About Us

The Comer School Development Program (SDP) began in the two lowest income and lowest achieving elementary schools in the city, 32nd and 33rd of 33. The two schools eventually rivaled the city's highest income schools, had the best attendance record, and no serious behavior problems. Over the past 40 plus years numerous schools have used SDP to similarly close the achievement gap. The SDP model has been implemented in more than 1000 schools in 26 American states, the District of Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, England, and Ireland.

It has been used successfully in P-12 settings serving students across the full socio-economic spectrum. This is possible in these different situations because support for development is needed by all young people, and development and learning are inextricably linked. When students can develop well they can learn well.

David Reynolds (http://www.icsei.net), the founder of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI, has said:

It is remarkable to see the evolution of the School Development Program over time because almost everything that we could take (learned) from the school effectiveness and school improvement communities Professor Comer has been doing....The great thing about this use of multiple levers is you stand a chance of getting the interaction effects which you don't get clearly if you are doing just one thing or two things...It's taken the dysfunctional society, which we increasingly inhabit, the absence of mesh, the absence of community networks, the fragmented nature of modern society to make it clear that his approach because of its emphasis on the social and the community as well as the academic, is one maybe even the only one that can save your public education and public education around the world.

As the SDP moved from building level, to districts across the country, successfully when applied appropriately, we noted that only a few programs could be sustained with full fidelity for more than five to ten years as staff turnover took place at building and district levels. While there were political, economic, attitudinal and other factors at play, different from place to place, the major underlying problem was a lack of a full and deep appreciation of the importance of support for student development in the service of academic learning and the lack of knowledge and skills needed to support development at building and district levels.

Also, state and national policies often made it difficult even when practitioners wanted to do so. This, in part, led to our SDP focus on the creation of a model that would help pre-service educators appreciate the link between development, academic learning and the preparation of students for adult life; and policy work that would facilitate support for the application of child and adolescent development principles to all aspects of education practice.
Because there is not a deep pool of administrators with a child and adolescent development background and perspective, it was difficult to sustain or take the program to scale with personnel and policy changes that resulted from leadership turnover.

In response we began to focus more on creating partnerships with schools of education that would provide pre-service educators with an early and deep appreciation of the critical link between development and learning and the skills to apply it in real classrooms. Also, we focused on promoting supportive education policy at the national, state, and local levels.

The Comer Process is not a project or add-on, but rather an operating system—a way of managing, organizing, coordinating, and integrating programs and activities. Three teams—the School Planning and Management Team (SPMT), the Student and Staff Support Team (SSST), and the Parent Team—work together to create a Comprehensive School Plan (CSP); to design and conduct staff development aligned with the goals of the Comprehensive School Plan; and to assess and modify the plan as necessary using a wide range of student and school-level data to ensure that the school is continuously improving. The teams are guided by three principles: decision making by consensus, no-fault problem solving, and collaboration.

The nine-element process fosters positive school and classroom climate and creates optimal conditions for teaching and learning, and emphasizes the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Over the past three decades, research (/childstudy/comer/evaluation/) conducted by the SDP and external researchers, have consistently found that schools that implement the Comer Process at high levels tend to experience high levels of student achievement and development.