



REAL SOLUTIONS FOR KIDS & COMMUNITIES

Community schools are the heart of communities, making a difference in the lives of children, families and educators every day.

Community schools remove barriers to learning by connecting students and families with housing, transportation, and physical and mental health supports.

When the wellness team at Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8 Community School in San Francisco found more and more families struggling with housing and unable to find shelter services, the school came together with students' families to spearhead an effort to set up an emergency shelter in the school gym, providing 140 students and families from across the city with a safe place to sleep at night.

Community schools connect parents and families to schools. Chicago's Parent Leadership Institute provides parents with resources to effectively advocate on behalf of their children and to partner with educators. This has led to more collaboration and families having a greater say in how their schools and the district make decisions. Chicago's Sustainable Community Schools also work with students and families to create culturally relevant and interesting lesson plans on topics developed through curriculum circles that give students a say on what they are learning together, and ensure that lessons have life-changing, real-world application.

Community schools work with students and families to create a safe, welcoming environment that celebrates students and makes them want to come to school.

Community schools like Seth Low Intermediate School 96 in Brooklyn, N.Y., through its PRIDE success mentorship program, match every student and family with a mentor who helps them tackle challenges and set goals. Since the launch of the program in January 2023, attendance has risen by 3 percent. This program has changed the way students view the importance of making an effort to be present daily—not just physically, but mentally, socially and emotionally as well.

Community Schools are smart investments. Research shows that community schools produce an average \$7 to \$15 return on investment for every \$1 spent. Districts can leverage federal and state resources to build on their investments. The Albuquerque Bernalillo County Community School Partnership was able to access a \$491,700 federal grant to continue to build its community schools network. The San Francisco Unified School District and the United Educators of San Francisco received \$33.7 million in grants through the California Community Schools Partnership Program.

For under-resourced communities with high-needs students, effective targeting of community schools strategies both helps students thrive and highlights the school's value to the community. Northeast Early College High School in Austin, Texas, faced threats of closure due to low enrollment, poor test scores and a 50 percent graduation rate. Parents, students and educators developed a plan to turn their school into a community school with more challenging curriculum, mobile health clinics, parenting classes, expanded after-school activities, and a full-time bilingual social worker being hired to diagnose chronic attendance problems. They also created an early college program that gives students the opportunity to attend classes at the community college across the street from the campus. Northeast is now graduating 85 percent of its students, and enrollment has more than doubled.

Whether your school is in a city, suburb or a rural area, there are multiple blueprints to guide unions, community partners and schools through the process of implementing a community schools strategy. The Boston Teachers Union began with a bargaining demand for a nurse in every school, an investment from the City of Boston for additional support for homeless students, and a citywide coordinator to support expansion of integrated supports for students. Now there are 13 Community Hub Schools with site coordinators and partnerships with the city, YMCA and the United Way helping to create a sustainable model for the future. Last year, the Rome Teachers Association celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Connected Community School Network, a nonprofit that began as a lead agency to one school in Rome, N.Y., and grew to connect 53 schools in 14 districts and eight counties. Helping rural schools implement the community schools strategy can help them become resource hubs that support their communities.

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WORK

- [AFT Community Schools Website](https://aft.org/position/community-schools) (aft.org/position/community-schools)
- [Community Schools Toolkit](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EtV-JX9pk2qFzVM853tUqWt5KumXZmp/view) (drive.google.com/file/d/1EtV-JX9pk2qFzVM853tUqWt5KumXZmp/view)
- [AFT eLearning Community](https://aftlearning.org/csn) (aftlearning.org/csn)
- [Community Schools Playbook](https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org/) (communityschools.futureforlearning.org/)

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