

United Way exploring community schools model

By Hayes Hickman

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For single parents working a minimum-wage job, taking time off so their child can visit the dentist isn't necessarily an option.

The United Way of Greater Knoxville, in collaboration with Knox County Schools and the Knoxville Chamber Partnership, is exploring options for bringing such services to the people who need them most.

And while still in its conceptual stage, planners hope the community schools concept might ultimately transform existing school buildings into hubs of activity with a variety of nonprofit agencies serving students and their family members.

"It's about providing a level of convenience for those who need the services," said the United Way's Caleb Fristoe. "It's elaborate, it's big, it will require a tremendous amount of coordination but I really think it's possible."

Local leaders observed a similar model during a site visit to Cincinnati in September, where the concept has helped produce one of the highest-performing urban school districts in Ohio and become a national model for the approach.

Building on existing after-school programs, the concept could offer anything from parenting workshops to fitness classes — or dental clinics.

The concept is just one example of the United Way's push to build on its core of basic-needs services with new initiatives in the areas of education, income and health.

The agency's 89th annual fundraising campaign is aiming for a top-tier goal of \$12 million, which would meet existing needs while allowing for investment in new programs.

Last year, United Way of Greater Knoxville benefitted more than 100,000 people through its support of 111 programs representing 44 agencies.

