



America’s world leadership is rooted in its political freedoms and in the high-caliber industry and innovation of its workforce. To advance—even to maintain—that standing in today’s global economy, we must find better ways to use all the resources at our disposal to educate our young people. Further, we must reach *all* of them to continue to grow our national prosperity and ensure the well-being of our families and communities.

In seeking solutions, schools must work together with communities. The community school strategy provides a vehicle for bringing together family, school and community partners, and resources so that every student has the learning opportunities and supports they need to succeed. Across the country, many such partnerships are already using public and private assets more effectively and achieving measurable results through shared accountability. With increased federal recognition, these communities—and many more like them—can do much more.

Without question, our schools need qualified teachers and strong principals. And like all public institutions, schools must be accountable for improving their performance. Research shows that family and community ties are essential in order for schools to educate our children.^{1,2} Whether in rural towns, urban areas, or big cities, non-academic factors—health, safety, family instability, chronic absenteeism, violence, teen pregnancy, homelessness and other issues—spill into the classroom, affect learning, and create challenges beyond what schools can be expected to handle alone.^{3,4}

Our students need effective schools *and* supportive communities. A community school strategy develops both. Community schools reflect what research and common sense confirm: All young people learn most fully when they are connected in positive ways to their communities; supported by caring

What is a Community School?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. They are centers of the community, open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends.

Using public schools as a hub, community schools bring together a wide variety of partners to offer a comprehensive range of services and opportunities to children, youth, families, and communities. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, early learning and care, and expanded learning, along with family and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families, and healthier communities.

Local citizens and local leaders decide what happens in their schools and schools return to their historic role as centers of community where everyone belongs, everyone works together, and our young people succeed.

¹ Bryk, Anthony S., Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John Q. Easton. *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. (2010). Chicago, Illinois: Consortium on Chicago School Research.

² Henderson, Anne T. and Karan L. Mapp. (2002). *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

³ Barton, Paul E. and Richard J. Coley. “Parsing the Achievement Gap II.” Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service (2009).

⁴ Charles Basch, “Healthier Students are Better Learners. AS Research Initiative of the Campaign for Educational Equity.” Teachers College, 2009



relationships and appropriate services in and out of school; and when time for learning is extended and rich in “teachable” moments that build social, emotional, physical and academic competence.

Family and community involvement in school-based and school-linked learning and development significantly expands the resources and supports available to children and their families— particularly the most vulnerable. And it creates the conditions for learning that enable children to do their best work. This participation builds trust and a sense of shared responsibility and investment in our schools and the well being of our children. In turn, the widespread adoption of these conditions leads to measurable improvements in the lives of children and families, schools, districts, and communities. More explicit federal actions to encourage and sustain the community school strategy make sense for several reasons.

First and foremost, community schools *work*. An increasing number of community schools are producing impressive results. For example, improved reading and math scores, increased attendance, and increased graduation rates, among others.⁵ As the experience of Evansville, IN, Tulsa, OK, Multanomah, OR, and Cincinnati, OH summarized later in this brief suggest, individual student improvement can add up to whole school and district-wide change when a community schools strategy is broadly implemented. This cross-section of community school initiatives includes improvements in:

- Math and reading achievement scores
- Attendance and behavior
- Graduation and college entry
- Instructional leadership and supervisory practices
- Trust among students, parents and teachers
- District enrollment
- School ratings within districts
- District ratings within states

Second, a community school strategy pays off in dollars and cents. A recent study⁶ by the Coalition for Community Schools shows that community schools increase and sustain capacity through diversified financial support. Estimated conservatively, they leverage \$3 from private and other sources for every \$1 of district funding provided. When serving as the CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan estimated a return of \$5-7 from the community schools initiative in Chicago.

Third, there is a strong and growing core of community schools nation-wide and great interest in many other communities in implementing the strategy. From tiny suburban Tukwila, Washington to sprawling Chicago, Illinois; from Tulsa, Oklahoma to the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania; and from rural communities

Key Community School Principles

- Foster strong partnerships
- Share accountability for results
- Align and coordinate school and community assets
- Set high expectations for all
- Build on the community's strengths
- Embrace diversity

⁵ Jacobson, R. and Pearson, S. *Community Schools Research Brief*. (2009). Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.

⁶ Blank, M, Jacobson, R, Melaville, A, and Pearson, S. *Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success*. (2010). Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.

Related Bills Supporting the Community Schools Strategy

Members of Congress have recognized the importance and success of community schools in several bills.

Full Service Community Schools Act of 2011 (HR 1090, S 58, Rep.

Hoyer, D-MD; Sen. Nelson, D-NE, Sen. Cochran, R-MS):

Authorizes funding for community schools to improve student achievement through the coordination, delivery, effectiveness, and efficiency of services provided to children and families.

Keeping PACE Act of 2009: (HR 3343, S 1411, Rep. Scott, D-VA; Rep. Kildee, D-MI): Encourages and supports parent, family, and community, engagement in schools.

DIPLOMA Act of 2011 (S 426, Sen. Sanders, I-VT; Sen. Mikulski, D-MD): Promotes a shared, approach to education through integrating a services framework to build community ownership for change, and strengthen results for children and youth by incentivizing local public-private partnerships.

Building Promise

Neighborhoods Act of 2011 (S 1004, Sen. Casey, D-PA; Sen. Franken, D-MN; Sen. Gillibrand, D-NY; Sen. Kerry, D-MA; Sen. Mikulski, D-MD): Allows for grants that are led by schools in partnership with community-based organizations.

The Coalition is appreciative of the Members who are standing in support of this strategy.

to New York City, school and community leaders have seen that the community school strategy pays off and are working to scale up their community school efforts. Federal recognition through the ESEA reauthorization would further energize all of these efforts.

Recommendations for Strengthening ESEA Reauthorization

Based on the evidence and our experience, the Coalition for Community Schools is confident that expanded adoption of the community school strategy can help to ensure that all students are ready to learn when they enter school and graduate prepared for college, career, and citizenship -- thus achieving the purpose of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

We urge that reauthorization of the ESEA be designed to:

- Unleash the innovation and problem-solving capacity of America's communities;
- Build a sense of shared responsibility among schools and communities for the education of their children; and,
- Facilitate the efficient and effective use of public and private resources.

In order to achieve these goals, we make the following recommendations for change in the reauthorization of the ESEA.

Integrate community schools into the ESEA statute as an allowable school intervention model

The community school strategy enables local education agencies (LEAs) and community partners to leverage resources to help students succeed. Furthermore, the strategy provides incentives to align numerous funding streams – public and private – with the assets of our communities. Current intervention models do not adequately define the importance of school, family and community connections. Congress must make clear its intent that schools and communities work together to support our students.

Legislative Implications:

ESEA should include community schools as an allowable intervention model. The bill [Supporting Community Schools Act of 2011](#) (Senate Bill 616), amends part A of Title I of ESEA to authorize local LEAs to use school improvement funds to transform schools identified as needing improvement, corrective action, or restructuring into community schools. It provides a blueprint for such action, as do related bills supporting the community schools vision. This provision

should be included under Title I and School Improvement Grants.

Require Comprehensive Accountability Frameworks

A single, standardized test should not be the only basis for judging schools or students. Community schools collect data that many schools do not on holistic supports and services. They incorporate an expanded shared accountability model, beginning with early childhood education through high school graduation and on to college, that includes multiple indicators of academic achievement as well as measures of engagement; attendance (using measures including chronic absence⁷, average daily attendance, and truancy); cognitive, social and emotional competencies; physical well being; and family and community engagement.

Expanding and realigning district, school, and community accountability systems will lead to improved data-based decision-making, reflecting a comprehensive picture of both students' and schools' performance.

Legislative Implications:

ESEA should require that plans or proposals for all Department of Education programs be grounded in a shared comprehensive accountability framework that includes, but also goes beyond academic data. (See Box for suggested framework). State and local data systems should integrate these multiple data points on overall school performance. Additionally, states and LEAs should be expected to make all data accessible to the public so that families, community residents, schools, and the broader community are able to identify challenges to student success and work together to address them. Technical assistance centers funded through ESEA should be required to assist LEAs and communities to develop and apply such frameworks.

Provide incentives for results driven public/private partnerships

Through results-focused partnerships, the resources of all LEAs, government, higher education, nonprofit services providers, and other community institutions can be aligned, integrated, and applied more effectively. ESEA language must provide concrete incentives for LEAs and other institutions to build partnerships and to improve the coordination of existing funding streams.

Legislative Implications:

ESEA, as appropriate in various titles, should require LEAs to propose a plan for how they will work with community partners to identify a comprehensive set of results that they seek to achieve for all students. These plans should also demonstrate how districts will collaborate with community partners and work with schools to attain these results. Every program funded by the Department of Education should ultimately be able to show how it contributes to these results. Furthermore, funding priority should be

Suggested Comprehensive Accountability Framework:

- Children are ready to enter school.
- Students succeed academically.
- Students attend school consistently.
- Students are actively involved in learning and their community.
- Families are involved in their children's education.
- Schools are engaged with families and communities.
- Students are healthy: physically, socially, and emotionally.
- Students live and learn in a safe, supportive, and stable environment.

⁷ Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or more of school for any reason.

given to applicants who demonstrate that they have a comprehensive accountability framework in place and focused partnerships to help achieve these results. Applicants should be expected to describe these partnerships in School Improvement Plans.

Enable Community–School Coordination

Effective coordination of school and community resources is essential at the school site. Research⁸ shows that students will achieve when resources for addressing students’ academic and non-academic needs are tailored, coordinated, and accessible. Community school coordinators create, strengthen, and maintain the bridge between the school and community. They facilitate and provide leadership for the collaborative process and development of a continuum of services for children, families and community members within a school neighborhood.

Legislative Implications:

ESEA must include explicit language throughout its Titles and programs, which makes it allowable for grant recipients to use funding for a staff person in every school to coordinate results-focused partnerships, integrate school and community resources based on individual student needs (across the grade levels – including early childhood), and engage families as well as other community members. Legislation should explicitly state that the coordinator could be employed by the school and/or community partner agency. Applications for all ESEA programs that operate at a school should require an explanation of how particular ESEA programs (e.g., Title I, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, School Improvement Grants, and others) fit into the overall school improvement plan and how the resources of the programs will be coordinated with other activities of the school and its community partners to help attain desired results.

Promote Family and Youth Engagement

The people affected by public policy must have a voice in its implementation. Research¹⁰ is clear on the link between family involvement and student achievement. Family engagement and youth participation should be integral parts of the reauthorized ESEA, since both are essential to creating the conditions for learning for our youth. This kind of engagement must inform the planning and oversight of school reform and be embedded across ESEA.

Legislative Implications:

ESEA should include language that calls for families and youth to be involved in the planning and oversight of specific programs funded under law.

All ESEA programs should explicitly give priority to family engagement and utilize a common definition of family engagement¹¹ throughout ESEA. States and LEAs should be expected to submit a

⁸ *Communities In Schools National Evaluation: Five Year Summary Report*. (2010). Fairfax, VA: ICF International.

⁹ Blank, M, Jacobson, R, Melaville, A, and Pearson, S. *Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources To Support Student Success*. (2010). Washington, DC: Coalition for Community Schools, Institute for Educational Leadership.

¹⁰ Henderson, Anne T. and Karan L. Mapp. (2002). *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement*. National Center for Family & Community Connections with Schools. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

¹¹ *Family engagement* means a shared responsibility of families and schools for student success, in which schools and community based organizations are committed to reaching out to engage families in meaningful ways that encourage the families to actively support their children’s learning and development, as well as the learning and development of other children. The shared responsibility is continuous from birth through young adulthood and reinforces learning that takes place in the home, school, and community.

comprehensive framework for family engagement in their Title I plans that reflects the important role of family and youth engagement, while supporting LEA leadership with implementation of, and accountability for, ESEA. Appropriate resources must be made available for this purpose. Plans and proposals for other ESEA funding streams should call for descriptions of how that particular funding stream will contribute to the implementation of that comprehensive framework.

Youth participation should be called for in the development of school improvement models and plans for middle school and high school reforms. Youth should be represented on planning teams and youth input should be captured through focus groups, surveys, speak outs and other means. LEAs plans and proposals should describe the concerns of their youth, how they have responded to those concerns, and how they intend to sustain youth participation.

Ensure Effective Professional Development

Professional development for teachers, principals and other school personnel as well as community partners is a key element in increasing student engagement and achievement. From a community school perspective, professional development should focus on: engaging instruction and family and community engagement.

Research¹² shows a major gap between life and learning for students in low performing schools; thus, instruction with deeper connections to the real world and the community, done from a community problem-solving perspective, will be more engaging and likely to improve student achievement. In addition, educators and staff of community partners must have the knowledge, skill, and ability to work effectively with families, communities, and each other.

The reauthorized ESEA must highlight family and community engagement as part of its professional development emphasis on ensuring that highly qualified persons are employed as administrators, teachers, principals, specialized instructional support personnel, and in other roles – for all grade levels, from preschool through twelfth grade.

Legislative Implications:

ESEA should require that preparation programs funded under the legislation (beginning with early childhood programs) provide administrators, teachers, principals, and other school personnel professional development to explicitly address all aspects of student achievement and growth including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and civic development; and to work in partnership with families and community. It should develop the capacity of principals, teachers and community partners to implement engaging curricular strategies in school and in the after-school hours. ESEA should also explicitly authorize the staff of community partners to participate in professional development in-service programs funded under the law.

Support Capacity- Building

National capacity-building support is needed to develop sustainable community schools and grow school, family and community partnerships across the nation. Such support will underscore Congress' commitment to better align and coordinate multiple federal programs through the community schools

¹² *The Intellectual and Policy Foundations of the 21st Century Skills Framework*. Partnership for 21st Century Skills. http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/route21/images/stories/epapers/skills_foundations_final.pdf.

strategy and to support the design and implementation of a more engaging curriculum. Existing capacity-building and technical assistance offered by the U.S. Department of Education is tied to individual programs, and does not sufficiently encourage thinking and working strategically across programs about how to get better results for students. In fact, there is no discrete investment in this kind of cross-systems, cross-institutional capacity-building anywhere in the federal government.

Legislative Implications:

ESEA should include funding to support capacity-building for community schools and other cross-systems strategies. Specifically, ESEA should authorize a specialized National Center for Family, School, and Community Engagement. The Center should be charged with attaining the following goals:

- Build the capacity of schools, families and communities to work together by providing tools, resources, training and technical assistance to LEAs, communities, and states seeking to intentionally align and integrate funding streams, develop data systems and carry out other functions that are necessary for a successful community schools strategy.
- Support a more engaging curriculum and differentiated instruction for all students (e.g., those with special needs and English Language Learners) from early childhood settings through high school, by providing curricular resources, professional development, technical assistance, and other support to states, LEAs, schools, and community partners.
- Work with other federal agencies to develop an integrated capacity building strategy to support community schools.

Align and Coordinate the Department of Education and Other Federal Agency Resources

Alignment and coordination of resources are vital if our youth are to succeed. In a time of scarce resources it is imperative that Congress find ways to make the most effective and efficient use of federal dollars across agencies (local, state, and federal).

Legislative Implications:

ESEA should give priority in its grant programs to applicants that demonstrate how any program funded under the Act will be aligned with funding streams of other federal agencies into a comprehensive community school strategy. This would facilitate the alignment of ESEA with health, juvenile justice, mental health, child welfare, nutrition, and other programs that influence student achievement. Applicants for ESEA programs must also demonstrate how data sharing and communications will remain in the strictest of confidence to maintain student data privacy.

ESEA should also authorize the creation of a Cabinet-level Commission on Inter-Agency Collaboration. Such a commission would build on the proposal in the *Federal Youth Coordination Act*, to create a White House Office on Children and Youth. Over a five year period, this Commission would advocate for and report on federal efforts to align and integrate funding streams, which enable schools and communities to achieve their goals. Congress should request annual reports from all federal agencies which highlight their integration of funding streams. This Commission should include key Cabinet secretaries, educators, and other national, state, and local leaders as well as practitioners concerned with youth, family, and community.

A Track Record of Success

Across the nation, systems of community schools are making a difference in the lives of children, youth, and families. Here are a few examples that show why school leaders are involved; the results

community schools are achieving; and the various ways in which a community school strategy develops “on the ground.”

Evansville, Indiana

“Education is a complex enterprise. Meeting our children’s academic, social, emotional, and health needs is a shared responsibility. That is why family, school, and community partnerships are at the core of our district’s strategic plan, and we are dedicating substantial resources to support this work.”

Dr. Vince Bertram, Superintendent of Evansville Vanderburgh School District

The Community School Strategy: The Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (EVSC) exemplifies a system-wide community school approach. Through what Evansville calls a “big table” that includes representatives from the school districts and 70 community agencies and organizations they are integrating their resources at 33 school sites. The school district and its community partners see nearly every grant as an opportunity to support their vision for community schools.

Results:

EVSC has taken important strides in academic achievement. In 2009-2010 they made District AYP. They have also seen improved test scores, increased graduation rates, and higher college going rates. EVSC’s focus on childhood development has contributed to a 31% increase in the percentage of students meeting early literacy benchmarks. In fall 2006, 38.8% of kindergarten students met DIBELS benchmark instructional recommendations upon entry into school, compared to 50.8% in fall 2010. In FY 2007, only one of the district’s schools was “exemplary,” the top ranking of five in Indiana’s accountability system. Last school year, 17 district schools were deemed “exemplary.”

Tulsa, Oklahoma

“By partnering with outside agencies and opening ourselves up to understanding the needs of the whole child and his family and community, we think we are a more integral part of a child’s life and we can be more effective in the classroom.”

Dr. Cathy Burden, Union Public Schools Superintendent

The Community School Strategy: Established in 2007 under the auspices of the Tulsa Metropolitan Human Services Commission (MHSC), in partnership with the Tulsa and Union Public Schools, the Tulsa Area Community Schools Initiative (TACSI) serves over 9,000 students and families in 18 community schools. It is administered by the Community Service Council of Greater Tulsa (CSC) and is guided by a community steering committee which includes leaders from both school districts.

Results: An Oklahoma University – Tulsa study compared 18 TACSI schools to 18 non-TACSI schools and found that students in TACSI schools that had deeply embedded the community school model scored significantly higher than comparable students in non-TACSI schools on math achievement tests. Further, the eighteen TACSI schools had higher ratings of instructional leadership and effective supervisory practices. Moreover, the culture of faculty trust, student trust of teachers, and parent trust (all important building blocks for academic success) in community schools was stronger than in comparison schools.

Multnomah County, Oregon

“When you show young people that you care and you build those relationships, like we do in our SUN School system, you help them succeed.”

Lorenzo Poe, Jr., Partnership Development Director for the Portland Public Schools

The Community School Strategy: In Multnomah County, Oregon, Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) transformed 60 schools in six different districts including the city of Portland, into community schools. A SUN Community School is a place and support hub where schools and communities work together to coordinate and provide educational, recreational, social and health services, and serve as the vehicle to link community institutions, such as libraries, parks, community centers, school based health centers, and churches and businesses.

SUN Schools are financed through a partnership of the county, city, and local LEAs; and are guided by a coordinating council including leadership from the City of Portland, Multnomah County, local school districts, Multnomah County Commission for Children, Families, and Community, Portland Parks & Recreation, Oregon Department of Human Services, and community-based organizations.

Results: Data show that students who regularly participated in SUN activities showed strong gains in academics, attendance, and behavioral areas. Seventy-five percent of SUN students have increased state benchmark scores in reading and 77% in math. Average daily attendance is at 94%. Eighty-eight percent of students improved in at least one interim academic or youth asset measure (i.e., 71% improved classroom academic performance, 64% improved homework completion, 54% improved classroom behavior, and 60% came to school more motivated to learn).

Cincinnati, Ohio

"Helping our young people succeed requires paying attention to the many aspects of their lives that influence learning. We have been a major partner in the Cincinnati Community Learning Centers Initiative to coordinate existing services and capture other funding sources to better meet those challenges."

Robert Reifsnnyder, President and CEO of the United Way of Greater Cincinnati

The Community School Strategy: Cincinnati's community schools initiative began with the district asking the community for advice on how to spend \$1 billion to rebuild the city's school buildings. The broad vision was to transform Cincinnati's Public Schools (CPS) into community schools -- what Cincinnati chose to call Community Learning Centers. School board policy anticipates that all schools will eventually become CLCs. CPS and various community partners offer opportunities and support in core areas such as physical, mental, and oral health; extended learning college access, tutoring, parent engagement, and early childhood. The community schools strategy has helped community partners become better organized to strategically meet the needs of individual CLC schools and students without duplicating services.

Results: Cincinnati Public School District is the most improved urban district in Ohio. It is the first urban district in the state to receive an "effective" rating. The decline in overall enrollment in CPS has reversed with almost 6,000 more students than projected. Oyler Community Learning Center, a pre-12 community school, has shown enormous academic gains. The school has increased its Performance Index 15.2 points, higher than all other elementary schools in the Superintendent's Elementary Initiative. Also, students are graduating from high school and matriculating to college in record numbers. With the 2010 senior class and two prior years of graduates from an accelerated program, Oyler has graduated more students in the neighborhood from high school in the past 3 years than in the collective 85 prior years.

