

## **Knox County working to expand the community school concept**

By Lydia X. McCoy

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For the last two school years, Knox County has been piloting a community school at Pond Gap Elementary and it is seeing results.

Now the school district wants to expand the concept and is trying to decide whether to move into more elementary schools or into the upper grade levels.

"What an expansion looks like will be dependent on what kinds of resources we have to provide that," said Melissa Massie, the district's executive director of student support services. "One of the really key essential pieces is a community resource coordinator."

Massie said a decision on what specific schools to expand into has not been made.

"We're looking at some data to think about where the places are that we already have a lot of students that are receiving support services or those places where it makes the most sense to look at providing those additional services," she said.

"I think when we're looking at a pilot for next year, we will probably look at between one and five, as we're growing this and learning from other places."

Under the community schools concept, buildings are used for more than just teaching students.

With the help of community partners, schools become a hub — staying open in the evenings, on weekends and during the summer for everything from health clinics to sites for yoga classes.

The Cincinnati public school system — which has gone from being in an academic emergency to being the highest-performing urban school district in the state of Ohio for the past two years — has become a national model for the concept.

In September, 20 Knox County leaders took a day trip to Cincinnati to tour and learn more about the model and since the trip have begun expanding the concept in Knoxville.

Schools Superintendent Jim McIntyre said the district has been having a lot of conversations with individuals and organizations that want to be a part of the community schools effort.

"I really believe that the Knox County Schools needs to lead this effort and ... really define what the initiative looks like, what the structure of it looks like and then invite individuals and organizations to plug into that effort of educating our children," he said.

One of the first steps the district has taken is to get bids on request for proposals for medical, dental and mental health services for the schools. Those bids will be opened on Tuesday.

To help with tackling the dollars and cents of expanding, McIntyre included a line item for expanding the community schools concept.

If approved, over the five-year period \$5 million would be designated for community schools, according to documents.

For fiscal year 2013, \$500,000 would be allocated — \$65,000 for a community schools resource coordinator and the remaining \$435,000 to expand the concept into three more schools.

"Like everything else in the school board's budget, the community schools concept is a means to an end. That end is greater student achievement and student success," McIntyre said.

"That relatively small investment on the part of the school system leverages huge amounts of community support and resources that then provide support to our kids and families."



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