

Community Schools in New York State



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School districts have faced considerable challenges and complex decisions. COVID-19, and the economic, social justice and racism crisis that we have been facing present an opportunity to identify evidence-based policies and practices that will enable schools to rethink ways to transform learning opportunities for students, teachers, and families. The pandemic and economic uncertainty exposed a deep educational inequity and had a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable students and families.

The *Community School* model would make sense for many school districts to consider. Existing community schools have found themselves in a unique position that has been advantageous for the schools and the communities they serve. They were already familiar with the needs their students and families faced so throughout the pandemic they have been able to act quickly to not only help students and their families but also the greater community.

Community schools take a comprehensive approach to improve academic and developmental outcomes. Community schools apply research about youth development and how social and emotional needs affect academic performance. Community schools have the framework in place to address the stress, trauma and mental health needs of students and their families and to eliminate the barriers for all students to have access to a high-quality learning experience.

This *NYSUT Fact Sheet* is intended to provide guidance on Community Schools.

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What is a Community School?

Community schools are a collaborative strategy, not a program, that organize community resources to best support the success of students. Community schools are about building relationships. The school serves as a hub that strengthens neighborhoods, families, students, and the community to address inequities and help improve student achievement. Community schools form strategic partnerships within the community and at the state and national level to leverage resources that support students, families, and the community. They help schools move towards educational equity by supporting students and families that have food insecurities, lack stable housing, internet, and Wi-Fi, (winter) clothing, access to critical mental and physical health services and other essential needs. Community schools focus on addressing social issues, increasing student achievement, and narrowing the achievement gap.

There are four evidence-based pillars found in most community schools:¹

1. Integrated student supports
2. Expanded learning time and opportunities
3. Active family and community engagement
4. Collaborative leadership and practices

What a Community School is **NOT**:

- A community school is not meant to be a burden on educators and administrators already busy schedules.
- A community school is not asking anyone to do work they are not qualified to do.
- A community school is not only for urban areas.
- A community school is not the same in every community.
- A community school is not temporary programs.

What Programs and Services are offered at a Community School?

There is no “one-size-fits all” community school model. Community schools focus on a strong academic program, expanded learning opportunities, comprehensive support services, and family and community engagement. An assets assessment can determine the partnerships, strengths and resources that exist in a school and the community. The need for programs and services can be determined by a needs assessment to analyze where the community school should focus and drive decision-making.

Community schools bring fragmented services found in the community – such as food assistance, health clinics and after-school programs – onto school campuses, integrating them into the core educational strategy. Services provided go beyond health, mental health and dental clinics, extended school hours and counseling. A community school may not be able to bring all programs and services into a school building, but they have resources in the community to obtain the necessary services.

Do Community Schools Work?

Community schools provide a framework for school improvement that taps into our value system that every child deserves access to high quality, equitable, public education. Community schools have been shown to improve student learning, strengthen families, and create healthier communities. Numerous studies show that community schools, when implemented effectively and given enough time to develop, can help close achievement gaps for students from low-income families and English language learners. Community schools are also associated with improvements in student attendance, engagement, behavior, and academic performance.^{1,2}

What does a Community School “look” like?

A “whole-school” approach is most effective, to support all learners. By working with school personnel, engaging families, referring students to medical professionals when necessary, and mobilizing resources in the larger community, community schools adopt a more integrated approach.

There is a direct link between success in school and the school environment in which student learning takes place. Students are more likely to achieve their full potential in schools that have a positive school culture and one in which students feel safe and supported. Community schools use a comprehensive and multifaceted systemic approach to unifying student and learning supports (trauma informed, whole child, restorative practices, positive behavior supports, family engagement, community partners).

Community School Coordinator

The key ingredient is the Community School coordinator/director. The coordinator is often the liaison for many different areas that may include parent/family engagement, community engagement, youth development, partnership and academic alignment, partnerships and health, mental health, tutoring, after school programs, mentoring and early childhood. A community school coordinator has many roles, skills, and qualities and therefore the coordinator is seen as the key piece in a successful community school.

Community School Models

There are several Community School models. These are some examples:

- **A Lead Partner model** uses a Community Based Organization (CBO) as partner (community school coordinator) that works collaboratively with the principal and the School Leadership Team to carry out the work at the school such as [Children's Aid](#). This model focuses on the whole child, while also engaging family members, to ensure that students succeed in the classroom.
- **University-assisted** community schools are places and partnerships linking the school system, key community resources and higher education with an integrated focus on academics, support systems and civic engagement. [Binghamton University Community Schools](#) is an example of this model with Binghamton University as the lead partner.
- **A Union-led model** is a community school initiative bringing together the union, school district, city, and community. [Connected Community Schools](#) an initiative of the Rome Teachers Association and [United Community Schools](#) founded by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) are two examples of this model. Connected Community Schools and United Community Schools coordinate and maximize public, non-profit, and private resources and government agencies to deliver critical services to students and their families using the school building as the community hub with the goal of creating improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities.

The **Connected Community Schools (CCS)** initiative is comprised of three primary non-profit agencies that have come together to offer a comprehensive community school model, *Rome Alliance for Education, Central New York Health Home Network and Safe Schools Mohawk Valley*.

Other community-based organizations offer a large variety of services that are funded through these public entities, donor funding and grants. All of this will be identified, accessed, and managed through a single point of entry operating system called *LINK (Leaders in Networking and Knowledge)*. This alignment of resources reduces barriers to student well-being, achievement, and school connectedness by addressing their social/emotional health, physical health, mental health, and social determinant needs.

- In a **District-led model**, the district serves as the lead partner. Massena Central Schools is an example of this. The district hired the Community School Director. Massena is a full-service community school that brings everyone (partners) to the table to figure out how to lift up students and families. [Massena Community Schools](#) provide resources and aid that are invaluable to the community which also provides a platform for the community to give back.

Kristin, **The Massena Community School Director**, reaches out to community partners such as law enforcement, local government, not for profits, faith-based organizations, and colleges. Through this rapid response team, partners work together to help students and families in need of necessities such as clothing, shelter, or food by leveraging partnerships and available resources.

At Ready 4 School, held each August, school supplies, gently used clothing, books, and food are donated to students and families. Volunteer hairdressers provide free haircuts to students, and community partners set up informational tables to connect families with needed resources. This collaboration between the school and Kristin's wide network of community partners helps to support the Massena community.

- A **County-wide model** like [Rockland 21C](#) is a collaborative effort of family, school, community, and government. Rockland 21C uses Family Resource Centers as the primary delivery device for services and activities that center around early childhood development, family and community engagement and family support and student development programs.

- A **Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) model** uses a framework to support students' academic development, social and emotional wellness, and the development of culturally responsive, trauma-informed schools. Restorative Practices are used to promote attachment, regulation, competency, and health. An example of this model is the [Finger Lakes Community Schools](#).

Finger Lakes Community Schools use a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework to support all students' academic development, social emotional wellness, and college and career readiness. They use Restorative Practices to promote attachment, regulation, competency, and health. Eight school districts have received training in restorative practices and Tier I, community building, and is up and running in those schools. They have developed a [Restorative Practice Toolkit](#) as a resource for others interested in implementing restorative

Key Ingredients of a Community School

- Supportive Administration
- Engaged Teachers
- Community School Coordinator
- School Site Shared Leadership Team
- Sustained Partnerships
- Needs and Assets Assessment
- Results Focused

How are Community Schools funded?

There are many ways to think about funding Community Schools. Community schools intentionally leverage federal, state, and local funding streams, both public and private, to provide supports and opportunities that students need. A Community School Coordinator/Director is integral to coordinating resources.

Community Schools can be supported with the Coronavirus Response Relief and Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), enacted in December 2020 and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), enacted in March 2021, as they are an allowable use under titles I, II and IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ARPA specifically identifies “full-service community schools” as an allowable use of funds to support student mental health. The Community Schools approach is an evidence-based intervention for schools identified as needing support and improvement under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Foundation aid can also be used to support the community school strategy, as can the community school set-aside and other funding sources.

BOCES CoSer

BOCES services are created when two or more school districts have similar needs that can be met through a shared program. BOCES helps school districts save money by providing opportunities to pool resources and share costs. These services must be approved by the commissioner of education according to need and practicality in a regional context. It will then be considered a Co-Ser (Cooperative Service) agreement.

Many community schools are applying for and using a Community Schools CoSer to provide for students’ social, emotional, physical, and academic needs through a menu of services.

Return on Investment (ROI)

- For every \$1 invested in establishing a community school and hiring a site coordinator, the national average of return on investment (ROI) is \$7.3
- Connected Community Schools (Rome, Waterville, Dolgeville) the average ROI for a Community School coordinator is \$14 for every \$1 invested.
- UFT's United Community Schools data shows \$100,000 investment in a Community School director can bring in \$600,000 in services and grants.

Why Union Involvement in Community School Initiatives?

Unions have gotten involved in community schools because they are convinced that services, supports, and enrichment activities support educators inside the classroom, make the curriculum more relevant and engaging, and create conditions for learning that enable children to succeed. Educators and school staff are often best acquainted with students, families, and their needs. Union involvement gives educators a voice in the initiative. Educator input on the local community school shared leadership team is invaluable. In addition to forging strong partnerships, important decisions about scheduling, personnel, and instruction need to be made. With the shared leadership structure of a community school, local unions get involved in community school initiatives in a myriad of ways. Union involvement ensures a culture and contracts that support community schools.

Union leaders and members often have existing relationships with noneducation allies. Union leaders and members often have access to and relationships with families, the community, community leaders, city leaders, other school district employees, public agencies, labor organizations, faith-based organizations, institutions of higher education and many other potential partners.

Union leaders and members can also advocate for local and statewide policies and funding in support of community schools.

Where to Begin?

► A Plan and a Vision

- Educate union members on how they can become involved in planning and implementation.
- Form an internal task force.
- Train building reps and union leadership

▶ **Needs and Asset Assessment**

- Organize resources to meet the needs of students, families, and school staff.

▶ **Engage partners**

- Look at the partners you already have. Are they the right partners and are they being used strategically?

▶ **Build capacity**

- Leverage labor-management relationship
- Curriculum planning and professional development

▶ **Identify sustainable funding sources**

- Is your district eligible for Community School set-aside money?
- Can you partner with another district for a BOCES CoSer?

▶ **Hire a Community School coordinator**

▶ **Develop a rollout strategy**

- Educate community, members, and families
- Host conversations about “what,” “why,” and “how” of community schools.
- Utilize CBA or MOAs to introduce language to support community schools to ensure the community school coordinator position and the local community school shared leadership team are in place.

List of Potential Partners (not inclusive):

- Social service and youth-serving agencies
- Parents/families
- Community members
- Students
- Funders
- Champions
- Afterschool providers
- Mental health providers
- Child welfare authorities

- Local hospitals and other health providers
- Dentists and dental schools
- Local businesses and corporations
- Career and technical/vocational schools
- Community foundations
- Chamber of commerce
- Employers
- Libraries
- Arts and cultural institutions
- Local universities/colleges
- Legal assistance organizations
- Local elected officials
- Law enforcement
- Government agencies
- Other school districts
- Sports/recreational organizations
- Parks (local, county, state and national)
- Labor unions
- Faith-based organizations
- Banks and financial institutions

Resources

- [New York State Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers](#)
- [Coalition for Community Schools](#)
- [New York State Community Schools Network Listserv Sign-Up:](#)
- [National Center for Community Schools](#)
- [New York School-Based Health Alliance](#)
- [NYSUT Community School Resources](#)
- [AFT](#)
- [NEA](#)

Endnotes

1. 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. Retrieved from: [Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement \(learningpolicyinstitute.org\)](#)
2. Johnston, W. R., Engberg, J., Opper, I. M., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Xenakis, L. (2020). What is the impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative? RAND. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10107.html
3. Bloodworth, M.R., & Horner, A.C. (2019). Return on investment of a Community School Coordinator: A Case Study. Apex and ABC Community School Partnership. Retrieved from: [ROI Coordinator.pdf \(communityschools.org\)](#)