



2026-2027 TESTIMONY TO THE JOINT LEGISLATIVE PUBLIC HEARING ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Our thanks to the members of the Finance, Ways and Means, and Education Committees for the opportunity to present testimony. We also extend our gratitude for your continued leadership and commitment to ensuring that all students across the State have access to the resources they need to succeed.

According to Community Schools Forward, “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.” *We believe that every school should be a community school.*

Currently, there are more than 820 community schools across 62 counties in our State, serving over 200,000 students. There are 421 community schools in New York City alone. It is important to note that community schools are not solely a strategy for urban areas—research shows that they have great value in rural regions, as well.

Community schools already provide the wraparound services and supports that will be necessary as the State makes PreK truly universal—and as it expands 3K in New York City. *We urge you to consider increasing funding for community schools in part because they can play a pivotal role in the success of universal early care and learning.*

The community schools strategy drives gains in ELA and math achievement, increases graduation rates, improves student behavior, decreases chronic absenteeism, and increases access to health and basic-needs supports. The strategy aligns closely with the State Education Department’s [Portrait of a Graduate](#) and offers a scalable framework for schools and systems seeking to advance these outcomes for future graduates.

A new analysis comparing NYC community schools to the rest of the City over a ten year period found:¹

- Graduation rates grew 13.5 percentage points more than the citywide average (25.1 vs. 11.6)
- ELA proficiency grew 3.8 percentage points more than the citywide average (22.9 vs. 19.1)
- Math proficiency grew 8.2 percentage points more than the citywide average (26.7 vs. 18.5)

- Chronic absenteeism grew at a slower rate than the citywide average (with community schools seeing an increase of 4.3 percentage point increase compared to the citywide average of 9.8)
- Community schools are also associated with safer, more supportive learning environments that promote students' social-emotional well-being ²

The New York State Community Schools Network (CSN) urges the State to:

1. Dedicate \$25M to create and expand community schools statewide.

While we greatly appreciate the existing foundation aid set-aside, there is limited accountability in terms of how schools spend that funding. A new, dedicated funding stream for community schools would allow school districts, BOCES, and community partners to target and maximize investment in essential activities and interventions while complimenting the set-aside funds and allowing districts—especially those without dedicated resources—to implement and expand high-quality community schools. We see this initial investment as a down payment on the \$100M necessary to adequately support community schools.

2. Provide \$6M for resource support networks

Dedicated support is essential to the effective implementation of the community schools strategy. This investment would fund:

- \$3M— 20 counties to hire staff and purchase materials (\$150,000 each)
- \$1.5M— two regional networks to provide technical assistance (\$750,000 each)
- \$1.5M— statewide coordination and technical assistance from the NYS Network for Youth Success, the CSN's backbone organization

Now is the time for sound, productive investment. All children deserve community schools.

Why This Funding Matters

The funding we request will not only help expand the number of community schools but also build the infrastructure necessary to sustain them. By investing in local coalitions and expanding the community school strategy, we are laying the foundation for long-term, sustainable change in how we support students. The proven success of community schools makes this investment a critical one with a high return for New York State's future.

As we work to expand community schools, it is vital that we focus on the quality of the schools we create. One key to their success is the dedicated staff, who ensure the school functions as a community hub and connect students and families to the necessary support services. Expanding the pool of qualified staff is essential to success

The Case for Community Schools

The return on investment in community schools is clear. National and state leaders recognize the promise of community schools:

- In 2024, SUNY hosted a convening on University Assisted Community Schools, and SUNY Administration and Binghamton University Community Schools have continued supporting over 15 SUNYs interested in this strategy. A follow up convening was hosted in 2025.
- The New York State Reimagine Education Advisory Council recommended community schools as an innovative model for school districts to use, especially in their efforts to reopen post-pandemic.
- Leading national education think tanks, including the Brookings Institution, the Learning Policy Institute, and the Hechinger Report, have all advocated for the expansion of community schools as a central element of transforming education in the wake of the pandemic.
- New York City's significant expansion of the Community Schools Initiative helped students and schools in neighborhoods hardest hit by COVID-19 address the emotional toll of the pandemic.

The evidence is clear: community schools work, and they deliver strong, measurable outcomes. Learn more about the impact of community schools here: <https://bit.ly/468oGhy>



Successful Community Schools Examples

Across New York State, the positive impact of community schools is evident:

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- **P.S. 197 The Ocean School (Far Rockaway):** Since becoming a community school, P.S. 197 has improved student achievement and family engagement, reducing chronic absenteeism and boosting test scores in ELA and Math through afterschool programs and a Saturday Academy.
- **Schenectady Central School District:** Schenectady has implemented a successful community schools model since 2020, with an advisory board of over 100 partners offering services like afterschool mentoring, food distribution, and mental health support.
- **Buffalo Public Schools:** Community schools in Buffalo, in collaboration with local health providers, have improved health outcomes for students, including reducing asthma rates and expanding mental health services.

- **Batavia Family and Community Engagement Center (FACE):** FACE provides a community hub for families with resources like a laundry facility and a community closet, and has formed partnerships with over 100 local organizations, supporting both academic and family success.