

**COMMUNITY SCHOOLS TO IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS AND CHILD WELL-BEING
NOVEMBER 2019¹**

In 2018, 408 New Mexico schools (47%) were identified by the PED as “high poverty,” because 80% or more of their students live in low-income families. Conditions associated with poverty—including food insecurity, housing and employment instability, and inadequate health care—create barriers to learning. In high-poverty communities, the negative effects of these barriers are compounded by fewer learning resources, opportunities, and support, both in and out of school. As a result, students in high-poverty schools perform far less well than those in other schools.²

Schools alone cannot “fix” poverty. However, Community Schools is a research-based strategy for mitigating the educational disadvantages associated with poverty and improving students’ attendance, behavior, and achievement by making schools the hub of community resources.

This memo offers seven recommendations to build on New Mexico’s prior support for Community Schools. They focus on creating the capacity and infrastructure required for the state to employ the strategy for sustainable school improvement statewide. These recommendations include ensuring sufficient resources, blending and braiding multiple state and federal programs and funding, technical assistance for full implementation, and accountability.³

THE POLICY GOAL: Build and sustain a system of fully implemented Community Schools that increase school success and child well-being in high-poverty communities.

Community Schools are built with four pillars—integrated health and social supports, expanded learning time and opportunities, strong family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practice—in a way that meets community needs and uses community assets. Together, these pillars (depicted below) provide more than “wrap-around” services.⁴

Like every good school, Community Schools must have a foundation of powerful teaching of challenging academic content and support for students’ mastery of 21st-century competencies. Community Schools also create opportunities to enrich teaching and learning during the school day by aligning out-of-school time and the real world of communities to classroom instruction.

National research shows that, when the Community Schools pillars are implemented fully, they reduce gaps in students’ learning opportunities, improve students’ outcomes, create more positive school climates, and build trusting relationships among adults and children that are crucial for learning.⁵ Cost analyses find a return on investment ranging from \$3 to \$15 for every dollar spent, accruing from less grade retention, lower dropout and higher graduation rates, and, in the long term, higher wages and taxpayer savings from higher employment and lower incarceration rates.⁶

What the Four Pillars of Community Schools Look Like in Action



New Mexico has acted on the promise of Community Schools. Partnerships in Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces have created more than three dozen Community Schools—some with impressive results. A 2019 LESC evaluation found that, on average, Community Schools in operation for more than 5 years showed better growth in student achievement growth than other district schools (most frequently in reading), even though their student populations included far more students from low-income families, students with disabilities, and English learners.⁷ Although state data do not permit assessing the impact on other key outcomes, local evaluations using district and school data show higher attendance, course grades, and graduation rates, as well as positive impacts on student behavior and well-being.⁸

Notably, however, New Mexico’s Community Schools vary considerably in the extent and quality of their implementation and, as a consequence, in their achievements.⁹ The state’s 2013 Community Schools Act allowed any public school to become a Community School, but the state provided no funding or other support for high-quality implementation and sustainability. Many schools that offer important social supports struggle, in the absence of resources, capacity, and technical assistance, to make improved teaching and learning a core part of the strategy. Moreover, the supports and interventions that do exist are not fully integrated into the public education system. Nearly all are voluntary, funded by philanthropy and charities, or dependent upon informal partnerships. Although these are important elements of Community Schools, their sustainability requires that they also are part of a guaranteed public infrastructure supported by public resources.

In response, the New Mexico Legislature’s 2019 amendments to the Community Schools Act and \$2M appropriation establish a stronger Community Schools framework, require that schools be guided by local assessments of community needs and assets, and provide \$2M that in FY20 will be funding 26 planning and 6 implementation grants—less than a third of the 111 applications. Additionally, other newly funded policies—K-5+ and Expanded Learning Time—support the Community Schools pillar focused most directly on improving teaching and learning. Despite these good steps, however, much remains to be done.

Recommendation 1: The Legislature should allocate additional, ongoing, targeted funding to supplement other related state and federal funding, so that all high-poverty schools become comprehensive Community Schools.

The Legislature should expand the existing Community Schools grants program to include all high-poverty schools (408 schools in 2018). One-year planning grants of \$50K and ongoing implementation grants of \$150K/year would ensure that each Community School has a full-time, highly qualified Community School coordinator, who, together with the principal, leads the planning and implementation of the four-pillar Community Schools strategy. Districts should designate a portion of their at-risk funding from the SEG (\$113M in FY20); their federal ESSA Title I funding (\$129M in FY18); and, for eligible schools, Title I school improvement funding and Title IV 21st Century Learning Community Center grants (\$4.7M in FY18) to match these state Community Schools grants. This expansion of grants to all high-poverty schools could be rolled out statewide over 5 years, after which state support should be permanent.

Recommendation 2: The PED should prioritize for Community Schools grant funding schools that implement K5+ and Expanded Learning Time programs and those schools identified as “priority” (schools eligible for school improvement support under ESSA).

Expanded Learning Time and Opportunity is the pillar that integrates teaching and learning into the Community Schools approach and most directly affects student achievement. The state-funded K-5+ and Expanded Learning Time programs provide substantial support for this pillar by adding days to the school year and supporting enriched after-school learning opportunities. Consequently, the first place that PED should provide Community Schools grants is high-poverty schools whose districts agree to use their funding for K-5+ and Expanded Learning Time to create instructional programs as part of a Community Schools approach—in effect, creating a school year with 205 instructional days and/or longer school days. Districts’ grant applications must propose comprehensive plans that incorporate evidence-based features of these state-funded programs (such as continuity between the additional and traditional instruction time) and include clear accountability mechanisms to document how K-5+ and Expanded Learning Time funds are spent and to monitor progress. These plans would include expanded learning opportunities for students and families offered in collaboration with relevant government agencies and nonprofit community partners provided after school.

Priority for Community Schools funding should also be given to schools whose “priority” status makes them eligible for school improvement funding under Title I of ESSA. Districts would adopt the Community Schools strategy as the evidence-based school improvement approach in those schools. District grant applications must propose comprehensive plans that integrate the evidence-based pillars of Community Schools.

Recommendation 3: Require districts and schools receiving Community Schools funding to submit comprehensive plans that implement the evidence-based pillars of Community Schools in culturally and linguistically responsive ways and in alignment with programs in their districts and schools funded under the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act and the Indian Education Act.

The PED should require each school receiving state Community Schools funds to submit a written plan detailing how the implementation of the Community Schools framework will be informed by a local needs and asset assessment; how the school will provide culturally and linguistically relevant communication between schools and families; how the school will leverage private, local, state, and federal funds; and how the school will establish and maintain partnerships with nonprofit organizations, faith- and community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, health-care providers, businesses, and other community organizations. The PED should require that districts and schools receiving Community Schools funding align their Community Schools approach with programs funded under the Bilingual Multicultural Education Act to support English learners and bilingual multicultural education programs (BMEPs) and programs funded under the Indian Education Act.

Recommendation 4: Require accountability for spending of state and local funds and sufficient data to monitor progress toward improved student opportunities and outcomes to enable oversight of Community Schools and to inform ongoing school improvement.

The PED should require that each school receiving state Community Schools funds conduct and submit an annual assessment on the progress of the programs and services of the Community School. That assessment should include metrics related to implementation and outcomes, such as 1) Community School culture and climate; 2) student academic achievement and community-based learning; 3) student attendance; 4) student behavior; 5) quality family engagement; and 6) for high schools, graduation rates and readiness for college or a career.

Recommendation 5: Create regional Community Schools support centers that provide technical assistance and capacity building to ensure high-quality implementation and sustainability across the state’s diverse locales and ensure sufficient PED support statewide.

To remedy the current gap in capacity and infrastructure for fully implemented Community Schools, the PED should establish and staff regional Community Schools support centers. These could be housed at the 10 Regional Education Cooperatives (RECs), within high-capacity districts, or at higher education institutions. The regional support centers would support Community Schools to fully implement all four components of the Community Schools framework in locally appropriate and culturally and linguistically responsive ways. This would include support for building local partnerships, blending and braiding funding across programs and agencies, reporting and accountability, professional development, and structured opportunities for districts and Community Schools to support one another to make high-quality teaching and learning the foundation of Community Schools.

Recommendation 6: Teacher and administrator preparation programs should develop and include curriculum and field experiences focused on the knowledge and skills for implementation, community collaboration, and using the Community Schools. This should include using the Community School strategy as a lever to improve teaching and learning in classrooms as well as beyond the traditional school day.

PED can develop and require that educator preparation programs include Community Schools “micro-credential” programs as part of pre-service and ongoing professional learning. Earning a micro-credential would certify that teachers and school leaders have obtained the capacity to lead local Community School development and serve as a Community School coordinator. This curriculum could be modeled after the National Education Association’s set of eight Community Schools Improvement Science micro-credentials designed to provide knowledge and skills available to implement a best practice version of the Community Schools strategy at any school.

Recommendation 7: The Governor’s Children’s Cabinet should be charged specifically with supporting Community Schools as hubs for aligned and coordinated programs and funding across relevant government agencies, thereby increasing access and efficiency and avoiding duplication of essential supports for children and families.

The Governor’s Children’s Cabinet includes PED, CYFD (including Juvenile Justice Services), Department of Health, Early Childhood Education and Care Department, Higher Education Department, Department of Workforce Solutions, Indian Affairs Department, and other agencies. As a body, it can facilitate information exchange, data sharing, and the blending and braiding of funding and initiatives to provide resources and support to Community Schools. Member agencies can locate services (and funding) for families and children at the school to address adverse out-of-school conditions in high-poverty communities (e.g., health, food distribution services, housing, public safety, immigration services, workforce programs, youth involvement). The Cabinet could adopt a set of shared indicators of progress and results in increasing educational success and child well-being, including agencies’ support for and engagement with Community Schools.

Recommendation 8: Create incentives for local nonprofit and business partnerships to ensure local participation and community-wide ownership.

A Statewide Task Force on School/Community Partnerships, with representation from business, mayors, and the nonprofit sector, should make recommendations and provide guidance to the PED and to the Community Schools Regional Support Centers (see Recommendation 5 above) about engaging partners to provide well-rounded educational opportunities and supports for student success through the Community Schools framework. This should include connecting middle and high school–level Community Schools with state and local efforts to develop college and career pathways, including by leveraging local and regional partners from key industry sectors, such as health care, agriculture, engineering, and construction.

¹ The Learning Policy Institute (LPI) conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, LPI connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system and support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child.

² Ladd, H. F. (2012). Education and poverty: Confronting the evidence. *Journal of Policy and Management*, 31(2), 203-227.

³ Four appendices to this memo provide a) examples of Community Schools policies in other states; b) a summary of the evidence of the need for and effectiveness of Community Schools in New Mexico; c) indicators of the readiness for Community Schools at scale in New Mexico; and d) details underlying cost estimates.

⁴ Low-income communities (including those with significant populations of Native American students and English learners) should be addressed first because, on average, they face the greatest need. However, the need for improvement and the benefits accruing with Community Schools extend beyond such communities.

⁵ Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, O. (2017) *Community Schools: An evidence-based school improvement strategy*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center.

⁶ Maier, et al. *Community Schools*, 2017.

⁷ Legislative Education Study Committee, Hearing Report, *Community Schools*, 2019.

⁸ See, for example, Communities in Schools New Mexico. (2019). *Summary of CIS of New Mexico data, metrics, and assessment*. Santa Fe, NM: Author; Jimenez, M., Dauphinee, T., & Damle, R. (2016). *Highlights from the ABC Community School Partnership Data Dashboard*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico.

⁹ Legislative Education Study Committee, Hearing Report, *Community Schools*, 2019.