

# COMMUNITY SCHOOLS 101: A PRIMER ON THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

## WHAT ARE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS?

**Community Schools** embody how education should function in a healthy democracy – they’re public schools that provide services and support which fit each neighborhood’s needs, created and run by the people who know our children best – families, educators, community organizations, local governments, and the students themselves – all working together.

Community schools provide not only tremendous opportunities for learning and success for students, but they also offer hope, opportunity, and transformation to entire communities. They are schools built with the understanding that students often come to the classroom with challenges that impact their ability to learn, explore, and develop to their greatest potential. Because learning never happens in isolation, community schools provide free healthy meals, health care, tutoring, mental health counseling, and other tailored services before, during, and after school. The days of attempting to compartmentalize problems that are inextricably linked has failed, and community schools provide an evidence-based pathway to lifting all students and the communities they live within. A better future of education is possible, and the NEA has the blueprint and is ready to get to work.

## WHY COMMUNITY SCHOOLS?

No matter our race, background, or zip code, we all want our neighborhood public schools to inspire imagination, cultivate curiosity and critical thinking, and ensure our children can live fulfilling lives. Every child deserves the opportunity to achieve their dreams, and every neighborhood deserves a public school that opens the doors to reach them.

At present, **more than 25 million** students in America’s public schools live in under-resourced households, the highest proportion in generations. This means more and more students are coming to school hungry, many face unstable housing situations or move frequently, and many do not have access to regular pediatric well-visits. A child without internet at home cannot keep up with assignments in a virtual world. Mornings without a meal makes it impossible to concentrate during lessons.

Every student in America – Black or white, rich or poor, toddler or teenager – face problems that do not stay at home once in school, and directly affect their ability to learn and thrive. Cookie cutter solutions do not work in education; each community is unique and has strengths to be leveraged and issues to tackle. Our students need support that extends beyond the walls of a school.

**EVERY DISTRICT THAT HAS FULLY EMBRACED THE NEA COMMUNITY SCHOOL MODEL HAS ACHIEVED MEANINGFUL AND SOMETIMES AMAZING OUTCOMES.**

At San Francisco’s MLK Academic Middle School reading and math scores rose by **9%**, all while increasing free breakfast by **89%** and decreasing suspensions by **85%**. These coinciding results are only possible when communities work together with their schools as both the center and conduit for change.

## SPEARHEADING THE MOVEMENT: NEA COMMUNITY SCHOOL SUCCESSES

**Ten years ago**, NEA was working with only a dozen or so local school districts to stand up community schools. Today, NEA is working with hundreds of local union affiliates and districts to pass legislation, secure funding, and hire the staff necessary to create community schools across the nation. To formalize NEA’s support and expand its efforts, in 2020 the NEA launched the Community Schools Institute with **39 states** and a **\$10 million** investment to lead the way and provide a roadmap to the future of public education.

Cohorts of groups supported by NEA are bringing together non-profit organizations, educators, families, students, unions, philanthropists, and local politicians to implement the Community Schools Model. Though in different stages of development, the **more**

**than 1,000 community schools** that the cohorts already stood up in collaboration with partners across the country are already seeing incredible success.



## THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Every family deserves a strong public education system that serves the needs of their children. Community schools are the blueprint of a healthy democracy – with the voices of students, parents, educators, administrators, and community members shaping them, supporting them, and improving them. The Community Schools' Model is not some wild fantasy, but a reality in neighborhoods across the country that can and should be replicated in every community, no matter how big or small.

Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and the Department of Education recognize the transformative ability of community schools. On July 14, 2021 the Department announced that **\$443 million** of President Biden's Build Back Better plan would invest in community schools and gave guidance on how to strategically use American Rescue Plan funds. This guidance was directly created from the NEA's best practices and Community Schools Model. It is a huge step in the right direction, but there is still work to do on the federal and state level to build a better future.

The NEA believes that our nation has a promise to keep – a great public school for every single student that helps them reach their potential and fulfill their dreams.

The nation's largest union of educators is already putting in the work with families, non-profits, and local governments across the nation – it's time every child gets the community school they deserve.

“Community schools serve as hubs for vital resources and connect students and families to services that can help them thrive. Importantly, community schools expand learning and enrichment opportunities for both students and parents alike, and promote family and community engagement in education, which ultimately can bolster students' success.”

– Secretary Miguel Cardona

## CASE STUDIES

### POTTER ELEMENTARY - TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA:

**POTTER ELEMENTARY** is one of six community schools in the Tampa Bay area that launched in the 2019-2020 school year using the NEA-backed Community Schools Model to create a hub of academic excellence, family support, and social services for the community. The timing was perfect, as the school served as a life-saving force for the community when the pandemic hit. Amidst the COVID-19 surge, the school's food pantry broadened into a grab-and-go service of staples, fresh produce, and hygiene products— such as soaps, menstrual products, and diapers— and even provided books for students. They partnered with Tampa's Black-owned restaurants to deliver 1,000 meals. Laptops and internet connectivity were provided to students and their families. Potter Elementary was built up as a community school and succeeded as one when it was needed most.

### RAND CORPORATION STUDY ON NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

From 2014 to 2017 the RAND Corporation conducted a detailed study of community school implementation in our nation's largest city. The incredible successes over such a short period of time were ground-breaking. Student attendance increased every year along with on-time grade progression and high school graduation rates. Achievement didn't end with academic success; RAND analyses showed a significant reduction in disciplinary incidents for elementary and middle school students that coalesced with an increase of student-reported connectedness to adults and peers. The positive effects of New York's community schools implementation have only begun, and will be a key school system to continue watching as this model is implemented across the nation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3245.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3245.html)