



Our Communities, Our Schools: Closing the Opportunity Gap in Minnesota With Full-Service Community Schools

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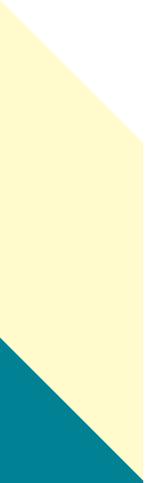
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I. What is EPIC?

The Educator Policy Innovation Center, or EPIC, was founded by Education Minnesota to bring together teams of experienced educators to provide research-proven solutions to the challenges facing Minnesota schools. The teams perform a comprehensive review of academic literature on a given issue and share their own relevant experiences. After discussing the academic literature and its real-world implications for students, the educators recommend policies to meet the challenge. The coupling of sound academic research with actual classroom experience means the policies recommended by EPIC are uniquely valuable because they combine the best from academia and real-world practical experience.

The EPIC research teams are open to all members of Education Minnesota because practicing educators are the experts when it comes to education policy. However, the voice of the educator has often been absent in education policy discussions. CEOs, some academics or politicians proclaim what is best for education with no grounding or experience in how their proposals affect real classrooms with actual students. As a result, our schools are hampered by disjointed, inefficient and at-times harmful state and federal policies.

Educators live every day with these policies. EPIC ensures policy makers will now have access to the best academic research and the thinking of front-line educators on the most pressing issues in education.

THE EPIC FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS TEAM

The EPIC full-service community schools team collectively has almost two centuries of teaching experience. These educators work with a broad range of students—from students in elementary to high school, special education, English learners, and gifted and talented. They hold a broad range of positions—classroom teachers, school nurses, social workers, school counselors, and college-readiness instructors.

Their collective experience and wisdom is reflected in their recommendations for creating more full-service community schools in Minnesota.



II. Executive Summary

WHY FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS?

While many students across Minnesota receive an excellent education, too often children of color and children from under-resourced families don't realize the same educational benefits and outcomes as their peers. For more than a decade, advocates and public officials have tried to change this by emphasizing No Child Left Behind strategies—relying on standardized tests, narrowing curriculum and placing schools in competition with each other. This has failed to produce widespread improvement. Full-service community schools offer a better path to equity and excellence by welcoming community members as partners in school improvement, bringing community services into the school, and empowering the people closest to students to examine disparities and target racial and economic opportunity gaps.

There is no question that Minnesota's educational outcomes are inequitable. Even though national test scores suggest that many Minnesotan children of color are doing as well as, or better, than students of color in most other states, unconscionable racial gaps remain. Beyond test scores, Minnesota sees deep, unacceptable gaps in school readiness, health outcomes, discipline rates, and graduation rates. These gaps reflect many social and economic injustices evident throughout the United States. Schools alone have not been able to fully close these societal gaps with standardized testing or competition-focused policies. That is why Minnesota needs a more effective school improvement framework that directly addresses opportunity gaps at the root of the racial and economic injustices in our state.

HOW FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WORK

A full-service community school engages families, teachers, and other community members to identify the strengths and needs that affect student success. Doing so requires attention not just inside the school, but also to the good work being done by others in the community.

A community school might, for example, bring more health services into the building, expand access to translation services, adopt a restorative practice approach to discipline, and take a variety of other equity-oriented steps to identify and respond to all of the different factors that help or hinder learning.

FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS CLOSE OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

True community schools recognize that excellence for marginalized students will require many strategies and forms of support, which must be targeted appropriately to each group of students. As they bring services into the school and help students learn and grow outside school walls, they also continually examine outcomes and make adjustments based on how well the strategy is working. Minnesota has a handful of schools and programs that are effectively implementing the full-service community schools model and seeing results. Students of color and under-resourced students in these schools are “beating the odds,” attaining educational outcomes more in line with their more privileged peers.

For Minnesota to truly achieve systemic educational equity, schools and communities must have strategies and support to do what’s best for the specific children who are there. We have tried top-down technocracy; we have tried counterproductive competition. It is time for a more authentic approach, rooted in each community and based on positive collaboration between those with the greatest stake in success for all students.

III. Community Schools as an Educational Equity Strategy

DEFINITIONS

OPPORTUNITY GAP:

“The opportunity gap is the disparity in access to quality schools and the resources needed for all children to be academically successful.”

–The National Opportunity to Learn Campaign

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

“Fairness achieved through systematically assessing and addressing disparities in opportunities and outcomes.”

–The Urban Strategies Council

FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

“A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone—all day, every day, evenings, and weekends.

Using public schools as hubs, community schools bring together many partners to offer a range of supports and opportunities to children, youth, families, and communities.”

– The Coalition for Community Schools

The full-service community school strategy is an educational equity strategy that places the needs of students of color and students in poverty at the center of analysis and decision-making in school improvement. The community school needs assessment examines opportunity gaps and looks at systematic disparities affecting student achievement. By addressing disparities at the community level, community schools target the root causes of inequities affecting the public school system.

HOW COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WORK:

Full-service community schools are more than schools with wrap-around services. They are foundations for the entire community and their families. As described by the Coalition for Community Schools: “Community school partners work to achieve these results: Children are ready to enter school; students attend school consistently; students are actively involved in learning and their community; families are increasingly involved with their children’s education; schools are engaged with families and communities; students succeed academically; students are healthy—physically, socially, and emotionally; students live and learn in a safe, supportive, and stable environment, and communities are desirable places to live.”

A full-service community school identifies and recruits partner organizations that also serve the specific school’s students and families. This allows the school and its partners to better address the community’s needs, harness its strengths, and coordinate program and service delivery. Typically, many of the partners will co-locate services at the school, which facilitates access to their services. For students and families to receive the greatest benefit from the model, several key groups must work together to examine needs and disparities, and work together to close opportunity gaps hindering academic achievement.

The Coalition for Community Schools identifies criteria. A community schools strategy creates the structure and culture needed to ensure fulfillment of the following six conditions:

- Early childhood programs are available to nurture growth and development.
- The school offers a core instructional program delivered by qualified teachers; instruction is organized around a challenging curriculum anchored by high standards and expectations for students.
- Students are motivated and engaged in learning—in both school and community settings—before, during, and after school and in the summer.
- The basic physical, mental, and emotional health needs of young people and their families are recognized and addressed.
- Parents, families, and school staff demonstrate mutual respect and engage in effective collaboration.
- Community engagement, together with school efforts, promotes a school climate that is safe, supportive, and respectful and connects students to a broader learning community.

These are unique strategies that offer a comprehensive approach to solving opportunity gaps that are persistent in many communities (Melaville, et al., 2011).

Furthermore, full-service community schools differ from traditional school improvement strategies in the following ways, as outlined by the Center for Popular Democracy.

<i>STRATEGIES</i>	<i>FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS</i>	<i>TRADITIONAL SCHOOLS</i>
Academics	Provide their students with a rich, rigorous curriculum that is culturally relevant, supports them in developing critical thinking skills, and offers them the opportunity to explore a variety of subjects, far beyond those covered by standardized tests. Academic support and enrichment activities are offered after school hours for all students.	Curriculum during the school day and after-school is shaped by the content of standardized tests, which often carry high stakes for students, teachers, and schools. Non-tested subjects, like art, music and sports, are diminished. There may be few after-school enrichment activities for all students.
Community engagement	Parents and community members are empowered to make decisions about how the community school will be run every step of the way. Partnerships between school leaders and community leaders are what make community schools work.	Real community engagement is absent from the functioning of the school. Apart from parent/teacher conferences and the PTA, community members are excluded from school decision-making.
Social services	Community schools provide a variety of services, from health care, to child care, to adult education, to arts and music. These programs are for the benefit of all. The school is the hub or center of its neighborhood.	The school building is closed mid-afternoon, and can't be used for any other programs. Families may have to travel far to access all the social services they need, which is a burden to everyone.

STRUCTURE

Several elements combine to help community schools succeed. This section lays out some of the most important components, in roughly chronological order, for a school that has recently decided to use the community schools framework.

1. EARLY ENGAGEMENT AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The first major step in adopting the community schools framework is examining opportunity gaps and assets of the school's community. This is called an "initial community assessment." This includes gathering data and information about the many factors—health, housing, family employment, in-school services, curriculum—that can affect students' ability and willingness to learn in the classroom ("Community School Toolkit," 2014). Community engagement is vital at this stage, and each school must be proactive and creative in reaching out to families and community leaders who have previously faced barriers to engaging with the school. (These barriers could include pragmatic factors such as work schedules that don't align with the timing of school-run activities, as well as more personal factors such as painful or hostile experiences with the school system in the past.) The assessment should also examine the school itself, considering factors such as school climate, discipline practices, academic enrichment opportunities, and cultural relevance of the curriculum.

When making sense of this information, participants should also look at the effects on different groups of students. This includes, for example, disaggregating data by race rather than only considering averages for the whole student population. Understanding the differences between student populations is critical to tailoring the appropriate strategy.

2. IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Many communities in Minnesota already include organizations providing necessary services and building on existing strengths. These organizations can be either public or private. Many are often looking for new ways to reach the people they want to serve and work with. Partnering with schools provides these organizations a direct way to work with students and families. Community schools recruit and welcome groups whose work lines up with the priorities revealed by the initial community assessment (Community Schools Toolkit, 2014).

Sometimes this takes the form of creating a permanent facility for a community partner within the school (e.g. converting existing space into a community clinic), and other times it means bringing community partners in regularly to provide their services (Melaville, et al., 2011). Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that the school's work with its community partners improves the ability of both to address the factors that interfere with student learning.

3. SITE COORDINATORS

Community schools often develop relationships with dozens of partner organizations, collect and analyze data from several sources, improve the provision of services the school already offers, and coordinate many staff members' activities. As a result, the process of overseeing the community schools effort is a full-time job. As such, the role of site coordinator is vital to the success of the framework at each school ("Strategic Alignment," 2015).

4. REGULAR EVALUATION AND ADAPTATION

Also vital to the success of the community schools framework is regular collection of data and information about the factors identified during the initial assessment, to track progress and make appropriate changes (Melaville, et al., 2011). Again, this information should be disaggregated wherever possible to gauge progress for students of color and students in poverty in the school. Adaptations, too, should reflect the needs of targeted student groups to ensure that the school is on a path to provide equity for all.

The full-service community schools approach recognizes that achieving a universal goal (for example, academic excellence for all students) may require the use of several different approaches and resources targeted to specific populations, such as ensuring translation services are available for families still learning English, (Concept paper: "Building an equity framework for full service community schools and Promise Neighborhood schools," 2012). Evaluating and adapting the programs and partnerships that the school offers provides the highest level of effectiveness for all students.

The structure of full-service community schools provides the backbone for educational equity by closing opportunity gaps within the school community. By aligning needed services for students and families, kids come to class more prepared to learn, more physically healthy, and less distracted.

IV. Impact of Community Schools on Educational Outcomes and Community Strength

The community schools framework rests, in part, on the assumption that addressing school culture and non-academic factors can have a significant impact on academic factors. This, combined with improved academic programs, has produced a wide range of positive outcomes for students, particularly students of color or those who live in poverty, in both non-academic and academic areas.

RESULTS IN MINNESOTA

Communities, including Brooklyn Center and Duluth in Minnesota, are successfully using this model as a strategy to tackle the opportunity gap, and they are seeing results. These communities are transforming their schools to respond to the needs of their children, families, and neighbors.

MYERS-WILKINS COMMUNITY SCHOOL IN DULUTH

Myers-Wilkins was an early adopter of the community school framework in 1998.

Parents, community members, and staff realized the impact poverty was having on children's emotional well-being and academics and they banded together to look for ways to address the neighborhood and school needs.

Myers-Wilkins, formerly the Grant Community School Collaborative, started out by mostly offering after-school and summer enrichment opportunities for students and families by partnering with various community organizations. About 78 percent of neighbors surveyed said that was the biggest need—quality activities for children in the neighborhood, according to the collaborative.

Now, nine organizations provide the institutional backbone of the collaborative. Dozens of others bring in community instructors, college-age tutors, summer theater camp volunteers, and a variety of other leaders who provide extracurricular academic and cultural experiences for students and community members.

Myers-Wilkins is also working with Blue Cross and Blue Shield to create a community health hub at the school, with community health workers to be employed on site.

The collaborative is a concept that is driven by the leadership of those directly affected by the success of the school—the families and the neighborhood. As the community needs change, the collaborative responds to those changes.

Family and community engagement has increased. According to data from the Myers-Wilkins Community School Collaborative, about 50 to 60 family and community events were

planned for the 2014-15 school year. Some, like the fall powwow and an event featuring Malcom X's daughter Malaak Shabazz, attracted more than 400 people. Volunteerism is high. In 2014, more than 100 volunteers served more than 1,700 hours at the school; 30 work study students worked 2,200 hours, according to the collaborative.

Myers-Wilkins also has one of the highest rates of parent and student satisfaction when district officials conduct school climate surveys, according to Duluth Public Schools.

And Myers-Wilkins is seeing academic gains and closing the achievement gap between students of color and their white peers. According to the 2013-14 Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) results, American Indian and Hispanic students at Myers-Wilkins are making more growth in math than white students statewide. Subgroups that are meeting state targets in math and reading are American Indian, African-American, special education, and free- and reduced-price lunch students, according to the Minnesota Department of Education's school report card.

Despite having the highest concentration of low-income students in the district (83 percent receive free or reduced price lunch and anywhere from 10 percent to 15 percent are homeless), Myers-Wilkins has never been cited for low performance by the state based on the MCAs, according to the collaborative.

Myers-Wilkin's success is why Duluth Public Schools wants to expand the full-service community school framework to other high-poverty schools in the city.

BROOKLYN CENTER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Brooklyn Center became Minnesota's first full-service community school district in 2009. Now, the school district has more than 100 programs and partnerships that are aligned with the district's academic goals.

Students can participate in dozens of expanded learning opportunities from sports to theater to video production. There's also after-school tutoring and help preparing for college entrance exams. Many of these programs are made possible by the federal 21st Century Learning Center grant.

The Brooklyn Center Youth Center opened in 2012 and is a collaboration between the city and school district so teens have a safe place to gather and be active when the school day is over.

Now, more than 80 percent of middle- and high-schoolers are involved in at least one after-school activity, according to the Brooklyn Center school district.

Family engagement is a priority. Parents can go to the Family Resource Rooms at the secondary school or Earle Brown Elementary to get help with basic needs like food, clothing, housing, and health care assistance. Computers are available for parents to write resumes and search for educational and career opportunities. They can also attend weekly parenting classes to help them advocate for their child and support their success.

School officials converted two classrooms into a health resource center in 2009. Park Nicollet Foundation funded the \$250,000 transformation. Now, any child who lives in Brooklyn Center has access to free and reduced cost medical, dental, vision, mental health and social support services.

Brooklyn Center's transformation is producing results. Graduation rates are up. About 87 percent of seniors graduated in 2014, up from 74 percent in 2010, according to data from the Minnesota Department of Education. The percentage of students enrolling in a Minnesota college or university increased from 61 percent in 2009 to 78 percent in 2013, according to district data. That doesn't include students who go to school out of state or join the military.

Student absences at the secondary school have been cut by almost a third from 9,000 students being absent one class period or more in 2009 to 6,500 during the 2013-14 school year, according to school district data. Districtwide behavioral references have been cut in half from 5,113 in 2009 to 2,495 during the 2013-14 school year.

RESULTS FROM OTHER STATES

1. NON-ACADEMIC

The Coalition for Community Schools and the Center for Popular Democracy have each identified examples of successful models nationally, including:

- Schools in California, Massachusetts, Washington, and national networks used a variety of approaches (including family engagement programs, out of school activities, etc.) within the community schools framework to "develop improved work habits, efforts and attitudes toward learning (Community Schools Results, 2011)."
- Schools in Kentucky, California, New York, Oregon, Florida, and elsewhere increased health services, adult education, and other family services. Results included increased family support of students' education, improved coping skills for children, and a 98 percent success rate of children with one criminal offense avoiding further arrests (Community Schools Toolkit, 2014).
- Schools in California, New York, and Alaska have adopted restorative justice approaches to discipline, improved social and emotional learning, and/or provided broad health care services. All aim to strengthen a school's climate and health. Schools have seen significant reductions in suspensions, expulsions, and/or missed school days, as well as significant increases in academic performance, graduation rates, and/or student attitudes toward school (Community Schools Toolkit, 2014).
- A study of New York City community schools found the social returns on investment, or SROI, ranging from \$10.30 to \$14.80 for every dollar invested. A SROI analysis captures value not only in terms of improved outcomes, but also through additional revenues generated and costs avoided using the community schools approach (Community Schools Results, 2011).

2. ACADEMIC

The same organizations have identified many remarkable academic results, including:

- Schools in Maryland, Florida, and Oregon improved access to early childhood programs (using the community schools framework), better preparing children for kindergarten. At Highland Elementary School Bridges Program in Palm Beach County, Florida, nearly 80 percent of students who participated in the an early learning program before kindergarten were rated fully ready on a state school readiness assessments. By comparison, only one-third of students who didn't attend an early learning program were ready for kindergarten (Community Schools Results, 2011).
- Schools in Ohio, Oklahoma, and Connecticut, as well as previously discussed states and national networks, saw significant gains in test scores and grades after the framework had been implemented, sometimes within the space of two to three years. An evaluation of the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative found students in community schools where the model was implemented successfully outperformed their peers in other schools by 32 points in math and 19 points in reading (Community Schools Results, 2011).
- Schools and networks saw significant gains in credits earned and significant reductions in grade retention and dropping out. In Portland, Oregon's School's Uniting Neighborhoods community school initiative, only 17 percent of students were chronically absent, compared with the district average of 32 percent (Community Schools Results, 2011).
- Schools saw significant improvement in graduation rates. In Cincinnati, graduation rates rose from 51 percent in 2000—when Community Learning Centers were first introduced—to 80 percent by 2011. The gap between black and white students shrank from nearly 15 percent to roughly 4 percent in fewer than 10 years (Community Schools Results, 2011).
- Schools participating in the national 21st Century Community Learning Centers and New York City specific Student Success Centers that have expanded academic help and support to students and families, increased college applications and admissions, and broadened the range of colleges to which students apply (Community Schools Toolkit, 2014).

V. What State Leaders Can Do

The state can take several steps to encourage the use of the community schools framework. The Minnesota Legislature has led the way nationally by providing initial seed money for full-service community schools, but there is much more to be done.

INCREASE FUNDING FOR SITE COORDINATORS

Because the site coordinator role is so important to a sustainable, successful community school, providing schools with the funds to pay a site coordinator and create a professional development program for site coordinators would both greatly facilitate adoption of the community schools framework (“Community schools state funding opportunities and examples,” 2014).

INCREASE FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

The state can help to cover the costs and provide appropriate data to schools and districts in the early stages of adopting the community schools framework. This is a necessary one-time cost schools incur, and the state can help them overcome this barrier to starting the process.

ENCOURAGE CO-LOCATION OF STATE-PROVIDED SERVICES AT SCHOOLS

The state provides and supports several health-related and other human services throughout the state. Encouraging local health and human services branches to collaborate and co-locate as appropriate with community schools would improve service delivery for many students and families, as well as demonstrate a broader state commitment to the framework (“Community schools state funding opportunities and examples,” 2014).

FUND NEEDED SERVICES AT SCHOOLS

As the community schools framework becomes more common, many communities may discover similar needs that would best be addressed with state-provided services. Being willing to work with these communities to develop and fund such services would further support the effectiveness of community schools.

VI. What Local Officials Can Do

Local leaders inside and outside of the schools play pivotal roles in supporting the development of the community schools framework.

DISTRICT LEADERS

District leaders, including school boards and superintendents, often initiate the transition into a community school. For example, Brooklyn Center's Superintendent Keith Lester first built the support for community schools. Whether or not they begin the conversation, district leaders can take many steps to encourage it, including recruiting community partners, dedicating district resources to help with community assessments, and supporting the work and innovation of school-level partners (Melaville, et al., 2011).

SCHOOL LEADERS

An enterprising school leader can also facilitate adopting the full-service community schools framework by engaging with community members and partners, ensuring teachers and other staff are part of the process, and supporting their site coordinator. They can initiate and sustain the move to the framework independently, provided district leadership doesn't oppose the idea. See section VIII of this report for new opportunities to expand community schools.

OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT (E.G. CITY AND COUNTY) LEADERS

Local government leaders who want to support educational equity can seek out ways to support the community assessment process by making data and/or some personnel time available to schools, as well as identify opportunities to locate appropriate county or city services in schools, provided those services address the needs identified by the community assessment.

VII. What Parents, Educators, Unions, and Community Leaders Can Do Together

With community schools, parents, educators, unions, and community leaders have the power to change schools and make a commitment to support long-term and sustainable transformation of the school and community. At their essence, community schools are not about any set of prescribed programs or top-down mandates put in place by politicians and school bureaucrats. The Center for Popular Democracy recommends a series of actions for parents, educators, unions, and community leaders to launch community schools (Community Schools Toolkit, 2014):

1. CREATE A CORE TEAM OF STAKEHOLDERS.

Creating a community school is a collaborative effort that requires all hands on deck. The first step is to create a core team of stakeholders, parents, educators, and community members to spearhead the vision and design process. Start with a small group of parents and community members you know. Together, make a larger list of parents and community members who might be interested and set up one-to-one meetings with them to discuss transforming your school into a community school. In each meeting, ask who else they think you should be talking with and share the list of core stakeholders to get their ideas about key individuals to recruit to your core team. Make sure to include key decision-makers in the list of people you meet with first. These should include your school's principal, the leader(s) of your school's parent association and members of any other important governance body at your school, like a principal's advisory committee, local school committee or school leadership team. Convene this core team to discuss the group's vision and hopes for transforming your school into a community school, and brainstorm some next steps.

2. IF POSSIBLE, VISIT A COMMUNITY SCHOOL.

Listen to other leaders, educators, students, and parents and learn what makes their school great and the process they used to get those results. The Minnesota Network of Community Schools is an informal network of community schools, non-profits, unions, and education equity champions who are working together to support current community schools and expand the community school strategy. Leaders from Brooklyn Center Community Schools and the Myers-Wilkins Community School Collaborative are active in the Minnesota Network of Community Schools and regularly offer tours of their schools.

**Brooklyn Center Community Schools
information is available here:
www.brooklyncenterschools.org**

**Myers-Wilkins Community School
Collaborative information is
available here: www.m-wcsc.org**

3. HOST A COMMUNITY MEETING.

Together with the core team, organize an initial community meeting about community schools for parents, school staff, and any key community organizations or leaders, to introduce people to the community school idea, spark interest, and recruit participation in the planning process. Allow people to voice their ideas and concerns, as well as volunteer to support the project. Ask people to sign up to become part of the core team.

4. SEEK OUT POTENTIAL PARTNERS.

Talk to a lot of people about community schools and learn about the range of projects and initiatives that could be integrated into the school. First, talk with the school's teachers, principal, and superintendent. Next, reach out to local politicians, hospitals, health clinics, and non-profit organizations to make a list of the organizations in your community that might want to offer services to families in your school. Set meetings with these organizations and describe your vision for creating a community school. Ask them if there are simple ways that they can partner with your school to make services more available to families. Bring the results of these conversations back to your core team to see which ones the team wants to pursue. Also, continue to recruit additional parents to participate in the planning process. Hold additional community meetings to continue visioning and discussing the priorities for the community school.

5. CREATE A VISION AND CHOOSE PROGRAM PRIORITIES.

Find someone in your community who is experienced in designing programs to help you conduct a needs assessment survey and asset map for your community school. Based on results of these assessments, meetings, and available partnerships, decide on community school priority programs. Feel free to look at case studies from other schools to get ideas. Remember that a full-service community school strategy is long term. You do not need to have everything in place in the first year.

6. LEARN ABOUT AVAILABLE FUNDING.

It can be hard at first to find funding to support partnerships and build new programs at your school. Ask school staff, local organizations, and local politicians for support in finding and getting funding. If you are not experienced at fundraising, you will need to enlist the help of someone who has experience with this, and you will need to engage school staff or skilled volunteers in preparing grant applications. See part VIII of this report for more information on funding for community schools.

7. MAINTAIN A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT.

A community school cannot be built all at once. It requires ongoing commitment from leaders and partners and an ongoing study of ways to improve the school and continued work to maintain and build new community partnerships. The core team must continue to meet regularly to monitor, evaluate, adjust, and expand the community schools plan even once the community school is operating. A community school is a way of running a school, not a one-time intervention or program. One of the most important things you can do is to stay engaged and keep learning, and to pull more leaders into the process with you. Work to make sure your core stakeholder group meets regularly to evaluate your efforts and improve them. One way to think of this work is as a cycle:



VIII. Opportunities to Expand Full-Service Community Schools in Minnesota

A GRASSROOTS POLICY VICTORY IN 2015

During the 2015 legislative session, grassroots community school leaders, educators, union activists, and education equity champions were successful in advocating for passage of a new full-service community schools law in Minnesota. The law makes it easier for more school districts to adopt the full-service community school strategy by defining the full-service community school strategy and providing funding for site coordinators and community needs assessments.

The 2015 full-service community schools law targeted schools with opportunity gaps harming students in poverty and students of color in Minnesota. Schools eligible for full-service community school grant funding must be on a development plan for continuous improvement and be in a district that has an achievement and integration plan. The law establishes the steps for application to the Minnesota Department of Education for a full-service community school grant. Additional funding is needed to expand and continue these grants.

STEPS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS INTERESTED IN BECOMING FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:

1. Establish a school leadership team. One-third of the team must be parents and one-third of the team must be teachers. It should include the school principal and representatives of partner organizations.
2. Conduct a baseline analysis of opportunity gaps and educational disparities in the school and surrounding community. The analysis includes these key areas:
 - a. Analysis of student body needs, enrollment, and retention for students with disabilities, English learner status, homeless and highly mobile status, and free or reduced-price lunch status.
 - b. Analysis of suspension and expulsion data, disaggregated by race, disability status, English language learning, and free or reduced-price lunch status.
 - c. Analysis of school achievement data disaggregated by major demographic categories, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, English learner status, disability status, and free or reduced-price lunch status.
 - d. Analysis of current parent engagement strategies and their success.
 - e. Evaluation of need for wraparound services for social, emotional, physical health, and those that support positive school climate and behavior strategies.
 - f. Analysis of community assets and plan for utilizing assets.

IX. Funding Community Schools

Unfortunately, our education finance system is inadequate, inequitable, and inefficient. However, full-service community schools are one of the most cost-effective school improvement strategies available to school leaders.

Community school funding can be separated into two essential parts: funding for the community schools site coordinator and school site capacity, and funding for the community school programs. The costs to a school district for the site coordinator and school site capacity can average from \$100,000 per year to \$250,000 per year. The bulk of these funds go toward the site coordinator's salary and benefits. Additional site funds are typically used for program and facility capacity building, and for the community needs assessment process ("A Policy Approach to Create and Sustain Community Schools," 2000).

Beyond the site coordinator compensation and site capacity budget, the Coalition for Community Schools advises:

"Opportunities, supports, and services at community schools are financed through a variety of public and private funding streams. These funds come from every conceivable funding stream dedicated to address the needs of young people and families. At the federal and state levels, the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Agriculture and Justice funds may be involved. In addition, foundations, corporations, and individuals provide funding. Often these funds are not in the hands of school districts; however, local government, community-based organizations, health systems, and other community partners manage them. The opportunity is to create an environment in the community school that encourages community partners to bring their programs into the school and encourages the school to reach out into the community."

"Frequently Asked Questions About Community Schools," Retrieved November 5, 2015

The following funding sources are commonly sought by school leaders implementing the full-service community school strategy:

1. State and federal full-service community school grant funding: This funding is available as competitive grants and are authorized and funded through state and federal legislation and appropriation. Both Minnesota and the U.S. Department of Education have full-service community school grant funding programs. ("Full Service Community Schools Program," 2015) ("Competitive—State Fiscal Year 2016—Full-Service Community Schools," 2015)
2. Other federal education funds available for community schools purposes:
 - a. School Improvement Grants: Schools commonly use federal SIG funds to implement activities and programs of the community school strategy.

- b. 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants: This federal grant may be used for afterschool enrichment and extended learning opportunities that are a part of the community school program. Many districts now use these funds to finance community school programming.
 - c. Title I funds: Title I funds may be used to support funding the site coordinator position. (Blank M., et al., 2010).
3. Re-aligning existing state categorical education funding: Without award or allocation of new funding, districts may spend certain categorical funding dollars on aspects of a community school plan that will achieve the intended outcomes for the designated categorical funds.
 4. School construction financing: A campaign to pass a local school bonding referenda is an opportune time to stipulate that new school construction should include designated community space, designed with community needs and the community school plan in mind. ("A Handbook for State Policy Leaders—Community Schools," 2002)
 5. Other state and county agencies: Other state and county agencies that fund programs for children and families are potential sources of funding for community schools. The challenge is to work with these agencies to identify their common objectives and recognize the effectiveness and cost-savings in cross-agency collaboration and funding.
 6. United Way, foundations and private funding: Many local United Way affiliates fund community school budgets.

"United Way can serve many roles within a community school strategy: as a key leader in the community leadership group, an intermediary organization managing the community schools work, a lead agency or a funder that provides the necessary resources needed. Many of these roles are represented in a United Way Community Schools Learning Community that serves as a peer networking opportunity for United Ways involved in community school initiatives. This network is convened by the United Way Worldwide, a group of local United Ways, along with the Coalition for Community Schools."

Coalition for Community Schools n.d. "United Way Community Schools Learning Community". Retrieved November 5, 2015

Additionally, grants may be available from numerous corporate, family, and community foundations seeking to fund education initiatives aimed at closing racial and economic disparities in education.

X. Conclusion

The full-service community schools framework offers Minnesota an opportunity to promote educational equity centered on the unique needs and strengths of each school community, and to address a wide range of factors that affect educational achievement. Dedicated youth and community organizations and individuals across the state already work hard to provide many services that can help students and families thrive. Community schools allow us to better coordinate that patchwork of effort, while also ensuring our schools continuously monitor and improve the ways they can support student learning.

From increasing the range of medical services on site, to using restorative justice practices to make school discipline healthier and fairer, to partnering with local employers to create learning internships, and beyond; the community schools framework can help schools directly address the opportunity gaps that are barriers to equitable outcomes in education.

Section III of this paper described how community schools close opportunity gaps in communities through:

1. Engaging and assessing of community needs and strengths early.
2. Identifying community partners to address those needs and build on those strengths.
3. Placing site coordinators who work full time to keep schools on track.
4. Evaluating and adapting regularly to make sure that equitable education is achieved.

Making all this happen requires leadership. Everyone can play a role in promoting educational equity through expanding community schools. As described in Section V, state officials can:

- Increase funding for site coordinators.
- Increase funding for community needs assessments.
- Encourage co-location of state-provided services at schools.
- Fund needed services at schools.

Local officials can also play key roles, as described in Section VI:

- District leaders can both begin and support adopting the community schools framework.
- School leaders are crucial to facilitating and sustaining the work of a community school.
- Other local government officials can use their resources and services to support community schools.

And, of course, communities themselves are critical to the success of community schools. Community leaders, parents, educators, and unions can transform their schools with these steps, described in section VII:

- Create a core team of stakeholders.
- Visit a community school, if possible.
- Host a community meeting.
- Seek out potential partners.
- Create a vision and choose your program priorities.
- Learn about available funding.
- Maintain a long-term commitment.

Unacceptable and outrageous gaps in educational outcomes in our state show that we must do better by students of color and students who live in poverty. Parents, educators, and school boards have been frustrated by the current emphasis on unproven, counter-productive approaches to these gaps. Our children deserve better than grill-and-drill testing that diagnoses, but does not cure, our ailments. And they certainly deserve better than competition-based “reforms” that look to profit from unproven methods.

Community schools connect students and families with needed services, and they build on community strengths by being welcoming and empowering rather than excluding. They do not abandon low-income families and families of color to fend for themselves, and they routinely look for ways to improve. Instead of relying on top-down education mandates and competition, community schools unite people in pursuing what is best for children. These schools are working in Minnesota and across the nation—closing the gaps where other attempts have failed.

It’s time to move beyond rhetoric about the racial and economic gaps pervasive in our state and take action to close these gaps. Minnesota is uniquely poised to do just that by fully embracing the full-service community schools model.

XI: Further Resources

Those interested in supporting full-service community schools are encouraged to consult the following resources in learning more about the framework and how best to support it in their community.

THE COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

<http://www.communityschools.org>

Perhaps the most extensive site dedicated specifically to educating about, advocating for, and supporting the work of community schools, this site includes resources to support leaders at any level—including the grassroots—transforming more schools into community schools.

CENTER FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY TOOLKIT

Accessible at: http://populardemocracy.org/sites/default/files/publications/CPD_CEJToolkit_FIN.pdf

This is a lengthy document offering additional details about the structure of full-service community schools and how to push for adoption of the framework in your community.

THE URBAN STRATEGIES COUNCIL'S EQUITY FRAMEWORK

Accessible at: www.urbanstrategies.org

For community schools to be as effective as possible, leaders should intentionally operate within an equity framework. As a starting point, the Urban Strategies Council offers both a general form of its equity framework, as well as a specific application to community schools.

XII. References

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Strategic alignment. (2015). Coalition for Community Schools.

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XIII. Full-Service Community Schools Competitive Grant Information

The following describes the application process for the 2015 full-service community schools competitive grant. All information is from the Minnesota Department of Education.

FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS STATE COMPETITIVE GRANT OPPORTUNITY

INSTRUCTIONS - INTRODUCTION MEMO

TO: Minnesota Public School Sites

FROM: Steve Dibb, Deputy Commissioner

DATE OF PUBLICATION: August 27, 2015

ACTION: Signed and submitted applications must be received by (not postmarked by):
October 13, 2015, 3:30 p.m., Central Time

PURPOSE OF THE GRANT OPPORTUNITY

The Minnesota Department of Education makes this funding available to school sites for the purpose of planning, implementing and improving full-service community schools to integrate community school programming at each covered school site and the effect of the transition to a full-service community school on participating children and adults.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

An eligible school site meeting at least one of the following criteria may submit an application:

- (1) the school is on a development plan for continuous improvement under Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.35, Subdivision 2; or
- (2) the school is in a district that has an achievement and integration plan approved by the commissioner of education under Minnesota Statutes, sections 124D.861, program to close the academic achievement and opportunity gap and 124D.862, achievement and integration revenue.

A district must submit a separate application and budget for each eligible school site if more than one school site is seeking funding.

FUNDING AVAILABLE

There is \$250,000 available in fiscal year 2016 for grants to school sites using funds appropriated under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.231, Full-service Community Schools.

Eligible and selected school sites may receive up to \$100,000 annually. School sites receiving funding under this section shall hire or contract with a partner agency to hire a site coordinator to coordinate services at each covered school site. Implementation funding of up to \$20,000 must be available for up to one year for planning for school sites. At the end of this period, a school must submit a full-service community plan, pursuant to paragraph (g) of Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.231 in order to access the remaining grant funds.

The state reserves the right to offer award amounts that differ than the applicant's request.

CONTINUATION AWARDS

An additional \$250,000 is available during state fiscal year 2017 for continuation awards. These awards would be available after approval of your state fiscal year 2017 budget and documentation of progress during the initial award period. Awards for fiscal year 2017 will not exceed more than \$100,000 per school site and would likely be in award amounts similar to the initial year award. Funding not expended during the initial year grant period would carry over into state fiscal year 2017.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUNDING DECISIONS

In addition to the scoring criteria outlined in the Application Components Section, the commissioner shall consider the awarding of funds to schools with significant populations of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches and also schools with significant homeless and highly mobile students.

The commissioner must also dispense the funds in a manner to ensure equity among urban, suburban, and greater Minnesota schools.

ESTIMATED GRANT PERIOD

The term of the initial grant period is anticipated to be from mid-November, 2015 through June 30, 2016 with a continuation award for state fiscal year 2017 contingent upon an approved budget, progress made to date and report receipt. The continuation period is anticipated to run July 1, 2016 through June 30, 2017. Remaining funding from the initial grant period may carry forward to the continuation grant period. Progress must be evident and reporting requirements must be met.

STATE'S RIGHT TO CANCEL

This grant opportunity does not obligate the state to award a contract and the state reserves the right to cancel the solicitation if it is considered to be in its best interest due to lack of funding, agency priorities or other considerations.

All costs incurred in responding to this grant opportunity will be borne by the applicant.

GENERAL INFORMATION SECTION

GRANTEE EXPECTATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

The following expectations are outlined in Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.231, Subdivision 2.

1. School sites receiving funding under this section shall hire or contract with a partner agency to hire a site coordinator to coordinate services at each covered school site.
2. Implementation funding of up to \$20,000 must be available for up to one year for planning for school sites. At the end of this period, the school must submit a full-service community school plan in order to access the remaining grant funds.
3. A school site must establish a School Leadership Team responsible for developing school-specific programming goals, assessing program needs, and overseeing the process of implementing expanded programming at each covered site.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM CRITERIA

The School Leadership Team shall have between 12 to 15 members and shall meet the following requirements:

- A. at least 30 percent of the members are parents and 30 percent of the members are teachers at the school site and must include the school principal and representatives from partner agencies; and
- B. the School Leadership Team must be responsible for overseeing the baseline analyses under paragraph (f) of Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.231. A team must have ongoing responsibility for monitoring the development and implementation of full service community school operations and programming at the school site and shall issue recommendations to schools on a regular basis and summarized in an annual report. These reports shall also be made available to the public at the school site and on school and district Web sites.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAM – OTHER TASKS

The School Leadership Team at each school site must develop a full-service community school plan detailing the steps the school leadership team will take, including:

- (1) timely establishment and consistent operation of the school leadership team;
- (2) maintenance of attendance records in all programming components;
- (3) maintenance of measurable data showing annual participation and the impact of programming on the participating children and adults;

- (4) documentation of meaningful and sustained collaboration between the school and community stakeholders, including local governmental units, civic engagement organizations, businesses, and social service providers;
- (5) establishment and maintenance of partnerships with institutions, such as universities, hospitals, museums, or not-for-profit community organizations to further the development and implementation of community school programming;
- (6) ensuring compliance with the district nondiscrimination policy; and
- (7) plan for School Leadership Team development.

BASELINE DATA ANALYSIS CRITERIA BEFORE PROGRAMMING

The School Leadership Team must be responsible for overseeing the baseline analyses. School sites must complete a baseline analysis prior to beginning programming as a full-service community school. The analysis shall include:

- (1) a baseline analysis of needs at the school site, led by the School Leadership Team, which shall include the following elements:
 - I. identification of challenges facing the school;
 - II. analysis of the student body, including:
 - a. number and percentage of students with disabilities and needs of these students
 - b. number and percentage of students who are English learners and the needs of these students;
 - c. numbers of students who are homeless or highly mobile; and
 - d. number and percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch and the needs of these students; and
- (2) analysis of enrollment and retention rates for students with disabilities, English learners, homeless and highly mobile students and students receiving free or reduced-priced lunch;
- (3) analysis of suspension and expulsion data, including the justification for such disciplinary actions and the degree to which particular populations, including, but not limited to, students of color, students with disabilities, students who are English learners, and students receiving free or reduced-price lunch are represented among students subject to such action:
- (4) analysis of school achievement data disaggregated by major demographic categories, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, English learner status, disability status, and free or reduced-price lunch status;
- (5) analysis of current parent engagement strategies and their success; and

(6) evaluation of the need for and availability of wraparound services, including, but not limited to:

- a. mechanisms for meeting students' social, emotional, and physical health needs, which may include coordination of existing services as well as the development of new services based on student needs; and
- b. strategies to create a safe and secure school environment and improve school climate and discipline, such as implementing a system of positive behavioral supports, and taking additional steps to eliminate bullying;

(7) a baseline analysis of community assets and a strategic plan for utilizing and aligning identified assets. This analysis should include, but is not limited to, a documentation of individuals in the community, faith-based organizations, community and neighborhood associations, colleges, hospitals, libraries, businesses, and social service agencies who may be able to provide support and resources; and

(8) a baseline analysis of needs in the community surrounding the school, led by the School Leadership Team, including, but not limited to:

- a. the need for high-quality, full-day child care and early childhood education programs;
- b. the need for physical and mental health care services for children and adults; and
- c. the need for job training and other adult education programming

ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAMMING

After the baseline analysis has been conducted, each school site receiving funding under this section must establish at least two of the following types of programming:

1. Early childhood:

- i. early childhood education; and
- ii. child care services;

2. Academic:

- i. academic supports and enrichment activities, including expanded learning time;
- ii. summer or after-school enrichment and learning experiences;
- iii. job training, internship opportunities, and career counseling services;
- iv. programs that provide assistance to students who have been truant, suspended or expelled; and
- v. specialized instructional support services;

3. Parent involvement:
 - i. programs that promote parental involvement and family literacy, including the Reading First and Early Reading First programs authorized under Part B, Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, USC, Title 20, Section 6361, et seq.;
 - ii. parent leadership development activities; and
 - iii. parenting education activities;
4. Mental and physical health:
 - i. mentoring and other youth development programs, including peer mentoring and conflict mediation;
 - ii. juvenile crime prevention and rehabilitation programs;
 - iii. home visitation services by teachers and other professionals;
 - iv. developmentally appropriate physical education;
 - v. nutrition services;
 - vi. primary health and dental care; and
 - vii. mental health counseling services;
5. Community involvement:
 - i. service and service-learning opportunities;
 - ii. adult education, including instruction in English as a second language; and
 - iii. homeless prevention services;
6. Positive discipline practices; and
7. Other programming designed to meet school and community needs identified in the baseline analysis and reflected in the full-service community school plan.

GRANTEE REPORTING

Grantees will be required to submit baseline data analysis based on criteria outlined in statute and under the Grantee Expectation Section. In addition, the full service community plan must be submitted within the initial year of funding. Annual reports must be summarized and reports shall be made to the public at the school site and on the school and district web sites. Additional progress reports may be requested. Refer to the information below for criteria to be considered in the Full-Service Community School Review Reporting.

FULL-SERVICE COMMUNITY SCHOOL REVIEW REPORTING

A. Every three years, a full-service community school site must submit to the commissioner, and make available at the school site and online, a report describing efforts to integrate community school programming at each covered school site and the effect of the transition to a full-service community school on participating children and adults. This report shall include, but is not limited to, the following:

- (1) an assessment of the effectiveness of the school site in development or implementing the community school plan;
- (2) problems encountered in the design and execution of the community school plan, including identification of any federal, state, or local statute or regulation impeding program implementation;
- (3) the operation of the school leadership team and its contribution to successful execution of the community school plan;
- (4) recommendations for improving delivery of community school programming to students and families;
- (5) the number and percentage of students receiving community school programming who had not previously been served;
- (6) the number and percentage of nonstudent community members receiving community school programming who had not previously been served;
- (7) improvement in retention among students who receive community school programming;
- (8) improvement in academic achievement among students who receive community school programming;
- (9) changes in student's readiness to enter school, active involvement in learning and in their community, physical, social and emotional health, and student's relationship with the school and community environment;
- (10) an accounting of anticipated local budget savings, if any, resulting from the implementation of the program;
- (11) improvements to the frequency or depth of families' involvement with their children's education;
- (12) assessment of community stakeholder satisfaction;
- (13) assessment of institutional partner satisfaction;
- (14) the ability, or anticipated ability, of the school site and partners to continue to provide services in the absence of future funding under this section;
- (15) increases in access to services for students and their families; and

(16) the degree of increased collaboration among participating agencies and private partners.

B. Reports submitted under this section shall be evaluated by the commissioner with respect to the following criteria:

(1) the effectiveness of the school or the community school consortium in implementing the full-service community school plan, including the degree to which the school site navigated difficulties encountered in the design and operation of the full-service community school plan, including identification of any federal, state, or local statute or regulation impeding program implementation;

(2) the extent to which the project has produced lessons about ways to improve delivery of community school programming to students;

(3) the degree to which there has been an increase in the number or percentage of students and nonstudents receiving community school programming;

(4) the degree to which there has been an improvement in retention of students and improvement in academic achievement among students receiving community school programming;

(5) local budget savings, if any, resulting from the implementation of the program;

(6) the degree of community stakeholder and institutional partner engagement;

(7) the ability, or anticipated ability, of the school site and partners to continue to provide services in the absence of future funding under this section;

(8) increases in access to services for students and their families;

(9) the degree of increased collaboration among participating agencies and private partners



