

The Community Schools Evidence Base and Landscape
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Thank you, Chair Campion and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to join this important conversation about community schools. My name is Anna Maier, and I am a Research Analyst and Policy Advisor at the Learning Policy Institute, which is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization focused on bringing independent, high-quality research to policymakers to improve education policy and practice. I have researched community schools extensively, including lead authorship of a 2017 review of the community schools evidence base, which I have entered into the written record in the form of a research brief titled “*Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A review of the Evidence.*”¹ I am delighted to see the findings from this evidence base are strongly reflected in H106.

Today I plan to: 1) Share information about the community schools evidence base; 2) Give an overview of the national landscape of state-funded community school initiatives, with an emphasis on what this strategy can look like in smaller and more rural settings; and 3) Provide examples of how community schools are responding effectively to the pandemic.

I’d like to start by acknowledging that community schools are not a new concept. This approach to education has a strong grounding in progressive education principles dating back to the 1900s, when John Dewey saw schools as a way to strengthen the fabric of society, and African American struggles for quality education and local control of schools that took place under de jure and de facto segregation.² Community schools are both relationship-centered and student-centered by nature. As I listened back to the discussion of H106 held in the House Education Committee, I enjoyed hearing about the community school examples that are in place in different parts of Vermont, including the Molly Stark School and the Winowski school-based health center. My understanding from this conversation is that Vermont is well-positioned to support this approach, due to a strong tradition of schools functioning as centers of their community.

Community Schools Evidence Base

The four evidence-based pillars of community schooling are: 1) Integrated student supports (also known as wraparound services in some cases); 2) Expanded and enriched learning time; 3) Active family and community engagement; and 4) Collaborative leadership and practices. These pillars are included and defined in H106. Today, I will share more information about each of these pillars and the associated evidence base, which shows that community schools can make a positive difference for students’

¹ Maier, A, Daniel, J., & Oakes, J. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence* (research brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_BRIEF.pdf

² Maier, A, Daniel, J., Oakes, J. & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_REPORT.pdf

educational outcomes. I would also like to enter an infographic into the written record that shows each of the pillars with associated examples.³

The Learning Policy Institute’s report “Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence,” which I was the lead author of, identified these pillars by reviewing a core set of studies of places calling themselves “community schools” and analyzing the common features of these schools.⁴ We found the following with regard to the four pillars:

- *Integrated student supports*, sometimes known as wraparound services, involve services like dental care, counseling, physical health care, transportation assistance, housing access, or nutrition support. These supports are often facilitated by a full-time coordinator who can manage partnerships and connect students and families to services.
- *Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities*, which include academic support, enrichment, and real-world learning opportunities that take place afterschool, over the weekend, and during the summer. These opportunities can include art, dance, tutoring, work-based learning, internships, and project-based learning that addresses issues relevant to the local community.
- *Active family and community engagement*, which invites parents and family members to the school not just to volunteer or partake in services, but also to serve as true partners in supporting and educating students. For example, parents might oversee the hiring of a community school coordinator.
- *Collaborative leadership and practices*, which establishes a culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility for outcomes through strategies such as having a site-based leadership team, employing a community school coordinator, and supporting teacher learning communities. For example, daytime and afterschool staff at a community school might participate in joint trainings and planning sessions on a regular basis.

After identifying these four pillars, we gathered additional evidence associated with each pillar, reviewing over 140 studies in total. In reviewing this evidence base, we found that there is no “one size fits all” approach to the pillars. In other words, each school and community is unique in terms of its assets and needs, and therefore each community school will look a bit different. Overall, we found benefits associated with a wide range of community school models, with improvements in everything from test scores, grades (especially in mathematics), and high school graduation rates to students’ attitudes towards school.

We also found some evidence that community schools can help to close the achievement gap for low-income students, English learners, and students in special education. For example, a 3-year evaluation study of four Title I elementary schools participating in the Canyon School District’s Community Schools Initiative in Sandy, UT tracked student participation in newly available preschool, after-school, and mental health programs, along with changes in parent/family volunteer hours and increases in grant-funded community partnerships.⁵ During this time, marked improvements were noted in teacher and

³ Learning Policy Institute. (2017). *Community schools infographic*. Palo Alto: Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_INFOGRAPHIC.pdf

⁴ Maier, A, Daniel, J., Oakes, J. & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*.

⁵ Anderson-Butcher, D., & Palut, L. (2013). *Evaluation of the Canyons Community Schools Initiative: Findings after two-year post-adoption and implementation*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Community and Youth Collaborative Institute. Total office

staff perceptions of the schools, especially in relation to increased supports available for their students, and reduced stressors among students and teachers. Parent and caregiver perceptions of school and community supports also improved. The elementary schools experienced a 39% drop in absenteeism and saw an average 22.5% decrease in office disciplinary referrals over 2 years. The drop in office referrals was largely driven by narrowing of the gap between special and general education students' disciplinary referrals. Stakeholders noted that this reform effort was initially championed by the Utah State Office of Education Special Education Department, and that students receiving special education services were a focus of attention throughout implementation of the initiative.

Community schools may also help to close racial and economic achievement gaps, since these programs often serve students from low-income families and students of color. For example, City Connects narrowed the achievement gap between English learner and English proficient immigrant students by 75% in mathematics and 50% in reading.⁶ The impact of receiving a Massachusetts Wraparound Zone grant on academic achievement was greatest for students with limited English proficiency.⁷ Students attending a Harlem Children's Zone charter school gained approximately 0.2 standard deviations in both mathematics and English language arts per year, relative to a control group. This rate of progress, if sustained, would be enough to close racial achievement gaps between African American and White students by 3rd grade.⁸ The Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative reduced the gap for students from low-income families.⁹ In Tulsa, collective trust was a potential mediator of achievement gains, as achievement of students from low-income families was significantly higher in schools with entrenched cultures of collective trust.

Of course, program effectiveness is related to the intensity and quality of services that students and families receive, as well as the length of time the strategy has been in place. In this sense, implementation matters greatly for achieving positive results. A community school in sum is greater than its individual parts. The pillars work together to reinforce each other in helping schools to function as inclusive, supportive institutions that are an anchor for the surrounding community. Having a community school coordinator or manager in place increases the capacity of school staff to work in partnership with students, families, and local community members.

National Landscape

In terms of the national landscape, many states (both large and small) are investing in community schools. Relevant state examples include:

disciplinary referrals decreased from 1580 to 1229 during this period. http://cayci.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/CSD_FinalReport_Version-to-Print.pdf

⁶ Dearing, E., Walsh, M., Sibley, E., Lee-St. John, T., Foley, C., & Raczek, A. (2016). *Can community and school-based supports improve the achievement of first-generation immigrant children attending high poverty schools?* *Child Development*, 87(3), 883–897. Differences between the two groups were no longer statistically significant after City Connects was introduced.

⁷ Gandhi, A., Slama, R., Park, S-J., Russo, P. S., Bzura, R., & Williamson, S. *Focusing on the whole student: Final report on the Massachusetts Wraparound Zones*. Waltham, MA: American Institutes for Research. <https://www.air.org/resource/focusing-whole-student-final-report-massachusetts-wraparound-zones>

⁸ Fryer, R. & Dobbie, W. (2011). *Are high-quality schools enough to increase achievement among the poor? Evidence from the Harlem Children's Zone*. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 3(3), 158–87.

⁹ Adams, C. (2010). *The community school effect: Evidence from an evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community School Initiative*. Tulsa, OK: University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Center for Education Policy.

- **Kentucky**, which passed the Education Reform Act in 1990 that included funding for Family Resource and Youth Services Centers.¹⁰ These centers serve both rural and urban schools with at least 20% of the student population qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. The centers provide a variety of integrated student supports for middle and high school students, including health and social service referrals, career exploration, substance abuse education and counseling, family mental health counseling, and summer and part-time job development for high school students. Kentucky has built on this model with Family Resource Centers serving elementary schools, including health services and referrals, family literacy services, afterschool care, and preschool care. Since the Education Reform Act was passed, Kentucky has significantly reduced its graduation gap between low-income and affluent students, reporting the smallest gap in 2015.¹¹
- **Maryland**, which has incorporated community schools into its school funding formula through the Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program. This entitlement grant program provides eligible public schools throughout the state (with 80% or more of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals) with approximately \$250,000 in annual funding to employ a community school coordinator, provide full-time coverage by at least one health care practitioner, and provide wraparound services as funds allow.¹²
- **New Mexico**, which funds competitive planning (1 year, \$50,000) and implementation (3 years, \$150,000) grants for community schools in both urban and rural settings throughout the state. In 2019 the state allocated \$2 million in grants, which increased to \$3.3 million in 2020.¹³ Notably, Cuba Independent School District (enrollment 550 for k-12) in rural northern New Mexico is using the community schools approach to offer expanded learning programs focused on Navajo culture and to provide integrated student supports. The district plans to partner with Navajo leaders to offer cultural programs and seasonal activities such as sweat lodge ceremonies, storytelling, and basket-weaving. Additional funding comes from the federal Indian Education Act and state-funded K-5 Plus and expanded learning time programs.
- **New York**, which provides funding and technical assistance for community schools in high-need districts through its school funding formula, made this additional investment on top of a previous community schools grant program.¹⁴ The state funds three community schools technical assistance centers (TACs) serving different geographic regions, including the Central/Western TAC that works with smaller districts and schools as well as large districts.¹⁵ Community school initiatives are emerging in smaller and more rural areas, including Rome, NY (population

¹⁰ See the Family Resource Youth Services Coalition of Kentucky website: <https://www.fryscky.org/>.

¹¹ See Education Week Quality Counts report: [https://www.edweek.org/state-and-national-highlights-reports-quality-counts-2020/2020/01/](https://www.edweek.org/state-and-national-highlights-reports-quality-counts-2020/2020/01;); America's Promise Alliance 2015 Building a Grad Nation report: <https://www.americaspromise.org/report/2015-building-grad-nation-report>.

¹² See Maryland Education Code § 5-203. <https://casetext.com/statute/code-of-maryland/article-education/division-ii-elementary-and-secondary-education/title-5-financing/subtitle-2-state-and-federal-aid-to-education/section-5-203-concentration-of-poverty-school-grant-program>. Concentration of Poverty grants were fully funded for Fiscal Year 2021 (for schools with 75% or more of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals) and will be fully funded for Fiscal Year 2022, with a plan to continue to phase in new schools until all schools with 55% or more of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals are included. Additional per pupil funds are available to execute priorities identified through the community schools needs assessment process.

¹³ Oakes, J., & Espinoza, D. (2020). *Community schools the New Mexico way*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/New_Mexico_Community_Schools_REPORT.pdf

¹⁴ See the Student Support Services page of the New York State Department of Education website. <http://p12.nysed.gov/sss/expandedlearningopps/CommunitySchools.html>

¹⁵ See the New York State Community School Technical Assistance Centers website: <https://www.nyscommunityschools.org/>

33,725) and Massena, NY (population 12,833).¹⁶ In these instances, it's helpful to recognize that school staff wear many hats (and thus it may make sense to share a coordinator across multiple sites) and county departments may serve as an important partner in bringing services such as mental healthcare to school sites, especially when community-based organizations are not present.

- **West Virginia**, which passed a State Board of Education resolution in support of community schools and has provided technical assistance to local community school initiatives through the West Virginia Department of Education.¹⁷ The Reconnecting McDowell initiative represents an innovative public-private partnership between rural McDowell County Schools (which has a high poverty rates and has been hit hard by the opioid crisis), local, state, and federal government agencies, telecommunications, construction, and coal-producing businesses, health care providers, teachers unions including the American Federation of Teachers, and nonprofit organizations.¹⁸ Community school services include a mobile dental clinic, a grandparents club, a robotics club, and trauma-informed mental health services.

State funding plays an important role in supporting community school initiatives. States and districts can expand their capacity to support community schools by blending and braiding of federal, state, and local resources. Relevant federal resources include the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) programs and activities such as Title I-A school improvement funds, Title II professional development supports for educators, Title IV-F Full-Service Community School grants, Title IV-A Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants, Title IV-B 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and the Medicaid program.¹⁹ In addition, Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds in the CARES Act and the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act allow funds for districts to be used on “any activity authorized by the ESEA of 1965,” which among other ESEA uses that could support community schools, would include the Full-Service Community Schools Program authorized in Title IV-F of ESEA.²⁰

¹⁶ For Rome, NY, see: Connected Community Schools website: <https://connectedcommunityschools.org/>; New York Schools Technical Assistance Center webpage: <https://www.nyscommunityschools.org/alliance-develops-new-ways-to-impact-families-in-the-rome-district/>. For Massena, NY, see: Masutani, J. (2019, March 18). One community school coordinator, 35 community partners, and 1,000 people at 1st ever “Ready 4 School” event [blog post], Retrieved from <http://coordinators.communityschools.org/profiles/blogs/one-community-school-coordinator-35-community-partners-and-1-000->; Massena Central School District community schools website (including monthly community school newsletter updates): <https://www.mcs.k12.ny.us/apps/pages/communityschools>; The People Project webpage, a coalition of educators, parents, community members, employers and government leaders in St. Lawrence County supported by the American Federation of teachers: <http://peopleproject.connections.aft.org/>.

¹⁷ See Policy 2425, West Virginia Education Code § 126-52-1:

<http://apps.sos.wv.gov/adlaw/csr/readfile.aspx?DocId=25989&Format=PDF>; West Virginia State Department of Education community schools webpage: <https://wvde.state.wv.us/healthyschools/section1/CommunitySchools.htm>.

¹⁸ See the Reconnecting McDowell website: <http://mcdowell.connections.aft.org/about-us/about-reconnecting-mcdowell>; Barmore, P. (2017, December 23). Home visiting in high school: Trying an intervention for toddlers on teenagers. *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/home-visiting-in-high-school-trying-an-intervention-for-toddlers-on-teenagers/>; Barmore, P. (2017, December 24). At ground zero of the opioid epidemic, schools are helping students overcome the odds. *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/ground-zero-opioid-epidemic-schools-helping-students-overcome-odds/>; Barmore, P. (2017, December 25). Can putting the least-experienced teachers in the highest-risk schools ever result in success? *The Hechinger Report*. <https://hechingerreport.org/can-putting-least-experienced-teachers-highest-risk-schools-ever-result-success/>

¹⁹ For more information on federal funding, see p. 11 of the Partnership for the Future of Learning Community Schools Playbook: <https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org/assets/downloads/community-schools-playbook.pdf>; See also the Partnership for the Future of Learning community schools finance brief: <https://futureforlearning.org/2020/04/16/financing-community-schools/>.

²⁰ For the CARES Act, see: <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr/748/BILLS-116hr748enr.pdf>. For the CRRSA Act, see: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/133/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22hr133%22%5D%7D&r=5&s=2>.

COVID-19 Response

Evidence is also emerging that community schools have been well-positioned to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These schools have strong relationships with students and families, a coordinative infrastructure, and partnerships with community-based organizations and government agencies in place that have allowed them to quickly and nimbly assess and respond to student and family needs.²¹

For example, the community schools coordinator at Doña Ana Elementary in New Mexico staffed a help desk to field calls from parents and connected students and families to mental health and social support providers. Families were able to engage effectively with virtual learning technology thanks to computing classes they attended last year through the school.²² In Oakland, CA, three school-based health centers stayed open during the recent shelter-in-place, conducting over 2,000 in-person medical and mental health visits, as well as providing care via video, phone, and text and trauma-informed training for Oakland Unified teachers.²³ In Los Angeles, teachers at the UCLA Community School and Horace Mann UCLA Community School adapted their curriculum to guide students through relevant project-based learning in a virtual setting, including a 10-week inquiry to investigate the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on communities of color and a community-based science unit using street maps and interactive tools.²⁴

Taken together, these examples show how community schools are well-positioned to adapt their approach and effectively support students and families in times of crisis.

Conclusion

I thank you for the opportunity to discuss the community schools evidence base today, including the ways in which the four pillars can make a positive difference for students' educational outcomes, the national landscape of state support for community schools, and the ways in which community schools are responding effectively to the pandemic. I would be happy to answer any questions. My contact information is: Anna Maier, Research Analyst and Policy Advisor, amaier@learningpolicyinstitute.org.

²¹ Maier, A. (2020, June 9). County-level coordination provides infrastructure, funding for community schools initiative [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-county-coordination-community-schools>

²² Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. (2020, July 7). In the fallout of the pandemic, community schools show a way forward [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-community-schools-show-way-forward-education>.

²³ Sarikey, C. (2020, June 18). School-based health centers: Trusted lifelines in a time of crisis [blog post], Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/covid-oakland-school-based-health-centers>

²⁴ Quartz, K.H. & Saunders, M. (2020, May 14). Community-based learning in the time of COVID-19 [blog post]. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/community-based-learning-time-covid-19>