

ALL IN: CREATING A CULTURE OF SUPPORT

The promise and potential of
Community Schools in New York City

August 2016



new york city
**COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS**
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New York City Community Schools Timeline

Year 1 | 2014-2015



AIDP

Attendance Improvement and Dropout Intervention (AIDP) schools have a particular focus on improving attendance and graduation rates. That work was initially funded by a \$52 million grant administered by the New York City Education Department and the United Way of New York City.



New School Development Process Pilot Program

Four schools were selected to pilot systems and structures that currently serve as the basis for the Community School model. Every school in the pilot program practiced collaborative governance, engaged in community mapping, produced needs assessments, and collected data to inform similar strategies across the 2015-2017 expansion of the Community School model.



Renewal Schools

The State Department of Education applied the Renewal School designation to distribute resources and accountability to schools that demonstrated low academic achievement between 2012-2014, performed "Proficient" or below on performance indicators for the Quality Review, or were determined as Priority or Focus schools by the New York State Education Department. In November of 2014, the New York City Department of Education transformed these schools into Community Schools. (Mayor's Community Schools Strategic Plan p.19)



New York City's Community Schools strategy seeks to achieve an equitable education system where students' academic performance includes students, parents, school staff, and community members as key stakeholders. In 2015, Chancellor Farina and Mayor Bill de Blasio established the Office of Community Schools which provides consistency and accountability to Community Schools as they expand across the city.

Year 3 | 2016-2017



New Grant Process

The process for schools to apply for funding and partner with community-based organizations for wraparound services such as health, adult and family services, guidance and social services, early childhood education, and expanded learning time extends to schools beyond Renewal Schools.

Year 2 | 2015-2016



New School Development Process: 16 Schools

In 2015, sixteen new Community Schools opened, utilizing the foundation of effective systems and services determined by the 2015-2015 pilot program. The new schools are intentionally housed in buildings with facilities that enhance the services of community based organizations (CBOs), thereby expanding rooms for families and space for medical and counseling services. (Mayors CS Strategic Plan p.21)

Total Goal

200+
Community
Schools





Property of the
Department of Education



INTRODUCTION

Community Schools

noun | /kəmyōnədə skōōls/

Publicly funded schools that simultaneously serve as neighborhood hubs.

Community Schools provide students with high-quality academic instruction, families with greater access to health and social services, and communities with shared tools to address their common challenges. These schools have traditionally targeted low-income districts serving high-need student populations. Community Schools aim to improve student achievement through strong partnerships between principals, parents, teachers, and community-based organizations (CBOs). At the crux of this integrated approach is the idea that by bringing together multiple community partners, Community Schools can more fully support the whole child's development, both inside and outside the classroom, to close the opportunity gap and allow all students to succeed.

Large, urban districts across the United States have piloted Community Schools, with positive preliminary results in Baltimore,¹ Los Angeles,² Nashville,³ and New York.⁴ These pilots demonstrate that Community Schools increase parental engagement, raise civic awareness, and invest students in both their schools and home communities. Partnering with CBOs can contribute to more positive school cultures by providing qualified staff to schools experiencing counselor and social worker shortages.

These results have caught the attention of New York elected leaders. In 2016, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo's budget proposal included a request for \$100 million to create Community Schools across the state.⁵ Now, under New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's leadership, 128 Community Schools in New York City are being developed, which will offer expanded pre-K and after-school programs for middle school students, among other services.⁶

The growth of Community Schools in New York and the governor's budget proposal prompted our team to take a closer look at this topic. The Community Schools model serves as a long overdue strategy to achieve a two fold purpose: 1) To address barriers to achievement caused by poverty. 2) Strengthen academic outcomes for students especially those living in under-served communities. We know that research reveals the effectiveness of the CS model. However, our experience as educators reveals the path to implementing the Community Schools model is not always clear. We know the The Office of Community Schools provides some guidance, however, it lacks a clear action plan.



FROM IDEATION TO REALIZATION: THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS' CHALLENGE

We know that research supports the effectiveness of Community Schools. Yet in our experience, the path to implementing the Community Schools model is not always clear. While the New York City Office of Community Schools currently provides some overarching guidance on how a Community School should be structured, it falls short of providing an actionable plan for the complex challenge of building and maintaining these components within a school. In the absence of strong guidance, the working relationships between schools, their partner organizations, and families vary greatly across the city in design, community involvement, leadership style, expectations, accountability measures, and staff professional development. As a result, Community School students in New York City receive inconsistent services from their community-based organizations (CBOs).

As teachers in New York City public schools, we believe this initiative is an opportunity to realize the true potential of Community Schools to serve as neighborhood hubs for our city's most vulnerable students. And as teachers, we have valuable insight into how to ensure that Community Schools deliver on their promise to students. We offer the following recommendations to the New York City Department of Education and the Office of Community Schools to strengthen school-CBO collaboration; to improve guidance and resources to community schools; and to better identify and track progress toward meeting student and community needs. Each is key to Community Schools' long-term success.

2016 Educators 4 Excellence – New York Teacher Action Team

CBO-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

Challenge: Disjointed Partnerships and Unclear Roles

Community Schools are intended to enable neighborhoods to move away from ad hoc governing systems and to provide students, their families, and even the surrounding community with more integrated resources and services. Through focus groups and surveys, we have learned that school leadership structures are not yet promoting strategic collaboration between all members of school leadership.

The Community School Director (CSD) is employed by the main CBO partnered with the school and oversees all employees of the CBO who work in the school setting.

According to New York City's Office of Community Schools, a dedicated CSD oversees ongoing needs assessments, defined community partnerships, intentional

coordination of services, strategic data collection, and authentic school-based governance.⁷

Like all school principals, a Community School principal is responsible for overseeing the quality of instruction across classrooms, maintaining a positive school culture, and managing structures for improvement.⁸ A CSD is primarily responsible for assessing and supporting students' non-academic needs. Despite these seemingly discrete realms of responsibility, this division of labor is not always simple, as the CSD is empowered to take ownership of certain aspects of school culture and design that were traditionally within the principal's purview.⁹

To help their schools serve students and the wider community, Community Schools set a vision with specific action steps and timelines. Even though the CBO plays

an integral role in serving students and the community, it is not uncommon for the CSD to be brought on after the vision for the school is laid out. The CSD may also be new to the community, as sometimes schools are paired with CBOs that have no pre-existing relationship with the community. When the CSD, who serves as the primary liaison with the community, is left on the sidelines, the Community School may fail to gain a holistic understanding of the community's needs. The school may leave out local leaders who are critical to its success. Without full collaboration between the principal and CSD from the very start, Community Schools may struggle to create, communicate, and carry out their visions.

“Historically, someone has always been left out, and that leads to a lack of buy-in, which makes people feel like they are disconnected. Any significant change has to include everyone.

Ann Neary, AP Literature and Journalism Teacher at DeWitt Clinton High School

Community Schools have greater structural flexibility than traditional schools. We believe that this allows them to create a customized model designed to help them coordinate the delivery of resources and services unique to their communities. This flexibility can also prove a challenge, however, if the principal and CSD do not have a shared understanding of who is managing which processes.

Like all New York City public schools, Community Schools have a School Leadership Team (SLT) charged with shaping a school's academic programs and culture, but the structure of this influential school stakeholder group has not been adapted to fit the Community School model. An SLT develops school-based educational policies, ensures that resources are aligned to implement them, and assists in the evaluation of the schools' education programs and their impacts on student achievement. It also plays a "significant role in creating a structure for school-based decision making, and shaping the path to a collaborative school culture."¹⁰ Consisting of the school principal, parent association or parent-teacher association president, United Federation of Teachers chapter leader, and a number of elected parents, staff members, and potential students, the SLT would seem a natural vehicle for school-CBO collaboration, but the current SLT governance does not provide for the CSD or any CBO representative to become a voting member. This oversight disincentivizes CBOs from truly investing in school communities since their voices are not represented in the central governing body of the schools.

We heard from our colleagues that without mechanisms for regular collaboration between the principal and the CSD, opportunities to fully leverage the Community School approach fall short. All too often, teachers and CBO staff are siloed, with poor sight lines into each other's work. A lack of coordination between staff and CBO efforts can lead to poor allocation of resources and services, thereby replicating the precise problem the Community School is meant to solve.

“

When anyone talks about any aspect of education, I think it is important to identify all of the stakeholders and involve them in decisions. Otherwise, there is no such thing as a shared vision.

Kevin Yarborough, Crisis Intervention Teacher at The Vida Bogart School @ 75

Recommendations to Deepen Community School-CBO Collaboration

- Communicate and implement the Community School’s vision together.
- The CSD should be a voting member of the SLT.
- The principal and CSD should facilitate joint professional development between CBOs and school-based staff.

It is abundantly clear that a Community School’s most critical partnership is the one between the principal and CSD, who must work together to establish the school’s vision and communicate that vision effectively to create buy-in among staff, parents, students, and the broader community.

The CSD and main CBO have a great deal of responsibility for delivering much-needed services for students and should, therefore, be full voting members of the SLT.

In order to have a more meaningful partnership, we believe that joint professional development would not only allow the CBO and school to better plan how to coordinate services, but would also familiarize teachers with the services CBOs offer. Teachers often serve as parents’ primary contacts with the school, meaning they are frequently best positioned to help connect families with the supports they need to remove external barriers to student learning. At the start of each year, teachers should meet with the CBO point of contact for their grade teams, as well as the CSD for their schools, to learn about the goals for that academic year.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES

Challenge: Steep Learning Curves and Untapped Resources

In its urgency to develop more than 200 Community Schools over the course of just three years, New York City has employed a number of creative strategies, in some cases building schools from the ground up and other times superimposing the Community Schools model upon existing schools.¹¹ As teachers, we know that these rapid transformations have created a steep learning curve for principals, CSDs and CBOs, many of whom are working within the Community School model for the first time. In the recent past, CBOs have been paired with schools at various points during the year, and sometimes mid-school year, making shared school-CBO planning and integration of services a challenge.

To assist new Community Schools and schools transitioning to the Community School model, New York City created the Office of Community Schools, which is responsible for providing resources and support to school leaders and their partner CBOs. Although the

Office of Community Schools has gathered a variety of valuable tools from high-functioning Community Schools, in our experience, few schools have been able to take full advantage of them because they have not had a designated contact at the Office of Community Schools to provide them with accurate and timely information. To date, many SLTs are unaware of or confused about the breadth of supports available to them through the Office of Community Schools.

The Mayor’s Community Schools plan recommends that every three years, each Community School should conduct “a community-level needs assessment of all enrolled students which should engage all relevant local stakeholders.”¹² At this time, however, the Office of Community Schools does not provide a standardized needs assessment. Without a consistent form or process, there is little comparability across the city, and identifying trends or best practices is exceedingly difficult when there is a lack of common metrics.

Recommendations to Improve Guidance and Resources

- The Office of Community Schools should create a clear point of contact to share tools and resources and ensure customized support for each school.
- The Office of Community Schools should provide tools and templates for all CBOs to conduct standardized needs assessments that can be used to inform the goals of the partnership between the school and the CBO.

A clear point of contact would allow the Office of Community Schools to connect schools with the resources they need. Teachers noted the need for clear meeting agendas, a process for setting meeting norms, best practices

to discuss community partnerships, data, and progress to goals as well as for guidance in mapping out a yearlong calendar.

The Office of Community Schools should also provide Community Schools with a template for conducting a needs assessment that would lend structure to the process and ensure comparability from year to year and across schools. Comparable data is key to establishing which strategies are successful or unsuccessful, not only at the school level but citywide, which will provide the Office of Community Schools with valuable information about best practices and successful school-CBO partnerships. The Office of Community Schools can, in turn, use this information to identify areas for additional guidance and support.

STUDENT AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

Challenge: Unidentified, Unmet, and Untracked Needs

A needs assessment conducted once every three years, as New York City's Community Schools Strategic Plan recommends,¹³ is wholly inadequate to accurately assess students' and communities' changing needs. New York's neighborhoods change rapidly and so, too, do their student bodies. Likewise, there is a high rate of staff turnover in both Community Schools and CBOs.

When needs assessments are administered so infrequently, it is not uncommon for a Community School to pursue priorities and strategies that were developed by the previous school and CBO staff that don't address current needs. Such plans, not surprisingly, often suffer from a lack of buy-in among school and CBO staff and fail to course-correct or capitalize on progress made in the previous year.

Although the Office of Community Schools requires Community Schools to hold monthly meetings with school-based staff in attendance, in practice, these meetings often occur sporadically, lack agendas, and can be poorly attended due to conflicting meetings. In light of these meetings' unpredictable schedules and lack of direction, school-based staff often de-prioritize Community School meetings.

Federal, state, and district guidelines require all New York City public school administrators to collect a variety of metrics on students in their schools, such as attendance rates and how traditionally underserved student subgroups are performing academically. There is currently no equivalent for CSDs in New York City, however. Without strong guidelines about which data CSDs should be tracking and reporting, many CBOs struggle to identify the range of student and community needs, to develop data-based action plans to meet them, and to measure their progress.

“**School-based decisions need to be informed by data; otherwise, you're changing the goalposts on students.**”

Andrew Silverstein, Dean of Students at South Bronx Classical Charter School

Recommendations to Better Identify, Target, and Track Progress Toward Meeting Student and Community Needs

- The Office of Community Schools should require CBOs to implement a thorough needs assessment for each school at the onset of the partnership and before the beginning of each school year.

- The Office of Community Schools should require CSDs to set reasonable annual growth goals based on the needs assessment, the progress toward which should be revisited monthly.
- At the start of each year, the CBO should measure and communicate progress to goals, identify priorities and strategies, and create action plans to address underserved or unserved students.

The Office of Community Schools should require CBOs to disseminate guidance for how CBOs should administer an annual, data-driven needs assessment. This nonpunitive process should be focused on gathering input, diagnosing needs, identifying solutions, and investing in and educating stakeholders. Each Community School should begin the process at the onset of its partnership and then report yearly on July 1, when students have finished for the year and school and CBO staff are best able to reflect on the past year and identify upcoming challenges.

This yearly analysis is critical because the quantity and quality of services Community Schools provide are contingent on accurately anticipating needs and staffing over the course of the upcoming academic year. Community Schools could focus over the summer on evaluating student data from the previous year in order to be well-positioned to set their visions by August 15 for the year ahead. Teachers in Community Schools would then have vital insight into their soon-to-be students' needs and the services that would be available to them. Teachers' professional development could be aligned to their individual needs and the needs of their students.

As teachers, we know how important constant reflection is, and therefore, we believe that monthly reflection on progress to goals would also provide the structure and direction that many Community School meetings currently lack. Community School leadership should invite a diverse set of stakeholders to participate in these meetings, laying the groundwork for productive conversations with staff and the wider community.

In addition to the yearly needs assessment and monthly reviews of progress toward goals, the CBO should, at the start of every year, communicate how well it met the requirements of the needs assessment from the previous year, its progress toward goals over the previous year, and the strategies to better meet student and community needs in the coming year. In the case of students not being served by the school-based CBO, the CBO should also create and communicate an action plan for assisting those students.

“ In regard to transparency, it creates a safe and trusting environment for all members of a school community to be knowledgeable about changes and new initiatives in the school culture.

Caroline Onwuemeli-Peters, Special Education Coordinator at Edward A. Reynolds West Side High School

There are already many mechanisms to measure and share a school's progress toward meeting academic goals. Community Schools, designed to meet a broader range of student and community needs, should also be transparent about the effectiveness of their services. For a Community School to be a true community hub, the community must have the information it needs to engage in a productive discussion about how well the school is doing and where there is room for improvement. Regular, data-informed, public review of a Community School's progress would also allow the Office of Community Schools to identify trends and best practices from across the city, and to apply this information to support Community Schools to better serve students and communities in the months and years to come.



CONCLUSION

Community Schools have the potential to bring the best of academic achievement and wraparound services to a neighborhood. Iterations of the Office of Community School's current model, informed by stakeholders, will be transformational for educating the whole child. Teacher commitment, high-quality Community School directors, data-driven partners, and clear vision will prove strong indicators of a successful community-school partnership.

Teacher voice serves as a mechanism to move this conversation forward as we all identify how we can best serve our students.

To download the paper and access more resources, visit E4E.org/NYcommschools.

NOTES

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<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/DHR/CareerOpportunities/Principal+Candidate+Pool.htm>

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¹¹ Retrieved from the New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan:

<http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/communityschools/downloads/pdf/community-schools-strategic-plan.pdf>

¹² Retrieved from the New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan:

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¹³ Retrieved from the New York City Community Schools Strategic Plan:

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The 2016 Educators 4 Excellence-New York Teacher Action Team on Community Schools

Jaime Guarnaccia

*High School Special Education and English Language Arts Teacher,
Bronx Leadership Academy II High School, Bronx, New York*

Cynthia Hudson

*Middle School Special Education Teacher – English Language Arts
and Social Studies, James Weldon Johnson (PS/MS 57), New York,
New York*

Christine Montera

*High School Social Studies Teacher, East Bronx Academy for the
Future, Bronx, New York*

Wendy Morin

*Middle School Mathematics Teacher, Lola Rodriguez De Tio (JHS
162), Bronx, New York*

Ann Neary

*AP Literature Teacher, Journalism Teacher, Newspaper and Literary
Magazine Advisor, DeWitt Clinton High School, Bronx, New York*

Kinshasa Nicholas

*Third Grade Teacher, Alain L. Locke Elementary School (PS 208),
New York, New York*

Caroline Onwuemeli-Peters

*Special Education Coordinator, Edward A. Reynolds West Side High
School, New York, New York*

Teresa Ranieri

First Grade Teacher, The Highbridge School, Bronx, New York

Andrew Silverstein

*Fourth Grade Lead Teacher, South Bronx Classical Charter School,
Bronx, New York*

Christine Velez

*Middle School English Language Arts and Social Studies Teacher, The
Angelo Patri Middle School (MS 391), Bronx, New York*

Claudia Whittingham

*Elementary School Special Education Teacher, IEP Teacher, Coding
Faculty, The William Floyd Elementary School (PS 59), Brooklyn,
New York*

Kevin Yarborough

*Crisis Intervention Teacher, The Vida Bogart School for All Children
@ 75, Bronx, New York*

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