

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION:

Engaging Students Through Community Schools

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Community Schools are public schools that serve as a hub for a community, bringing together diverse organizations and services in authentic partnerships. It is an evidence-based strategy that promotes educational excellence and equity for all students, while strengthening family and community engagement.

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Community School Strategy: A Sound Investment

Every student should have an opportunity to thrive, be supported by trusted adults, access diverse growth opportunities, and have multiple pathways to reach their full potential and to achieve their dreams. For many students however, systemic and institutional constraints, further exacerbated by the pandemic, have limited such opportunities. Community Schools are a strategy to build collaborative leadership structures that support students' engagement in learning, where students and their families can thrive.

There are four distinguishing aspects to Community Schools:

- 1** a **Community Schools Coordinator**, a liaison hired by a school or a community organization to broker partnerships and resources between a school and community;
- 2** a **Collaborative leadership structure** of shared decision-making that contributes to a coordinated ecosystem of supports for students;
- 3** **Authentic family and community engagement** designed to mobilize family strengths and community resources; and
- 4** **Whole-child enrichment, health, and social supports** that remove barriers and promote conditions and opportunities for learning.

The Community Schools strategy was particularly salient during the pandemic in engaging students in learning while attending to their immediate housing, food, technology, transportation, and health access needs. In the aftermath of the pandemic, Community Schools are addressing wellness services, coordinating learning and enrichment opportunities, engaging families, as continued strategies to re-engage students, illustrating that Community Schools are an investment in children, youth, families, and our shared future.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS SUPPORT STUDENT ENGAGEMENT BY:

Transforming high-poverty, low-performing schools into **thriving schools by:**

Curbing chronic absenteeism through coordinated supports and engagement strategies

Addressing social determinants of health, from access to learning and development supports, social and emotional learning, and health and well-being services

Authentically **engaging families and the community**, leveraging assets and community wisdom

Connecting families to existing resources such as early childhood centers, housing, food, and workforce preparation

Working in partnership with diverse service providers to advance holistic student outcomes

Building employer partnerships to advance career-focused mentorship and transition into post-secondary education and/or employment

Maximizing multiple resources and ensure efficiency in the use of public funds that can be braided and blended to meet students' needs, avoiding duplication of effort

Bringing aligned funds and resources into public schools that would otherwise not be available

Resulting in **impressive return-on-investment** to the government support provided.

By cultivating long-standing authentic youth, family, and community partnerships and an ecosystem of cross-partner collaboration, Community Schools are able to quickly and effectively coordinate resources in and out of schools to support all learners.

Ways Mayors and City Leaders Can Support Student Engagement Through Community Schools

Mayors and their staff can support student engagement through Community Schools by:

- 1** Working with school districts to increase awareness of student [dis]engagement root causes and **conducting a Community Schools visibility campaign** on how this strategy can address these issues.
- 2** **Building a System of Community Schools** through collaborative leadership structures such as Children’s cabinets or statues that create shared governance efforts.
- 3** **Brokering partnership agreements** among other local government agencies, school districts, counties, colleges/universities, workforce boards, nonprofit organizations, community collaboratives, and unions to address issues such as cross-city student mobility and chronic absenteeism.
- 4** Collaborating across agencies to **maximize city resources for initiatives that support young people**, such as providing free public transportation for students to promote school attendance and access to afterschool programs and employment opportunities, as well as authentically engaging young people in decision-making that speak to local needs of students.
- 5** Leveraging and/or introducing **tax revenues** to scale and sustain Community School Coordinator positions to coordinate services for children, youth, and families within Community Schools.
- 6** **Engaging with the Coalition for Community Schools** by joining the Community Schools Leadership Network, signing up for the Coalition’s Research Practice Network webinar series, connecting to existing State Coalitions Network efforts, and reaching out to the Coalition for capacity building support.

Illustrative Stories of Engaging Students Through Community Schools

The Community Schools strategy has shown impact across various aspects of student engagement. Below, we highlight a few illustrations:



NEW YORK CITY, NY:

The [Luis Belliard School](#), a NYC Community School, has reduced its chronic absenteeism rate and improved its proficiency rates in English language arts and math (+13% and +30% respectively) after developing a committee to tackle the correlation between student absenteeism and test scores. The school was able to implement additional supports for youth and families to address the root causes of chronic absenteeism, such as implementing afterschool programs and providing in-house vision, medical, and dental services.

CINCINNATI, OH:

Diverse partners within the [Community Learning Center Institute](#) (CLCI) came together to make the city's Community Learning Centers' a unique and successful learning environment. The Oyler School, as part of the broader local strategy to [revitalize neighborhoods](#), has reimagined the students' learning environment through an investment to reimagining their school building. Through the Community School strategy, Oyler was able to bring in a health clinic staffed by a nurse practitioner, a vision center where children can get free eye exams and glasses, a dental clinic, and mental health counselors. These improvements have helped create a significant increase in their students' graduation (92.7%) and college going (70%) rates.



ANAHEIM, CA:

After questioning why their community had nearby liquor stores, yet lacked grocery stores, [students at Magnolia High School](#) worked with local officials and community partners to create the school's own agriscience community center that now provides food to both students and the community to combat urban food desert conditions. Policies were adopted to ensure an inclusive curriculum that helps to elevate issues that matter to students and enables them to have a say in their learning.



BATESVILLE, AR:

[Batesville, a rural school district](#), is leveraging its Community Schools strategy to integrate students supports through expanded learning opportunities for students ages 5-12, launching an internship and an apprenticeship program with local high school and business/industry partners. Batesville has also opened telemedicine clinics, school-based mental health support, hot spots, and food distribution programs to support students, their families, and the community.

Explore additional Community Schools stories at: <https://www.csstorymap.org/>

ABOUT THE COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The [Coalition for Community Schools](https://www.communityschools.org) is an alliance of local, state, and national partners that advocate for Community Schools. The Coalition is comprised of networks made up of cross-sectoral, system, and role leaders, inclusive of local and state decision-makers, including elected officials, government agencies, grassroots organizations, and various service-providers and institutions.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is home to the Coalition. IEL leverages its strengths and assets to support the work of the Coalition.

Connect with the Coalition for Community Schools by visiting <https://www.communityschools.org> or email ccs@iel.org

Coalition for Community Schools Resources

[Community School Standards](#)

[Building a Community Schools System Guide](#)

[Framework: Essentials for Community School Transformation](#)