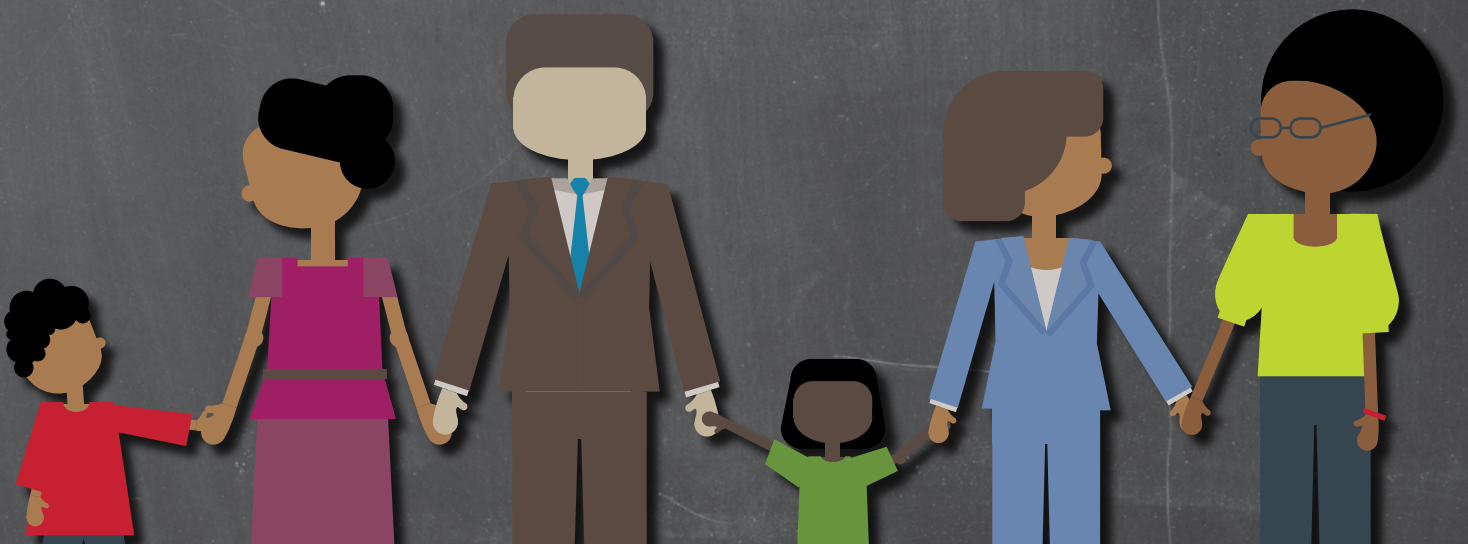# Community Schools Toolkit

Resources for parents, community organizations and policymakers about making community schools a reality in your neighborhood, school district, or state.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CENTER FOR POPULAR DEMOCRACY

NYC Coalition for Educational Justice
ORGANIZING FOR EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

populardemocracy.org   nyccej.org

A Toolkit for Creating Community Schools

Sixty years after the landmark Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education that firmly established a right to equal opportunity and equity of resources, we still have a long way to go. Children in low-income and African-American and Latino neighborhoods throughout the country too often attend schools with less access to rigorous college-bound curriculum, technology, the arts, support services, and adequate levels of staffing than their more affluent and white counterparts.

While some current trends in school reform promote closing schools rather than improving them, and expanding charters rather than expanding supports for students as the answer to educational inequity; the organizations that worked to put together this toolkit call for Sustainable Community Schools as the REAL solution that can finally address the growing inequalities in our society and opportunity gaps in our schools. We believe that every child deserves a high-quality public education in their own neighborhood and that schools and communities are inextricably linked.

Our organizations and others across the country have come together in a growing alliance called the Alliance to Reclaim our Schools (AROS), to advance educational justice in the communities that need it most. To learn more, please visit: **reclaimourschools.org**.

This toolkit is a resource for parents, organizations, and policy makers who want to get started to make Sustainable Community Schools a reality in their communities. But each community is unique and complex, and the design and implementation of a community school will look different depending on the needs and resources in a particular place, and on its stage of development over time. We hope that the resources here will support parents and other stakeholders in getting started on this journey!

This toolkit highlights particular programs and services that have been included in community schools, and consolidates some policy and outreach resources that can be helpful in advancing a community schools agenda. Fundamentally, however, community schools are not about any set of programs or any one policy. They are about communities taking back the power to transform our schools, and making the commitment to support their success over time.

**LEARN MORE AT
reclaimourschools.org**

Learn About It!

THE WHOLE CITY

THE WHOLE SCHOOL

THE WHOLE CHILD

Why Community Schools?

If a child comes to school hungry...

they cannot learn

If a child comes to school sick...
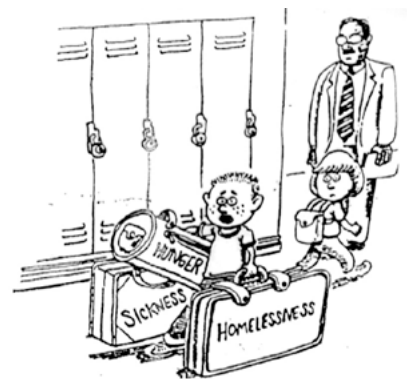
they cannot learn

If a child comes to school worried about immigration, unemployment or violence...

they cannot learn

If a child's family does not have the information, resources and stability to support them... *they cannot learn*

Schools must address these obstacles so children can reach their full potential!

"Could someone help me with these? I'm late for my class."

What Is a Community School?

For our organizations and others in the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (reclaimourschools.org) Sustainable Community Schools include the following elements:

- Curriculum that is engaging, culturally relevant and challenging. A robust selection of classes and after-school programs in the arts, languages, ethnic studies, and AP and honors courses. Also offered are services such as ELL, special ed, GED prep and job training.

- An emphasis on high quality teaching, not on high stakes testing. Assessments are used to help teachers meet the needs of students. Educators have a real voice in professional development.

- Wrap-around supports such as health care, eye care and social and emotional services that support academics. They are available before, during and after school and are provided year-round to the full community. Providers are accountable and culturally competent.

- Positive discipline practices such as restorative justice and social and emotional learning supports are stressed so students grow and contribute to the school community and beyond. Suspensions and harsh punishments are eliminated or greatly reduced.

- Transformational parent and community engagement is promoted so the full community actively participates in planning and decision-making. This process recognizes the link between the success of the school and the development of the community as a whole.
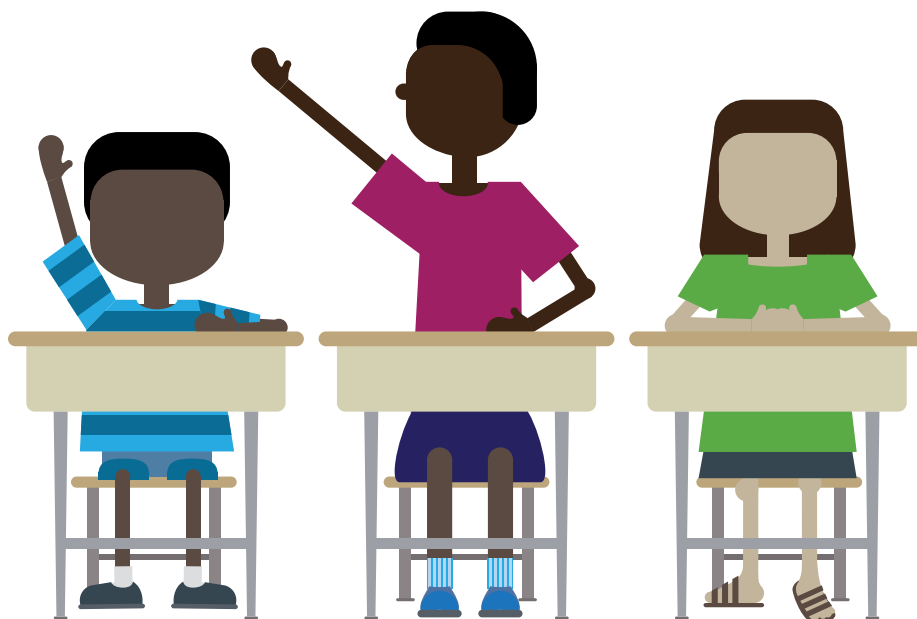
How Do Community Schools Work?

Community schools are a way to think about problems and solutions holistically. Instead of treating a range of educational "problems" as separate, school-specific issues, community schools work to find ways to unite them and solve them together, for the benefit of the entire community. Here are some ways that a community schools approach has led to the development of programs to address some common issues facing struggling schools:

PROBLEM
Low Attendance

EXAMPLE

Burton Elementary in Grand Rapids struggled with chronic absenteeism and low attendance rates. They are a neighborhood school serving 85% Latino families, with 97% of the students eligible for free and reduced price lunch. Parents at Burton wanted to see their children succeed in school, but there were a lot of barriers (community safety, lack of access to childcare and transportation) that made it difficult for kids to make it to school every day.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL RESPONSE

Burton established a School Attendance Team and a Family Outreach Committee to reach out to families of chronically absent students. The idea was to gain a better understanding of what the families were struggling with that resulted in low attendance, and to help them with those problems. Burton now has a full-time social worker who assists parents with finding affordable health care and job placement services, as well as several school bus routes through the neighborhood to help students get to school safely. Burton Elementary has attendance rates of 90%, which they anticipate will hold steady.

PROBLEM
Lack of Health Services

EXAMPLE

Winton Hills Academy in Cincinnati is surrounded by federal housing projects, where many of the residents lack access to good health care, child care, and affordable healthy food. Not only did this place a burden on families who struggled to make ends meet, but children of those families suffered in school from untreated illnesses and hunger, which detracted from their studies. Without assistance, parents and community members couldn't fix those problems on their own.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL RESPONSE

By becoming a Community Learning Center (CLC), Winton Hills was able to bring resources together and locate them in the school building. The school hosts a food pantry, and actively partners with a nearby community garden growing fresh food. The school is also home to a health and dental clinic, open to all community members. This takes a huge weight off of parents' minds, and means that kids get access to preventative health services and nourishing food without having to leave the school building.

PROBLEM
Lack of Parental Involvement

EXAMPLE

Parents at Albuquerque Public Schools often weren't able to fully engage with the schools their children attended— either because they were working too many jobs, encountered a language barrier, or found the school structures confusing and alienating. The lack of parent involvement meant that schools struggled to understand what their students' needs were, and weren't able to enlist parents' help for their kids' studies. Parents also were unable to give feedback to their schools and invest in their improvement.

COMMUNITY SCHOOL RESPONSE

Albuquerque places parent involvement at the top of the priority list. Many schools have hired parent liaisons who have deep roots in their communities, and who are trained in best practices of parent engagement. The parent liaisons have bridged the gap between home and school, particularly with regards to the language barrier; teachers and parents alike admire the results, and agree that parents are now more comfortable "at the table as partners."

PROBLEM
Bad school climate

EXAMPLE

The West Philadelphia High School was on Pennsylvania's "Persistently Dangerous Schools" list for six years, beginning in 2001. They struggled with a series of violent incidents, and a extremely high rate of suspensions and expulsions. Principal Saliyah Cruz remarked, "One of the first things I noticed was that there was not a great deal of respect between adults and students. There was a small group of students who were chronically involved in the discipline loop. Adults were getting frustrated and no one was learning anything here."

COMMUNITY SCHOOL RESPONSE

In 2007, Philadelphia instituted their "restorative practices" program to improve their school climate. Restorative practices involves bringing together students who have broken school rules with their peers, teachers, and parents, in order to discuss the harm done and what the student can do to make amends. West Philadelphia moved beyond simply punishing students for misbehavior— they established a culture of caring, respect, and responsibility using restorative practices.

Community Schools as a Reform Strategy Across a Whole School District

Cincinnati, Ohio

Cincinnati has decided that all of its public schools should become community schools. Parents and community members had protested for decades, saying that their schools were not getting enough resources and their children were being left behind— something had to change. To date, 34 of their 55 schools are community schools, with resource coordinators and community partnerships to provide vital school-based services.

RESULTS

- Over a decade, graduation rates have gone from about 50% to about 80% and in some years, graduation rates for African-American students have exceeded those of white students, indicating that the system has made real progress towards closing the achievement gap.
- Students feel a sense of engagement and excitement in their schools. They have access to a full range of new programs
- Families and community members are empowered to have a say in how their schools are run.

Parent engagement is an essential part of making community schools work in Cincinnati. Each community school is led by a Local School Decision Making Committee (LSDMC) of parents, community members, teachers and staff, all of whom work together to make decisions that will improve their school. This level of engagement allows the school to connect with the neighborhood that surrounds it, and become a welcoming place for everyone.

Oakland, California

Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) began a similar overhaul in 2009 in order to make all their public schools into community schools. Together with parents, OUSD's board put together a "developmental triangle" which centers students' needs, and prioritizes 1) high quality instruction, 2) creating equitable learning opportunities, and 3) developing social and emotional health. By developing structures such as the Community School Site Leadership Team, Oakland has created the space for different stakeholders to develop meaningful relationships with each other as they seek to improve the school and ground it in the community.

RESULTS

- Tardiness, truancy, and suspensions rates have plummeted
- Communities and schools are building avenues of trust
- Nutritional quality and immunization rates have improved, and students come to school ready to learn

Like Cincinnati, Oakland schools have prioritized the leadership of those directly affected by the schools' success: youth, parents, teachers, and community members. Each individual school develops a strategic plan to move forward—and its implementation depends on the consensus of all stakeholders on the school. By building in feedback loops that allow for constant input and engagement, Oakland's community schools are moving towards their goal of success for all students.

How do Community Schools Compare to Traditional Schools?

	Community Schools	**Traditional Schools**
ACADEMICS	Provide their students with a rich, rigorous curriculum that is culturally relevant, supports them in developing critical thinking skills, and offers them the opportunity to explore a variety of subjects, far beyond those covered by standardized tests. Academic support and enrichment activities are offered after school hours for all students.	Curriculum during the school day and after-school is shaped by the content of standardized tests, which often carry high stakes for students, teachers and schools. Non-tested subjects, like art, music, and sports, are less prioritized. There may be few after-school enrichment activities for students.
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT	Parents and community members are empowered to make decisions about how the community school will be run every step of the way. Partnerships between school leaders and community leaders are what make community schools work.	Real community engagement is absent from the functioning of the school. Apart from parent/teacher conferences and the PTA, community members are excluded from school decision-making.
SOCIAL SERVICES	Community schools provide a variety of services, ranging from healthcare, to childcare, to adult education, to arts and music. These programs are for the benefit of all. The school is the hub or center of its neighborhood.	The school building is closed mid-afternoon, and can't be used for any other programs. Families may have to travel far to access all the social services they need, which is a burden on everyone.
FUNDING	Funding for community schools can come from many different places: from grants at the local, state, or federal level, from Title I funds, or even from donations from foundations or philanthropists. Also, partnerships with community-based organizations allow the school to access the resources of those organizations.	Traditional schools don't draw on multiple sources of funding, which means they are limited in the services they can provide to students and to the neighborhood.

What Programs Do Community Schools Offer?

The following programs are examples of those that might be offered in a school that is pursuing a community schools strategy. In any community school, programs that are offered should be designed to meet the most pressing needs of students and their families. We have included these program descriptions just to offer those new to community schools some concrete examples of what community schools programming can look like. In community schools throughout the country, many programs have been developed to meet the following four core needs.

FAMILY SERVICES

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

SCHOOL CLIMATE & HEALTH
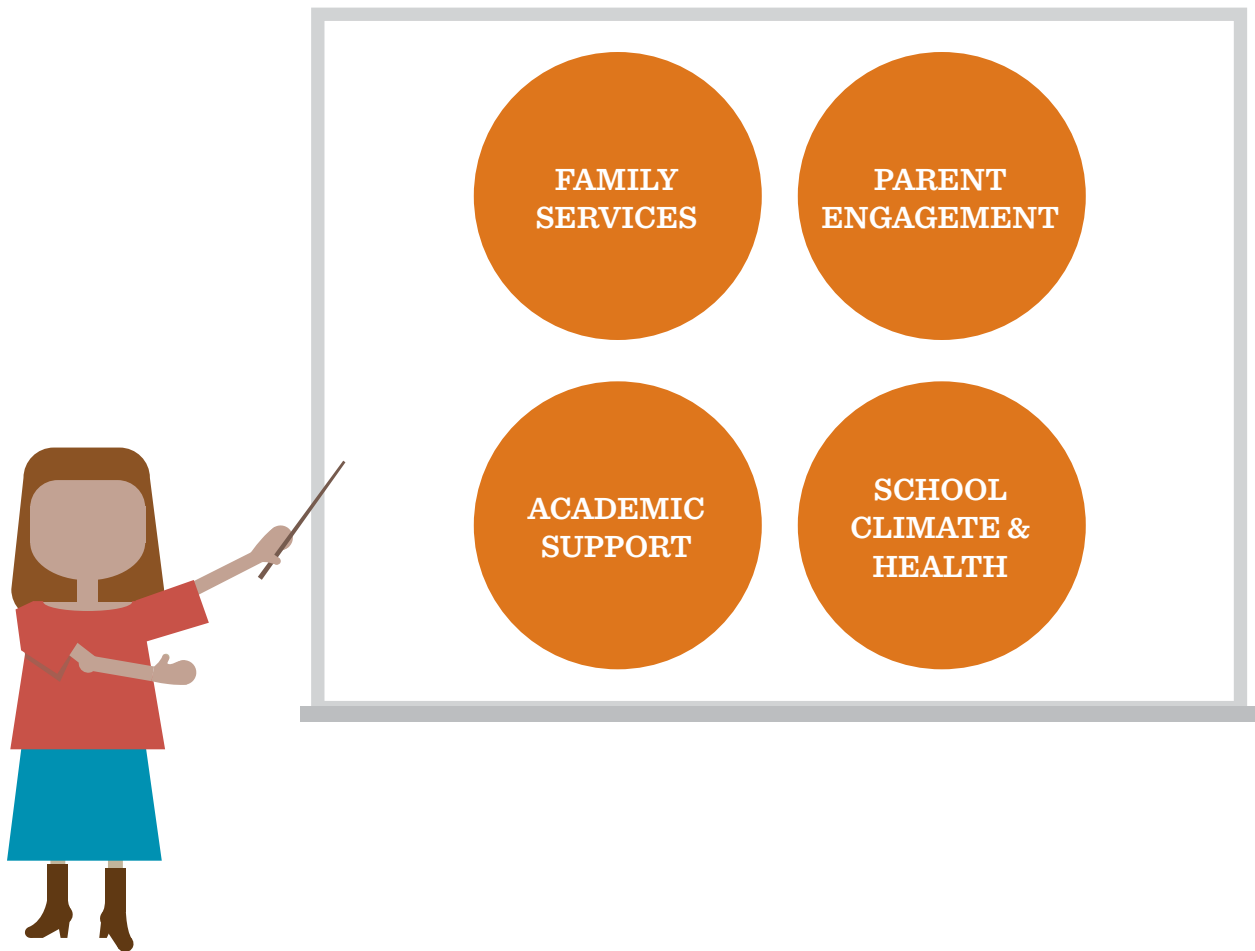
FAMILY SERVICES

Many community schools implement programs to help meet the needs of their students, and their whole families, transforming themselves into important hubs of service provision in their communities.

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (Kentucky)

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers in Kentucky are designed to help families and children solve nonacademic problems that interfere with student learning. Core services at elementary and middle schools include full-time preschool/child care for 2- and 3-year-olds; after-school and summer child care for 4- to 12-year-olds; home visits and new parent support; parent literacy and education programs; support and training for child care providers; and direct provision or referral to health services. Each center offers a unique blend of programs and services determined by the needs of the community and available resources.. Centers have a record of success based on improved student performance in class work, homework and peer relations as reported by teachers. Parents, too, report they experience greater satisfaction and involvement with the schools as a result of assistance through their local FRYSCs.

SEE: http:// chfs.ky.gov/dfrcvs/frysc/

California Healthy Start

Established by the California legislature in 1991, Healthy Start offers school districts and their collaborative partners seed money to fund services at or near the school site to promote health, educational and social development of children, including academic (tutorial, truancy counseling, adult basic education, youth development, ESL, extended day care and early childhood education); health (immunizations, screening and referrals); and mental health (psychological evaluations, counseling, outpatient substance abuse treatment programs). As of the 1999 evaluation, there were 469 operational grantees with 1,122 associated schools. Healthy Start programs are located in 49 of the 58 counties in California, in both rural and urban areas

Family Community Centers
NYC Beacon Program

In New York City, Beacon Centers are community centers located in public school buildings, offering students and their families recreational, social service, educational enrichment and vocational activities before and after school, in the evenings, and on the weekends. Supports and services include providing safe places, leadership skills devel- opment, adult education, parent involvement, family support, family and community service activities, and health services.

The Sunnyside Community Services Beacon Community Center in Sunnyside, NY, actively reaches out to immigrant families in their community, addressing the barriers that make it difficult for these families to become actively involved in their child's education. In addition to providing academic enrichment activities—such as life-skills development, career awareness, community building, recreation and the arts—the Beacon offers adult English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to help parents gain proficiency in English, multilingual workshops to help parents adapt to the policies and expectations of New York City schools, and events such as potluck dinners and performances to foster positive multigenerational and multicultural interactions. The Beacon is open until 10 p.m. on weeknights and all day on Saturday to ensure working parents are able to participate in the program's numerous activities.

Schools as Neighborhoods
Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (Oregon)

The Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) initiative works through partnerships with local schools, districts and community organizations to improve the lives of children, their families and their communities. It was founded by the City of Portland and Multnomah County in 1999, in partnership with the State of Oregon and Multnomah County Public School Districts. SUN schools extend the school day from 7:00 am to 9:00 pm and serve as community centers. They link with libraries, parks, community centers, churches, neighborhood health clinics and businesses for services and resources, offering an array of services and activities, primarily before- and after-school academic and enrichment programs that are linked with the school day; family involvement and strengthening programs; health and social services for students, families and community; community events; and adult education opportunities

Family Literacy
Toyota Family Literacy Program (TFLP)

Adult education programs often involve classes in English, high school equivalency, basic computer skills, leadership development, vocational offerings, and professional certification. The Toyota Family Literacy Program (TFLP), which started in 2003 and was implemented in 30 cities, was the first national family literacy program created to address the literacy needs of Hispanic and immigrant families with children in kindergarten through third grade. Children of TFLP parents outperformed a comparison group of children on multiple assessments, including state instruments, language acquisition, developmental reading and school reporting systems. TFLP also narrowed the achievement gap among African Americans, Latino/Hispanic Americans, and their white and Asian American counterparts. All principals in TFLP schools reported the greatest benefit of family literacy is parents' increased support of their children's education. Parents were also more likely to

participate in conferences with teachers, come to school events and attend afterschool programs.

Improved Family Communication
The Family Empowerment Program (FEP)

The Family Empowerment Program (FEP) in Miami, FL, works to help grow students' positive communication and social skills, and places a strong focus on developing children's self-worth, empathy, self-discipline, responsibility and ability to collaborate. The afterschool program also combines a structured learning environment with free individual and family counseling services for parents and children to practice problem solving and communication skills. FEP offers learning sessions to provide students and parents the opportunity for family bonding and improving family communication. Parents are taught how to set positive boundaries, establish healthy standards for behaviors and recognize warning signs of risky behavior. In addition, the program helps to facilitate parent involvement in their child's school. An evaluation of the program found that students significantly improved coping with conflict and understanding their self-worth, and parents made positive gains in conflict management and bonding with their child. Of children participating in the program who were at risk of or who had a first criminal offense, 98 percent remained arrest-free.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Community school practitioners and researchers agree that parent and community engagement is key to raising student achievement and sustaining excellent schools. Research shows that there are five key ingredients to school improvement: effective school leadership, strong parent-community ties, collaborative teaching, supportive environment, and rigorous instruction. Schools that are strong in all five supports are at least ten times more likely to achieve substantial gains in student achievement, and without any one of these elements, schools are unlikely to see significant academic gains at all (Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2010). Specifically, research shows that increased parent engagement increases student attendance, credit attainment, academic achievement, behavior and social skills.

Successful parental engagement programs aim to make families active participants in the life of the school, ensure parents feel welcomed and connected, engage families in meaningful communication about student learning, empower families to be effective advocates, and connect students and their families to expanded learning opportunities.

A few successful parent engagement models are profiled below.

Engagement in School Decisions

Traditional parent engagement practices recognize that schools should engage parents as participants and supporters. But the long-term sustainability of community schools depends largely on parents and community members, who have the most investment in the long-term success of the school, developing deep ownership over and leadership in the school. This requires shifting the paradigm from parents as participants to parents as leaders and decision-makers who work hand-in-hand with school staff and community organizations to co-plan, co-implement and co-monitor the school. This transformative parent engagement builds the opportunities and capacities of parents to contribute to their school's success and keep their schools accountable for student learning and development for the long term, with the ultimate goal of increased student achievement for the school and the school system.

Some strategies to engage parents in the community school effort so that they begin to become invested as leaders in the project are:
- Hold a **Community School Kick-off Forum** of several hundred people from all stakeholder groups, with particular emphasis on parent participation, to discuss student, family and community assets and needs, their vision for the community school, and to begin to develop a community school plan. Conduct broad-based outreach for the forum using a combination of community organizing direct outreach methods such as phone calls to parents, flyering and door-knocking, as well as traditional school outreach mechanisms such as notices back-packed home by principals.
- Hold a **Community Walk** for the school staff and community to get to know the neighborhood and meet key community leaders and institutions.
- Conduct a school-wide **Parent Outreach Day** during which volunteers from the school staff together with parents knock on the doors of families from the school to publicize the community school and elicit participation from parents and family members on whatever level they are most interested and comfortable.

In order to practice this transformative parent engagement and operate in true collaboration, community schools should have a collaborative decision-making structure that includes principals and school leaders, teachers and other school staff, and parents and community members in designing, planning, implementing and evaluating community school visions and plans.

Early Childhood Readiness
Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors

Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors is a peer-to-peer training program that seeks to increase kindergarten readiness and strengthen parents' capacity to be strong advocates for their children. Facilitators model ways to interact with and teach young children at home, instill early language skills, prepare children for school, and advocate for them once they get to school. The program is delivered via train-the-trainer mode using local leaders (teachers, social workers, parent leaders) through collaborations with national and regional groups (like Head Start Association, Catholic Charities Campaign for Grade-Level Reading). Trainings are organized by the National Head Start Association.

RESULTS

The program currently operates in 196 cities in 31 states. It has significantly increased skills and self-confidence amongst parents necessary in promoting learning at home. The program has also increased practices to promote language and literacy, as well as parents' understanding of how their young children learn.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON UPCOMING TRAININGS FROM THE NATIONAL HEAD START ASSOCIATION:
https://www.nhsa.org/initiatives_and_partnerships/abriendo_ puertas__opening_doors_network/other_resources.

Student Associations

The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) is a citywide body of elected student leaders representing most of the city's public high schools. BSAC works to identify and address pertinent student issues, putting students at the center of the decisions that affect them the most. For example, BSAC began consulting with the district and the Boston Teachers union on the issue of teacher evaluations back in 2006. The talks led to the creation of the "Constructive Feedback Form," which provided students an opportunity to give their teachers feedback on classroom management, individual learning styles, subject instruction, school culture and student engagement. The form was developed to provide helpful, constructive information – not to punish teachers, but to help them see what their strengths are and where they can improve.

Increased Communication Between Teachers and Parents

The **"Parent-Teacher Home Visit Program" based out of Sacramento, California,** is a program that aims to train teachers to make relationship-building home visits to gain understanding about their students and build relationships with parents. Teachers make two visits a year and are compensated for the visits. Traditional parent-teacher conferences are replaced with "Academic Parent-Teacher Teams" in which teachers hold three classroom team meetings where they present performance data, parents share strategies they use at home, teachers model additional activities families can use, and parents practice the activities. These classroom meetings are followed by 30-min personal parent-teacher conferences where teachers give parents individual information about their own child's performance.

RESULTS

The approach led to 30% higher gains in reading and 47% higher gains in math on average. Parent-teacher home visits also led to increased student attendance rates, increased student test scores, decreased suspension and expulsion rates, and decreased vandalism at the school site. Schools also reported improvement in teacher morale and turnover, grade-level teacher collaboration, high school graduation rates, school climate, and parent participation.

CHECK THE PARENT-TEACHER HOME VISITS PROGRAM'S WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION:
http://www.pthvp.org/images/stories/pdfs/pthvp-infopacket.pdf

WATCH THIS VIDEO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ACADEMIC PARENT-TEACHER TEAMS:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YNsWrFiYfY

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

In addition to addressing the variety of issues that impact students ability to learn, some community schools develop programming that is intended to have a direct impact on students' academic experience as well. These are some examples of such programs:

Support for Students

21st Century Community Learning Centers

The federally-funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CLCs) program supports the creation of school-based academic support centers. The CLCs provide learning opportunities during non-school hours for students who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. The program helps bring students up to speed in subjects such as reading and math, and also offers students a broad array of enrichment activities that complement their regular academic programs. The CLCs additionally offer educational services to the families of participating children, with flexible hours to accommodate parent's working schedules. By emphasizing the importance of expanding access to academic help after the end of the school day, and by extending the opportunity to families so that they can participate in literacy, ESL, and GED classes, CLCs affirm that a community approach to learning works best.

Student Success Centers (NYC)

Student Success Centers (SSCs) are collaborations between community-based organizations and public schools. Staffed by trained and stipended students, the Centers provide hands-on support, training and encouragement for students to apply to college.

RESULTS

The numbers of college applications, and college admissions have risen since SSCs were launched, and students receiving support from a Student Success Center are more likely to apply to a wide range of colleges and to make well-informed college decisions. The list of activities organized by the Centers are impressive. They've taken students on college-visiting trips. They organize "college-culture events" to energize students about life on college campuses. Every spring, the students who staff the Centers visits ninth, tenth and eleventh grade classrooms to talk with students about beginning to prepare for college. The Centers offer summer trainings as well, helping students prepare their applications and teaching them about the financial aid process. Schools are crediting the Centers with transforming the college-going cultures in their schools.

SEE: www.annenberginstitute.org/pdf/successcenters.pdf

Support for teachers

Strategic Staffing Initiative (Charlotte, North Carolina)

In Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina, the Strategic Staffing Initiative assigns highly skilled leadership to targeted low-performing schools. Once a school has been identified, experienced principals spend time at the school to assess its challenges and strengths. They are then given the option of bringing in a core team of highly qualified teachers to help with the turnaround effort. Together, over the summer, the principal and staff develop an improvement plan, and are given additional support and resources to implement that plan.

RESULTS

Since its initiation in 2007, Strategic Staffing has had positive impacts on student academic performance, attendance, teacher retention and other factors. Evaluators have found the most effective strategies include: using time differently, to increase the opportunities for teachers to work together; creating a culture of learning for both students and educators; improving instruction in the classroom through mentoring and lead-teacher supports; and improving and simplifying the administrative functioning of the school so that teachers and students feel supported.

Lead Teacher Program (New York City)

Through this program, highly trained and specially qualified lead teachers are hired by grade or subject-level in schools. These teachers provide a variety of supports and training to their less experienced colleagues. For example, lead teachers might facilitate teacher planning and study groups, observe their colleagues and coach them in effective teaching techniques, and open up their own classrooms so other teachers can observe them. Such a structure not only helps create a climate of continuous learning in a school, but also allows professional development to be targeted to the specific needs of the teachers in the building. Most lead teacher programs offer an additional salary bump for the teachers, to compensate them for the additional responsibility and their recognized effective teaching.

RESULTS

The program began with a $1.6 million pilot in ten south Bronx schools in 2004, with parents actively leading its design and launch. Within a year of its implementation, an external evaluation showed significant gains by students in the ten pilot schools. On the strength of the pilot, the Department of Education negotiated the expansion of the program to 100 of the city's lowest performing schools in its second year

IMPROVING SCHOOL CLIMATE & HEALTH

Community Schools also often incorporate programming designed to improve school climate and student health. Here are some examples of such programs and their impacts:

Restorative Justice

In community schools, a well-rounded education is the utmost priority-- but students' emotional and social needs must also be met in order to foster a healthy school environment. Restorative justice is an alternative way of thinking about school discipline that doesn't remove students from school or from the classroom for misbehavior; rather, it allows them to take responsibility for their actions and work with others to repair the harm. It also engages students in conversations with school staff and other students, where everyone is encouraged to take appropriate responsibility for supporting one another, repairing any harm, and ensuring that the school is a positive, safe, and respectful place.

Restorative Justice Oakland Youth

Restorative Justice Oakland Youth (RJOY) is an organization founded in 2005 to promote restorative practices in Oakland public schools in order to combat the high suspension and student incarceration rates. RJOY assists schools with trainings for "restorative circles," which are the discussion groups where restorative justice takes place.

RESULTS

West Oakland's Cole Middle School saw significantly reduced suspension and expulsion rates after the introduction of restorative practices at their school, and students reported improved relationships with one another and with adults in the school as a result of the program's implementation

Morris Campus Restorative Justice Project (Bronx, NY)

At the Morris Campus Restorative Justice Project, school personnel have partnered with Sistas and Brothas United (SBU), an organization devoted to developing the leadership of youth in the Northwest Bronx who are concerned with the conditions in their neighborhood and looking for creative ways to address its problems. SBU youth leaders and staff have provided training and support to school staff and a group of peer leaders at the school in how to implement "talking circles" as a regular classroom ritual on the campus, as well as an array of other conflict resolution and healing disciplinary processes.

RESULTS

Teachers and students credit the program with bringing about significant shifts in how positively students feel about their school, how well students in the different small schools in the building relate to one another, and other aspects of school climate.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:
http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/wp-content/uploads/Fix-School-Discipline-Tool- kit-for-Community-2014-FINAL.pdf

Social and Emotional Learning

The Anchorage School District in Alaska has been embedding Social and Emotional Learning in every school. The district adopted a detailed set of SEL standards for all its schools, and hired coordinators to help train teachers, develop curriculum and monitor the implementation and outcomes of its SEL instruction. All teachers— at every grade level and in every subject—are trained to develop lesson plans and classroom strategies that support SEL. In the early grades, students get used to talking about emotions, and how they impact behavior. Teachers focus on creating a culture of respect and dialogue, and lessons become opportunities for collaboration and reflection. Students don't just fill out worksheets; they discuss their answers with their peers and learn how to defend their ideas. SEL is a framework for school improvement, and helps guide every facet of the school, including its approach to discipline and conflict.

RESULTS

Since the initiative began, student academic performance has improved, graduation rates are up, and behavior incidents are decreasing.

School-based Health Centers

The Children's Aid Society operates five School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs) in New York City, serving about 4,000 school children and their family members each year. The SBHCs are staffed by a full team of qualified pediatricians, social workers, psychiatrists, dentists, orthodontists, and other support staff. They focus on preventative care and monitoring students' health as they go through critical growth periods.

RESULTS

Fewer students miss school because of illness, meaning that parents also miss fewer workdays. An estimated 248 emergency room visits were prevented in the 2010-2011 school year, saving a quarter of a million dollars in taxpayer money.

SECTION 2
Plan for It!

For Parent Leaders Who Want to
Launch a Community School
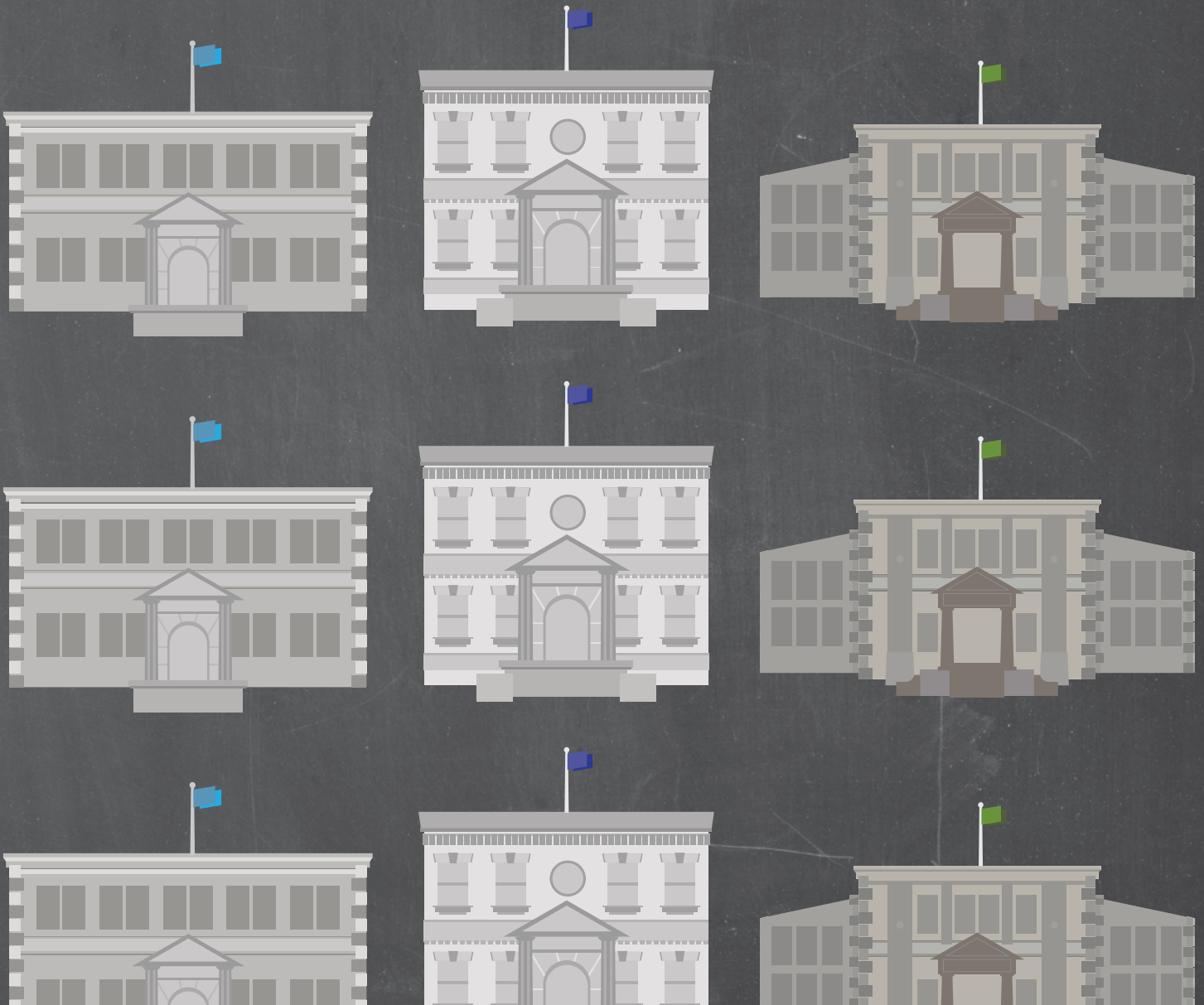
Fundamentally, community schools are not about any set of programs or any one policy. They are about communities taking back the power to transform our schools, and making the commitment to support their success over time.

Parents can be important advocates, decision-makers and implementers in making community schools a reality. This section is for parents who want to engage with other parents to help their own schools become community schools.There are many other tools and resources that can help guide you in implementing your community school, and you will need the support, expertise and partnership of many other stakeholders in doing so. Think of this section as a guide to getting started.

HOW TO LAUNCH A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

1. Create a Core Team of Stakeholders
2. If Possible, Visit a Community School
3. Host a Community-Wide Meeting
4. Seek Out Potential Partners
5. Create a Vision and Choose your Program Priorities
6. Learn about Available Funding
7. Maintain a Long-Term Commitment

1 Create a Core Team of Stakeholders

Creating a community school is a collaborative effort that requires all hands on deck. The first step is to create a core team of stakeholders parents, educators and community members to spearhead the vision and design process.

The core team could include:

- Parents at your school
- Your principal, teachers, and other school leaders
- Representatives of community-based organizations and service providers in your neighborhood
- Local elected officials, clergy and other local leaders
- Local school board members
- Representatives of businesses you would like to partner with
- Individuals and organizations who have expertise in conducting needs assessments and designing community programs

Step 1

Start with a small group of parents and community members you know. Together, make a larger list of parents and community members who might be interested and set up one-to-one meetings with them to discuss transforming your school into a community school. In each one-to-one, ask who else they think you should be talking to and share the list of core stakeholders, to get their ideas about key individuals to recruit to your core team.

Make sure to include key decision-makers in the list of people you meet with first. These should include your school's principal, the leader(s) of your school's parent association, and members of any other important governance body at your school, like a Principal's Advisory Committee, or Local School Committee, or School Leadership Team.

Step 2

Reach out to your school principal, teachers and local community organizations to join the Team

- Convene this Core Team to discuss the group's vision and hopes for transforming your school into a community school, and brainstorm some next steps.
- Use pages from the first section of this toolkit, and the following additional resources to help people understand what a community school is, and what its potential benefits are.

RESOURCES

http://www.thrivingstudents.org/sites/default/files/community_schools_fact_sheet.pdf

http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Community%20School%20Results%202013.pdf

2   If Possible, Visit a Community School

Listen to other leaders, educators, students and parents and learn what makes their school great and the process they used to get those results.

3   Host a Community-Wide Meeting

What to Do

Together with the Core Team, organize an initial Community Meeting about community schools for parents, school staff and any key community organizations or leaders, to introduce people to the community school idea, spark interest and recruit participation in the visioning and planning process. Make a plan to get the word out about the meeting. Ask other parents to help you make phone calls to as many parents as you can, make flyers and post them up around the school, and ask for the meeting to be publicized by the school in its communications with parents. Make sure to follow up with people several times to confirm their attendance!

- Allow people to voice their ideas and concerns, as well as volunteer to support the project

- Adapt these materials for your meeting: **Appendix A: Powerpoint presentation English or Spanish**

- Use this one-pager **info sheet on community schools (Appendix B)** in **English or Spanish**

- **Show this video**: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uFWQgmBv50g

- You could also **invite someone** from a local community school to speak on their experiences.

- Ask people to **sign up to become part of the Core Team**.

- Send around **sign-up lists** to collect everyone's name, email, and phone number.

APPENDIX B
Community Schools
Powerpoint Presentation
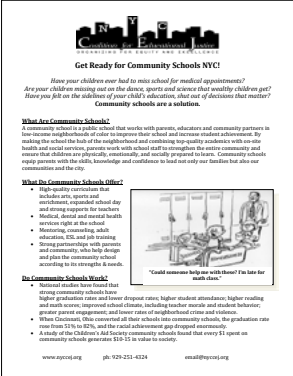
APPENDIX C
Community Schools Info Sheet
(in English and Spanish)

4   Seek Out Potential Partners

Talk to a lot of people about community schools and learn about the range of projects and initiatives that could be integrated into the school. Begin with conversations with the school's teachers, principal, and superintendent. Next, reach out to local politicians, hospitals, health clinics and non-profit organizations to make a list of the organizations in your community that might want to offer services to families in your school. Set meetings with these organizations and describe your vision for creating a community school. Ask them if there are simple ways that they can partner with your school, to make

services more available to families. Bring the results of these conversations back to your core team to see which ones they want to pursue.

Also, continue to recruit additional parents to participate in the visioning and planning process. Hold additional community meetings to continue visioning and discussing the priorities for the community school.

5   Create a Vision and Choose Your Program Priorities

- Find someone in your community who is experienced in designing programs to help you conduct a needs assessments and asset map for your community school.

- Based on the survey, community-wide meetings, needs and asset mapping and available partnerships in your community, decide on community school priority programs. Feel free to look at case studies from other schools to get ideas.

A SAMPLE NEEDS ASSESSMENT PROCESS, INCLUDING SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUP INSTRUCTIONS, FOR TEACHERS, PARENTS AND STUDENTS IS HERE:
http://ilcommunityschools.org/images/FSCS%20Grant/ Community%20Needs%20Assessment%20-%20ALL.pdf

A SAMPLE TOOL TO DO ASSET MAPPING IS HERE:
http://ilcommunityschools.org/images/ New%20 Tools/Community%20Asset%20Mapping%20-%20 Overview%20&%20Resource%20As- sessment.pdf

A SAMPLE TRAINING THAT YOU CAN USE TO ENGAGE OTHERS IN HELPING YOU TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY IS HERE:
http://www.researchfororganizing.org/index. php?page=surveys#Tool33

6 Learn about Available Funding

It can be hard at first to find funding to support partnerships and build new programs at your school. Ask school staff, local organizations, and local politicians for support in finding and getting the funding. If you are not experienced at fundraising, you will need to enlist the help of someone who has experience with this, and you will need to engage school staff or skilled volunteers in preparing grant applications. If your school district does not have a funded community schools program, you may wish to review this toolkit's **Section 3: Fight for It!** to get ideas about how to advocate for this funding.

An Upcoming Federal Opportunity

Also, ask your school district leadership about **School Improvement Grant (SIG)** funding. Under a measure recently passed by Congress, struggling schools can use federal SIG dollars to fund proven models for comprehensively improving school performance. Community Schools are one such strategy. States must apply for this funding, and will be *submitting applications in January of 2015*. States then generally pass the funding to local school districts, which allocates it to struggling schools with strong turnaround plans.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FUNDING A COMMUNITY SCHOOL, SEE:

LOCAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
United Way
http://www.unitedway.org

STATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
Community Schools Resources
http://www.communityschools.org/policy_advocacy/state.aspx

FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
U.S. Department of Education
http://www2.ed.gov/programs/21stcclc/awards.html

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS RESOURCES
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/title1brief1.pdf

PRIVATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Role%20of%20Business%20and%20Foundation%20Leaders%20in%20Supporting%20Community%20Schools.pdf

7 Maintain a Long-Term Commitment

A community school cannot be built all at once. It requires ongoing commitment from leaders and partners and an ongoing study of ways to improve the school and continued work to maintain and build new community partnerships. The core team must continue to meet regularly to monitor, evaluate, adjust and expand the community schools plan even once the community schools is operating. A community school is a WAY of running a school, not a one time intervention or program. As a parent leader, one of the most important things you can do is to stay engaged and keep learning, and to pull more parents into the process with you. Work to make sure your core stakeholder group meets regularly to evaluate your efforts and improve them. Finally, make sure that new parents, of younger children in your school, have a way to become engaged and lead the effort, so that when you and your children move on, there are other parents to take your place. One way to think of this work is as a cycle:

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE:
http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/ AssetManager/parentsguide_BuildingCS.pdf

Bring together your core stakeholder group

Identify your school's strengths and weaknesses by gathering input and information

Set goals for what you want to achieve in your school and launch the programs you need to achieve them

Track your progress! Did you achieve what you wanted? What changes are needed?

SECTION 3

Fight for It!

For Parents, Community Organizations &
Policy Makers Who Want to Bring
Community Schools to Your Neighborhood,
School District or State
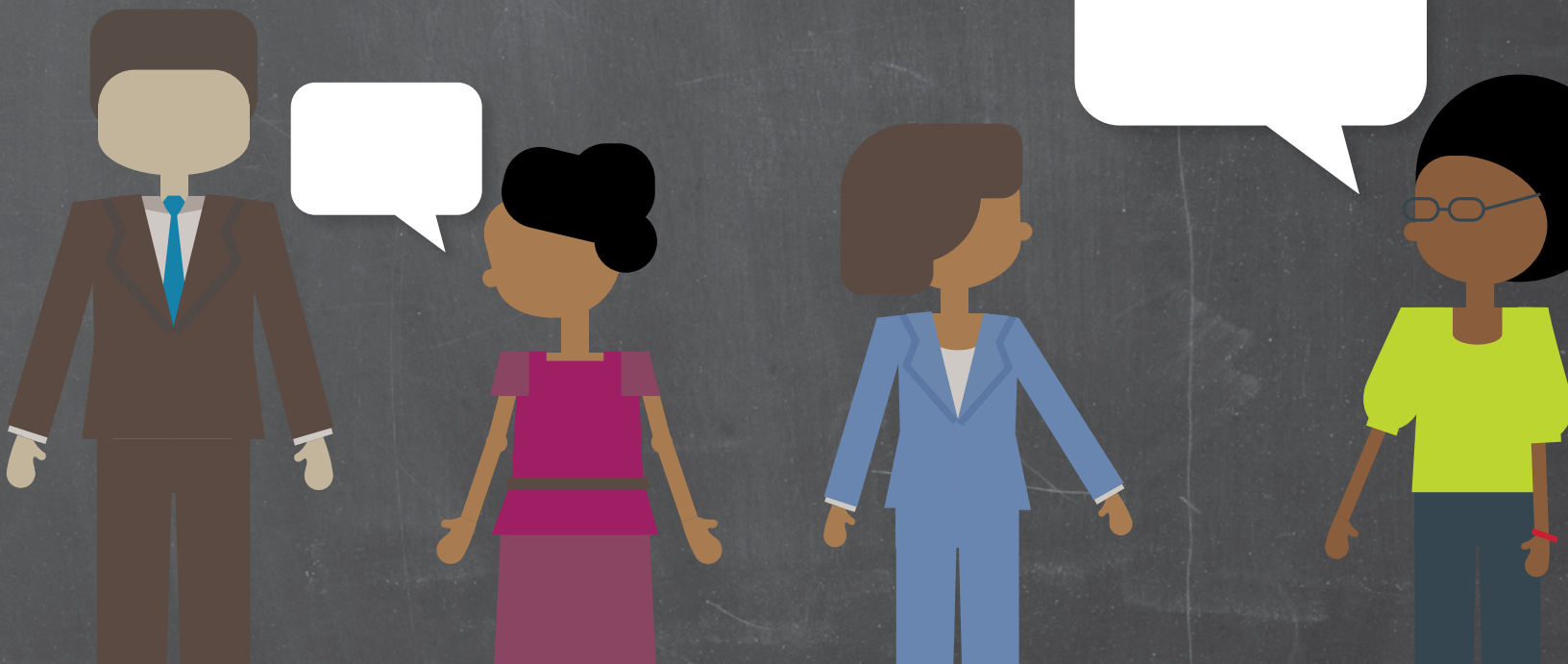
Community Organizations and Policy Makers have a critical role to play in making community schools a reality, especially in places where community schools initiatives don't yet exist or need to be expanded. This section includes sample tools, to advance Sustainable Community Schools as a key education reform.

HOW TO FIGHT FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

1. Build Your Base

2. Push Reforms at Several Levels:
    School District
    City
    State
    Funding

3. Use Additional Tools

1 Build Your Base

You can start by inspiring your organization's constituents about what community schools are and how they work.

- Host a workshop for parents and community members to learn about the concept, and share their ideas and questions. **A sample workshop is here (Appendix C)**.

- The following **Powerpoint (Appendix A)** in **English** or **Spanish** is useful in this workshop, or in other contexts.

- This **video** is also useful in this workshop, or for a quick introduction to the concept:

  https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=P8GaUJEP2h0

- The **following info one-pager (Appendix B)** in **English** or **Spanish** can be adapted to your location.

- One important action that participants in your workshop can take immediately is to gather **signatures on a petition (Appendix D)** in **English** or **Spanish** to expand community schools in your area.

One important role that parents can play in ensuring the implementation of a strong community schools initative in your locality is to focus on advocacy for Transformative Parent Engagement as a cornerstone of the intiative. Spend time with parent and community leaders learning about what **Transformative Parent Engagement (Appendix E)** means.

APPENDIX C
Sample Workshop Format

APPENDIX A
Community Schools Powerpoint Presentation

APPENDIX B
Community Schools Info Sheet (English and Spanish)

APPENDIX D
Community Schools Interest Petition (English and Spanish)

APPENDIX E
Transformative Parent Engagement

2 Push Reforms at Several Levels

Tools for Convincing Policy-Makers

Policy-makers want brief, well-researched arguments about the **impact** of community schools. The following two resources meet this need.

http://aplusnyc.org/wraparound-services/

http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Community%20School%20Results%202013.pdf

School District Change

School districts can do a great deal to advance community schools as a core reform strategy and are essential partners to local schools in implementing this strategy. One strategy you can pursue is to advocate with your School District Leadership to pass a community schools policy. The following two links are existing policies in major U.S. School Districts:

Cincinnati:

http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CincinnatiBoardPolicy.pdf

Hartford:

http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/HartfordCommunity_Schools_Policy.pdf

Community groups can also make recommendations regarding how to implement community schools in their school districts. Here is an example of a parent coalition's proposal to city leaders about how to build a community schools initiative and what it should include:

http://www.nyccej.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/cej-community-schools-brief.pdf

City level change:

City government officials who are not working within the school district can also do a great deal to elevate the need for community schools, advocate for a particular model for community schools, and drive resources to them.

Washington DC passed a resolution recently.

Here is a **template (Appendix F)** that you can use to draft a community schools resolution in your city

State Level Change

State governments are highly influential in school financing, and can do a great deal to advance a community schools agenda. The **template legislation here** can be tailored and modified by state elected officials, in partnership with community groups who can advocate for its passage:

Federal Funding Advocacy

In January 2015 states can apply for millions of dollars in aid for struggling schools, and these funds can be used to advance a community schools strategy. Policy-makers at the state level, at the city level and at the district level can use information about the SIG program and about this possibility for using SIG dollars. To participate in this advocacy, please contact us at **communityschools@populardemocracy.org.**

3   **Additional Tools**

Many community groups have elevated the need for community schools by documenting the educational context in their communities. Some samples of these reports are here:

Pittsburgh:

http://www.gpspgh.com/storage/documents/gps_comm-based_plan_revised_final.pdf

Newark:

https://drive.google.com/viewerng/viewer?url=http://www.brickcitylive.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/The-Newark-Promise.pdf&chrome=true

Philly:

http://www.pft.org/docs/PCAPS%20Community%20Education%20Plan.pdf

And the following reports have some helpful additional information about school closures and school financing:

http://www.otlcampaign.org/blog/2014/05/21/death-thousand-cuts-racism-school-closures-and-public-school-sabotage

http://www.otlcampaign.org/reports/raising-revenue

Appendices

New York City Coalition for Educational Justice

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nyccej.org

Center for Popular Democracy

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THE **POPULAR**
CENTER **DEMOCRACY**
FOR

802 Kent Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11205

11 Dupont Circle, NW #240
Washington, DC 20036

347-915-0432

populardemocracy.org