



2020-2021 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.

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.

Every child deserves to live a happy and healthy life. Unfortunately, we know in historically marginalized and under-resourced communities across the state, our children do not have access to the health services they need. Approximately 4 million children live in New York State, and nearly 750,000 of them are poor.¹ We know that children living in poverty experience a variety of barriers to healthy growth and development. One of the best and most effective ways to keep kids healthy is by making high-quality physical, mental, vision, and dental health care as accessible as possible. For many communities, schools are uniquely positioned to integrate health care services as they are a hub for the community where children learn, feel safe, and spend most of their time. Furthermore, nationally in two parent households, 63 percent have both parents working.² Opportunities for safe, engaging, and enriching programs after the end of the traditional school day and throughout the year are a critical support for youth, families, and communities.

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.³ 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 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

¹ Children's Defense Fund. "Child Poverty in America 2018." <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Child-Poverty-in-America-2018-State-Factsheet.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2019).

² United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Employment Characteristics of Families Survey." <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.nr0.htm> (accessed November 27, 2019).

³ 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).

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.

Budget Requests

We are pleased to see that the Executive Budget maintains \$250 million in Community Schools Aid included in last year’s budget and provides an additional \$50 million to expand funding this year. We ask the State to **maintain \$250 million in existing community school funding, support the additional \$50 million in Community Schools Aid, and add 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.⁴

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.

Across the state, communities are investing and aligning resources through the community schools strategy. Below are several examples from members of the New York State Community Schools Network:

Community Schools Initiatives

- Monticello Central School District (MCSD): This past year, the Monticello Central School District launched a Community Resource Center that offers caseworker meetings with families to offer employment counseling, food resources, parenting skills, and other services.
- Finger Lake Community Schools: This fall, Finger Lake Community Schools partnered with community partners to provide free mammograms to 30 women and over 100 flu shots to Lyons residents.
- Genesee Valley Central School District (GVCSD): The District provides free breakfast, lunch, and snack to all students regardless of income, and sends additional food home through a weekend Backpack program. By partnering with local organizations, the District is also able to provide produce from local farms. Also, telehealth has been made available for mental health care, where a consultation occurs privately in the school where the student, parent, and doctor can collaborate to form a treatment plan. Comprehensive services may include psychiatry, medication management, and therapy.
- Massena Central School District Community Schools: With the help of community partners, Massena Community Schools has seen great success with home visits and other events. For

⁴ “Community Schools Research Brief 09,” *Coalition for Community Schools*, 2009, <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CCS%20Research%20Report2009.pdf>

example, they host an annual Ready 4 School event each fall that offers free haircuts, school supplies, clothes, bicycle tune-ups and helmets, and educational tables with resources from community partners.

- The International School for the Liberal Arts (ISLA): The International School for the Liberal Arts in the Bronx was recently recognized for its SNAP registration efforts by the Food Bank for NYC, which cited the school's "selfless and relentless service" and called them a "great example of excellence in service."
- Children's Aid: NYS Community Schools' services have a direct effect on problems of absenteeism. A study of Children's Aid schools in NYC found that their community schools had higher attendance of students and teachers than in comparison schools.
- Town of Webb Union Free School District (TOW UFSD): TOW UFSD recently created a Community School Initiative Policy to help support community groups expand their operation within the school space, in response to survey results that found there was a need for a community center.
- Rockland 21C: Through a partnership with Rockland county school districts, Rockland 21C expanded on home visits and built a connection to the schools through school-based Family Resource Center (FRC) coordinators who held playgroup sessions for ParentChild+ graduates. Also, in 2017, Rockland 21C developed a Community Schools Cooperative Service (CS CoSer), the first of its kind that represents a strategy to organize resources so that academics, social and emotional needs, and medical and dental services and supports are integrated into the fabric of schools.
- Salt Lake City School District (SLCSD): Partnering with the Community Connections of Franklin County, SLCSD obtained an in-kind, full-time family advocate in response to a common drive to provide wraparound mental health and other daily-life supports for students and families. Within two weeks of working with the school, the new family advocate was working on 12 critical care cases.
- UFT/UCS: Queens High School of Information, Research and Technology (QIRT) in was recently chosen by the Restorative Practices initiative to be a School Resource Clinician (SRC) school. As such, QIRT is now host to two clinical social workers with expertise in crisis and counseling who will provide support to both QIRT and five surrounding schools.

By integrating health and mental health services, expanded learning, and family engagement in a school through the community school strategy, the work not only leads to increased well-being of our students but expanded student achievement, stronger families and communities, and ultimately a better New York State.

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.

- 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.

As New York seeks to ensure that all students graduate high school ready for college and career, it must invest in expanded learning programs. The New York State Network for Youth Success recommends that the Legislature:

- **Maintain \$250 million in existing community school funding, support the additional \$50 million in Community Schools Aid, and add 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 Uplifts New York. To increase and protect investment in afterschool programs, the state must invest \$38 million in the Advantage After School Program, which will restore funding to the FY19-20 level of \$33 million, and increase overall funding to accommodate a per pupil increase of \$2,320. Invest an additional \$25.2 million in the Empire State After-School Program to increase per student-rate from \$1,600 to \$2,320. Also, maintain the \$10 million increase for Empire State After-School Program, and amend language to stipulate an increase of the per student rate from \$1,600 to \$2,320 to account for the minimum wage increase.**
- **Early Childhood Education. Invest at least \$150 million to ensure children across the state have access to quality full-day pre-k programs. This investment will enhance quality and eliminate barriers to expansion in districts ready with a plan to prioritize and meet the needs of at-risk children in their communities.**
- **School-Based Health (SBH). Maintain \$17.1 million in FY20 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.