



October 10, 2019

To: House Interim Committee on Education and Senate Interim Committee on Education

From: Susan Harriman, Executive Director, ForwARd Arkansas

Re: Request for Submission of Written Testimony

Senator English, Representative Cozart and Members, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the adequacy determination process through the submission of written testimony.

ForwARd Arkansas is a public-private partnership first conceived in 2014 and formally established in 2016 in partnership with the Arkansas State Board of Education, the Walton Family Foundation and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to make Arkansas a leading state in education through building a network of engaged and empowered communities, strengthened by statewide policy solutions. We serve as a champion for equity, a connector and convener for shared opportunity, and a catalyst for innovation.

ForwARd Arkansas Calls for Equity

We note that efforts to bring equity and opportunity to all students will mean that change is needed in schools where students need greater access to a high-quality education system to ensure their opportunity to learn. Efforts within the school setting, by a wide-ranging variety of talented and resourceful organizations, have been unable to turn the tide in a sustainable way. When the highest poverty schools remain underperforming year after year, when a cohort of students' needs are repeatedly unmet in this small subset of schools, we must insure there is systemic change to meet the need for additional, focused student supports in their communities that are connected to those schools. All students may not be successful in even the best schools, but we must ensure that all students have equitable opportunity for success. We can be sure the test of equitable and adequate education is not yet met when students in Arkansas's high-poverty schools, districts, and regions of the state lack sustainable access to educational excellence.

ForwARd Arkansas Calls for Excellence

Some students in high-poverty schools excel. *Some high-poverty schools excel.* However, most high-poverty schools struggle. What do "D" and "F" schools look like? Eighty-five percent of them are in the top two tiers of ESA funding (70 percent or above Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL). All but one of the "F" schools is in the top two tiers. The "D" and "F" schools are, for the most part, high-poverty schools receiving double or triple ESA funding, but it is not achieving its purpose. Our analysis indicates a need for change in high-poverty schools.

In an op-ed published in the Arkansas Democrat Gazette, March 16, 2019, the respective co-chairs of the House and Senate Interim Committees on Education, Senator Jane English and Representative Bruce

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Cozart, and ForwARd’s Associate Director, Cory Biggs, stated “*To move from an education system that is merely ‘adequate’ to a system that is truly excellent, we must ensure that our model of school funding aligns with and supports our goals to demonstrate both achievement and growth for all students.*” We see that call for excellence echoed in the Arkansas Department of Education’s Vision for Excellence in Education which is outlined as part of the state’s ESSA plan.

Arkansas has not yet reached excellence. The facts are clear: few high-poverty schools in Arkansas beat the odds. Some researchers use 60 percent or even lower percentages of free and reduced lunch (FRL) counts for various analyses showing that high-poverty schools can beat the odds. We used 70 percent for our analysis because it is the point in the Enhanced Student Achievement (ESA) funding structure where additional levels of that funding begin. Schools with 70 percent to less than 90 percent FRL get twice the amount of ESA funds as districts with less than 70 percent, while districts with 90 percent or more FRL receive three times as much.

Better use of existing state ESA funds is needed in struggling schools. These schools also need to leverage student supports and resources available in their communities. Schools can’t overcome the most challenging impacts of poverty on their own.

In the Arkansas MySchoolInfo 2018-2019 data, we selected the 1,026 schools that had two data points—a letter grade and a recorded Free and Reduced Lunch percentage. Of those 1,026 schools, 188 were assigned a grade of “D” or “F,” about 18 percent. These low-performing schools serve more than 74,000 students. That’s a fraction (about 16 percent) of the approximately 470,000 students for all our select schools. All children, however, should have the opportunity to be educated in a school of excellence.

ForwARd Arkansas’s Recommendation

ForwARd Arkansas’s recommendation is to require and/or incentivize low-performing schools to implement the *Community School Model* to meet student support needs in addition to efforts to improve academics with ESA funding. This would only be applicable to “D” and “F” schools leaving higher performing schools to manage ESA resources at the local district level.

Intentionally Implement the Community Schools Model

The *Community School Model* design is a way to efficiently and effectively address student needs without overburdening existing school staff that already are working to address educational needs. In this case, staff includes teachers, school leaders, and counselors.

A community coordinator is the center of the *Community School* model. This person serves as a liaison between school staff and students and their families. They assess overall student needs unique in each community. They build partnerships connecting the school with community resources through joint-use agreements and memoranda of understanding. They assess services and programs provided on the school campus. They assess and support individual needs such as a child needing a winter coat or dental services. They are accountable for and report on services accessed and services that are needed but for which no resources are currently available.

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The *Community School Model* will help address the poverty that generates barriers to learning. Connect students to community supports. All “D” and “F” schools should use ESA funding to implement a *Community School*. Reading initiatives, curriculum alignment, and professional development will not ultimately be successful if students are not ready to learn due to a host of challenges related to poverty. In persistently low-performing schools or districts *both* educational improvements and student supports are needed. Either alone will be inadequate.

Community Schools Have Minimal Implementation Costs

The *Community School Model* can be accomplished with existing ESA funding and federal funding. No new state dollars are needed. To consider how the cost of a coordinator would impact ESA funds in a small district, we looked at Earle. In 2018, Earle Elementary was assigned a grade of “F.” That year, the Earle School District received \$895,168 in NSL Revenue (MySchoolInfo). They had a fund balance for all categorical funds of \$336,757 at the year’s close. The cost of a coordinator with benefits could be estimated at \$45,000 or less.

To establish *Community Schools*, schools should provide funding for the community coordinator at a level comparable to that of a teacher from existing ESA funds in “D” and “F” schools, possibly in combination with Title IV funds (See attachment). This can be phased in by implementing it in “F” schools initially. In addition, continue or increase incentives to use ESA money for Pre-K, tutoring, and before and after-school programs.

Federal Resources Can be Tapped

ESSA requires states to review the resource (money, staffing, and time) allocation of their worst performing districts and schools. See ESSA (§1111(d)(3)(A)(ii)), (§1111(d)(1)(B)(iv)), and (§1111(d)(2)(C)). In a September 24, 2019 Education Week article, Daarel Burnette II noted that this new feature is based on evidence showing how district and school money is spent impacts outcomes. It further recognizes that many times in low-performing schools and districts there is a disconnect between spending patterns and academic goals. Requiring that ESA funds in “D” and “F” be used for community coordinators would be one way to demonstrate that these low-performing schools are using their resources to address student barriers to learning.

ForwARd’s Leadership in Communities and the Community Schools Model

When ForwARd was established in 2016, Arkansas was using the “academic distress” designation. At that time there were 25 schools in academic distress.¹ Since then, the state’s assessment tools have changed, and accountability systems have changed but now there are 38 “F” schools. We have witnessed innumerable interventions from both contractors, consultants, and school improvement specialists. These schools need to be improving much faster than they are. In addition to strong work being done to support

¹ Twenty-five schools were designated on April 14, 2016. Two more schools were added to the list after that date. (http://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/public/userfiles/Public_School_Accountability/School_Performance/Classified_Academic_Distress_Schools_08112016r.pdf)

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and turn around schools, we must address student needs to ensure they are prepared to learn when they arrive at school.

From ForwARd's beginning, community engagement in our ForwARd Communities has been a key strategy for realizing our vision for schools, students, and families. ForwARd staff were part of the founding of the Arkansas Coalition of Community Schools (ACCS). ForwARd has provided leadership for the ACCS along with support from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. That Coalition is composed of a wide variety of key stakeholder organizations in Arkansas representing, among others, the Arkansas Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, Arkansas Education Association, Arkansas School Board Association, the Arkansas Department of Education, Arkansas Department of Health, Rural Community Alliance, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, the No Kid Hungry Campaign, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, Arkansas Children's Hospital, and representatives of individual school districts.

ForwARd drafted the original text and was a catalyst for the adoption of the bipartisan Senate Resolution 25 (SR25) of 2019 supporting *Community Schools*. (See attached.) ForwARd staff have structured and funded videos, a website, and Facebook pages for ACCS. ForwARd staff have participated in national Coalition of Community Schools (CCS) conferences and in *Community School* training programs. We have toured *Community Schools* in Albuquerque, Chicago, New York, and Baltimore. ForwARd participates in two network groups within CCS—the State Coalitions Network and the CCS Research Practice Network. Through those networks and at conferences, we have heard from *Community School* leaders in many of our neighboring states—Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Kentucky, and Tennessee among them. We advised a Hendrix College student's research in Earle that concluded that the *Community School* design would benefit students there.

ForwARd staff met with other state coalition network members in Michigan earlier this year and then joined CCS in rolling out a Hill Briefing in D.C. on the Return on Investment for Community School Coordinators. ForwARd staff are serving ACCS in hosting the national Director of CCS in Arkansas on October 16, 2019.

The idea of *Community Schools* is not a recent initiative of ForwARd. We have been at it for nearly four years now, first through staff initiatives and then as those staff joined ForwARd's work. As a result of our efforts, others are beginning to see the potential and raise it as a solution as well. ForwARd has invested heavily in this work. We have observed *Community Schools* in practice. And we have been on the leading edge of Arkansas's interest in *Community Schools*, including grant writing efforts that have been unsuccessful largely due to a lack of a cash match—a problem that could be solved through implementation of the recommended policy changes described above. We are committed to bringing equity and excellence to Arkansas high-poverty schools through *Community Schools*.

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Attachments

We submit these brief attachments with our testimony.

- Please find a copy of Senate Resolution 25 (SR25) of 2019 To recognize the value of *Community Schools* in improving achievement and strengthening family and community engagement. Note the bipartisan sponsorship. ForwARd drafted the original text of the resolution and was a catalyst for its adoption.
- A blog post authored by Dr. Jay Barth, "Learning from Earle: Community School Approach as a Strategy for Turning Around Challenged Rural Schools."
- An article published in Phi Delta Kappan explains the nature and value of community schools. In the "Effectiveness of Community Schools" section, the evidence base for community schools is cited.
- Title IV. Part A. Sec. 4108 of the federal ESSA legislation that references the coordinator position typical of community schools. See page 4 of the attachment which states:

(H) designating a site resource coordinator at a school or local educational agency to provide a variety of services, such as—

(i) establishing partnerships within the community to provide resources and support for schools;

(ii) ensuring that all service and community partners are aligned with the academic expectations of a community school in order to improve student success; and

(iii) strengthening relationships between schools and communities; or

(I) pay for success initiatives aligned with the purposes of this section.

Again, thank you for requesting comments. I'm available to answer questions Members may have at: sharriman@forwardarkansas.org or 501-244.0000 (office) or 501-580-9657 (cell).

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1 State of Arkansas
2 92nd General Assembly
3 Regular Session, 2019

SR 25

4
5 By: Senators Elliott, J. Hendren
6

7 **SENATE RESOLUTION**

8 TO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN
9 IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND
10 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

11

12

13 **Subtitle**

14 TO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY
15 SCHOOLS IN IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND
16 STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY
17 ENGAGEMENT.

18

19 WHEREAS, every child should be able to grow up with the opportunity to
20 achieve his or her dreams and contribute to the well-being of society, and
21 every community deserves a public school system that fully delivers on that
22 promise; and

23

24 WHEREAS, according to the most recent data, 63% of Arkansas students,
25 and in some schools as many as 98%, qualify for free or reduced lunch, which
26 means the students live in lower income households; and as a result, some
27 students may face more challenges than others in succeeding in school and in
28 life and need additional support; and

29

30 WHEREAS, so students can reach full potential, community schools
31 provide comprehensive programs and services that are carefully selected to
32 meet the unique needs of students and families that may be dealing with a
33 lack of stable housing, inadequate medical and dental care, hunger, trauma,
34 or exposure to violence; and

35

36 WHEREAS, since some families cannot afford to provide their children



1 with enrichment opportunities and additional academic support outside of
2 school, community schools play a vital role in ensuring that all students
3 have access to the learning and enrichment opportunities that support
4 academic and life success; and
5

6 WHEREAS, according to a report from the Learning Policy Institute, the
7 4 key pillars of an evidence-based community schools approach are integrated
8 student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities,
9 active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and
10 practices; and the pillars promote conditions and practices found in high-
11 quality schools, as well as address out-of-school barriers to learning; and
12

13 WHEREAS, research shows that community school interventions can result
14 in improvements in a variety of student outcomes, including better
15 attendance, academic achievement, reduction of racial and economic
16 achievement gaps, and higher high school graduation rates; and
17

18 WHEREAS, ForwARd Arkansas, the Arkansas Association of Educational
19 Administrators, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and the
20 Arkansas Coalition for Community Schools support implementation of community
21 schools as a strategy for school improvement, particularly in areas of high
22 poverty; and
23

24 WHEREAS, research shows that these programs offer a strong return on
25 investment, providing up to \$15 for every \$1 invested in community schools;
26 and
27

28 WHEREAS, federal funding can be used to support community schools, and
29 research demonstrates that community schools meet the standard under the
30 Every Student Succeeds Act for evidence-based approaches to support schools
31 identified for comprehensive and targeted support and intervention; and
32

33 WHEREAS, a community school is a school that includes each of the
34 following:

35 (1) Integrated student supports, which address out-of-school
36 barriers to learning through partnerships with social and health service

1 agencies and providers, coordinated by a community school director, including
2 without limitation medical, dental, vision, and mental health care services,
3 and counselors to assist with housing, transportation, nutrition,
4 immigration, and criminal justice issues;

5 (2) Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities,
6 including before school, afterschool, weekend and summer programs, which
7 provide additional academic instruction, individualized academic support,
8 enrichment activities, or learning opportunities that emphasize real world
9 learning and community problem-solving, including without limitation art,
10 music, drama, creative writing, applied learning experience with engineering
11 or science, tutoring, homework help, and recreational programs that enhance
12 and are consistent with the school's curriculum;

13 (3) Active family and community engagement, which brings
14 students' families and the community into the school as partners in a
15 student's education and makes the school a neighborhood hub providing adults
16 with educational opportunities, including without limitation English as a
17 Second Language classes, computer skills, adult literacy, art, and other
18 programs that bring in community members for meetings and events; and

19 (4) Collaborative leadership and practices, which build a
20 culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility
21 using strategies which at a minimum shall include a school-based leadership
22 team, a community school director, and a community-wide leadership team,
23 including without limitation other leadership or governance teams, teacher
24 learning communities, and other staff to manage the complex joint work of
25 school and community organizations; and

26
27 WHEREAS, a community school is also a school that uses the following
28 mechanisms:

29 (1) An annual needs and assets assessment of and by both the
30 school and community, including student demographics, academic achievement,
31 school climate, and other relevant school and community-level information,
32 and a review of needs and assets in the 4 key pillars;

33 (2) A community school plan that sets forth how educators,
34 school staff, government agencies, and community partners will use and
35 leverage all available assets to meet specific student and family needs in
36 order to improve opportunities and outcomes for students;

1 (3) A school-based leadership team that leads the annual needs
2 and assets assessment and develops and oversees implementation of the
3 community school plan; and

4 (4) A dedicated full-time community school director at each
5 community school site whose primary responsibilities include leading the
6 needs and assets analysis and facilitating the development and implementation
7 of the community school plan in collaboration with other members of the
8 school-based leadership team; and

9
10 WHEREAS, the Arkansas community and family engagement framework was
11 developed to support districts, schools, and communities with engagement
12 opportunities and information to assist schools with implementation
13 strategies for parent involvement plans that may include the community school
14 structure; and

15
16 WHEREAS, leaders of Arkansas schools understand that community schools
17 are an evidence-based strategy for improving achievement of all students,

18
19 NOW THEREFORE,

20 BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE
21 STATE OF ARKANSAS:

22
23 THAT the Senate strongly supports the successful implementation of
24 community schools as an evidence-based strategy to provide students with
25 equitable access to a high quality education, effective family and community
26 engagement, and an improved outcome.

Learning from Earle: Community School Approach as a Strategy for Turning Around Challenged Rural Schools

We can all point to examples of small, rural districts where schools and students are thriving, but we can also agree that many of these districts face long odds due to historic high poverty rates, low enrollment and poor educational outcomes. Unfortunately, strategies focused on turning around low-achieving rural schools too often fail to fully consider the distinctive attributes of such schools relying instead on a “one size fits all” approach. For example, many of the most successful turnaround strategies were developed in urban settings and do not necessarily address the unique needs of under-resourced rural schools with declining student populations. Strategies such as closing down underperforming schools to firing staff at those schools for a “reboot” to charterization actually have the real possibility of doing additional damage in a rural school that already has plenty of challenges identifying high-quality personnel to teach its children. Even virtual education strategies make little sense in communities without widespread access to high-quality broadband.

This is particularly relevant—and problematic—in Arkansas, a state with more of its students in rural schools than all but a few other states. A new report, *Learning from Earle: Determining Best Practices for Rural Education Policy*, explores this challenge and highlights potential strategies for success in turning around low-achieving rural schools. The report, authored by my Hendrix College student Adam Williams, was issued by the Arkansas Policy Project at Hendrix in collaboration with ForwARd Arkansas with support from the Rural Community Alliance.

Learning from Earle focuses on the Earle School District in the Arkansas Delta—a district taken over by the state of Arkansas because of fiscal challenges in 2017 that also has all the other challenges, including low academic performance, typically confronting struggling schools. Williams uses Earle as a case study to think through the challenges facing rural educational transformation, concluding that the tactic that provides the greatest promise for success in Earle and districts like it is the “community school” approach, which focuses on bringing down the walls between schools and their surrounding communities to enhance services offered by community-based organizations to support education in the district. This win-win approach strengthens and supports schools by bringing services such as health care, afterschool programming and computer access “in house” where they can be more easily accessed by students and their families—the community also benefits as school improvement offers enhanced quality of life in the community.

An asset map included in the report notes that Earle schools and students have benefitted from a handful of vital services found in a healthy community school approach, including early childhood education opportunities, community access to a library and computers, and career training opportunities. The community’s commitment to its schools is also shown by the positive millage vote that allowed for the construction of a new elementary school. However, more work should be done and insights from the asset mapping process could help the Earle community prioritize how best to focus its energies in making a positive difference in turning around its schools in a sustainable manner. For example, out-of-school learning opportunities,

book programs and initiatives that empower parents to be more successful advocates for their students are still lacking in Earle. Indeed, knowing that the limitations facing Earle will not be disappearing in the near future, moving toward a more formal implementation of the community school approach could be a viable solution to help schools and students there continue to grow and thrive.

As Learning from Earle emphasizes, while this focus on maximizing the assets of the community for the benefit of school transformation “may not seem groundbreaking,” it can make a positive and lasting difference as it has in rural locales not unlike Earle. As Williams concludes, “For rural schools to be given the best chance to succeed, the main goal of reform strategies should be to position schools and districts in the greatest possible way to benefit from their particular strengths.” This often includes collaborating with organizations in their communities to provide school-based access to vital programs and services as a way to support students and their families, both in and outside of school.

Dr. Jay Barth is a Distinguished Professor of Politics and Director, Civic Engagement Projects at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. From 2012 to 2019, Dr. Barth served as a member of the Arkansas Board of Education.

It takes a community: Community schools provide opportunities for all



Everyone benefits when a school assumes responsibility for coordinating services that address the many nonacademic needs of students and their families.

By Reuben Jacobson, Lisa Villarreal, José Muñoz, and Robert Mahaffey

At one school, a teacher shows up every day with a solid lesson plan and a great attitude. She has most of her students engaged, working in groups, and doing all the classroom practices we know represent high-quality pedagogy. However, several of her students are missing from school – again. One student is absent because he cares for two younger siblings in the

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morning, but the teacher doesn't know how to get him help. One is too hungry to focus, but there is no breakfast program at her school. One has trouble staying awake and cries a lot, and two others are frustrated because they need glasses and can't see what's written on the blackboard. At the end of the day, many of her students will head home to an unpredictable, unsafe environment or may wander the neighborhood unsupervised, perhaps getting into trouble. The teacher remains committed to her work, but she wonders how she will ever be able to succeed with students who have "so many problems."

At another school, students start their day by meeting with local mentors over breakfast. During third period, a student must be excused for her annual checkup, but instead of leaving school to go to the doctor, she sees a pediatrician at the school-based health clinic and then returns to class. When the traditional school day ends, a dozen volunteers come to the school to lead after-school activities that students have asked for, including robotics, music, and athletics. Later that evening, students and their parents come to the school for a regularly scheduled community dinner provided by the district, where teachers are on hand to help students with homework, and parents receive guidance on registering for health insurance and connecting to needed social services.


The second school is a community school, one of a growing number of schools that provide both the familiar K-12 curriculum and a much broader range of supports to students and families – high-quality academic instruction, and mentoring, health care, college and career counseling, financial advising, and much more. In many cases, the community school

serves as a neighborhood hub, bringing together educators, families, business leaders, elected officials, and many other local partners to ensure that students have real opportunities to succeed in school and in life.

At a time when federal policy makers are rightfully asking local educators and elected officials to take more ownership for how schools operate, community schools are becoming more important than ever. After two decades, the education reform pendulum has finally begun to swing away from the no-excuses world view. Today, the public understands that students need a variety of supports – academic and nonacademic – to help them learn. As the 2017 PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools revealed, 77% of Americans strongly support after-school services, 76% strongly support providing mental health services at school, and nearly two-thirds strongly support providing health services. Clearly, the public believes in the commonsense strategies that are core to the community schools approach.

Community schools are a contemporary approach built on more than 100 years of experience. Their roots lie in the teachings of John Dewey, the great education philosopher who believed that schools should be centers of community life, and learning should be relevant, helping young people address the real-world problems that face them, their families, and their neighbors. Their roots lie also in the caring practices of the social reformer Jane Addams, whose 19th- and early 20th-century settlement houses were designed to help immigrants and the poor gain solid footing so they could contribute to the country's prosperity. In the past century and up until the late 1970s, many of the functional services of community schools were

publicly funded via federal initiatives including affirmative action, bilingual education, Medicaid and Medicare, low-income and public housing, social security, unemployment, food stamps, and programs to place case managers, social workers, and nurses in the schools. These foundational services, whose roots were nurtured by the community organizers of the 1960s, helped level the playing field so American schools became the greatest in the world. But fast-forward to the year 2000, and most of these foundational services had been eviscerated in favor of broad tax cuts, and the public and political will to serve all children (particularly low-income children of color) had nearly vanished.



The community school is the hub of the neighborhood, uniting educators, community partners, and families to provide all students with opportunities to succeed in school and in life.

Community schools today are a historical return to the notion of school as the center for community life. They are hyperlocal institutions where neighbors, students, faith-based leaders, teachers, principals, school district officials, and parents can come together to share their concerns and aspirations, combine their resources, and find effective and sustainable ways to respond to challenges such as neighborhood violence, hunger, housing shortages, and environmental pollution. Further, community schools tend to be valuable partners to local businesses, joining with them to create student internship and job training opportunities and workforce development programs.


Every school – whether urban, suburban, or rural – can become a community school. And increasingly, school and community leaders across the country are stepping up and saying they want their schools to operate this way.

Unique community needs

We used to say that no two community schools are the same, given that their programs and services differ from building to building and from neighborhood to neighborhood. Over the past 15 years, however, we've learned a lot about how community schools operate, and research has pointed to some fundamental practices and principles that all effective community schools have in common and that get results when they are well-implemented. So what does a community school require?

Every community school should start by asking local students and their families what needs to happen so students can succeed in school and graduate ready for college, careers, and citizenship. Depending on how they answer this fundamental question, they may choose to focus on any number of priorities, such as ensuring that young children are ready to learn, improving student attendance, strengthening family involvement in the school, promoting physical and mental health, or providing opportunities for academic enrichment. The specific programs and services they choose to offer will depend on the local context, but the guiding principle should always be to start by identifying students' most critical needs and strongest assets and then bringing together the programs, partners, and resources necessary to meet them.

Every community school should also be committed to building equitable and trusting relationships with their many stakeholders. No school can succeed for long without doing so, but, especially for community schools, success depends on the quality of the relationships that school and district staff maintain with various partners, including teachers, counselors, social workers, parents, clergy, elected officials, business leaders, volunteer tutors, and others. They must understand themselves to be providing services with people, not to them. Thus, community schools assemble a leadership team that embraces students, families, and other partners and includes them in the decision-making process. Further, and unlike other schools, community schools and their partners share accountability for student and community outcomes – and, again, this requires that partners have a seat at the table when important decisions are made.



When the community has greater ownership over its schools, people are more likely to trust them and less likely to move from reform to reform, program to program, and partner to partner.

Finally, community schools are distinct in that their senior-level administration typically includes a site coordinator (sometimes called a community school director or site manager), who works hand in hand with the principal, other school staff, partners, and the broader leadership team to manage the process of identifying needs, locating resources, implementing programs, and assessing their impact.

An example from Cincinnati Public Schools illustrates how such coordination works. In Cincinnati, every

school is, in effect, a community school. Known as Community Learning Centers, each school employs a resource coordinator who works closely with school leaders and the school's Local School Decision-Making Committee to gather data about student needs, monitor their performance, and create targeted interventions for individual students and the school as a whole. Cincinnati's process, which goes by the acronym REFORM, requires the site coordinator to:

- Review needs and asset data to plan for the year;
- Engage partners to assist in meeting school goals;
- Focus supports for individual students such as increased tutoring for students who are behind in reading or mentoring for those struggling with behavior issues;
- Offer opportunities for partners to meet together and share updates on overall progress;
- Reset partnerships or interventions that aren't working as intended so changes can be made as part of a continuous improvement process; and
- Measure effects and outcomes so the school, partners, and families can stay focused on the results they seek and make adjustments as necessary.

Community schools guiding principles

The Coalition for Community Schools has learned a great deal from practitioners about the effective design and implementation of this model. Working with partners from across the country, we developed a set of voluntary community school standards this year to create a common language for the field and help new schools and scaled-up initiatives get started quickly in building out their approaches.

The seven principles include:

- #1. Pursue equity.** Educational excellence and equity are inseparable. Community schools identify and confront policies, practices, and cultures that keep students of different backgrounds and races from achieving equitable outcomes.
- #2. Invest in a whole-child approach to education.** Meaningful teaching and learning embraces but goes beyond mastery of core academic subjects to include youth development principles; holding high expectations for children, youth, and adults; and developing their social-emotional, health, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.
- #3. Build on community strengths to ensure conditions.** Community schools use the assets of the entire community — including the gifts of people who live and work there, parents, families, residents, and community partners — to create optimal learning conditions for each student.
- #4. Use data and community wisdom to guide partnerships, programs, and progress.** Reliable and community-specific data, coupled with the wisdom of youth, families, and residents, guide how educators and community partners work together to achieve measurable results.
- #5. Commit to interdependence and shared accountability.** Mutually agreed-upon results and related indicators, as well as written agreements, enable educators and community partners to hold each other accountable.
- #6. Invest in building trusting relationships.** Trusting relationships fuel school transformation by helping create a safe and respectful climate where caring adults, families, and students come to rely on each other as part of a shared approach to student success.
- #7. Foster a learning organization.** Improved student learning depends on a school community where educators and community partners work together toward continuous improvement.

www.communityschools.org/standards

Three priorities

The opportunities provided by community schools can be grouped into three broad areas: powerful learning, integrated health and social supports, and authentic family and community engagement.

First and foremost, community schools are schools that are dedicated to effective teaching and learning. Thanks to help from community partners and volunteers, a lot of meaningful, authentic, and challenging learning opportunities occur during and

outside of the regular school day (including tutoring sessions, after-school and summer programs, social-emotional learning, business internships, musical performances, and more).

Second, most community schools provide a mix of social services and supports, commonly known as wraparound services, that address student needs related to physical and mental health, housing, nutrition, and much more. Simply put, succeeding in school is hard when one is hungry, homeless, or needs glasses. Rather than dismissing such conditions as mere excuses, community schools recognize that they present significant barriers to learning, and they remove them while also maintaining a focus on powerful learning.

Third, because families are the primary source of support for children's learning and development, community schools prioritize reaching out to parents and other family members to see what resources they need – from books to visiting nurse programs to mobile libraries and workforce development opportunities – and encourage them to be involved in the life of the school. The more they engage with the adults in the neighborhood, the more community schools can do to address local civic and educational needs.

Effectiveness of community schools

A growing body of research findings suggests that community schools work. For example, recent reports from the National Education Policy Center and the Learning Policy Institute (Oakes, Maier, & Daniel, 2017; Maier et al., 2017) offer the most comprehensive review of the research to date. Having surveyed the available

evidence about community schools' outcomes — as well as evidence on component parts of the model, such as integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership — the authors argue that community schools are an evidence-based strategy that education leaders and policy makers should support. They find that community schools can help improve attendance, reduce the dropout rate, and close the achievement gap. For example, in Baltimore, 77% of community school students in grades 6 to 8 were less likely to be chronically absent than a control group. In Tulsa, students in high-implementing community schools outperformed noncommunity schools in math by 32 points and reading by 19 points. Research also suggests that community schools are a good investment of public dollars and offer a strong social return on investment.

Also significant, we find that community schools are an education reform strategy that is built to last, in that they rely on partnerships that live on after individual leaders depart or funding sources change. When the community has greater ownership over its schools, people are more likely to trust them and less likely to move from reform to reform, program to program, and partner to partner.

Community schools are a viable way to promote equity as well. They focus especially on relying on the wisdom and assets of the most vulnerable students and families while providing opportunities, services, and supports at the time they are needed. Community schools are found in urban areas from Tulsa to Oakland, from Chicago to Salt Lake City, from Austin to Grand Rapids. They are also growing in inner-ring suburbs

and rural areas, from Montgomery County in suburban Washington, D.C., to Broome County, N.Y., in rural upstate New York.

Finally, community schools can be designed and launched by just about anyone with the will to marshal local community resources on behalf of students and families. Successful initiatives have been created by organizations as varied as school districts, United Ways, universities, funders, local governments, and other community-based organizations.

Across the country, the number of community schools continues to grow, as local educators, community leaders, and others look for equitable, efficient, and effective ways to provide the broad range of supports and services that allow young people to become truly well-prepared to enter college or a career. The Coalition for Community Schools counts at least 5,000 community schools nationwide, has helped organize 15 state-level coalitions for community schools, and is the national intermediary for our local, state, and national partners. Moreover, with the recent passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, states, cities, and towns have an important new opportunity to rethink how they want schools to function. In particular, do they want them to continue to be stand-alone institutions that meet only a portion of students' needs? Or are they ready to build more dynamic and supportive partnerships among schools, families, and other local stakeholders? The community schools movement offers a commonsense, nonpartisan, and very promising way to bring together programs and partners to make a lasting effect in their communities.

Community schools enable the features of good schools

Community school pillars	Associated "good school" characteristics
Integrated student supports address out-of-school barriers to learning through partnerships with social and health service agencies and providers, usually coordinated by a dedicated professional staff member. Some employ social-emotional learning, conflict resolution training, and restorative justice practices to support mental health and lessen conflict, bullying, and punitive disciplinary actions, such as suspensions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to all aspects of child development: academic, social, emotional, physical, psychological, and moral • Extra academic, social, and health and wellness supports for students, as needed • Climate of safety and trusting relationships
Expanded learning time and opportunities, including after-school, weekend, and summer programs, provide additional academic instruction, individualized academic support, enrichment activities, and learning opportunities that emphasize real-world learning and community problem solving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is the top priority • High expectations and strong instruction for all students • Sufficient resources and opportunities for meaningful learning
Active parent and community engagement brings parents/community into the school as partners in children's education and makes the school a neighborhood hub providing adults with educational opportunities they want, such as English as a second language classes, green card or citizenship preparation, computer skills, art, STEM, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong school, family, and community ties, including opportunities for shared leadership • Climate of safety and trusting relationships
Collaborative leadership and practices build a culture of professional learning, collective trust and shared responsibility using such strategies as site-based leadership/governance teams, teacher learning communities, and a community school coordinator who manages the multiple, complex joint work of school and community organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture of teacher collaboration and professional learning • Assessment as a tool for improvement and shared accountability
<p>Source: Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2017). <i>Community schools: An evidence-based strategy for equitable school improvement</i>. Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center. http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/equitable-community-schools</p>	

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REUBEN JACOBSON (jacobsonr@iel.org) is deputy director of the Coalition for Community Schools, Washington, D.C. **LISA VILLARREAL** is CEO of Youth Ventures Joint Powers Authority, Oakland, Calif., and chair of the Coalition for Community Schools Steering Committee. **JOSÉ MUÑOZ** is director of the Coalition for Community Schools, Washington, D.C. **ROBERT MAHAFFEY** is executive director, Rural School and Community Trust, Washington, D.C., and vice-chair of the Coalition for Community Schools Steering Committee.

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ESSA Title IV. Part A.

SEC. 4108. [20 U.S.C. 7118] ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT SAFE AND HEALTHY STUDENTS.

Subject to section 4106(f), each local educational agency, or consortium of such agencies, that receives an allocation under section 4105(a) shall use a portion of such funds to develop, implement, and evaluate comprehensive programs and activities that—

(1) are **coordinated with other schools and community based services and programs**;

(2) **foster safe, healthy, supportive, and drug-free environments that support student academic achievement**;

(3) **promote the involvement of parents in the activity or program**;

(4) may be **conducted in partnership with an institution of higher education, business, nonprofit organization, community-based organization, or other public or private entity with a demonstrated record of success in implementing activities** described in this section; and

(5) may include, among other programs and activities—

(A) drug and violence prevention activities and programs that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available) including—

(i) programs to educate students against the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, smokeless tobacco products, and electronic cigarettes; and

(ii) professional development and training for school and specialized instructional support personnel and interested community members in prevention, education, early identification, intervention mentoring, recovery support services and, where appropriate, rehabilitation referral, as related to drug and violence prevention;

(B) in accordance with sections 4001 and 4111—

(i) school-based mental health services, including early identification of mental health symptoms, drug use, and violence, and appropriate referrals to direct individual or

group counseling services, which may be provided by school-based mental health services providers; and

(ii) school-based mental health services partnership programs that—

(I) are conducted in partnership with a public or private mental health entity or health care entity; and

(II) provide comprehensive school-based mental health services and supports and staff development for school and community personnel working in the school that are—

(aa) based on trauma-informed practices that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available);

(bb) coordinated (where appropriate) with early intervening services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.); and

(cc) provided by qualified mental and behavioral health professionals who are certified or licensed by the State involved and practicing within their area of expertise;

(C) programs or activities that—

(i) integrate health and safety practices into school or athletic programs;

(ii) support a healthy, active lifestyle, including nutritional education and regular, structured physical education activities and programs, that may address chronic disease management with instruction led by school nurses, nurse practitioners, or other appropriate specialists or professionals to help maintain the well-being of students;

(iii) help prevent bullying and harassment;

(iv) improve instructional practices for developing relationship-building skills, such as effective communication, and improve safety through the recognition and prevention

of coercion, violence, or abuse, including teen and dating violence, stalking, domestic abuse, and sexual violence and harassment;

(v) provide mentoring and school counseling to all students, including children who are at risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, involvement in criminal or delinquent activities, or drug use and abuse;

(vi) establish or improve school dropout and reentry programs; or

(vii) establish learning environments and enhance students' effective learning skills that are essential for school readiness and academic success, such as by providing integrated systems of student and family supports;

(D) high-quality training for school personnel, including specialized instructional support personnel, related to—

(i) suicide prevention;

(ii) effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management;

(iii) crisis management and conflict resolution techniques;

(iv) human trafficking (defined, for purposes of this subparagraph, as an act or practice described in paragraph (9) or (10) of section 103 of the Trafficking

Victims Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. 7102));

(v) school-based violence prevention strategies;

(vi) drug abuse prevention, including educating children facing substance abuse at home; and

(vii) bullying and harassment prevention;

(E) in accordance with sections 4001 and 4111, child sexual abuse awareness and prevention programs or activities, such as programs or activities designed to provide—

(i) age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate instruction for students in child sexual abuse awareness and prevention, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to safely report child sexual abuse; and

(ii) information to parents and guardians of students about child sexual abuse awareness and prevention, including how to recognize child sexual abuse and how to discuss child sexual abuse with a child;

(F) designing and implementing a locally-tailored plan to reduce exclusionary discipline practices in elementary and secondary schools that—

(i) is consistent with best practices;

(ii) includes strategies that are evidence-based (to the extent the State, in consultation with local educational agencies in the State, determines that such evidence is reasonably available); and

(iii) is aligned with the long-term goal of prison reduction through opportunities, mentoring, intervention, support, and other education services, referred to as a “youth PROMISE plan”; or

(G) implementation of schoolwide positive behavioral interventions and supports, including through coordination with similar activities carried out under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.), in order to improve academic outcomes and school conditions for student learning;

(H) designating a site resource coordinator at a school or local educational agency to provide a variety of services, such as—

(i) establishing partnerships within the community to provide resources and support for schools;

(ii) ensuring that all service and community partners are aligned with the academic expectations of a community school in order to improve student success; and

(iii) strengthening relationships between schools and communities; or

(I) pay for success initiatives aligned with the purposes of this section.