Recommendations Related to Turning Struggling Schools into Community Schools through School-Community Partnerships and Receivership

New York's 2015-16 State Budget creates an important opportunity to help students in some of the state's most struggling schools come to school every day ready to learn. Under Education Law, these struggling schools are required to employ a community school approach to improve student achievement by providing them with additional time and substantial supports for their learning and healthy development. As regulations, requests for proposals, funding, and guidance related to these requirements are promulgated, it is crucial that the State draw on the expertise of school leaders,community-based leaders, teachers, and representatives of key statewide organizations who have implemented and/or supported community schools and related expanded learning models.

This report offers a series of recommendations on effective planning and implementation of these community school strategies based on ongoing conversations among expanded learning, community school, and other education experts from across the state who have been engaged for the past year in exploring New York's experience with expanding learning through school-community partnerships. These recommendations specifically address community schools partnerships within the context of the receivership and transformation sections of the 2015-16 State Budget, and are based on what we learned from researchers, statewide organizations representing principals, superintendents, school boards, teachers, and expanding learning providers, practitioners engaged in school-community partnerships,and other experts.

A strong consensus among the contributors is the belief that community schools and expanded learning time are relevant strategies for all schools and students, not just for those which are struggling the most. While we hope these recommendations will inform state policies being developed in the next few months related to the receivership and transformation grants, we intend to provide more comprehensive recommendations in the fall that will emphasize the need to implement these strategies in all schools.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, SCHOOL INTERVENTION PLANS, AND TRANSFORMATION GRANTS

The state should not rely on the community schools strategy as the sole academic turnaround strategy for struggling schools, but rather it should be implemented in tandem with effective supports for teaching and learning.

It is particularly important to note that a community school is a strategy to organize school and community resources around student success. This research-based strategy for school improvement[1] involves integrating a strong core instructional program with supports and services designed to address the needs of students beyond their academic needs—medical, mental health, vision and dental care; healthy meals; a safe and enriching place to go after school while their parents are working; and educational opportunities for families seeking to support their children's healthy development. This strategy allows students to come to class ready to learn and relieved of some of the other challenges they may be facing, but the strategy must work in concert with effective teaching to foster academic success. The community schools strategy alone cannot turnaround struggling schools—the state must also invest resources in professional learning for educators and school leaders.

The community engagement team (CET) and the school leadership team should be required to include community partners to ensure that the planning and implementing of the school intervention plan and the transformation grant effectively addresses the targeted outcomes that will result in enhanced teaching and learning.

Community-based organizations, such as social services organizations, afterschool providers, health and mental health providers, community centers, settlement houses, and others,bring strengths and experiences in human services and youth development to the school-community collaboration. The development of the school intervention plan for the community school and its related expanded learning programs should draw on the collective knowledge of the school leaders, community-based organization leaders, parents, teachers, and students (as age appropriate)to ensure that the program's design meets the needs of the school and community.

Effective partnerships include both the school and the lead community partner in all aspects of planning the community school. These partnerships require mutual understanding of goals, clear values exchanges, and high levels of trust, and recognition that they take time to develop. Community and school partners must be aware of the need for clear and consistent communication, sharing of academic resources and student data (in a manner consistent with federal, state, and local policies), and joint decision making in planning and implementation. The partners should agree to work together on the basis of mutual confidence in a continuous and active collaboration.

Full implementation of new community-school programs should begin with an initial planning period (six months to a year) to develop the school intervention plan with meaningful input from the CET, to share the plan with the wider school community, and to make meaningful modifications based on additional community input. Such planning time must be reflected in the standards set for demonstrable progress to ensure that schools are not penalized for taking planning time.

A community school is not just a hub for services, it is also a set of partnerships—the strategy must include the development of programs in partnership between the school and the lead community-based organization that meet the specific needs and desired outcomes identified by the community. Without time to truly engage the community and genuinely understand their biggest challenges and top priorities, the school intervention plan runs the risk of wasting resources without making an impact or being actively resisted by the parents, students, and teachers it was intended to engage because it does not meet their needs. The identified schools must be given sufficient time to develop a comprehensive plan with meaningful community input. Additionally, it is important that organizations representing principals and teachers are also meaningful participants in the development of the school intervention plan to address potential workforce issues and to foster greater buy-in of all educators of the school.

There are multiple guides to this planning process provided at no cost by organizations with expertise in community schools and expanded learning—including the National Center for Community Schools' Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action and the New York State Afterschool Network's School-Community Partnerships Guidebook—and the identified schools should be encouraged to use such a guide to help structure their CET and wider community conversations.

If the planning time leaves only a partial year for implementation, technical assistance (see below) should be provided to help the school-community team select activities for the remainder of the first year that can be high-impact in a limited time.

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[1] Bryk, Anthony, et al. (2009). Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

> **The state should use a timely process to assess whether the transformation grant allocation is sufficient for full implementation of school intervention plans, and allocate additional funding as needed. The state should begin planning immediately for long-term sustainability of these new community schools. Funds should not be redirected from related competitive grant programs to the identified schools.**

A 2010 study on financing community schools found annual costs ranging from just above $400,000 to $2.7 million, with models in New York costing between $1.2 million and $2.7 million.[2] There may also be capital costs for clinics or other spaces needed for new services, particularly for schools implementing this strategy for the first time. Further, these schools have been identified because they are struggling to serve very high needs populations; they will most likely need to implement many additional services to be most effective, suggesting the budgets for their school intervention plans are likely to be on the higher side of the available cost models.

Given these costs, there is concern that the $75 million allocated for transformation grants will not be sufficient to fully implement the plans of all of the "persistently failing" schools for the two years of the allocation, much less going forward. Moreover, the planning time required for an effective community school will likely push full implementation for some schools into 2017-18, after the expiration of the transformation grants, unless all identified schools are required to begin planning for community schools implementation in 2015-16. If that is the case, it will be crucial that transformation grant funding is available beyond 2016-17.

In any case, long-term stability of these new community schools will require additional investment for several years. Clear statements now about long-term funding commitments will encourage school intervention plans to be realistic and strategic. One key form of technical assistance (see below) will be guidance for the school intervention teams on possible strategies for aligning the school's existing local, state, and federal funding to the priorities developed by the CET.

It is crucial that any gaps not be filled by giving the identified schools additional priority for related state and state-administered expanded learning funding (e.g. 21stCentury Community Learning Centers, Advantage After School) without increasing the size of those funding streams. These funds are already prioritized for programs serving high-needs students, and without increased funding, shifts in priority points simply move a program from one school serving high-needs students to another school serving high-needs students. There is no net improvement in statewide student outcomes from this approach, and it has the potential to destabilize schools that were seeing improvements using the additional grant-funded support and learning time.

RECEIVERSHIP

> **Receivers should be required to demonstrate experience with planning and implementation of community schools and expanded learning models, or to partner with organizations with such experiences.**

The many school-community partnership models operating across New York and the country have developed substantial knowledge base and set of best practices. Any receiver assigned to administer programs in these struggling schools should be familiar with these knowledge bases in order to most effectively implement the community school strategy.

The community school strategy differs in many ways from traditional approaches to the school day, and receivers will be responsible for effective management and oversight of activities such as engaging community-based organizations, families, and students in ongoing needs assessments; adding services such as school-based health centers and afterschool programs to meet the needs identified through assessments; restructuring the school day to incorporate additional enrichment and physical activity; rearranging transportation schedules to align with the restructured day; and blending and braiding funding from various sources to support these additional services. A receiver without previous experience in these areas would be at a disadvantage when trying to transform a struggling school using the community schools strategy, particularly given the urgency of improving these students' learning.

> **Current transformation or turnaround approaches being implemented by the identified schools that align with the requirements set forth for transformation should be examined for their effectiveness and maintained by the receiver unless there is evidence to modify or discontinue these strategies.**

The identified schools may have implemented some form of extended learning time. Priority Schools were generally required to offer at least 200 hours of learning time above the state minimum, and some schools may have already begun to implement community schools strategies as well. These strategies and models require time to foster positive outcomes, and should be assessed by the CET for improvement and continuation, whenever possible. Changing strategies and services over short periods of time creates disjointed programs and does not foster strategic development to support youth and families. One key to the success of school-community partnership models is the development of trust among school administrators, teachers, community-based organizations, parents, and other community stakeholders. If plans and strategies are not given sufficient time to take root, that trust will not have time to develop, stakeholder buy-in will erode,and the benefits of the strategy may be severely compromised.

Along the same lines, the state, school district, and the identified school must plan for sustainability of the strategies fostered under the transformation grants and/or receivership to ensure that the components of the community school that foster success for the students and families do not lapse after the initial surge of funding.

[2] Coalition for Community Schools. (2010). Financing Community Schools: Leveraging Resources to Support Student Success. Retrieved from http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/finance-paper.pdf

> **The goals established in the school intervention plans and the performance measures selected for determining whether a school has made "demonstrable improvement" must be realistic for the stage of implementation of the community schools and turnaround strategies.**

As with any intervention in a school, the community schools strategy needs time to work before results may be apparent. While students will begin to benefit quickly from reductions of barriers to learning and from additional learning time and mentoring, research suggests that measures like attendance, behavior, engagement with school, and school climate may change more quickly than test scores. Annual goals and performance measures should be based on those aspects of the multiple measures of school performance and student success outlined in the statute that can realistically be expected to improve in each year of implementation of the community schools strategy. Periodic surveys of the school's teaching and learning conditions and climate may be useful tools to determine baselines in these areas and to measure improvement.

Moreover, as recommended above, a six-month to year-long planning process is typically necessary for effective implementation, and the school-community partnership will then still need time to fully implement programming. The measurable annual goals in the school intervention plans and the related determinations of "demonstrable improvement" in Year 1 should thus be based on realistic assessments of what outcomes are likely to improve during the amount of time the school-community partnership has actually had to implement the school improvement plan. "Demonstrable improvement" from the planning and partial implementation year should be calibrated to the few months of implementation, and should be looking for indicators such as upticks in attendance, especially for previously chronically absent students; use of new services; increased positive ratings for school climate indicators; increased parent participation in school activities; and indicators of the quality of the school-community partnership.

The selected performance measures should be relevant to the community schools strategy and should provide information to the school and community-based organization that they can use for program improvement. Health and wellness indicators and growth in social and emotional skills should be added to the categories listed in the statute. Many schools will benefit from technical assistance in measuring goals beyond academics.

STATEWIDE RESOURCES

> **The state should fund technical assistance centers to provide coaching, best-practices, research, resources, and networking for all schools implementing the community schools strategy, regardless of funding source.**

Developing additional time and resources is not sufficient in and of itself. The time must be well-deployed, the resources relevant to student and family needs, and the school and community leadership united in their focus on improving students' outcomes across multiple developmental areas. Research on expanded learning and school-community partnerships consistently finds that quality matters. The state's accelerated timeline for generating significant improvement in its struggling schools demands that the implementation of each school intervention plan be as effective as possible. School-community partnerships will need assistance to accomplish this goal, and the state should fully fund a technical assistance center to provide this crucial guidance.

Without technical assistance, programs too often waste time reinventing the wheel because they are unaware of the existing resources and evidence base. Technical assistance providers—including in New York the National Center for Community Schools, TASC, the Partnership for After School Education, and the National Center for Time and Learning—have demonstrated that they can improve the quality of program implementation by guiding schools and community organizations to research and resources, arranging professional development opportunities, and providing targeted coaching and support. Technical assistance centers based on these models would provide the opportunity to leverage a set of resources and expertise for all of the community schools across the state in a cost-effective way. The state's limited resources must be used efficiently, and a small investment in a technical assistance center will help create maximum impact from the transformation grant funding.

The New York State Education Department should provide guidance to community schools on the permissibility of sharing data with partner organizations under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). A model agreement should be provided.

Successful community schools require both the school and the community partner to have access to data about the students they serve. In order to successfully and responsibly utilize school and student data, the district, school, and community-based organization must develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that includes what data will be collected and how it will be shared between the partners in a manner consistent with federal requirements.

There is often substantial confusion about what data can be shared under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). It is important to note that community partners receiving state or federal education funding can access student data for the purposes of program evaluation.[3] The state should clarify common confusions by providing sample agreements, as it does for 21st Century Community Learning Centers applicants.

Building on the work of the Council on Children and Families around the Community Schools Grant Initiative, there should be an active planning council of state agency representatives to support these struggling schools as they implement a community schools strategy. Representatives should have the ability and authority to make systematic changes as recommended by the planning council to better support partnerships.

School-community partnershipsfrequently involve both State Education Department and Office of Children and Family Services funds and oversight. Many times, particularly with community schools models, they span the purview of even more agencies, including those involved with health, mental health, probation, detention, workforce investments, child welfare, and higher education.

The state should draw on existing models of interagency planning to bring together statewide agencies and other key organizations involved in the services needed by community schools. A planning council should develop and implement policies to support new programs and respond quickly when conflicting agency policies hamper effective implementation. In particular, the Office of Children and Family Services will be a necessary partner in planning for the afterschool component of the community schools as the School-Age Child Care regulations can create conflicting requirements for programs operating within a school building and sharing funding between partners. Concerns about HIPPA data sharing will likely also arise.

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[3] Partnership for Children & Youth. (2012). Data-Sharing: Federal Rules and Best Practices to Improve Out-of-School-Time Programs and Student Outcomes. Retrieved from http://www.partnerforchildren.org/storage/documents/downloads/after_school_downloads/ost_data-sharing_and_ferpa.pdf

What Is a Community School?

"A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, services, supports and opportunities leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities." – Coalition for Community Schools
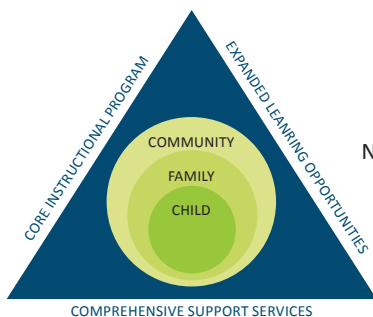
National Center for Community Schools

Community schools strategies provide multiple integrated services children and their families might need—including health and dental care, afterschool and summer programs, mental health care and counseling, adult education, and social services—through the school. A non-profit organization coordinates these services, including those provided by other organizations, and is deeply embedded in the school's leadership team and decision-making process.

TYPICAL COMPONENTS:

• Afterschool or Expanded Learning and Summer Enrichment
• Parent Involvement
• Adult Education
• Medical, Dental, Mental Health, and Social Services
• Early Childhood
• Community and Workforce Development

There are a variety of strategies for strong school-community partnerships that have been developed over the years. Different approaches fit the needs and resources of different communities and schools.

The community schools strategy allows schools and their partners to (1) bring community resources to schools; (2) add learning time; (3) consider the developmental needs of the whole child, including appropriate social-emotional skills, healthy physical activity and eating habits, civic engagement, constructive self-expression, development of personal ambitions, and elimination of barriers to achievement related to unmet non-academic needs; (4) ensure all children have the opportunity to explore the arts, sports, community service, STEM, and other areas of knowledge that may or may not be available during the traditional school day; and (5) coordinate such services so that they effectively meet the needs of students, families, and the school.

Benefits of the Community Schools Strategy

The Coalition for Community Schools conducted a study of the work of mature community schools initiatives, and found multi-faceted gains:

- improved academic performance in both reading and math;
- improved student and teacher attendance;
- reduced dropout rates and improved graduation rates;
- improved behavior;
- gains in indicators of positive youth development, such as leadership and conflict resolution skills;
- greater parent involvement; and
- community benefits, such as better use of school buildings and safer neighborhoods.[1]

A 2009 study comparing Children's Aid Society (CAS) community schools to other New York City schools found several positive results:

- CAS community schools had consistently higher attendance than peer schools;
- every CAS elementary school scored higher than the citywide mean on English Language Arts progress;
- CAS middle schools far outperformed peer schools in math progress;
- and CAS high schools scored higher than peer or city-wide schools on all measures, including attendance, credit accumulation and proficiency.[2]

Community schools typically involve expanding learning time through lengthening the school day or year or through afterschool or summer programs. These models have also proven effectiveness in New York.

- Expanded learning time schools operated by The After-School Corporation (TASC) in New York City reduced chronic absenteeism and increased the percentage of youth considered "super-attendees" for attending 96% or more school days.[3]
- Youth who participated in afterschool programs funded by the United Way of Greater Rochester attended an average of 4 days more of school than their peers and earned GPAs 0.9 higher than their peers.[4]
- A study of voluntary summer learning programs, including Rochester Summer Scholars, found that the programs increased fourth grade students' math achievement by about 20 percent of what they typically would gain during a school year.[5]

[1] Coalition for Community Schools.(2009). Community Schools Research Brief '09, Washington, D.C.

[2] ActKnowledge. (2009). Community Schools Average Greater Student Achievement Gains Than Other Schools: Highlights of 2009 Study Comparing Children's Aid Society Community Schools to Other New York City Public Schools (All Schools and Peer Schools), New York City.

[3] TASC. (2014). Time to Grow: Year Two Report on ExpandED Schools. Retrieved from http://expandedschools.org/sites/default/files/Time%20to%20Grow%20-%20Year%20Two%20Report%20on%20ExpandED%20Schools.pdf

[4] United Way of Greater Rochester. (2013). United Way of Greater RochesterAfter-School Program Evaluation: Year Two Results. Retrieved from
http://www.uwrochester.org/pdf/AfterSchoolEvaluationExecutiveSummary2011-201210-25draftwithtable.docx

[5] RAND. (2014). Ready for Fall? Near-Term Effects of Voluntary Summer Learning Programs on Low-Income Student's Learning Opportunities and Outcomes. Retrieved from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/summer-and-extended-learning-time/extended-learning-time/Documents/Ready-for-Fall.pdf