

# Community Schools FAQ

## Q. What is a community school?

A. A community school provides meaningful developmental and enrichment opportunities for students and families beyond the typical school day and year; mobilizing all the assets their communities and stakeholders have to offer. These wraparound services available through community schools provide students with programs and services that remove barriers to quality learning and provide enhanced opportunities that directly contribute to better academic performance, higher attendance rates, and improved physical and mental health. Community schools are comprehensive, and implementation and sustainability vary across the board. A community school is not only an out-of-school time program for youth; rather it is the product of a school and a community working collaboratively to support students and families. Overall, community schools enable early, comprehensive development that prepares children to be vital, contributing members of the community throughout their lives, and engaged parents and community members that build safer, stronger, and more self-sufficient neighborhoods.

## Q. Who is involved in a community school?

A. For a community school to work, public schools, nonprofit organizations, and local businesses come together, using the school as a hub, to provide a broad range of programs and services to students, their families, and the community at-large.

## Q. How does a community school work?

A. An essential component of a high quality community school is a full-time Resource Coordinator (RC) who is charged with meeting the holistic needs of students, families, and the community. RCs coordinate and maintain a number of resources using the school as a point of access for students and families. We use a funnel as a metaphor to help represent the important work RCs do to connect all of the services and programs students and families need to flourish under one roof: the community school. These resources, often funded with blended private and public dollars and offered through nonprofit organizations, include programs that support students' academic and social-emotional development, activities to promote family/parent engagement, and services that may otherwise not be accessed like health screenings, financial education, and employment and training programs.

## Q. What programs/services does a typical community school offer?

A. Community school program offerings vary based on local needs and resources. Community schools also engage parents as partners in their child's education, and provide supports to ensure they are able to do so. The strategy is flexible, ensuring the needs and assets of each community are considered. However, most community schools will offer programs and services in the following categories to all students, families, and community members: Out-of-School Time and Summer Programs; Early



Childhood Resources; Tutoring & Mentoring Programs; Mental Health Supports; College and Career Guidance; Arts Programs, Academic Supports & Enrichment; Healthcare and Social Services Supports; and Employment and Training Assistance.

**Q. How are community schools funded?**

**A.** Community schools braid funding provided by local, state and federal grants, which serve as a foundation to implement the community school model. Because public sources of funding are not sufficient to fully support a community school, additional funding from foundations, local business, and corporations supports the work of community schools. Having a stable funding source that supports community schools will allow for this initiative to grow and for schools to offer more comprehensive programs and supports to students and families. Specifically, partnerships are essential in the current economic climate. With budgets under continued threat and challenging economic prospects, schools must build deep and intentional relationships with community partners to expand learning opportunities.

**Q. What challenges do community schools face?**

**A.** Despite the demonstrated success and benefits of the community school model, funding for community schools continues to be limited. Community schools are expected to respond to increasing needs (like mental health supports) with decreasing resources, and schools too are forced to do more with less as their budgets continued to get squeezed. Though community schools have proven to be an effective and efficient use of public and private investments, they face increased stress and pressure as funding for afterschool programs, social services, and the foundational funding for a community school Resource Coordinator gets cut. These cuts also impact supports and limited resources available to provide these critical supports to students and families. Under these challenging and uncertain economic times, Resource Coordinators are expected to offer students and families more expanding learning opportunities after school and during the summer months. To support the community school movement in Illinois, government officials can promote policies that support the growth and strength of community school model, as well as secure funding necessary to sustain and expand community schools.

**Q. Why are community schools important and how do they support academic achievement?**

**A.** Although schools are responsible of providing quality academic programs to students during the day, research has demonstrated that academics alone is not enough to ensure student success, rather a more comprehensive menu of programs and services are needed in order to create optimal learning environment and a strong, vibrant community. Community schools are necessary because they help address the many challenges schools and educators face in underserved communities, including poverty, under resourced schools, and unstructured time. Emerging evidence in the field of education and youth development demonstrates that community schools can contribute to student academic progress as measured by decreases in grade retention and dropout, and increases in attendance, math achievement, and overall GPA. Ultimately, a student's success (or failure) is the product of multiple and varied factors at the individual, family, and school levels. Community schools play an active role in providing a number of academic and non-academic supports and services that target all the needs that contribute to a student's achievement gap.

**Q. How many students are impacted by community schools?**

**A.** Community schools serve more than 1.5 million students in nearly 3,000 elementary and high schools across the United States. In Illinois, there are over 175 community schools across the rural, urban, and suburban areas and many more in the early stages of development. Community schools are led by over 60 lead partners including nonprofit agencies, community-based organizations, and in some cases, the school district itself.

**Q. How can I learn more about community schools?**

**A.** For additional information, including current community school members in Illinois and how you can support the work of community schools, visit the Federation for Community Schools' website: [ilcommunityschools.org](http://ilcommunityschools.org). The Federation for Community Schools is a member coalition that works to **amplify the voice** abilities of community schools by creating a network to strengthen their collective impact, promote policy changes that support community schools, and provide professional development opportunities for individuals in the field.