



2024-2025 TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Our thanks to Senator Krueger, Assemblymember Weinstein, Senator Mayer, and Assemblymember Benedetto, and to the other members of the Finance, Ways and Means, and Education Committees for the opportunity to present testimony to you today.

Every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential, yet today's students confront unprecedented obstacles affecting their learning, health, and overall well-being. Even in the best of times, students experience non-academic issues that impact learning and make it much harder to focus on academics—they come to their classes hungry; deal with stress; lack adequate mental or physical health care; or cope with other social-emotional hardships. Community schools play a crucial role in addressing these barriers, providing holistic and integrated support for all students.

Community schools are an investment in children, families, and our shared future. Quality community schools support higher student achievement, social-emotional well-being, and strong graduation rates. Community schools supports students as they work to achieve their career goals and puts them on a path to become contributing members of society by increasing opportunities for ALL students.

It's been over 10 years since the State invested in a pilot to scale the community schools strategy through the Community Schools Grant Initiative. Building on the success of this pilot, the State invested funds in the community schools strategy to help struggling and persistently struggling schools. In 2016, the State doubled down on its commitment to the community schools strategy by suggesting use of the strategy to high-needs schools through the community schools set-aside. However, there has not been an increase in state investment in the community schools strategy since 2019.

The State must further implement the community schools strategy to leverage academic, emotional, and family/community support for NYS communities, especially communities of color and low-income communities that were negatively impacted by COVID-19 at a disproportionate rate.

The Case for Community Schools

All of New York's students should be provided equitable access to a well-rounded education. A well-rounded education goes well beyond the curriculum and high-quality teaching. It includes afterschool and summer programs, health and mental health services, family engagement opportunities, and other supports that ensure students come to the classroom ready to learn. The integration of comprehensive health services and expanded learning opportunities can be maximized through community schools. According to the national Community Schools Forward Taskforce, "The community schools strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development. As partners, they organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive." In short, a community school strategy brings people together and coordinates resources to provide children with the tools and resources to build a better life.

The community school strategy is a cost-effective way to maximize multiple resources and funding streams while ensuring efficiency in the use of individual, private, and public resources. By leveraging funds and resources that would not otherwise be available to schools, the community schools strategy creates a strong "return on investment" by making sure that the funds can be leveraged efficiently and effectively to meet students' needs and improve outcomes.

By developing and integrating partnerships in a school, the academic, social-emotional, and health needs of children and families can be addressed. Key to the success of community schools is having a lead partner who coordinates the services at the school level and also has a full-time presence in the school. A Community Schools Director/Coordinator, usually a full-time staff member located in a community school, is a community organizer who creates, strengthens, and maintains the bridge between the school and community. Coordinators facilitate, lead, and manage various pieces of community schools, including: collaborative leadership and infrastructure coordination; needs assessment, planning, and sustainability; student-centered data and continuous improvement; powerful learning and integrated health and social supports; and authentic family and community engagement.

One study shows that each \$1 invested in the CS Coordinator returns approximately \$7.11 in net benefits.¹ In NYC, UFT (United Federation of Teachers)'s United Community Schools data showed that a \$100,000 investment to hire a community school director can bring in more than \$600,000 in services and grants to the school community. The Rome Connected Community Schools program reported an even higher ROI upward of \$14 for every \$1 invested in community school initiatives.²

With the right resources in place, community schools increase access to health and mental health care, a critical core element of the work. School-based health centers ensure that kids miss as little class time as possible. Additionally, community schools provide expanded learning opportunities through afterschool and summer programs and parent/family engagement support. These services reduce the burden on working parents/caregivers who know their kids can get high-quality professional care and are safe and learning throughout the full workday.

The community schools strategy is hyper-local: it is intended to adapt to the unique needs of the community. So, while there are certain standard components and practices, each community school has different partnerships and priorities. The standard components—or “four pillars”—of community schools are: collaborative leadership and practices, integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, and active family and community engagement.

The community schools strategy is evidence-based and effective for school improvement. The Learning Policy Institute and National Education Policy Center conducted a review³ of nearly 200 studies of community schools and concluded that it meets the criteria for an evidence-based improvement strategy in the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Several leaders in the field recognize the promise of community schools:

- New York State's Reimagine Education Advisory Council recommended community schools as an innovative model school districts should utilize and include in their school reopening efforts.
- Multiple national education think tanks and organizations, from the Brookings Institute to the Learning Policy Institute to the Hechinger Report, have called for the community schools approach to be expanded when considering roadmaps for transforming education after the pandemic.
- New York City significantly expanded the Community Schools Initiative to help NYC students and schools in neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19 deal with the emotional toll from the pandemic.

The evidence that community schools work is clear. Learn more about the impact of community schools here: <http://tinyurl.com/3626hrtx>



¹ Bloodworth, Michelle R., & Horner, Anna C. "Return on Investment of a Community Schools Coordinator: A Case Study." Apex & ABC Community School Partnership. https://www.communityschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/ROI_Coordinator.pdf

² "Fact Sheet 21-16: Community Schools in New York State" NYSUT Research and Educational Services. <https://www.nysut.org/resources/all-listing/research/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-community-schools-in-new-york-state>.

³ Oakes, J., Maier, A., & Daniel, J. "Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement." Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-equitable-improvement-brief>.

Budget Requests

Prioritizing investments in community schools statewide would enable more New York communities to coordinate the assets of their schools, families, and community partners for students' immediate and long-term success. The NYS Community Schools Network urges New York to uplift this proven strategy in the following ways:

Dedicate \$100 million to expand community schools statewide. Dedicated funding for community schools would allow school districts, BOCES, and community partners to target and maximize resources toward specific activities and interventions (eg. funds to hire a community schools coordinator/director, investment in infrastructure and resources to build collaboration and integrated leadership, and funding to mobilize community wisdom and strength) that align with community schools' principles. An established community schools fund would be a critical initial investment that supports school districts that do not have a Community Schools Set-Aside as part of their school aid, and/or those that need further support utilizing the community schools strategy. This funding should ensure equitable distribution that allows districts to accept or decline funding available to them based on their interest and readiness to implement the strategy. There is also a need to expand and strengthen the capacity of community schools technical assistance (TA): Many schools seek technical assistance to help them best leverage funds towards their community schools strategy. Additional TA funds would help expand the coordination and support needed to implement the community schools strategy.

Maintain the current Community Schools Set-Aside of \$250 million to ensure sustainability for current community schools. The Community Schools Set-Aside, as well as the maintenance of the \$100,000 funding minimum for school districts, provides ongoing support for many community schools in New York. Maintaining the set-aside funds will provide the sustainability needed for continuous improvement and adoption of the community schools strategy.

Highlighting the Success of Leveraging School-Community Partnerships

Now more than ever, local school districts are provided with game-changing investments through the full funding of Foundation Aid and significant funding from the federal stimulus relief to reimagine every New York student's learning experience in a high-quality, well-rounded education. As these stimulus dollars come to an end, there is further need for the State to invest in this strategy and ensure sustainability for the successful investments in the community schools strategy throughout the state. The following partnerships were highlighted by the NYS Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers in their monthly newsletter in 2023.

Situated on the eastern tip of Far Rockaway, **P.S. 197 The Ocean School** transformed into a community school in 2014 with the Child Center of New York as the lead CBO partner. They experienced significant growth in the first three years and witnessed a decline in chronic absenteeism and notable increases in ELA and Mathematics state test scores. The school deservedly progressed from "renewal" to "rise" status. Assistant Principal Bradley Richman attributes their success to the school's collaboration with the Child Center of New York, stating, "Our partnership with the Child Center of New York starts with two organizations and functions as one. That's how our scholars succeed." The school offers diverse afterschool enrichment opportunities, including dance, culinary arts, drumline, and martial arts, alongside a Saturday Academy featuring electives. Notably, they have prioritized family engagement initiatives, leading to substantial parental involvement in the school's activities.

The Schenectady Central School District has a robust advisory board comprising 100 partners; they implemented the community schools strategy in 2020. Collaborating with local entities such as Cornell Cooperative Extension, Empire Youth Orchestra, Schenectady Connect, Mobile Food Pantry, and Peer-to-Peer Advocates, the district aligns programs and services with the identified needs of students and families. To address these needs, Girls Incorporated offers afterschool mentoring to 60 girls in grades 1-5, while the Boys and Girls Club of Schenectady provides academic support and enrichment through afterschool programming. Additionally, Schenectady Inner City Ministries operates a bi-weekly mobile food pantry at each community school, supplying families with groceries equivalent to 15 meals on each occasion.

Like other community schools in Buffalo, **BPS #50 North Park Community School** organizes Saturday Academies, serving as community "open houses." School leadership and CBO partners collaborate to plan these events, occurring eight times annually alongside four evening events. BPS #50 made history by taking the Saturday Academy off-site, hosting it at Frank Lloyd Wright's Martin House in collaboration with BestSelf Behavioral Health and Say Yes Buffalo. The event featured vendors from beloved city establishments, including Explore & More Children's Museum and the Buffalo Museum of Science, attracting over 300 attendees.

The **Batavia Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE)** is a welcoming space located at the Robert Morris campus, established by the Batavia City School District (BCSD) to foster collaboration between the community and schools. The center offers various amenities, including laundry facilities, computers, a play area for children, and a Community Closet providing access to food, clothing, and educational items. FACE has formed partnerships with 14 formal and more than 90 informal collaborators from diverse sectors in the Batavia community. The programming includes activities like Daisy Troop, Young Lives for teen moms, and English classes for parents learning English. As FACE expands its engagement efforts, the focus is on Family Empowerment, aiming to build a culturally responsive community. BCSD's vision to enhance learning opportunities, nurture healthier families, and establish a stronger community aligns with the goal of creating a more culturally responsive Batavia.

Additional Recommendations

Community schools effectively leverage multiple funding streams at the school site to efficiently meet school community needs. These programs are not only a part of the scaffolding of community schools, but they are critical for ensuring an equitable recovery for young people and families across the state. The NYS Community Schools Network supports the following priorities:

Afterschool and Summer Programs: Invest an additional \$119 million towards a new and improved afterschool program. Dedicate \$5 million of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funds towards school-age child care quality support through the NYS Network for Youth Success.

Early Childhood Education: Create a permanent state child care fund to increase child care worker compensation.

Mental Health: Maintain the \$250,000 allocated to mental health grants to support community schools in New York.

School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs): Maintain \$17 million in funding and add an additional \$6 million to further support SBHCs.

The New York State Community Schools Network advocates to develop, promote, and sustain community schools in collaboration with government, local school districts, and community partners. Through a diverse coalition of community-based agencies, parents, teachers, and statewide advocates, we champion effective community school policies so that children and families can thrive. ⁴

Comprehensive health and mental health services and access to expanded learning opportunities are critical to the education and wellbeing of our children in New York State. We are committed to ensuring our children, families, and communities have the resources and opportunity to live happy, healthy, and full lives.

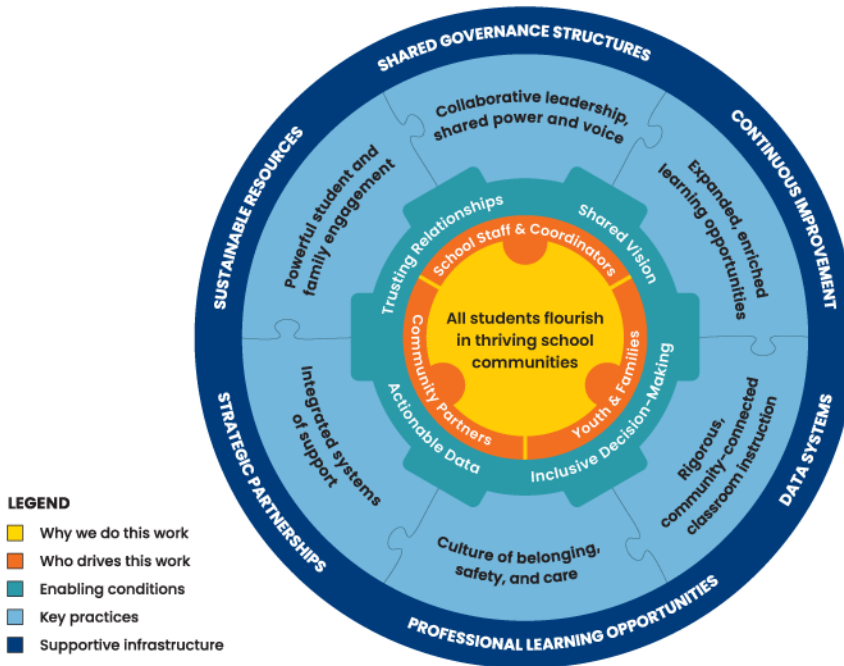
Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic. Please contact Alli Lidie, Chief Operating & Strategy Officer at the New York State Network for Youth Success and Network Lead for the New York State Community Schools Network at Alli@NetworkForYouthSuccess.org with any questions regarding this testimony.

⁴ <https://www.nyscsn.org/>



COMMUNITY SCHOOLS FORWARD

Essentials for Community School Transformation



BROOKINGS



<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>