Enhance Trustworthiness

The composition of the research team should inform considerations about trustworthiness. Team members are university-affiliated researchers, two of whom were contracted to evaluate the initiative in the context of which the data were collected. All team members have experience and training in youth-focused research. The secondary coder and supervising researcher were chosen by the primary researcher because of their expertise on youth perspectives in evaluation, full-service community school programming, and the application of youth perspectives to the development and implementation of full-service community schools.

Aspects of the analytical approach also contribute to the trustworthiness of the current study. To strengthen the credibility of the analysis, the team members responsible for the development of the coding scheme were chosen based on their experience in evaluation, full-

service community schools, qualitative methods, and critical studies. Second, each coder engaged with, and analyzed the transcripts before meeting to compare their drafted coding schemes. To further foster credibility, we triangulated data sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014). To increase the dependability of the study, the supervising researcher cross-checked the thematic findings against the transcripts independent of the two coders.

RESULTS

As summarized in Table 2, we identified 35 themes and grouped them into ten analytical categories that we then further reduced into four higher order content groupings: 1.) conceptualizations of what constitutes community schooling; 2.) positive experiences and impacts from engagement in programming; 3.) negative experiences and issues with programming and classrooms; 4.) suggestions for how to improve community schooling. We've organized our ensuing presentation of results into subsections focused on each higher order content grouping.

Table 2.
Summary of Qualitative Analysis

Content grouping	Source
Category	
Theme	
What community schooling means to students	
Developing community-school connection	1, 3
Programming with direct youth participation	
Academic courses, lessons, or field trips	1, 2, 3, 4
Arts focused programming	1
Community service	1, 3, 4
Nutrition and cooking classes	1, 2, 3, 4
Sports and physical activity classes	1, 2, 3, 4
Youth-adult partnership discussions	1
Positive experiences and impacts from engagement in programming	
Positive experiences from participation in programming	
Conflict mediation and self-empowerment sessions	3
Enjoy the sports & physical activity programming	2, 3, 4
Enjoy trying new foods/cooking/nutrition	1, 3, 4
Interesting science activities	4
Positive connections with the staff	2, 3
Youth generally enjoy activities	1
Positive impacts from engagement in programming	
Benefits of being healthy	1, 3
Healthy food-related behaviors	1, 2
Learned sports	2, 4
Learning how to participate and treat their peers	1
Life and emotional skills	1, 2, 3
Success support & learning	1, 2, 3, 4

Table 2 (cont.)

Negative experiences and issues with programming and classrooms

Negative experiences and issues due to classroom problems	
Teachers are frustrated & stressed leading to traumatic behaviors	1
Some youth “bring other people down” and interrupt learning/class time	1
Negative experiences participating in programming	
Bad food in youth programs	2
Some programs are boring, particularly when unstructured	3, 4
Students not well behaved in program	1
Youth forced to clean	2
Issues with the implementation of programming	
Poor coordination of programming can lead to discomfort	1
Programs not being available/accessible to all	3
Unsanitary food and facilities	2

Suggestions for how to improve community schooling

Ways to improve community-school connection	
Medical assistance and further diversity of participation	1, 3
Suggestions for how to improve programs that only engage youth	
Greater variety of academic opportunities and classes	1, 2, 3
Increased youth-adult partnerships to improve program/school operations	1, 3
More variety and cleaner food provided to students	1, 2, 3
More variety in arts focused programming	3, 4
More variety in sports and physical activity programming	2, 3, 4
Opportunities for students to engage in community outreach and mentoring	1, 3, 4
Student-focused program scheduling and school transportation	1, 2, 3, 4

Note. 1 = School One; 2 = School Two; 3 = School Three; 4 = School Four

What does full-service community schooling mean to students?

We developed two categories to organize the six themes reflecting students' discussions of the programs, activities, and processes that they believe define community schooling. The themes that we assigned to the first category focus on the interaction between a community school and the broader community. The themes that we assigned to the second category focus on the youth programming implemented by community schools. The following subsections contain more thorough descriptions of each category.

Community-School Connection

In two of the focus groups, students discussed full-service community schooling as including communication between schools and the community to develop a more cooperative

relationship. Students described community schools as communicating with other schools and the community about what programs they are implementing and what they are teaching students. One student stated, “[community schooling involves ...] Different schools communicating about the community and their work at each school about what they’re doing and what they’re teaching.” Some students suggested that communication from the full-service community schools serves to educate, organize, and eventually change the community. For example, one student stated, “Having different activities for the community to do and educate them in different things. At our school, we have a lot of programs that go after school, and after this work and education.” However, other students described the relationship between community schools and the community in more abstract and limited ways. One student stated, “Community education is letting the people know what’s supposed to be happening, stuff like that.”

Youth Programming

In each of the focus groups, students described full-service community schools as including programming that was either directly for youth or incorporated youth participation. Students described a variety of youth programming activities, most of which expanded on classes and programs seen in more conventional schools. We grouped these activities into the following themes: academic courses, educational field trips, community service opportunities, arts programming, nutrition/cooking classes, and sports or other physical activities. The representation of specific activities and/or themes in students’ comments varied across focus groups. For example, students from the first focus group described such physical activities as jumping rope, running track, and stretching; whereas, students from focus group three described

pilates, karate, yoga, and dancing. In terms of varied representation of themes across groups, only the students from focus group one described any kind of art programming¹.

Students in the focus groups described community schools implementing youth-adult partnership discussions. For instance, one student described, "...we just come downstairs and eat with [the Community School Director at his school] and have a discussion about more active stuff and the way he could make it better in community ed." Some students suggested that these kinds of discussions helped them feel more capable of making decisions that improve their schooling experience. For example, one student stated, "[in these discussions] ... we don't argue and stuff. We get together and decide on what we want to do and make it fair for others."

Positive Experiences and Impacts From Engagement in Programming

We created two categories to bring together twelve themes that described what students enjoy about full-service community school programming and the positive impacts it has on their lives. The first category brings together students' comments about the positive experiences of participating in programming. The second category includes students' descriptions of the benefits that community school programming had on their lives. Together, these categories depict students' perception of community school programming as both enjoyable and beneficial. We believe it important to note that none of the focus groups talked about positive experiences or impacts in the classroom, perhaps suggesting that students excluded classroom activities from their idea of community schooling. In the following subsections, we provide more thorough descriptions of each category and their component theme.

¹ In the district attended by the students, each community school has significant latitude regarding the type of programming that they may offer. For this reason, it seems reasonable that the students' experience of programming would vary across focus groups.

Positive Experiences From Participation in Programming

Students in each focus group described having positive experiences while participating in almost every form of youth programming that they associated with community schooling (e.g., food class, sports, arts activities). Although reference to specific types of programming varied across students and focus groups. Collectively the groups described positive experiences with: conflict mediation and self-empowerment spaces; sports and physical activities (e.g., baseball, basketball, dancing, karate); lessons on new foods, cooking, and nutrition (e.g., cooking competitions, healthy cooking classes); and science activities.

Students from focus groups two and three additionally described having positive relationships with school staff. For example, several students from group two named the community school director as someone they trusted and enjoyed interacting with. Moreover, students from group two described participating in self-empowerment and conflict mediation sessions with the community school director. One student described the sessions as, “...he had separate set groups from people that was having behavior issues and was always kicked out and stuff. Yeah, I was one of those. And he got us like, one day was already meant going the other day. One was like for more empowerment of yourself and the other one was figuring out who you are and why you’re having these problems.” Another student added, “...basically like we can air stuff out there that we couldn’t talk to nobody else. And we had to sign the contract. Everything was kept confidentially inside the group.”

Positive Impacts From Engagement in Programming

Students from each focus group described ways in which participation in youth-focused programming positively impacted their lives. Students described numerous benefits from engaging in youth-focused programming such as learning new skills to being supported in

practicing more healthy behaviors. We grouped these impacts in the following themes: benefits of being healthy; healthy food-related behaviors; learned sports; learning how to participate and treat their peers; life and emotional skills; and success support and learning.

As with previous categories and themes, students' descriptions of specific positive impacts received from youth-focused programming generally differed across groups. For example, students in group one described the benefits of being healthy as including how healthy eating reduced tooth damage and how being active gives people energy to live. Similarly, students in group four described learning numerous sports and physical activities through the community schools' programming (e.g., tennis, karate). Furthermore, only students in group one commented on how youth programming taught them how to participate and treat their peers. For example one student said, "Like how you can participate with others and how to treat others," while another described this benefit as, "People should work as a team because if you work as an individual you won't get much stuff done as you need if you don't have others to help you."

Despite the aforementioned variation, we observed a few similarities across focus groups' reports of the positive impacts that they received from community school programming. These similarities tended to focus on beneficial impacts and emotional skills, and support with learning. For example, students from groups one, two, and three described how community school programming provided opportunities to learn how to cope with and relieve stress. Similarly, students from each focus group talked about how youth programming provided by the schools taught them lessons necessary to succeed in life (e.g., choosing their future career, staying on the right track).

Negative Experiences and Issues with Engagement in Programming and Classrooms

We created four categories to organize nine themes that described students' negative experiences with the programming and the classroom experiences in the community schools that they attended. Two of these categories focus on classroom experiences, the other two focus on programming. The following subsections contain more thorough descriptions of each category and their component themes.

Negative Classroom Experiences

Students in group one described having negative classroom experiences with some teachers. Their comments focused on occasions where problematic student behavior exasperated teacher stress and resulted in negative interactions with teachers that also hampered learning. One student gave a particularly poignant example, "...we didn't get as much math done in the beginning of the end of the year because kids will just come in there to argue with you and stress her out. And she'll walk out the class, slam the door and knock everything on the floor. And we don't learn nothing. We just got tests we did we know nothing about them." Students in group one also described negative classroom experiences involving peers. Students described specific behaviors of their classroom peers that they interpreted as stemming from these peers' desire to "bring other people down." For example, one student described these students as,

"...[wanting] to bring other people down with them. They see the good kids doing their work, they're like come over there, try to grab their paper and copy it. It's not helping them. They don't know nothing about the subject, just using somebody else's."

Negative Experiences in Youth Programs

We created a category to bring together four themes that captured students' reports of negative experiences in youth programming; bad food in youth programs; some programs are

boring, particularly when unstructured; students not well behaved in programs; and youth forced to clean. The distribution of these themes varied across groups.

Students from group two talked about disgusting food. One student described the food they were provided as, "...old nasty food. [Cross talking 0:05:25] in the microwave.

Undercooked chicken nuggets and grilled chicken nuggets in the microwave. When they give us subs, the meat just turns different colors. That milk is expired." Students from group two also talked about how they were forced to clean by one of the program's facilitators. One student complained that, "She'll make us sweep. She makes up wipe the tables. Put the tables back. We just do a lot." Lastly, students from group one recounted instances where student behavioral problems during programming lead to negative experiences. One student described the situation,

"Yeah. Because earlier today we were doing water balloons and we weren't supposed to throw yet, but they grabbed them and started throwing them all of a sudden. So we had to go down to the playground and we didn't get a chance to really throw water balloons and have fun."

Negative Experiences Associated with Programming Implementation

The final category that we assigned to this content group includes three themes--each emerging from a separate focus groups--that represent students' negative experiences associated with the manner in which programs were implemented within community schools: poor coordination of programming can lead to discomfort; programs not being available or accessible to all; and unsanitary food and facilities.

Students in group one commented on how poorly coordinated activities could result in discomfort, frustration, and disinterest among participants. As one stated, "When it's 20 minutes, like it should take a group at a time to go to it because it'll be too many kids and people don't

want to face it. It'll be too hot. We get sweaty and we don't want to go." Students from group two talked at length about unsanitary cafeteria conditions (e.g., "janitors don't do their job."), disgusting food (e.g., "expired milk"), and wasteful food practices from cafeteria staff (e.g., throwing away food).

Lastly, students from group three talked about how youth-focused programming was not structured to be inclusive to all students. Some students described that there was not enough time allotted for each activity, such that these would wind up overlapping or occurring in short succession. For example, one student described the situation as:

"Right. And a lot of things with sport, just hard to fix the schedule on them, because it's already set before we actually get to school. When we come to school, you can like – if you access on the website where you can actually go see schedules and like it's already put, like the only time they redo a game is if the weather messes up with that or some school can come. But most of the time our schedule are already done."

This same student linked the lack of sufficient time to the need to schedule activities around the availability of volunteers. The student stated, "... our coaches are volunteers, that they don't get paid. So therefore, they have other jobs. So they also have to work around a job schedules and get in with us when they have the time." In contrast, other students commented on how they were excluded from youth-programming due to decisions by the facilitators. One student described, "...teachers pick those certain students. So it's like sometimes those students half the time they don't start off wanting to do it, but then they just do it anyway, because they got picked."

Suggestions for Improving Community Schooling

The final higher order content group that we created includes the two analytical categories that bring together eight themes comprising student suggestions for how full-service community schools can improve their connection to the community and provide more salient programs for the youth. These responses describe how students understand the current functioning of full-service community schools and the ways they could benefit from their insight. In two of the focus groups, students discussed ways to improve connection between full-service community schools and the community at large. Broadly, students described a need for full-service community schools to provide more opportunities and services for community members to become engaged in, and learn about, the schools. With regards to services, students specifically pointed out how full-service community schools could provide medical assistance to both students and community members. Students even described wanting to help in outreach to the community. As one student stated, “...we can go to different schools and try performing, get different people involved in community education, because if they see how much fun other people are having, like the events that other people do, of course go and enjoy.”

In each of the focus groups, students described ways to improve the youth programming provided by full-service community schools. We grouped these suggestions into the following themes: greater variety of academic opportunities and classes; increased youth-adult partnerships to improve program/school operations; more variety and cleaner food provided to students; more variety in arts-focused programming; more variety in sports and physical activity programming; opportunities for students to engage in mentoring; and student-focused program scheduling and school transportation. As with other categories, specific suggestions varied across groups and individuals. Students from each focus group described ways to improve student-focused program

scheduling and school transportation. Students broadly described the need for scheduling to be more responsive to the limited time students had and the competing options available to them. Other students commented on how the transportation provided by the schools is not geared towards accessibility and ease for youth. Students suggested that full-service community schools should provide a bus/shuttle service that would allow students to more easily engage in youth-focused programming. For example, one student described the shuttle service as, “It’s like they don’t actually come to your house, but it’s places like around your neighborhood or a couple of blocks or something like down the hill.” In response, another student said, “Yeah, and have a certain time to pick us up. That would be cool. That would be really cool.”

DISCUSSION

What does full-service community schooling mean to students?

The students in this study discussed two components of full-service community schooling, community-school connection and youth programming, both of which are reflected in the existing, adult-centered literature (e.g., CCS, 2018; Oakes et al., 2017). That said, the manner in which students discussed these components provides important insights that expand on said literature.

In the case of *community-school connection*, students' comments focused on the coordinated communication about programming and curriculum between schools and the community. This communication sought to educate the community and empower it to change. Although these types of community- and family-engagement are reflected in most articulations of the core components of full-service community schooling (e.g., CCS, 2018; Oakes et al., 2017), students' discussion was generally limited to specific connecting activities and some students described these types of engagement in abstract and unclear terms. Whereas the Coalition of Community School's (2018) standards outline eight domains of practices and procedures for community school initiatives to effectively communicate with the broader community, only one of these standards was reflected in students' comments. It will be important for researchers and practitioners to examine whether the discordance between this initiative's community engagement and communication practices with the national standards generalizes to other schools and districts that are implementing community schooling, to assess the reasons behind these discrepancies, and to develop and test solutions for those discrepancies.

Across all focus groups and all questions, students spoke at length about the different *youth programming* available through full-service community schools. Although some

programming did not differ from that available at many public schools (e.g., sports, arts), students (correctly) linked its presence in their schools to the full-service community schooling initiative. Other programming expanded beyond the usual public school offerings (e.g., peer mentoring, nutrition classes). Students' rich descriptions of youth programming provide insight into the manner in which they experience the core components of full-service community schooling (e.g., CCS, 2018). Students' understanding of full-service community schools largely centered around the programs made for them that they enjoyed.

Students described enjoying--and benefiting from--specific types of programming (e.g., sports, cooking, and nutrition) as well as the relationships that they formed with programs' adult facilitators. Researchers and practitioners may do well to focus future efforts on the role that youth programming--and the providers thereof--play in engaging and supporting the students in full-service community schools. For example, under the right conditions, partnering and collaborating with supportive, non-parental adults can be a key developmental asset for youth (Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2009; Zeldin, Christens, & Powers, 2012). Nevertheless, existing standards for community-schooling provided limited guidance on such relationships. Because the participants in this study highlighted positive experiences and benefits with youth-adult partnerships, researchers and practitioners may wish to devote efforts to more closely examining the role of adult mentors in community schooling, and to approaches that ensure such mentoring is conducted in an appropriate manner that is beneficial to students.

Overall, we note that students discussed only two components of full-service community schooling as laid out in the national standards, and one of these--community-school connection--only in a limited degree. Students were unaware of the other components of full-service community schooling, which is particularly problematic as the national standards suggest that

students should be educated on all of the activities of community school initiatives (e.g., CCS, 2018). Given the preeminence of youth voice in the community schooling standards, a narrow understanding of community schooling among the students who receive it may signal a not fully realized implementation of these standards in these students' schools.

What characteristics of full-service community schooling do youth enjoy (and not enjoy)?

In each of the focus groups, students described a number of youth-focused programs that they enjoyed. Students focused on the activities that they got to do separately from the classroom; with an explicit emphasis on experiences provided by the community schooling initiative. These new experiences included conventional (e.g., sports, arts classes) and unconventional (e.g., cooking and nutrition classes, faculty-student mediation groups) extracurricular programming. No students included any classroom or curricular programming among those that they enjoyed, and some students raised concerns with specific classroom experiences.

It is possible that students' preferences are influenced by the particular context of our study. Because of long-standing financial challenges, the district in which we conducted this study had gradually cut almost all out-of-classroom activities (e.g., sports, arts, etc.). The full-service community school initiative that we evaluated reinstated these types of out-of-classroom activities. Moreover, as this was the first year of implementation of the initiative in the four schools and the third year of implementation district wide, it is understandable how these programs were novel and exciting for students. For students to provide accurate accounts of full-service community schools, faculty and staff may have to be more intentional about ensuring that their initiatives and programming are transparent and accessible to students first

and foremost. Otherwise, students may only reflect on their enjoyment of full-service community schools based on the most visible changes to services for them.

Overall, and consistent with the results of previous studies on applied youth development interventions, students enjoyed programs where they could actively engage their interests and could learn that skill that benefit them in their daily lives (Lerner et al., 2014). Specifically, the results support those from studies that have identified the attributes youth enjoy about good out of school programming (Lerner et al., 2014). Previous research has shown that successful youth developmental programming, based on empirically supported developmental theory, not only achieves program outcomes, but also promotes positive development in other areas; including academic performance and life skill development (Lerner et al., 2014). Incorporating--and evaluating--guidelines that ensure that out-of-school programming within community schools reflects desires and interests of its students serve to facilitate more efficacious implementation of full-service community schooling and improve the experience of students.

Although all focus groups discussed aspects of full-service community they enjoyed, only a few focus groups described aspects they did not enjoy or like. In particular, students' descriptions of the aspects of full-service community schooling that they did not enjoy focused on interpersonal conflicts with teachers and with other youth (primarily in classroom settings). These interpersonal conflicts led to students in one focus group feeling disappointed with programming, disengaged in their learning, and disempowered in the school overall. Further, these conflicts resulted in disruptions to classroom learning and other programming.

Students' positive description of out-of-school programming in contrast to their negative experiences in the classroom may highlight discrepancies in the level of attention full-service community schools give to the classroom environment (Min, Anderson, & Chen, 2017).

Although wrap around services are necessary for fulfilling the many goals of full-service community schools, they do not make up for positive classroom environments and efficacious teachers. These results mirror previously identified gaps in the empirical research, where researchers have infrequently focused on how full-service community schooling affects classroom experiences and academic performance (Min et al., 2017). Researchers indicated limited methodological capacity to study not only how full-service community schools promote conventional academic outcomes (e.g., classroom climate, truancy), but also those critical outcomes espoused by the community school standards (e.g., holistic learning, empowerment; Min et al., 2017). Furthermore, a recent review of the literature on teaching in full-service community schools indicated that teacher collaboration, leadership, compensation, and collective bargaining are possible mechanisms necessary for classroom and academic success in full-service community school (Daniel, Quartz, & Oakes, 2019). Future empirical research is needed to elucidate the unique mechanisms that lead to classroom success in full-service community schooling.

How, if at all, has full-service community schooling impacted the lives of youth?

Students described numerous benefits from participating in youth programming, such as developing a number of life skills (e.g., nutrition, cooking) and gaining socioemotional assets (e.g., conflict mediation, peer collaboration). These outcomes contrast with those measured in most studies examining the benefits of full-service community schooling on youth, which tend to focus on academic or behavioral improvements (e.g., reduced truancy) (Heers et al., 2016). Although students addressed some academic impacts (e.g., exposure to a greater variety of subjects), they spoke more consistently and exuberantly about the socioemotional and life skills they learned. Students' focus on life skills and socioemotional assets supports criticisms of prior

studies as being focused on conventional indicators of school success (e.g., attendance, academic achievement) despite their possible conflict with the goals of full-service community schooling (Heers et al., 2016). Researchers should explore other impacts on youth that are unique to the goals and philosophies of full-service community schools such as youth empowerment, attitudes toward school, resilience, , and critical consciousness.

What factors salient to youth do full-service community schooling fail to address?

Students focused on two ways that full-service community schools could be improved: increased variety of programming and improved accessibility of programming. Students described a number of programming alternatives that they would like to see provided by their schools. For instance, one student discussed a desire for a puberty class that would include sexual education, reproductive health, and personal hygiene instruction. Students did not describe any opportunities to provide insight into which programs should be made available to them, but instead were expected to choose from a list of programming previously planned and scheduled by the initiative. These results are inconsistent with the tenets of full service community schooling, which emphasize youth voice and decision-making in determining the content of programming (e.g., CCS, 2018), but are consistent with research into the amount of youth participation in these initiatives, which demonstrate that said emphasis is seldom implemented (Heers et al., 2016). These findings suggest that increased attention to youth voice and influence may be required of the adult stakeholders involved in this community schooling initiative.

With regards to the suggestions around accessibility, students seemed to have a complex understanding of the barriers to engagement. For example, students discussed at length the need for transportation options to be structured around their needs and how the use of unpaid

volunteers to run programming resulted in scheduling complications for all participants. These findings reflect previous research that indicates that the benefits derived from potentially useful services and supports can be hampered or negated by accessibility barriers (Hernandez, Nesman, Mowery, Acevedo-Polakovich, & Callejas, 2009). That said, student perspectives might provide the stakeholders who guide the initiative with insight into accessibility barriers that may have otherwise been overlooked in their program planning and operations. Further research is needed to understand the benefits of student insight in planning and designing program logistics.

Limitations

The findings of the current study should be understood in the context of its limitations. We collected the data used in this study for a broader study that was nested within program evaluation. Specifically, although the focus groups were developed to elicit youth perspectives on full-service community schooling, they were part of a broader study developed to assess youth reactions to participatory research methods. The expert who developed the focus group protocol and the researchers who administered it were unaware of the intention of the original study; nevertheless, it is possible that this process resulted in the development of a focus group protocol that was based in the best practices of engaging youth perspectives on program planning and design. Future empirical research should focus directly on soliciting youth perspectives for the purposes of understanding full-service community schooling.

In addition, the original evaluation and subsequent study were done at an early stage of implementation for the full-service community school initiative. Given this timing, it is important to reflect on how the lack of experience students had with this new initiative and its relatively novelty in the community possibly shaped student discussion. For example, students tended to not associate full-service community schooling with their classroom experiences. This

result might have emerged due to those impacts or programs not having been established as clearly at this point of implementation. Future studies into youth perspectives on full-service community schools should be implemented at later stages of implementation to compare how differences in implementation fidelity and dosage may impact the level of complexity with which students reflect on full-service community schooling.

Another large limitation to the current study is the homogeneity of the sample which might limit the transferability of the results onto other contexts. The students who participated in the study all came from the same school district located in a small Midwestern city. Additionally, given that the school district from the original study is largely African American, the sample was predominantly African American. It is likely that full-service community schooling operates differently across different communities with different structural (e.g., community health initiatives, no school of choice) and demographic characteristics (e.g., rural or urban classification, ethnoracial makeup) (Min, Anderson, & Chen, 2016). Although the current study has a high degree of transferability to other students in similar contexts they are limited in their capacity to speak to different circumstances. Future studies should solicit a wider array of youth perspectives from different contexts, and compare them across levels of implementation, across different community contexts, and with more diverse samples to solicit more complex youth perspectives on the functioning of full-service community schooling. By comparing youth perspectives across contexts, future research will further our understanding of how full-service community schooling operates given community characteristics and aid in the greater adaption of the implementation full-service community initiatives.

Conclusions

With these limitations, this study still provides useful insight into student perceptions of full-service community schools. The findings fill an important gap in research by elucidating what students understand full-service community schools to be, what they enjoy (and dislike) about them, and what they believe that community schools could do differently. Youth focused many of their comments on their enjoyment and valuing of extracurricular programming that taught them life skills or aligned with their interests and on the relationships with adult partners that they built in this programming. In terms of areas for improvement, youth raised concerns over the accessibility of many services and supports, seldom addressed classroom issues (and tended to do so as negative aspects), and their comments reflected a lack of attention to youth voice--and clear communication with youth--throughout the initiative. Overall, our findings illustrate that youth can provide complex and engaging perspectives on the practices and systems of full-service community schooling. However, the process of the of this study also revealed some tensions that have yet to be addressed in how youth voice should be engaged in full-service community-schooling. While the national standards outline a need for youth voice and perspectives to be included in the planning, design, and evaluation of full-service community schooling, they do not provide criterion for how to go about this endeavor. The youth in this study provided several opinions and ideas—like addressing the use of unpaid volunteers—that, while sound in their rationale, may be difficult for administrators and practitioners to feasibly address. Without more research and reflection on how to not only solicit youth perspectives on full-service community schooling, but to do so in a meaningful and ethical manner, these initiatives may continue to struggle in this effort. We hope that the insights from this research

can inform future implementation and study of full-service community schooling to ensure the more democratic and empowering participation of youth in their education.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent Form (Deidentified)

1. WHY ARE YOU RECEIVING THIS FORM?

- You are invited to participate in a group discussion about your experiences with **[Community Schools Approach]**.
- We also want to learn more about what types of group discussions students find motivating.
- To help you decide whether to participate or not, this form explains what this group discussion involves, why we are doing it, any risks or benefits of participating, and who to contact if you have any questions.

2. EXPLANATION OF THE PROJECT and WHAT YOU WILL DO

- You are being invited to a group discussion with about 12 other students about everybody's experiences with **[Community Schools Approach]**.
- You will also be asked complete a short questionnaire before and after the group discussion. The questions are about:
 - Your feelings about school
 - Whether you feel that your opinions matter
 - How interested in community issues you are
 - Your feelings about the discussion

3. IT IS ABSOLUTELY FINE FOR YOU TO SAY “NO” OR TO CHANGE YOUR MIND AT ANY POINT

- Participation is voluntary. It is completely up to you whether to participate in this project.
- Even if you decide to participate, you can still not answer specific questions or stop participating at any time.

- If you don't want to participate or change your mind later, there will be NO penalty or consequence at school or with community education

4. ARE THERE ANY RISKS OR BENEFITS OF YOU PARTICIPATING?

- **RISKS:** We can't think of any major risks. You'll be asked questions about Community Education, and Community Education staff will NOT know if you decided to participate or not (nor will they know what you said).
- **BENEFITS:** While many students like participating in the types of group discussion that we are inviting you to, we can't be sure that you'll like it.

5. COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

- Participating in the group discussion and completing the questionnaires will take you between 60 and 90 minutes (depending on your reading and learning style).
- Students who participate in this project will receive a \$10-dollar Walmart gift card in return for their efforts.

6. CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

If you have concerns or questions about this project, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the person coordinating it:

Sara Stacy; 316 Physics Rd., East Lansing, MI 48824; stacysar@msu.edu; (517) 355-9562

7. ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE

If you accept our invitation, please sign your name below and write in the date.

Signature

Date

Appendix B: Flier to Recruit Youth Participants (Deidentified)

Dear Parent/Guardian,

In all [District Name], the [Community Schools Approach] provides students, parents, and community members with programming and support. To improve this initiative, we are asking children at [School Name] to participate in a listening session.

During listening sessions, groups of children will be asked to answer some written questions about [Community Schools Approach] and also talk about their experiences with [Community Schools Approach]. What they share will be used to improve [Community Schools Approach] and will be kept confidential.

Your child is being invited to participate in a listening session on [Date], which will happen after summer school activities.

As a thank you for their time, all children that participate in this listening session will receive a **\$10 Walmart gift card**.



If you would like your child to participate, NO ACTION IS NEEDED. Your child will be invited to attend the session after regular summer school hours on [Date]. Any children invited to participate of course can choose not to.

If you would NOT like your child to participate OR if you have questions about your child's participation in these groups: Please contact Sara Stacy by email (stacysar@msu.edu) or phone (513-526-6132).

Thank you,

[Community Schools Approach Staff]

Appendix C: Focus Group Protocol (Deidentified)

Step 1: Introduction

Time

20 Minutes

Materials

- Nametags (x20)
- Pre-survey (x20)

Process

As students enter, have them complete a nametag.

INTRODUCTIONS

Once all students are present, the facilitator/s introduces them self to the group:

- **E.g.:** Students from MSU, interested in your perspectives on **[Community School Approach]**.

The facilitator/s then discuss the purpose, goals, and time commitment for the focus group:

- **Purpose of the focus group:** To gather the youth's perspectives on **[Community School Approach]**. This information will be used to impact the future of **[Community School Approach]**.
- **Time commitment:** The activities today should take about an hour and a half.

CONSENT & PRE-SURVEY (Implemented by research staff, not facilitators)

- Informed consent
- Pre-survey:
 - The pre-survey includes questions about your beliefs and experiences.
 - Please answer these questions as honestly as you can.
 - These questions will not be reviewed by **[Community School Approach]** or school staff.
 - They will not affect your ability to participate in **[Community School Approach]** or school activities.
 - Your information and answers that you give will remain anonymous.
 - You can work independently or follow along as the questions are read aloud.
 - Distribute pre-survey, read aloud all items, and assist with any questions or needs.

RANDOM ASSIGNMENT

- Once youth have completed their pre/survey, distribute envelopes for assignment.
- Youth open their envelope and are assigned to participate in one of the evaluation approaches.

Step 2: Group Discussion

Time

60 Minutes

Materials

- Flipchart paper
- Markers

Process

Facilitator introduces the topic:

- As I mentioned, we are going to be discussing a few of the programs at your school:
[Community Schools Approach]. We want to get your opinion on these programs so that we can understand how they are going and get a sense of how we can make them better.

Facilitator presents questions one at a time to the youth and allows time for group discussion.

The facilitator will use flip charts or white board as necessary to document the group discussions.

The base questions are (record on flip chart):

- a. When you hear **[Community Schools Approach]** what do you think that includes?
- b. What are your favorite **[Community Schools Approach]** programs, and why?

- c. What are you least favorite **[Community Schools Approach]** programs, and why?
- d. How have **[Community Schools Approach]** programs helped you?
- e. If you could add or improve any **[Community Schools Approach]** service, which would it be and why?

The facilitator will probe to guide the discussion, such as:

- Does anyone disagree or has anyone had a different experience?
- Why do you feel that way?
- Can you talk about that more?
- Does anyone else have something they want to add here?
- Did we miss anything?

Step 3: Debrief, Discussion, & Post-Survey

Time

20 Minutes

Materials

No new materials needed

Process

Facilitator leads a brief discussion about how the discussion went.

Facilitator debriefs youth on the activities they participated in:

- Thank you *so much* for participating in the discussion today about **[Community Schools Approach]**.

- The discussion and information provided today will be directly used to understand and improve these programs at your school.
- We really appreciate your thoughtfulness and engagement during the activities today and the time you committed to being here. We could not do this work without you!

POST-SURVEY (Implemented by research staff, not facilitators)

- Now, we would like to ask you to complete a brief survey, that is very similar to the one you completed at the beginning of our time today.
 - Again, the survey includes questions about your beliefs and experiences.
 - Please answer these questions as honestly as you can.
 - These questions will not be reviewed by **[Community Schools Approach]** or school staff.
 - They will not affect your ability to participate in programs or school activities.
 - Your information and answers that you give will remain anonymous.
 - You can work independently or follow along as the questions are read aloud.
 - Distribute pre-survey, read aloud all items, and assist with any questions or needs.
 - Distribute gift cards once youth have completed the post-survey.

Youth can leave once they have finished.

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