



Community Schools in Illinois

*An Effective Strategy to
Address Equity, Health, and
Academics in Our Schools*

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CONTENTS

1	Introduction
2	History of Community Schools
3	Community Schools in Illinois
5	Pillar One: Integrated Student Supports
9	Pillar Two: Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities
11	Pillar Three: Family and Community Engagement
13	Pillar Four: Collaborative Leadership and Practices
16	Community Schools 2020: Responding to Public Health Needs and Racial Injustice
18	How Community Schools are Funded
20	The Future for Community Schools in Illinois
21	Appendix A: Evidence of Academic Improvement
22	Endnotes

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN ILLINOIS:

An Effective Strategy to Address Equity, Health, and Academics in Our Schools

Introduction

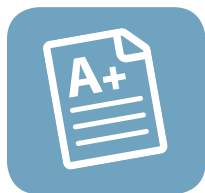
School districts and communities across Illinois are meeting the full needs of students and their families by adopting the community schools model. Community schools are a specific model of education and community organizing, different from just a neighborhood school. Community schools are public schools that partner with families and community-based organizations to provide well-rounded educational opportunities and supports for students' school success.¹ Effective community schools work collaboratively, assess community needs, give students sufficient learning time and depth, use data to inform improvement, and create and support infrastructure at the administrative level.²

Since each community school is a reflection of local needs, assets, and priorities, no two community schools look exactly alike. However, all community schools have four pillars or components in common. These pillars are:

1. integrated student supports;
2. expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities;
3. active family and community engagement; and
4. collaborative leadership and practices.³

Using all four of these components, community schools have the features found in high-quality schools and in better-resourced communities, where families can afford to supplement the services offered by these schools.⁴

Community schools are a key strategy in working towards equity. The partnerships from community schools address systemic barriers that limit opportunities for many children and families. This work has become more important than ever given increasing concerns about racial injustice following the murder of George Floyd and the heightened support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Community schools also leverage community assets to provide access to resources necessary for families to experience success, which became essential for serving families and communities during the outbreak of COVID-19.⁵



Data collected from community schools show that they are effective in improving grades, test scores, and attendance rates in schools.⁶ Teacher attendance is also higher in community schools.⁷ For example, the Community Schools Initiative (CSI) in Chicago found that community schools can close gaps in educational

attainment. During a study of test scores, CSI schools as a whole started out with lower test scores than the district average and narrowed this gap over five years. After three years of CSI implementation, the number of CSI students meeting or exceeding Illinois state test standards in reading, mathematics, and science was comparable to district averages. Over time, some CSI schools also began to exceed the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) averages.⁸

Community schools are also fiscally efficient and provide “an excellent return in social value on investments for these schools of up to \$15 for every dollar invested.”⁹ These returns derive from improvements in education, employment, health outcomes, and reductions in crime and welfare.

In this report, we will explore the community school landscape in Illinois and the impact community schools are having on youth and families here in the state. We will start by exploring the history of the community schools and how they have their roots in Illinois. Then, we will share where these community schools are located in Illinois and what services they provide. Within each community school pillar, we will examine data and information about how community schools conduct this work in Illinois. We will also discuss how these services support Illinois communities in responding to racial injustice concerns and the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, this report will examine the funding limitations for community schools and what these programs need in order to continue to flourish.

For this report, we gathered data from community schools across Illinois.¹⁰ Although the data collected on the impact of community schools in Illinois is impressive, the data present is only a sampling of those programs that exist in Illinois. Further, many of the impacts of community schools are difficult to track, and we will discuss these limitations in data collection as well.

History of Community Schools

Educators have used elements of the community school strategy for hundreds of years to help youth living in poverty. In the late 19th Century, Jane Addams and other social workers founded settlement houses in Chicago in poor, urban, immigrant, communities of color in order to provide children and families with social services.¹¹ During this time, social reformers looked to schools to be social centers that could address the needs of the urban poor and teach community values, educate people on important hygiene practices, and provide a forum for open discussion for community members from various backgrounds.¹²

Later, during the years of the Great Depression, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation launched a model to use school buildings outside of school hours in order to support students and families.¹³ Proponents of community school methods during this time sought to strengthen struggling communities through democratic, community-oriented approaches to education.¹⁴ For example, “Franklin High in East Harlem, NY conducted neighborhood surveys to assist in the neighborhood’s campaign for more public housing.”¹⁵ However, growing conservatism in the following decades largely undermined these efforts.

During segregation, many African American communities used community school strategies to try to mitigate economic hardship and violence from white supremacists.¹⁶ For example, the James Adams Community School in Pennsylvania served Black kindergarten through 9th grade students during the day, and at night, they offered free activities and classes for students, families, and community members.¹⁷ Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, school leaders used community schools as a way to support urban education and school desegregation.¹⁸

Today, community schools are an organized model with a presence around the world. The Coalition for Community Schools estimates that there are more than 5,000 community schools nationwide serving over five million students in the United States.¹⁹ It is estimated that there are 27,000 community schools worldwide.²⁰

Community Schools in Illinois

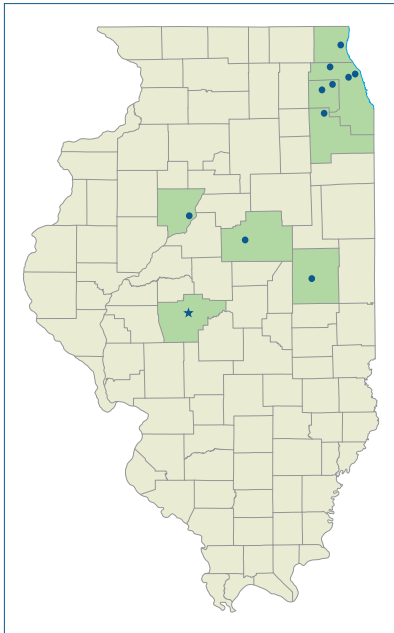
In Illinois, community schools are found throughout the state, and this model continues to grow. Although we can easily track the areas where community school systems exist, it is harder to track the number of youth and families these systems serve. Many community schools only track the number of youth in their afterschool programs because large funding streams require those numbers. However, students in a community school might not attend the afterschool program, but these same students might still benefit from community school mental health or nutrition services. Similarly, students' parents might attend family and community engagement events run by the community school. Siblings and extended community members might also benefit from any of these services. Given the far-reaching impact of community schools, it is often times difficult to track the total number of people impacted.

A. CHICAGO

The City of Chicago has a robust community school system. CPS sponsors a network of community schools through CSI, funded in part through the federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant (21st Century). CPS and the Chicago Teachers Union also fund another network of community schools through the Sustainable Community Schools Initiative. Further, some community-based organizations receive direct 21st Century grants and use those dollars to leverage additional funding to run community schools.²¹ The following is a sampling of community-based organizations in Chicago that serve as the lead partner agency for community schools, the number of schools in which they operate, and the number of youth they serve, where these numbers are available.



CHICAGO SUBURBS AND DOWNSTATE COMMUNITY SCHOOL SYSTEMS



Organization	Number of community schools	Number of youth served
BUILD, Inc.	4	NA
Center for Community Academic Success Partnerships	NA	2,429
Enlace Chicago	8	+/- 800 youth
Family Focus	NA	1,475
Gads Hill Center	1	103
Metropolitan Family Services	28	7,046
National Museum of Mexican American Art	4	464
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago	16	3,600
Youth Guidance	12	2,422

B. CHICAGO SUBURBS

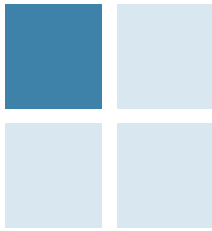
Community schools in Illinois extend beyond Chicago as well. The Chicagoland suburbs have a combination of well-established, long-standing community schools as well as emerging models. One can find community schools in the Chicago suburbs of North Chicago, West Chicago, Skokie, Evanston, Bensenville, Bolingbrook, and Palatine. These community schools differ in terms of structure—sometimes community-based lead partner agencies lead the community school, while local schools districts lead others. The following is a chart of some of the suburbs' community schools and who they serve.

Community school system	Numbers served/scope of services
North Chicago Community Partners	90% of Pre-K to 5th grade children, 60% of 6th to 8th grade students, and 25% of high school students—or about 1,900 students in the district's traditional public schools. NCCP also supports 100% of the teachers and staff in the district through its Teacher Care program.
Palatine, Partners for Our Communities	1 school
Skokie District 69	3 schools
WeGo Together for Kids, West Chicago	1 Birth to 3 home visiting program, 3 preschool sites, 6 elementary schools, and 1 middle school

C. DOWNSTATE

Downstate, community school systems exist in Champaign, Bloomington, Peoria, and Springfield. Again, these community schools are at various stages of development and their models differ. The following is a chart of some of the downstate community schools and their scope of services.

Community school system	Numbers served/scope of services
Baby Fold, Bloomington-Normal	4 schools, 1,170 students
Springfield School District 186	1 community school and other schools have family liaisons and wraparound services
Champaign Unit 4 Schools	3 schools



PILLAR ONE: Integrated Student Supports

Youth living in many of the places community schools serve experience challenges that inhibit school-day learning, such as food and housing insecurity, inadequate health care access, exposure to violence, the need to be a child-care provider for other family members, and many times language and immigration concerns. Community schools provide additional supports to meet the full needs of students, so they can focus on learning. These supports include medical, dental, mental health, and tutoring supports.²² Community schools also support families by offering parent education classes, job training, housing assistance, and nutrition programs.²³ In middle- and upper-income communities, access to these resources contributes to a positive learning environment. Integrated supports recognize that low-income students benefit from the same opportunities available to their upper-income peers.²⁴

Meeting the full needs of students in this way leads to improved attendance, behavior, social well-being, and academic achievement.²⁵ Studies also show that integrated student supports improve mathematics achievement, reading achievement, school behavior problems, and school attachment.²⁶

Providing these supports and services alone does not create a community school. The supports these schools offer and how they meet community needs must be determined in a collaborative way and offered in conjunction with the other pillars.²⁷ Below we explore various integrated supports available in Illinois community schools and how these services positively impact students and families.

Percent of community schools offering integrated supports in Illinois

Afterschool programming	100%
Programming before the school day	47%
Summer programming	93%
Family events	93%
Adult classes	87%
Career support for families	27%
Public benefits	60%
Physical health care	47%
Nutrition programming	53%
Mental health care	33%
Civic engagement opportunities	53%



47% of community schools offer programming before the school day



93% of community schools offer family events



60% of community schools connect families to benefits even if those services are not offered in-house

A. OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

All community schools surveyed reported offering afterschool programming, which is an essential element of community schools and the basis for funding streams upon which many community schools depend. Forty-seven percent of community schools offer programming before the school day, which helps many parents that start work before the school day by providing child care and connecting youth to breakfast opportunities. Ninety-three percent of community schools offer summer programming. One can find additional information on out-of-school time programs in the “Pillar Two: Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities” section of this report.

B. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Ninety-three percent of community schools offer family events, which range from opportunities to include families in the academic setting to large-scale community events and festivals to celebrate and bring communities together. Further, 87% of community schools in Illinois offer adult classes. These classes focus on a variety of topics, including citizenship readiness, English as a second language, financial literacy, attaining one’s General Educational Development (GED) certificate, job readiness, crafts, and fitness along with other engaging topics. Sometimes community schools even collaborate with local higher education institutions to offer credit for courses held in the local school building. Twenty-seven percent of community schools report offering career support for families, which can include interview preparation, resume writing, connections to job openings, and developing skills to aid with success in the workplace.

C. CONNECTING TO PUBLIC BENEFITS

Most community schools, 60% of those surveyed, also connect families to public benefits even if the community school does not offer those services in-house. For example, even if a community school does not have an in-house medical clinic, they may have partnerships with local health care providers and expertise in connecting families to health insurance options to assist with this need.



47% of programs offer physical health care



53% of programs offer nutrition programming



33% of programs offer mental health care

D. PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE, NUTRITION, AND PHYSICAL FITNESS

Forty-seven percent of the programs surveyed reported offering physical health care. Physical health care might take on the form of an in-house medical clinic or a school might bring in providers to offer ad-hoc medical services such as physicals, vaccines, eye exams, or dental exams.

Fifty-three percent of programs offer nutrition programming, which may include access to meals for students and information for students and families on making healthy eating choices. Some community schools offer onsite food pantries where families can come to obtain food and other essential items. Other community schools connect families to fresh produce, farmers markets, or send students home with groceries.

Data collected from programs in Illinois show that when community schools offer physical activity programming, nutrition resources, and support, the physical health of their communities improves. For instance, the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago found a 17% increase in students recognizing that when you exercise when you are young it keeps your body healthier when you are older, and 60% of students say they exercise on average for 60 minutes every school day in their community schools. WeGo Together for Kids in West Chicago found that their community schools increased the number of people participating in healthy lifestyle opportunities by 20%. Twenty-five percent of teachers in the community schools run by the National Museum of Mexican Art in Chicago report improved physical fitness and health in their students.

E. MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Thirty-three percent of community schools reported offering mental health care, sometimes even offering onsite mental health counselors for students. Even though a smaller number of community schools offer these services, many that do not have expressed a desire to expand in this area. Community schools sometimes struggle to offer this service due to expense and the lack of availability of mental health care workers. The community schools in Illinois that do offer these services show a big impact in improving the mental health of their students and communities. BUILD, Inc. in Chicago found that 88% of their students say BUILD helped them understand their feelings and concerns. WeGo Together for Kids in West Chicago found that 71% of clients who received mental health services met at least one treatment goal.

Even if programs do not offer formal mental health services, the additional services and teachers in afterschool programs provide supportive adults to help students navigate mental health needs. Metropolitan Family Services, which operates community schools in the Chicagoland area, reports that 86% of students say they have a staff member whom they rely on for support. The YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago also found a 20% increase in students saying they have an adult with whom they can talk to about what is going on in their life, and 79% of students in general say that there is a community schools' adult they can talk to about their life. Five hundred fifty three students in Palatine's community schools report having a trusting relationship with an adult.

The integrated supports from community schools also go a long way in improving social-emotional learning skills and behavior for students. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.²⁸ The following are some of the SEL and behavior outcomes community schools in Illinois see:

Metropolitan Family Services reports that

- **86%** of students are learning ways to take care of themselves when upset
- **86%** of students are learning to working as a team
- **76%** of students are getting along better with fellow students
- **77%** of students are learning ways to solve conflicts
- **64%** of students show improved behavior

YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago finds that

- **81%** of students said they work well with other students
- **71%** of students say they can calm themselves down when upset

BUILD, Inc. in Chicago finds that

- **88%** of students say BUILD helped them understand their feelings and concerns
- **87%** of students say that BUILD helped them better understand healthy conflict resolution

Family Focus, which operates in Chicago and its suburbs, reports that

- their teachers see a **64%** improvement in students' SEL skills

Youth Guidance in Chicago finds that

- **75%** of students are behaving well in class
- **74%** of students are getting along well with other students

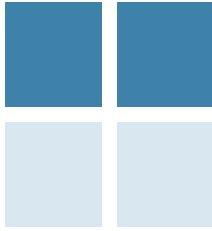


53% of community schools offer civic engagement opportunities

F. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In Illinois, 53% of community schools offer civic engagement opportunities. Many community schools provide policy updates and keep families engaged in advocating for their rights. Community schools might support voter registration efforts, the Census, or protesting for certain causes.

These are a sampling of some of the most common services offered by community schools. Other community schools services may include legal services, clothing closets, and other local partnerships with private corporations. Since all community schools are developed specifically for the families and students they serve, these services can vary greatly.



PILLAR TWO.

Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities

Another key aspect of community schools is access to expanded and enriched learning time opportunities. These learning opportunities might include services outside the school day, including afterschool programs, before school care, summer learning activities, or winter and spring break activities. This programming at its best expands upon and relates back to school day learning. However, community schools also may provide services during the school day, such as specialists that focus on workforce readiness, the arts, or special projects. Oftentimes outside partners provide these services. During the school day, these partnerships might help create internship, service learning, arts, STEM, or work-based opportunities for youth.²⁹

In more affluent areas, many youth have access to additional learning experiences to supplement the school day, including support for struggling learners or enrichment to build upon and expand on what students learn in school. Community schools often offer afterschool and summer learning experiences to support students with these needs and close this opportunity gap.

Much research has found that expanded day programs are positively related to improved student outcomes.³⁰ Studies show that afterschool programs are sparking students' interest in school, leading to better school attendance, grades, standardized test scores, and behavior.³¹ Afterschool programs also provide a safe haven and help dissuade youth from engaging in risky behaviors on and offline. Studies have found that participants in afterschool programs are 30% less likely to participate in criminal activities.³² Moreover, afterschool programs are fostering the workforce of today and tomorrow in Illinois by providing essential child care for workers and by exposing youth to new career options and teaching workforce skills.

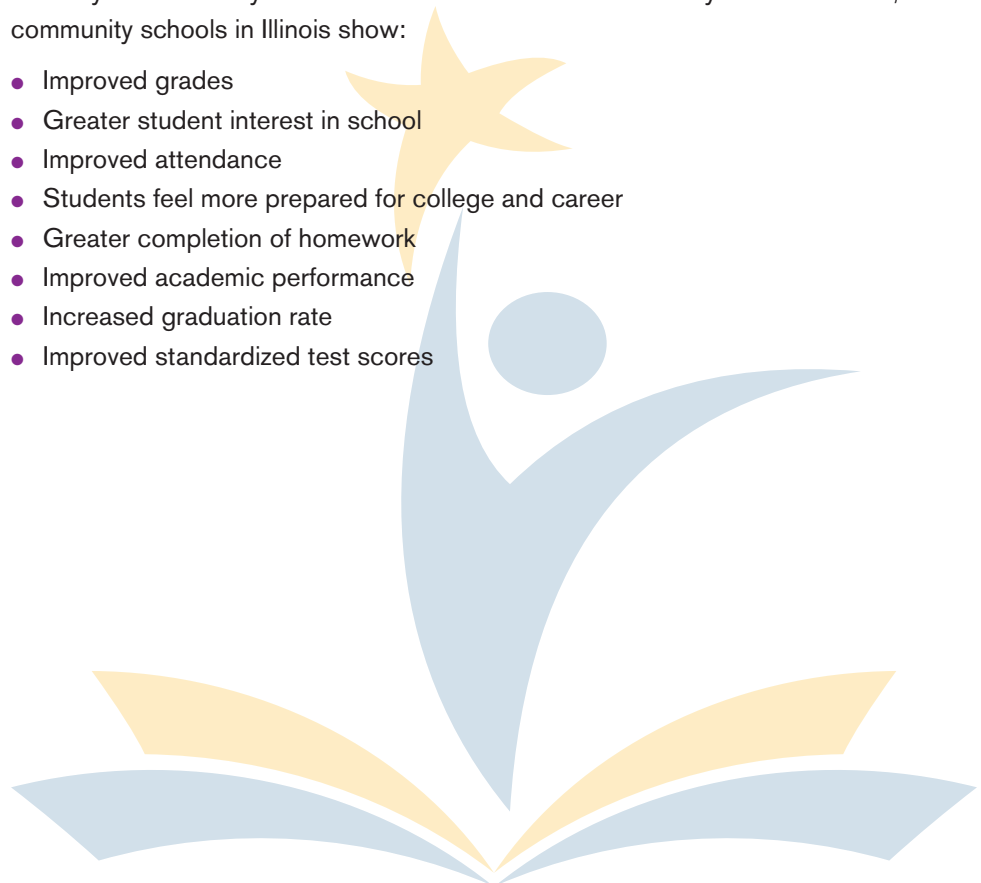
The Afterschool Alliance's America After 3PM report states that 741,400 children in Illinois, or 41% of children, would participate in an afterschool program if one were available.³³ As of 2014, only 18% of Illinois children were lucky enough to have a placement in an afterschool program.³⁴ The current funding streams for afterschool programs are not large enough to support the need for afterschool in Illinois.

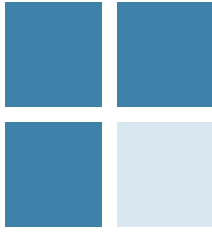
Not only do these programs move the needle in areas of need in our state, but they will also save money in the long-term. By increasing kids' earning potential, improving academic achievement, and reducing juvenile crime and delinquency, afterschool saves up to \$9 for every \$1 invested.³⁵

Expanded and enriched learning time opportunities offered by community schools in Illinois are making a huge difference in academic outcomes for youth. These programs provide homework help, tutoring, extra support in core classes like reading and math, project-based learning, and enrichment programming.

Academic growth for students is a great indicator of the effectiveness of expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities. Every single community school that we collected data from showed improved academic outcomes. However, the metrics that community schools used to measure this growth vary. This makes it difficult to show a statewide metric for community schools and academic growth. Appendix A shows a variety of community schools and academic metrics that they collect. Overall, community schools in Illinois show:

- Improved grades
- Greater student interest in school
- Improved attendance
- Students feel more prepared for college and career
- Greater completion of homework
- Improved academic performance
- Increased graduation rate
- Improved standardized test scores





PILLAR THREE.

Family and Community Engagement

An essential part of making all of the pillars of community schools work well is implementing family and community engagement. Ensuring youth are having their full needs met oftentimes means ensuring their families are set up for success as well. According to the Learning Policy Institute, “Family and community engagement can take many forms, including parent support of student learning, family and community partnership in school, and family and community organizing.”³⁶ As previously discussed, many community schools hold workshops and classes for parents and families and connect these stakeholders to essential services that help their family to thrive.

The *Community Schools Playbook* states, “Meaningful mechanisms for family and community engagement, led by welcoming and culturally informed teachers and school staff, can strengthen the school community, build positive relationships and school climate, and improve student outcomes on many measures, including attendance, discipline, and academic achievement.”³⁷ Research shows that family and community engagement can also lead to reductions in substance abuse, student mobility, and crime.³⁸ Long-term research from Chicago shows that collaborative family and community engagement in schools increases trust between stakeholders, improves school climate, and attitudes about school.³⁹

Family and community engagement is an essential component of the community schools model, because it is necessary in order to have collaborative decision-making and leverage local resources and expertise. When family and community members have a role in the assessment of needs and assets for community schools, they provide integral insight into the root causes of issues facing the community. Moreover, this engagement invests families in the success of their students, school, and community.

Family and community engagement is also a large need. A 2015 national survey by Gallup showed that less than a quarter of all parents report engagement with their child's schools. Gallup also identified five key driving factors that can support family engagement: "1) leadership that creates a respectful, open, and trusting environment; 2) opportunities for each student to achieve success in ways that fits how he/she learns best; 3) an atmosphere in which students are treated with respect and receive appropriate discipline; 4) a personalized learning environment where teachers and staff know each child's individual strengths and needs; and 5) meaningful and open communication between parents and teachers."⁴⁰ Community schools embody all of these family engagement components.

Community schools all around Illinois facilitate strong family engagement. The following is a sampling of family engagement data from community schools in Illinois:

- **North Chicago Community Partners**

reports that **94%** of teachers say the community schools model increased parent and/or family engagement.

- **YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago**

states that **85%** of parents using their program say that community schools made them more closely connected to their child's school.

- **WeGo Together for Kids of West Chicago**

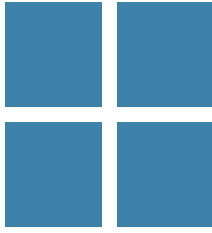
found that their community schools model increased the number of parents participating in a parent education opportunity by **42%** and increased the number of families connected to community resources by **95.7%**.

- **Enlace Chicago**

reports that **80%** of parents involved in Enlace Chicago's community schools indicated that they had acquired a deeper understanding of how they could assist their children's learning and become involved in school activities.

- **National Museum of Mexican Art**

found that for community schools run by the National Museum of Mexican Art, **80%** of parents involved in ESL, computer, and student support courses have successfully acquired those skills.



PILLAR FOUR.

Collaborative Leadership and Practices

Collaborative leadership and practices are the essential piece that bring all the other community school pillars together. “Collaborative leadership and practices engage stakeholders with different types of experience and expertise, including parents, students, teachers, principals, and community partners in working together and sharing decisions and responsibilities toward a commonly held vision or outcome for the school. Such practices rely upon leadership that skillfully manages relationships by creating structures and activities to support and sustain these interactions over time.”⁴¹

According to the Learning Policy Institute, these collaborations can take a range of forms, including: “1) school governance and program planning, such as responsibility for assessing school context and needs, resource distribution, and continuous improvement; 2) the coordination of services and supports; and 3) practices and systems to maintain constructive relationships between school staff and members of the community.”⁴²

Collaborative leadership helps ensure that the implementation of community schools is inclusive, creates shared ownership of the work, and is tailored to address local needs based upon local assets. Research demonstrates that these practices positively impact student outcomes, such as school climate, improving instruction through teacher-peer learning, strengthening relationships, and building trust and a sense of collective capacity.⁴³ Teachers also report more time for working with students and planning because other supports help to address nonacademic issues in community schools.⁴⁴ One study in Chicago found that collaborative structure and activities were key to creating “relational trust” and “were important to providing the social resources needed to improve school conditions that directly affect student learning, the learning climate,

and ambitious instruction.”⁴⁵ To fulfill this need for collaboration, many community schools have advisory boards made up of community members that help to guide decision-making. Further, community schools also often conduct needs assessments where they gather data back from the community on what their priorities are.

Collaborative structures for community schools take a variety of forms throughout Illinois. In Illinois, five major models of community schools have emerged. We describe these five models with examples below.

A. COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION LED

In community-based organization led community school models, a community-based organization coordinates the community school planning as a Lead Partner Agency (LPA). LPAs are organizations that make the long-term commitment to join with the school to manage and sustain the community schools strategy and serve as an intermediary to link partners.⁴⁶ Often this community-based organization runs the extended learning programming and identifies partners for, or provides, wraparound services.

An important component of these community schools is having a resource coordinator at every site, which other models sometimes have as well. Resource coordinators are the community organizer that maintains the bridge between the school and community.⁴⁷ These coordinators facilitate the collaborative process, including running needs assessments, creating school advisory boards, collecting data, many times managing the afterschool program, and coordinating all the additional services for the community school.

Many of the community schools in Chicago use this model with various organizations, such as Metropolitan Family Services, Youth Guidance, Enlace, and the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, serving as the LPA. Outside of Chicago, Bloomington-Normal schools also use a community-based organization led community school model with the Baby Fold as the LPA. The Baby Fold runs four community schools with a resource coordinator in each school. The Baby Fold coordinates services and out-of-school programming with outside organizations and also organizes family engagement initiatives.

B. SCHOOL-DISTRICT LED

Other community schools use a school or district led model. In this model, the local school district takes the lead in coordinating the community school, sometimes doing the extended learning program in-house or contracting with an outside organization to provide the programming. The school district in this model often identifies the partners for wraparound services. Many of the community schools in the Chicago Suburbs and downstate use this model. The following are descriptions of different community schools in Illinois that follow this model:

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- **Skokie/Morton Grove District 69** runs their own community schools model with one fulltime resource coordinator, one fulltime birth to 3 coordinator, one fulltime community schools manager, three part-time family liaisons, and outside community-based organizations for afterschool programs and supportive services.
 - **West Chicago Elementary School District 33** runs their own community initiative as well. However, this community school system also has an intermediary, collective impact organization, which facilitates their partnerships and runs the community school called WeGo Together for Kids. WeGo Together partners with outside community-based organizations for afterschool programs and other services. The Coordinator of Partnerships for District 33 and WeGo Together for Kids oversees the District's entire community school effort. They have a Community School Coordinator for birth to five, one for the elementary schools, and one for the middle school. They also have Family Liaisons that do a lot of the direct service support (i.e., linking families to resources, attendance support, parent education, etc.). There are three Family Liaisons at the preschool, one for each elementary school, and three at the middle school (one for each grade).
 - **Springfield School District 186** also has a district led model. Springfield has parent educators to coordinate services and a Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Coordinator in one school to facilitate a more robust community school system. Springfield also partners with Boys and Girls Clubs, churches, other community-based organizations, and extended learning providers.
 - **Champaign Unit 4 Schools** have a community school model in three of its schools. Each school has a site-based council of advisors that receive a stipend to help coordinate the community school. The district also has two full-time staff and a family and community liaison to help coordinate community schools.
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C. OUTSIDE COMMUNITY BUILDING

Many of the community schools in Illinois focus on providing services inside the school building. However, in Illinois there are also community schools that use an outside community building model. In this model, an outside partner houses all of the community school services in a community building. Community-based organizations provide some services in the community building and dispatch other services to the schools directly. The community partner also works closely with the school district on shared leadership and extended learning time. For instance, in Palatine, Partners for Our Communities runs a community school using this model.

D. VOLUNTEER FOCUS

Another unique community school model in Illinois has a volunteer focus, for example the community schools run by North Chicago Community Partners. In this model, an outside partner runs the community school in partnership with the district, but volunteers instead of employee teams conduct the majority of the work for partner-

ships and services. In North Chicago, they have a Resource Manager and Program Manager at each site. They also have three to five Program Associates assigned to the kindergarten through 12th grade schools who deliver programs on a daily basis and implement family engagement events.

E. EMERGING MODELS

Finally, some community schools in Illinois are classified as emerging models that are just getting started. These are often school districts just starting to explore the community school model and often have one resource coordinator serving several schools at once. While this type of model is sometimes hard to manage because the resource coordinators may have limited capacity, many emerging models might not have the funding and structures in place yet to fully support the community school strategy throughout a school building or district. However, these schools still strongly support the pillars of community schools even if they operate with a limited capacity.

Community Schools 2020: Responding to Public Health Needs and Racial Injustice

Any examination of an education initiative after January 2020 would be incomplete without considering its reaction to the public health crisis created by COVID-19 or the ongoing issues of racial injustice faced by many low-income and high minority communities. Below we discuss how community schools in Illinois have responded to these increased needs.

A. COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AND ADDRESSING COVID-19

As demonstrated by the history of this movement, for decades community schools have worked to ensure that the neighborhoods they serve have access to quality healthcare and essential goods and services for families. Going into the public health crisis in 2020, many community schools were already actively engaged in these activities, making community schools an extremely effective strategy in solving many of the problems exacerbated by the outbreak of COVID-19. Starting in March 2020, community schools assessed the needs of their communities to determine how the public health crisis affected the health, education, and livelihood of their families. Community schools continue to respond to the needs of families in the following key ways:

- **Connecting families to essential goods and services.** Community schools have long-standing connections to community and business partners that can provide goods and services. Given that community schools are already so collaborative and skilled in assessing and responding to the need of their community schools, during the public health crisis programs quickly determined what their families needed and ensured they had access to those goods and services. This included diapers, personal hygiene supplies, and personal protective equipment, which became incredibly difficult to come by in the early days of the pandemic.



Community schools also linked families to meals for their children and nutritious groceries. Further, community schools connected families to mental health counselors, medical care, and help navigating the unemployment process.

- **Academic enrichment and child care.** Education is an ongoing concern as schools and families continue to navigate the public health crisis. During this time, community schools in Illinois sometimes provided in-person child care for essential workers. Many continued to provide remote learning options, such as virtual clubs, activities, homework help, tutoring, and camps. When community schools sent home snacks or groceries to families, they also sent home games and activities for students and families. Some programs even sent home kits to students so that they could continue to engage in their afterschool programming that touched on STEM, the culinary arts, or gardening.
 - **Cash assistance.** Given community schools' vast partnerships and ability to leverage community resources, many community school systems were able to offer cash assistance to families in need during this time. This assistance helped families to pay for rent, utilities, groceries, and other necessities. This resource was especially useful for families that were not eligible for federal stimulus assistance, such as undocumented families. Community schools also provided gift cards to families so they could purchase essential goods and groceries as well.
 - **Family engagement and support.** Community schools continued to support the needs of parents and families during the public health crisis. Some community schools offered parent support groups where parents could discuss their needs and concerns and help one another navigate online learning. Community schools also continued to offer parents classes and workshops online. Some programs still offered family engagement events for students and families, such as virtual game nights.
-

Moving forward, schools will need to use the tenets of the community schools model in order to effectively address the growing needs of their communities during this public health crisis and ensure that students are able to learn and grow. School districts across Illinois could benefit greatly from using the community schools model to appropriately assess and meet the needs of their students and families during this health crisis.

B. COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ADDRESSING ISSUES OF RACIAL INJUSTICE

Community schools are grounded in the principles of equity and the need to provide students with the opportunities necessary to succeed in school and life. For these reasons, community schools have long engaged in work combatting racial injustice for the families they serve in low-income and, many times, neighborhoods of color. Racism and police brutality continue to gravely affect these communities.

In the spring of 2020, with the murder of George Floyd, community schools stood ready to support the Black Lives Matter movement and helped communities voice their needs and frustrations. Many community schools during this time helped to organize youth-led peace marches or joined other peaceful protests. Some have engaged in conversations about police reform and inequities in the criminal justice system.


Moving forward, community schools are essential to achieving equity for the communities most affected by racial injustice. Too often low-income students of color do not have access to resources needed to succeed in school and life. This is a stark opportunity gap from their higher-income peers who may have greater access to adequate physical and mental health care, tutors, career exploration opportunities, and academic enrichment opportunities. These opportunities are essential for a well-rounded education and healthy life. Community schools provide a way to address these needs and help to grow and shift in response to future community needs. Investing in community schools will help to work towards equity in the communities around Illinois that need it most.

How Community Schools are Funded

Community schools use a variety of funding streams to fund their various components. Some of this funding is from federal and state governments. However, community schools also leverage private grants, donations, volunteers, and in-kind services for funding.

A. FEDERAL

In Illinois, and in the Chicagoland area especially, many community schools use the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st Century) grant to fund their work. 21st Century is a federal grant administered by the Illinois State Board of Education to fund afterschool programs. 21st Century serves primarily students kindergarten through 12th grade, who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools, through funding for afterschool programs.⁴⁸ In Illinois, schools leverage this funding to work in partnership with local human services and youth development agencies to offer a variety of services, like parent programming, counseling, and access to social service resources in addition to afterschool programming. These grants, however, are only for a limited number of years, meaning community schools are constantly having to compete for more funding or are at risk of not having their funding renewed. Further, President Trump has proposed eliminating this funding several times. This funding source was also never meant to sustain community schools and the data collection, technical assistance, and professional development required as a part of this grant does not directly address the needs of community schools.



There is also a federal Full-Service Community Schools grant (FSCS). This program started in 2010 and provides support for the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools that improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools.⁴⁹ However, only a limited number of these grants are available nationwide, and the federal government does not make these grant opportunities available every year.⁵⁰

B. STATE/LOCAL

Some community schools use state Teen Responsibility, Education, Achievement, Caring, and Hope (Teen REACH) funding for afterschool programming. This program has received inconsistent funding over the past few years due to Illinois budget issues. It is funded through the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), targets at-risk youth ages 6 to 17, and provides supports to bolster educational performance, life skill development, parental involvement, mentorship connections, service learning, and engagement in sports, cultural, and artistic experiences.⁵¹ Many community schools, however, struggle to use this money because the hours of programming required are often more than public schools can serve given school closures for holiday, teacher in-service, or school breaks.

In the fall of 2018, Chicago Public Schools announced a new pilot called the Sustainable Community Schools Initiative.⁵² This program funded schools on mainly the South and West sides of the city, at \$500,000 per school, to connect schools to neighborhood organizations to provide academic and non-academic services for children and families.⁵³ To be eligible, schools had to apply, be located in a low-income community, have 81% of their students qualify for free or reduced priced lunch, and have open enrollment.⁵⁴

C. PRIVATE GRANTS/IN-KIND SERVICES

Community schools also leverage private grants and in-kind services for their funding. Some community and family foundations provide grants to community schools for general operating expenses or for special projects. Local businesses and corporate philanthropic organizations also support this work through awarding grants to community schools.

Another major way community schools promote sustainability is through in-kind services. Sometimes a private partner may not be able to make a monetary donation, but they can provide a free service to a community school. These services can support families, such as medical services or tax return assistance, or can support the organization, such as general counsel or accounting services.

The Future for Community Schools in Illinois

Community schools are closing the opportunity gap and meeting the essential needs of students and families across the state. Every year in Illinois this model continues to grow as more school districts become community schools or expand their service reach. Despite the accomplishments of community schools in Illinois, these programs still face a range of obstacles. Given the proven effectiveness of community schools for youth and families, Illinois would benefit from a dedicated funding stream to support this work and a statewide office for community schools.

Community schools constantly struggle with sustainability despite how effective they are. Community schools currently have to braid together their funding from a variety of sources, in particular 21st Century; and these funds are extremely limited. In 2014, the Illinois State Board of Education received 142 21st Century applications requesting a total of \$53 million, but were only able to award grants to 87 applicants for a total of \$33 million.⁵⁵

21st Century was not created to support the community schools model—it was created to support afterschool programs. The 21st Century program does not collect data or provide supports specific to this model. Unifying community schools in one state program, would allow Illinois to collect data specifically on community schools' impact, better determine areas of strengths and weaknesses for community schools, and provide supports and training that take into consideration the unique aspects of this model to help push for better student outcomes. A statewide office for community schools could also work to expand this model statewide and provide support to both emerging community schools and already-established institutions.

Not only will funding for community schools address needs in our community, but community schools also make the most of the money invested in them. Community schools leverage on average \$1 to \$3 in additional resources from additional investors from just \$1 in public funding.⁵⁶

Every day in Illinois, students and families face obstacles that prevent students from succeeding in school. This leads to long-term negative impacts for students, families, and communities. A traditional public school does not have the capacity to handle all of these needs. However, the community school model leverages partnerships to ensure that they meet the whole needs of students and families and promote student success in academics and life. Given the increased needs our schools face in responding to the public health crisis and racial injustice, community schools are a smart investment to ensure we meet the whole needs of students and their families.

APPENDIX A: Evidence of Academic Improvement

Program	Location	Academic Outcomes
Baby Fold	Bloomington-Normal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved math and reading MAP scores (higher than non-participants)
BUILD, Inc.	Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 67% of students feel prepared for college and beyond
Center for Community Academic Success Partnerships	Chicago and South suburbs of Cook County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 74% of students maintained or improved math grade from fall to spring 75% of students improved academic performance
Chicago Youth Centers	Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers report 32% of students improved academic performance Teachers report 8% of students improved attendance
Family Focus	Chicago and Western suburbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers report 72% of students improved academic performance
Gads Hill Center	Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43% of students improved their GPA 95% of students improved attendance 100% graduation rate
Metropolitan Family Services	Chicago and South suburbs of Cook County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 71% of students are doing better with school work 85% of parents report youth are more interested in school Teachers say 60% of students improved attendance Teachers say 70% of students improved academic performance
National Museum of Mexican American Art	Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5% increase in state composite scores for reading and math Higher attendance for students who attend afterschool
North Chicago Community Partners	North Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 93% of teachers say NCCP services improved academic performance 96% of parents say students' grades are better
Partners for Our Communities	Palatine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 588 out of 720 students had satisfactory grade performance
Springfield School District 186	Springfield	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 77.5% of students improved academic performance
WeGo Together for Kids	West Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 29.4% of youth met or exceeded growth target in math 30.2% of youth met or exceeded growth target in reading
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago	Chicago and surrounding suburbs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 77% of students say they always turn homework in on time 95% of parents say that CSI enrichment programs helped their child's performance
Youth Guidance	Chicago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 78% of students improved academic performance 69% of students attending class regularly

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