



2021-2022 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.

COVID-19 has presented unprecedented obstacles to students learning, health, and overall well-being. School closures amid this pandemic reveal that schools provide more than just academic support for students, and accentuate how schools will need all the support they can get to fully reopen safely and address academic and non-academic issues that support students' overall wellbeing. As an evidence-based, effective strategy, community schools have continued to provide the critical support students and their families need, building on their robust relationships with community partners and awareness of specific community needs. The community school strategy emphasizes flexibility while maintaining a localized, customized, and collaborative approach to addressing student needs. In this time of uncertainty, we are sure of this - New York community schools work.

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 have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 at a disproportionate rate.

In any year, all of New York's students should be provided equitable access to a well-rounded education. A well-rounded education includes supports that ensure students come to the classroom and are ready to learn, such as afterschool and summer programs, health and mental health services, and family engagement opportunities.

The integration of comprehensive health services and expanded learning opportunities can be maximized through community schools. A community school is a strategy to create the conditions for learning, growth, and success. 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. Community schools are smart investments: for every one dollar invested in a coordinator, the school receives more than \$7 back in value.¹ 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

¹ Apex, ABC Community School Partnership. "Return on Investment of a Community School Coordinator: A Case Study." http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/ROI_Coordinator.pdf (accessed February 6, 2020).

working parents/caregivers who know their kids can get high-quality professional care and are safe and learning throughout the full work day.

The community schools strategy is hyper-local: it is intended to adapt to the unique needs and context 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 recommends it as an evidence-based strategy that states and districts should consider under ESSA for school improvement.

Recognizing 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 Mayor de Blasio announced in December 2020 efforts to expand 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.

Budget Requests

We are pleased to see that the Executive Budget maintains \$250 million in Community Schools Aid included in last year’s budget. We ask the State to **maintain \$250 million in existing community school funding, and expand funding over the next five years by planning for an additional \$100 million in a new Community Schools Categorical Aid to adequately fund and sustain community schools statewide**. These new funds will allow school districts to develop quality community schools, to strengthen and enhance their work, and to sustain successful community schools. The community schools strategy has been shown to be effective for increasing student achievement in New York.²

We also ask for the State to **increase the \$1.2 million investment in Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) by \$650,000 for a total appropriation of \$1.85 million annually through 2023**. School districts and community partners must receive the necessary support and implementation assistance to ensure their efforts are successful. An additional \$650,000 would provide funding for each of the three TACs to hire a dedicated staff member and enhance existing capacity for on-site technical assistance and coaching. This will also allow for an annual “statewide” convening for community school directors or district representatives. Providing principals, superintendents, and district administrators with vital on-site technical assistance and capacity building support will be more effective and efficient in ensuring schools and school districts are successful in their community school efforts. Further, an annual statewide convening will provide networking opportunities and valuable resource sharing. Finally, increased funding will allow for the creation of an 8.5% set-aside for Department administration to increase staff capacity and support.

² “Community Schools Research Brief 09,” *Coalition for Community Schools*, 2009, <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CCS%20Research%20Report2009.pdf>

A June 2020 survey conducted by the New York State Community Schools Network revealed that community schools and organizations partnered with community schools are providing important wraparound services to support students and families. During this pandemic, community schools in New York are:

- Providing equitable access in academic support and tutorial services to high-needs students to improve student learning
- Leveraging resources, personnel, outreach efforts, and communication platforms to develop and share supportive and enriching activities
- Providing social emotional and enrichment supports remotely to mitigate learning loss and help students earn credits towards graduation
- Helping to develop and create processes and structures that support schools and families
- Providing new and modified professional development for teachers to help them adapt to teaching online and participating in other virtual learning opportunities
- Responding to students and parents' urgent needs by providing hotspots to families, access to food, and personal care packages to support comprehensive mental health and family services
- Providing professional development opportunities for students who are entering the workforce or exploring career pathways
- Providing technical assistance and professional development to staff
- Providing social emotional support for families that are stressed about working and supporting their kids, including providing access to childcare so parents can return to work
- Researching strategies (What can be done? What should be done? What should not be done?) to address the trauma of the pandemic and its impact on students and families
- Activating and channeling youth and family voice by providing platforms and other spaces to do so

How community schools are responding to the COVID-19 crisis today highlights and reinforces the effectiveness of this strategy and its positive impact on communities. Broad implementation of this integrated approach will help mitigate the challenges caused by COVID-19 and also address disproportionate harm the pandemic has brought to vulnerable students and communities. New York must further strengthen this strategy to leverage academic, emotional, and family/community support for NYS communities.

Technical Assistance Centers

The New York State 2017-18 Enacted Budget allocated funds to support three regional technical assistance centers (TAC) to support its investment in community schools funding to districts. The responsibilities of these TACs include statewide dissemination of information on effective and promising practices in the establishment and ongoing management of Community School strategies through professional development and technical assistance activities. The following are a sampling of impact highlights since the TACs have been in operation.

- Hosted multiple webinars for the field focused on pandemic needs, including engaging students remotely, sustaining work during school closures, equitable family engagement, achieving race equity in your school district, multi-tiered systems of supports, effective strategies for diminishing social isolation, social emotional learning, and more.
- Three school districts have hired Community School Coordinators after receiving a technical assistance visit from the Eastern Regional TAC.
- The Central/Western Regional TAC worked with representatives from the NYS Office of Mental Health and the NYS Department of Criminal Justice Services to develop a collaborative

approach to mental health and regional youth justice initiatives as a way to build regional community school capacity.

- The NYC Regional TAC provided intense support to new Attendance Improvement and Dropout Intervention (AIDP) schools brought under the community schools umbrella with a specific focus on improving attendance and reducing chronic absenteeism.
- The Central/Western Regional TAC worked to connect regional constituents with peers facing similar challenges in communities of practice, i.e. meetings of large urban districts, rural districts, and BOCES to discuss strategies for capacity-building within their own unique communities.
- The Eastern Regional TAC helped rural school districts connect with community partners of which they were previously unaware.
- All three TACs assisted districts in developing partnerships to support school-based health centers and/or school-based mental health clinics.

In summary, the New York State Community Schools Network recommends that the Legislature:

- **Maintain \$250 million in existing community school funding, and expand funding over the next five years by planning for an additional \$100 million in a new Community Schools Categorical Aid to adequately fund and sustain community schools statewide.**
- **Increase the \$1.2 million investment in Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers (TACs) by \$650,000 for a total of \$1.85 million.**

Additional Recommendations

The NYS Community Schools Network also supports critical funding for the programs and services that community schools effectively leverage and coordinate in order to ensure that students and their families are supported and engaged. In collaboration with the New York State Network for Youth Success, Winning Beginning New York, and the New York School-Based Health Alliance, we support the following budget requests:

- **Afterschool, Summer, and Expanded Learning Programs. Baseline funding for Advantage After School (\$33 million), Empire State After-School Programs (\$55 million), Extended School Day and School Violence Prevention (\$24.3 million), and the Youth Development Program (\$15.6 million) in 2021. Help afterschool programs respond adequately to New York's family needs by directing \$250,000 to the NYS Network for Youth Success to sustain the mobilization and coordination of high-quality expanded learning programs, and include budget language that provides flexibility for programs to adapt in times of an emergency. Dedicate a percentage of new revenue streams to increase access to affordable high-quality afterschool, summer, and expanded learning programs.**
- **Early Childhood Education. Protect and build on the state's current \$857.2 million investment in pre-K by investing \$770 million to expand access to quality full day pre-K for all children in the state. Funding for the next pre-K expansion should include enhanced rates to meet quality standards. This includes an additional 20% set aside to support highly qualified and appropriately compensated teachers in both community programs and public schools.**

- **School-Based Health (SBH). Maintain \$17.1 million in FY21 funding levels, and add an additional \$5 million to restore non-Medicaid State grant funds to the sponsors whose grant funds were disproportionately reduced in 2017 due to a 20% cut in the State Budget and a new NYS Department of Health methodology, which resulted in 25 - 70% reductions in total SBHCs funds.**

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.

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 feel free to contact Alli Lidie, Associate Executive Director at the New York State Network for Youth Success, at Alli@NetworkForYouthSuccess.org with any questions regarding this testimony.