THRIVING TOGETHER

A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK STATE

New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity

Dear Educators, Students, Families, and Community Partners,

Envision a school where learning extends beyond the classroom, where families feel a shared sense of ownership and belonging, and where the entire community works together to support students' capacity to thrive. This is the heart of a community school, and we're excited that you're exploring this transformative approach. In a community school, learning includes academics as well as social-emotional development, health and well-being, and durable skills like creative and critical thinking, resilience, self-awareness, motivation, and curiosity. This holistic and supportive setting improves outcomes, including higher attendance rates, better academic performance, and increased graduation rates. Community schools strengthen their entire population, promoting community cohesion and well-being.

This guide is a resource for understanding, implementing, and thriving as a community school in New York State. It emphasizes how community schools use strategies like Multi-Tiered System of Supports-Integrated (MTSS-I), culturally responsive-sustaining education practices (CRSE), and social emotional learning (SEL) to ensure every student thrives in a supportive and inclusive environment. By leveraging collaborative leadership structures, stakeholders collaboratively drive the work to align with the diverse needs of their communities. Whether you're just beginning to explore community schools or are seeking to strengthen your existing strategy, you'll find valuable information and practical resources in this guide.

In New York, our growing network of over 800 community schools is as diverse as the state itself, with each school uniquely designed to meet the needs of its students, families, educators, and community stakeholders. Within this diversity of strategies, we're united by a common desire to create thriving school communities where all students and adults can flourish.

This guide is an invitation to join a movement that's reshaping education in New York State, and you play a vital role in this work. Whether you're a student, teacher, parent, caregiver, school leader, or community partner, your voice, ideas, and passion are essential to the success of community schools.

Welcome to the New York State Community Schools family—we're so happy you're here!

Gemma Rinefierd

Gemma Rinefierd, Ed.D.
Assistant Commissioner
Office of Student Support Services

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

The Community Schools Forward project[1] provides the following definition of a community school:

> *The community schools strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development. As partners, they organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive.*
>
> *The school community, led by the principal and community school coordinator/manager, works to develop a vision and goals for the school, student and family well-being, and student learning. When educators, families, students, and community partners share responsibility for developing the resources that address the unique needs of their schools and communities, they create conditions for working together that enable them to make transformative changes. These conditions include building strong, trusting relationships, engaging in inclusive decision-making, and creating a thriving community. It is in this environment that schools are able to generate optimal, "whole child" conditions for student learning and development. This is accomplished through the integrated implementation of the key practices: powerful student and family engagement, collaborative leadership and shared power and voice, expanded and enriched learning opportunities, rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction, a culture of belonging, safety, and care and integrated systems of support. For this strategy to be effective and sustainable, a system-level support infrastructure needs to be in place. This includes, but is not limited to, sustainable resources, shared governance structures, continuous improvement, data systems, professional learning opportunities, and strategic partnerships.*

The Community Schools Forward project's Essentials for Community School Transformation Framework provides an organizing visual for these essential elements:
- At the center of the framework is **why we do this work**: to create thriving school communities where all students can flourish.
- Surrounding this core are the **people who drive this collaborative work**: school staff and coordinators, youth and families, and community partners.
- The next layer of the framework identifies the **enabling conditions** required for optimal development:
  - **Shared Vision**: A collective understanding of the school's goals, developed collaboratively by all stakeholders.

---

[1] The Community Schools Forward project resources are developed by the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution (CUE), the Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools (NCCS), the Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) at IEL, and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI).

- **Trusting Relationships**: Strong collaborative relationships between school staff, students, families, and community partners developed through continuous engagement.
- **Inclusive Decision-Making**: Empowerment of all stakeholders to participate in key decisions, ensuring buy-in and creating a stronger school community.
- **Actionable Data**: Use of data to inform decisions and monitor progress, helping schools adapt their practices to meet the identified, evolving needs of students and the community.
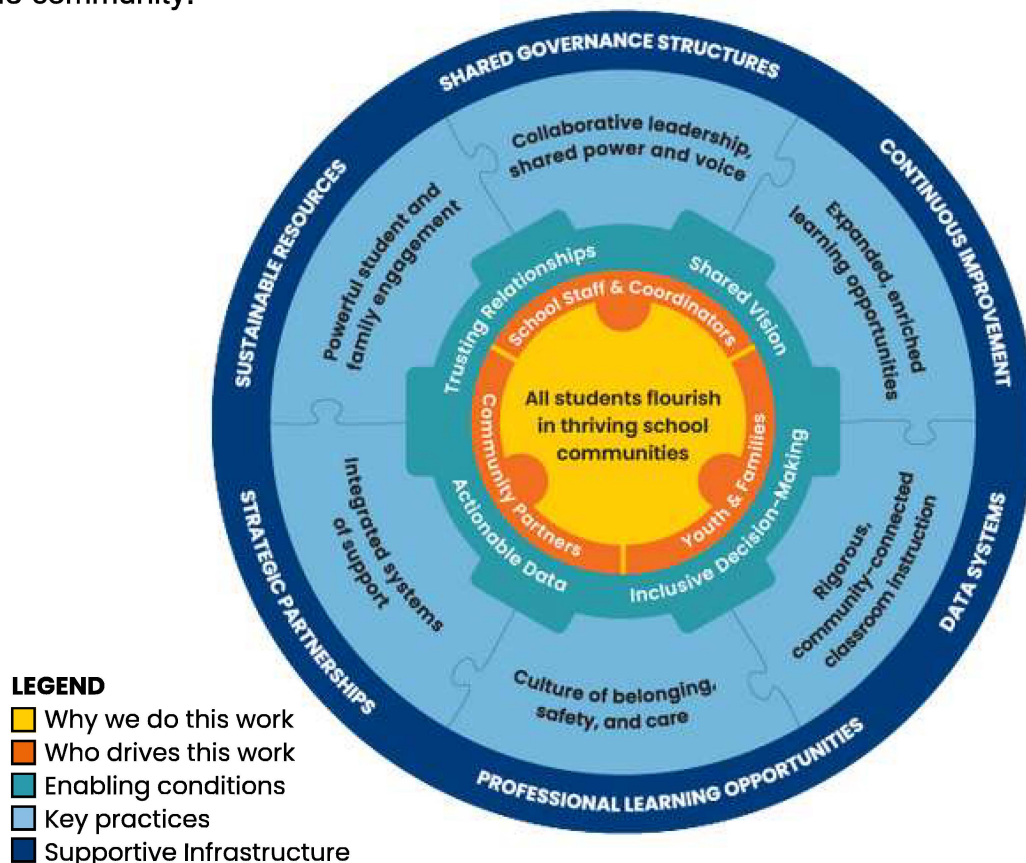

Figure 1: Essentials for Community School Transformation (Community Schools Forward, 2023)

- With these core supports in place; community schools can fully develop and sustain the **six key practices**:
  - **Powerful Student and Family Engagement**: Schools provide opportunities for adults and young people, actively involving students and families in shaping school priorities and programs.
  - **Collaborative Leadership with Shared Power and Voice**: Facilitating inclusive leadership among educators, students, families, and community partners, emphasizing the importance of lifting up all voices to support collective action.
  - **Expanded and Enriched Learning Opportunities**: Providing diverse learning experiences beyond the classroom to enhance learning and provide individualized support, including before and after school, summer, and weekend programs.

- Rigorous, **Community-Connected Classroom Instruction**: Ensuring that learning is high-quality, challenging, relevant, and connected to students' communities and cultures.
  - **Culture of Belonging, Safety, and Care**: Building an environment where everyone feels valued, connected, and supported.
  - **Integrated Systems of Support**: Aligning academic, health, and social services to address the needs of the whole child.
- To maintain and enhance the community school model, the framework highlights the supportive infrastructure necessary for success:
  - **Sustainable Resources**: Long-term funding from diverse sources.
  - **Shared Governance Structures**: Decision-making bodies that involve all stakeholders.
  - **Continuous Improvement**: A cycle of reflection and improvement, guided by data.
  - **Strategic Partnerships**: Relationships with external organizations that enhance school programs and services.
  - **Professional Learning Opportunities**: Ongoing training for staff, including the Community School Coordinator.
  - **Data Systems**: Robust data systems to track progress, identify needs, and ensure continuous improvement.

Beyond this Framework, the Community Schools Forward project offers the following resources:

- Key Practices for Community Schools Transformation Infographic
- Theory of Action for Community School Transformation
- Outcomes and Indicators for Community Schools: A Guide for Implementers and Evaluators
- Stages of Development, and
- Technical Assistance Needs Assessment.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP MODELS

Community schools are a strategy, not a one-size-fits-all model. There are multiple ways to structure them based on local needs and resources, including but not limited to:
- **District-led**: The school district manages and coordinates the strategy, facilitates partnerships with community-based organizations, and embeds the strategy across its schools.
- **CBO-led**: A community-based organization is the lead partner, providing coordination and resources.
- **Union-led**: Educators' unions are central in guiding and implementing the strategy, leveraging their expertise and advocacy to enhance teaching and learning conditions.

- **University-assisted**: A higher education institution partners with the school to provide expertise, research, and resources. The university benefits from opportunities to engage in meaningful community work, conduct applied research, and provide students and faculty with practical, real-world experiences that inform their teaching and learning.

Each of these models reflects the same commitment to collaboration, shared leadership, and meeting the holistic needs of students, families, and communities while tailoring the approach to the strengths and resources of the lead entity.

Any community schools structure is strengthened by integrating MTSS-I, CRSE, SEL, and collaborative leadership structures. SEL builds the skills necessary to develop and maintain trusting relationships and a culture of belonging that can help students and staff engage fully, while CRSE encourages classroom instruction and engagement strategies that affirm and reflect the diverse identities of students, families, and communities. MTSS-I offers a structured way to address the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students through tiered interventions grounded in actionable data. Collaborative leadership teams support inclusive decision-making and shared governance, helping ensure that the the voices of school's stakeholders guide its vision and goals. Together, these initiatives create the conditions for community schools to thrive as equitable, inclusive, and supportive environments.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL COORDINATOR

The **Community School Coordinator (CSC)** leads the community school strategy, often holding titles like **Community School Director**, **Community School Manager**, or **Community School Liaison**. Their role involves weaving together academic, social, health, and community supports to create a nurturing environment for student success. Functions of a CSC include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Partnership Management**: The CSC builds and sustains relationships with community partners, including health service providers, local businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies. They align partnerships with the school's vision and goals to address the identified needs of students and families.
- **Integrated Systems Coordination**: The CSC identifies and aligns academic, health, and social services to support students and families. They collaborate with school administrators, teachers, and counselors to help foster an environment that supports academic progress and student well-being.

- **Family and Student Engagement**: The CSC organizes family forums, student advisory councils, and other engagement opportunities, ensuring that all community voices, particularly those historically marginalized, are heard and represented in school decisions.
- **Leadership in Shared Governance**: CSCs work collaboratively with principals and collaborative leadership structures to facilitate inclusive decision-making and align mission and goals with identified needs.
- **Data and Continuous Improvement**: CSCs collect and analyze data to monitor the effectiveness of programs and identify areas for additional support. CSCs lead the needs assessment process to identify student, family, and community needs. Data-driven decision-making allows the school community to continuously adapt and improve its strategies to meet changing needs.
- **Resource Development and Sustainability**: The CSC works to secure sustainable funding, including through grant opportunities, and by collaborating with partners for long-term financial support. The CSC aligns funding with the community school's needs.
- **Professional Learning Coordination**: The CSC provides ongoing professional learning opportunities for school staff and community partners. This empowers teachers, administrators, and partners with the knowledge, skills, and supports necessary for collaborative work toward shared goals.
- **Community Bridge and Advocacy**: CSCs act as liaisons between the school, families, and community resources. They foster a welcoming school climate and maintain consistent communication between stakeholders.

The **CSC** role requires empathy, adaptability, communication, strategic thinking, and leadership to align all services and initiatives into a cohesive and supportive environment. CSCs help establish a positive school climate, remove barriers to learning, and ensure that the needs of students and families are met. Hiring a full-time CSC is the most efficient and cost-effective approach to implementing this model with fidelity.

HOW TO BECOME A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Outside of New York City, schools determine whether to adopt a community school strategy in collaboration with community stakeholders, with approval from their district or other governing body. Charter and private schools follow a similar process, working with their community stakeholders and securing approval from their board of trustees or other leadership body. In New York City, Community School status is determined by the New York City Department of Education's Office of Community Schools (OCS), based on a variety of factors including chronic absenteeism and availability of funding. New York City Community Schools use OCS's publicly available Assets and Needs Assessment as a resource to identify priorities and guide their planning.

By adopting the strategy, school communities commit to building and maintaining an environment where strong, trusting relationships flourish between educators, students, families, and community partners. This collaborative atmosphere fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose and increases engagement from all stakeholders.

Public and charter schools in New York State identify their community school status each year in the Basic Educational Data System (BEDS) Institutional Master File (IMF) application. This provides valuable data that supports the growth of community schools throughout the State. The 2023-2024 list of self-identified community schools is available on the NYSED website.

Schools that adopt the community school strategy are encouraged to collectively commit to transforming their practices based on a framework that aligns with their vision and community needs. The Community Schools Forward project's **Essentials for Community School Transformation** framework is recommended for its comprehensive and systemic approach to addressing student and community well-being.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS FUNDING

NEW YORK STATE FOUNDATION AID SET-ASIDE

In New York State, 240 school districts have a formula-based **Community Schools Set-Aside** within their Foundation Aid, a component of State Aid. This set-aside is targeted at high-need districts, with an additional focus on schools with extraordinarily high levels of student need, as defined by the Commissioner of Education. Receiving the Community Schools Set-Aside does not automatically make a school a community school. However, districts receiving this funding are encouraged to use it to thoughtfully implement the strategy as a framework for school improvement.

Community Schools set-aside funding can be used for a variety of expenses, including but not limited to enhancing academic support, providing health and well-being services, supporting social-emotional learning, community engagement, and coordinating services for students and families. This funding aims to address both academic and non-academic barriers to student success, creating a holistic support system for the school community.

A list of districts receiving the Community Schools Set-Aside and their allocation amounts, as well as guidance on allowable spending, is available on the NYSED website.

Dedicated community schools funding can support various aspects of the community school strategy, including programs, services, and infrastructure; however, prioritizing the hiring of a Community School Coordinator (CSC) is essential, as the CSC is essential in connecting services, building partnerships, and plays a critical role in ensuring the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the strategy.

OTHER COMMUNITY SCHOOLS FUNDING

No specific community schools funding source is required in order to become a community school. The fundamental shift is in how the school operates rather than in how it is funded. When a school community adopts the community school strategy, the entire budget effectively becomes a community schools budget, because the strategy is holistic and integrates every aspect of school operations to better support students, educators, families, and the community. Community schools are able to leverage a variety of funding sources to support specific aspects of their strategy.

ANNUAL REPORTING

BASIC EDUCATIONAL DATA SYSTEM (BEDS)

Each year, all public school districts and schools, charter schools, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), and nonpublic schools in New York State are asked to report via the Basic Educational Data System (BEDS) Institutional Master File (IMF). This report asks schools a variety of questions, including questions for public and charter schools about their community schools status and services. This data is used to better understand the growth of community schools in New York State and to prioritize the resources of the CSTACs.

Beginning in the 2024-2025 school year, BEDS offers the Community Schools Forward Project definition of a community school. (See 'What is a Community School?' above.) This definition replaces a previous Coalition for Community Schools/Institute for Educational Leadership Definition used in 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24.

The Community School-related BEDS questions include the following:

- Is this school a community school?
- Is this school actively and intentionally working toward meeting goals articulated in the Community Schools description provided in the instructions?
- Does this school receive funding from the Community Schools Foundation Aid Set-Aside? (This question does not appear for charter school respondents.)
- Is there a New York State Department of Health-approved School-Based Health Center serving this school's location?
- Is there a New York State Department of Health-approved School-Based Health Center Dental Program serving this school's location?
- Is there a New York State Office of Mental Health-approved School-Based Mental Health Clinic or satellite provider operating at this school's location?

This data establishes each year's list of self-identified community schools. We encourage schools to talk to the individual tasked with submitting the report about their status before the BEDS report is filed to ensure the school's status is represented accurately.

Districts should contact the Office of Student Support Services (studentsupportservices@nysed.gov) with programmatic questions regarding Community Schools. Questions related to the operation or submission of the BEDS form should be directed to the Office of Information & Reporting Services (https://datasupport.nysed.gov/hc/en-us).

STATE AID MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (SAMS) SUPPLEMENTAL SCHEDULE 8 (SS-8)

Districts that receive the **Community Schools Set-Aside** within their Foundation Aid must report annually via the **State Aid Management System (SAMS) Supplemental Schedule SS-8**. The set-aside applies to school districts that have been identified as high need, with an additional requirement for schools with extraordinary high levels of student need. The list of schools identified as having extraordinary high levels of student need is available on the Foundation Aid: Community Schools Set-Aside Guidance web page. NYSED's website provides a list of districts with Foundation Aid Community Schools Set-Aside Allocations.

Districts with this set-aside must report on their distribution of the funding within the following categories and subcategories on the SS-8:

- Payments to BOCES for Community School CO-SER
- Allowable Academic Services
- Allowable Health, Mental Health and Counseling, and Dental Care Services
    - School-Based Health Centers
    - Other Health Services
    - School-Based Mental Health Clinics
    - Other Mental Health and Counseling Services
    - Dental Care Services
- Allowable Nutrition Services
- Allowable Legal Services
- Other Allowable Services
- Community School Site Coordinator
- Coordination between Schools and Service Agencies
- Allowable Excess Transportation Costs
- After School Programs
- Allowable Programs for English Language Learners (ELLs)
- Other Allowable Costs Not Listed

Subdivision 4(e) of section 3602 of the Education Law provides the foundation for this guidance. More detailed information on allowable spending is available on NYSED's Foundation Aid: Community Schools Set-Aside Guidance web page.

Districts should contact the Office of Student Support Services (studentsupportservices@nysed.gov) with programmatic questions regarding Community Schools and questions regarding whether and where to include expenses on the new SAMS Community Schools Expenditure Form. Questions related to the operation or submission of the SS-8 form should be directed to the State Aid Office (omssams@nysed.gov).

The data collected in BEDS and State Aid reports assists NYSED in gaining a better understanding of community schools in New York, including how many exist and where, the services they offer, and how funding is allocated. This informs the work of our three regional New York State Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTERS

Three regional Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers (CSTACs) are available to support schools that are exploring or implementing a community schools strategy. These centers build on the existing strengths of schools and districts to reduce barriers to learning and support the whole child.

REGIONAL SERVICE AREAS

- The Central/Western Regional New York CSTAC at Binghamton University serves Allegany, Broome, Cattaraugus, Cayuga, Chautauqua, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Erie, Genesee, Herkimer, Jefferson, Lewis, Livingston, Madison, Monroe, Niagara, Oneida, Onondaga, Ontario, Orleans, Oswego, Otsego, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties.
- The Eastern Regional CSTAC at Fordham University serves Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Dutchess, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, Nassau, Orange, Putnam, Rensselaer, Rockland, Saint Lawrence, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Suffolk, Sullivan, Ulster, Warren, Washington, and Westchester Counties.
- The New York City CSTAC at Fordham University serves Bronx, Kings, New York, Queens, and Richmond Counties.

SERVICES AND SUPPORTS PROVIDED BY CSTACS

- **Technical Assistance:** The CSTACs provide technical support, including phone and email support and responsive professional learning. For high-need districts they are also able to provide site visits, individualized assistance, and facilitated team learning to help schools and districts implement effective community school strategies.
- **Communities of Practice (CoPs)**: CSTACs facilitate Communities of Practice for community school stakeholders to share best practices, collaborate on common challenges, and build professional relationships.

- **Professional Learning**: CSTACs offer a variety of professional learning opportunities, including workshops, webinars, and conferences. These sessions cover topics such as effective partnership development, family engagement, integrated services, and leadership development.
- **Resource Sharing**: The CSTACs maintain a curated collection of resources, including toolkits, recorded webinars, and evidence-based practices.
- **Networking and Collaboration**: CSTACs also host events, such as roundtables, that allow schools and districts to network and collaborate. These opportunities allow schools to connect with peers, share successes, and develop joint solutions to challenges.
- **Focus on Data and Improvement**: The CSTACs support schools in collecting and using data to inform decision-making and drive continuous improvement through the needs and resources assessment process.

CONNECT WITH YOUR CSTAC

The CSTACs work collaboratively across the state to ensure that all schools have access to high-quality resources and support in their work to build more resilient, supportive educational environments across the State. Schools interested in joining or expanding their community school efforts can contact their regional CSTAC to access tailored assistance and connect with other community schools through communities of practice.

To learn more, explore the CSTACs' website at NYS Community Schools, which includes previously recorded webinars, a calendar of upcoming events, and a monthly newsletter that shares updates on new opportunities and resources.

RESOURCES

New York State Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers.
https://www.nyscommunityschools.org/

New York State Education Department
https://www.nysed.gov/student-support-services/community-schools

National Center for Community Schools
https://www.nccs.org/

Coalition for Community Schools
https://www.communityschools.org/

Blank, M., Harkavy, I., Quinn, J., Villarreal, L., & Goodman, D. (2023). _The Community Schools Revolution: Building Partnerships, Transforming Lives, Advancing Democracy_. https://www.communityschoolsrevolution.org/

Institute for Educational Leadership. (2023). _Building a Community Schools System_. https://iel.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IEL_SystemsBuildingGuide_2022_FINAL_2.15.pdf

Johnston, W., Engberg, J., Opper, I., Sontag-Padilla, L., Xenakis, L. (2020). _Illustrating the Promise of Community Schools: An Assessment of the Impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative_. Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3245.html

Learning Policy Institute. (2023). _Community Schools Forward_. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward

National Center for Community Schools. (2011). _Building Community Schools: A Guide for Action_. https://www.nccs.org/publication/building-community-schools/

National Center for Community Schools. (2017). _Leading with Purpose and Passion: A Guide for Community School Directors_. https://www.nccs.org/publication/leading-with-purpose-and-passion/

Partnership for the Future of Learning. (2010). _Financing Community Schools: A Framework for Growth and Sustainability_. https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org/finance