

2021 Legislative Session Issue Brief

Full-service community schools

We all want to advance solutions to help students — no matter what they look like, where they live or how much money their parents make — thrive and lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

Unfortunately, the wealthiest few and their backers are using Minnesota's gross racial disparities and opportunity gaps to push more standardized testing, narrowing curriculum and privatizing our public schools. And these strategies do nothing to improve educational outcomes for our students.

Full-service community schools offer a better, proven path. Communities from Deer River to Rochester are bringing community services into the school and empowering the people closest to students – parents, educators and neighbors – to transform schools to respond to their needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that schools are truly the hubs of our communities. And our full-service community schools were even better equipped to quickly respond to family needs because of the relationships built with their partners.

Education Minnesota supports providing \$90 million in state funding to help the state's existing 19 full-service community schools continue their work and allow other schools to become full-service models as well.

What are full-service community schools?

This concept puts social, medical and before- and after-school academic services and enrichment activities where they are most accessible—on the school campus. Instead of treating a range of educational “problems” as separate issues, community schools work to find ways to unite them and solve them together.

This is not a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach. Every school is different based on the needs of the students, families and community. That's why every school does a needs assessment. Here are some examples of programs and services that could be offered:

- Child care, adult education, early childhood education, medical clinics, mental health services, food shelves and family literacy classes.
- Programs that help parents and community members develop deep involvement and leadership in their school.
- High-quality before- and after-school tutoring, college application help and specialized training and professional development for teachers and school staff.
- Services that improve school climate and health. This includes rethinking school discipline and using restorative, trauma-informed practices, training teachers in social and emotional learning, and offering school-based health centers.

Why full-service community schools?

They work. If a child comes to school hungry, sick or struggling with trauma, it's hard to focus on learning. And if a family is hurting financially and has unstable housing, it's more difficult for them to support their child's learning.

Community schools across the nation are finding that addressing school culture and non-academic factors can have a significant impact on academic achievement and social emotional health. Brooklyn Center in Minnesota is one of those school districts.

Continued on back

Updated: Feb. 11, 2021

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Graduation rates are up. About 84.3 percent of Brooklyn Center High School seniors graduated in 2019, up from 74 percent in 2010, according to data from the Minnesota Department of Education. 88.5 percent of Black seniors graduated in 2019 from Brooklyn Center High School compared to 69.9 percent of Black seniors statewide. And at the alternative learning site, 60.6 percent graduated in 2019, up from 22.7 percent in 2015.

Discipline referrals and tardies are down and attendance is high. Attendance rates were at 93.5 percent at the middle school and 92.2 percent at the high school during the 2018-19 school year.

What can the Legislature do to sustain and expand full-service community schools?

- Increase state funding to \$90 million to support existing and new full-service community schools. The funding is used to hire site coordinators, who are key to sustainable, successful community schools. The funding goes to schools in this priority order:
 - *Existing full-services community schools.*
 - *Schools identified under ESSA as needing assistance, as recommended the state's School Finance Working Group.*
 - *Any other districts that apply.*
- Encourage co-location of state-provided services. 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.