



COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: TRANSFORMING STRUGGLING SCHOOLS INTO THRIVING SCHOOLS

The South Carolina Education Association (The SCEA) is pleased to submit recommendations to improve education opportunities in the state as a result of the *Abbeville v. the State of South Carolina* equity lawsuit.

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OVERVIEW

The South Carolina Education Association (The SCEA) is pleased to submit recommendations to improve education opportunities in the state as a result of the *Abbeville v. the State of South Carolina* equity lawsuit. Following the 3–2 decision that determined that South Carolina was failing to provide the poorest districts with enough funding to meet the constitutional standard of a minimally adequate education, the S.C. Supreme Court ordered lawmakers and the governor in the lawsuit to find ways to improve poor and rural schools. The court ordered the Legislature to work with representatives of those school districts to come up with a solution. And, in 2016, the federal Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law, requiring states and districts to employ school improvement strategies supported by evidence from studies that fall into Tiers 1-3. The S.C. Supreme Court order and the new ESSA law are opportunities to remodel South Carolina’s education strategy for all schools, including poor and rural schools. If lawmakers decide to utilize our recommended Community School strategy in South Carolina, they will join many other states that have turned the page on decades of inequity.

The SCEA has a well-deserved reputation for defending and protecting children, as well as public education in our state. With over 135 years of service, the organization is a part of the National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization. The NEA's 3 million members work at every level of education with affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

The SCEA utilized Kyle Serrette, Senior Policy Analyst at the NEA to assist in developing and presenting this proposal. As an expert in key school improvement policies, school districts across the country have adopted policies that he has helped draft. Serrette is a former member of the steering committee for the Coalition for Community Schools, is on the board of the Alliance of Reclaim Our Schools (AROS), serves on the steering committee for the Partnership for the Future of Learning, and is a Community School Advisory board member for the City of Newark. Serrette has almost 20 years of experience in public education.

OUR PROPOSAL

Community schools have been in existence since the early 20th century, with efforts to make urban schools, “social centers” serving multiple social and civic needs. Today, many school systems

have used them as part of community-wide investment initiatives and, in some areas, as way to save struggling schools.

The Community School strategy remodels schools by developing a deep and diverse understanding of an individual school’s needs and assets, uses improvement science to problem solve with key stakeholders, and forms strategic partnerships with businesses, non-profits, and various government agencies to meet the needs that are identified. The most transformational Community Schools explore the needs and assets of ***75 to 100 percent of students, families, community, and school staff*** with a focus on everything, including:

- 1) culturally relevant and engaging curricula
- 2) an emphasis on high quality culturally relevant teaching, not high-stakes testing
- 3) coordinated and integrated wraparound supports, such as health care and social and emotional services
- 4) positive discipline practices, such as restorative justice
- 5) parent and community engagement
- 6) inclusive school leadership committed to making the transformational Community School strategy integral to the school’s mandate and functioning.

The Community School strategy served as a remodeling instrument in Kentucky’s schools. In Adair County, in Columbia Kentucky, a school was experiencing a high rate of chronic absenteeism. Using the Community School strategy, 60 percent of students improved their attendance. In Campbellsville School District, another small Kentucky school district, a large number of elementary and middle school children’s reading assessment scores were in the 10th percentile. After using the Community School strategy to find a solution, 85 percent of the students who were scoring low increased their reading assessment scores. In Bath County School district (Kentucky), only 19th percent of kindergarten students tested ready for school. After using the Community School strategy to determine a solution, 46.3 percent of kindergarten students tested ready for school.¹

Community schools can be traced back to early 20th century efforts to make urban schools “social centers” serving multiple social and civic needs.² Today, many districts have turned to them as part of community-wide investment initiatives and, in some districts, as community members have demanded alternatives to closing struggling schools.

Rationale

Kentucky was selected as the community school model because it is a southern state that improved its education system in response to an equity lawsuit, similar to the current requirement for South Carolina.

In the 1980s, Kentucky had the most illiterate adult population in the country, with Appalachia at 48.4 percent. It was 43rd in the country in per-pupil education spending, 47th in per capita state and local spending, 49th in post-high school college enrollment, last in rates of adults having a high school diploma, and 48th in Education Week’s annual Quality Counts report of key education indicators.³ Today, Kentucky has risen to 27th in Education Week’s annual Quality Counts report, it has the 9th highest graduation rate and the 13th lowest high school dropout rate.⁴ One of the keys to Kentucky’s success has been the implementation of the Community School strategy (in 93 percent of their schools).⁵

In 1989, vast disparities existed across Kentucky, with local funding for schools ranging from as low as \$80 per pupil, to as high as \$3,716 per pupil across the state.⁶ At that time, the Kentucky State Department of Education was faced with a legal challenge. In *Rose v the Council for Better Education*, the State Supreme Court declared the “entire system of common schools” unconstitutional on the basis of inequity and inadequacy, and called on the General Assembly to establish an “efficient system of common schools.” It’s now been 25 years since the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) was passed. The 1990 law paved the way for a statewide effort not only to equalize funding across Kentucky’s highly diverse districts, but also as mechanism to remodel how their schools worked. ***In addition, the law provided for the reorganization of how funds were spent, and not the amount spent.*** The law allows school districts to access other state monies to support the Community School strategy, termed Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, or FRYSCs in Kentucky. The FRYSCs have been a key component of the new funding law’s success. The state-funded Division of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers initiates contracts with school districts for the FRYSC strategy and provides training and support for FRYSC coordinators and their staff. With FRYSC funds, local school districts now employ approximately 1,200 people in 98 percent of all eligible schools in Kentucky. There are more than 625,000 students enrolled in schools served by FRYSCs—roughly 93 percent of all public school students in the state.

Kentucky is not the only geography that has used the Community School strategy to achieve better results. In an area of Los Angeles plagued by poverty, there is a high school where 99 percent of graduates go to college; the city of Cincinnati was able to shrink its racial and socioeconomic achievement gap from 14.5 percent to 4.5 percent; in Texas, two schools located in Austin’s most high-poverty neighborhood went from the brink of closure to becoming two of the highest performing Title I schools in their city; a school in Baltimore went from being ranked 77th in the

city to 2nd; schools in Los Angeles, Austin, Baltimore, Kentucky, and many other places across the United States have achieved and sustained these results by adopting the Community School strategy.⁷

Research Supporting the Community School Strategy

According to the Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center, which published the brief *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement*, the following four research based strategies appear in Community Schools that have demonstrated positive outcomes:⁸

- 1) **Integrated Student Supports:** removing barriers to school success by connecting students and families to service providers or bringing those programs into the school addressing the reality that children whose families are struggling with poverty - and the housing, health and safety concerns that often go with it – cannot focus on learning unless their non-academic needs are also met
- 2) **Expanded Learning Time and Opportunities** – these take place before and after the typical school day and during the summer to augment traditional learning opportunities. Some include additional academic instruction and mentoring and others offer informal out of school learning experiences, emphasizing student centered, hands on, engaging experiences such as music, art, and athletics. Positive effects result from high quality programming when traditional instruction is taught by certified teachers and when they feature experiential learning activities. In other words, how the time is used, matters.
- 3) **Family and Community Engagement:** strategies include support for better parenting, communication between school and home, family volunteering, parents helping with learning at home, parents involved in school decision making and community organizing for school and district reform. Regular and consistent communication about the importance of education is the best way for parents to improve their children’s academic trajectories. Education reforms in communities of concentrated poverty must include broad based coherent approaches to include family, school and community resources.
- 4) **Collaborative Leadership and Practices:** Processes whereby parents, students, teachers and principals with different areas of expertise work together, sharing decisions and responsibilities toward a shared vision or outcome. Collaborative leadership impacts growth in student learning by increasing the capacity within a school for academic improvement. Collaborative school cultures are central to school improvement, the development of professional learning communities and the improvement of student learning.

The schools that have used the Community School strategy to transform themselves into thriving schools have achieved this by using four key mechanisms:

1. Creation of a new school **vision** based on a deep **needs and asset assessment** with school staff, students, parents and guardians, and the community.
2. Development of a **strategic plan** from the ground up which results in the creation of various problem solving teams dedicated to continuous improvement. The problem solving teams focus on 6 key **pillars** and other relevant areas:
 - i. Culturally relevant and engaging curricula;
 - ii. An emphasis on high-quality teaching, not high-stakes testing;
 - iii. Wraparound supports, such as health care and social and emotional services;
 - iv. Healthy school climate and positive discipline practices, such as restorative practices; Parent and community engagement; and
 - v. Inclusive school leadership committed to making the transformational community school strategy integral to the school’s mandate and functioning.
3. Hiring of a **Community School Coordinator** (CSC) that acts as the chief strategist for a school. The CSC implements #1 and #2. Importantly, the CSC doesn’t create the strategic plan, but facilitates a process with stakeholders.
4. Development of **a stakeholder board** that helps the school achieve the goals found within the strategic plan.

Community School Grants Program

The South Carolina Department of Education shall make \$25 million in grants available to plan and implement the Community School strategy at district-run schools within the geographic bounds of districts. A request-for-proposal (“RFP”) process must be used in awarding grants, and proposals shall be evaluated and scored on the basis of criteria, established by each district.

The South Carolina Department of Education shall establish an office of Community Schools that oversees all aspects of this proposal. The South Carolina Department of Education shall make grants of \$100,000 per year per school. The grant must first receive district approval before the South Carolina Department of Education can approve. Community Schools Operational Grants shall be for a term of five years and shall be renewable at the discretion of the South Carolina Department of Education. School districts must approve grantees within 45 days of receiving a grantee’s application; if the application that is submitted is not reviewed within 45 days, the plan will be considered adequate. The South Carolina Department of Education must approve grantees within 45 days of receiving a grantee’s application; if the application that is submitted is not reviewed within 45 days, the plan will be considered adequate and the grant will be approved and disbursed; if the application that is submitted by a grantee is deemed incomplete or inadequate, the South Carolina Department of Education must notify the grantee and provide support to the grantee to reach approval within 90 days of notice.

At the conclusion of each year under the grant term, each grantee, spearheaded by the Community School Coordinator and supported by the School Leadership Team, shall submit to the South Carolina Department of Education and make available at the school site and online, a report describing efforts to integrate community school programming at each covered school site and the impact of the transition to a sustainable community school on participating children and adults.

Reports submitted by grantees shall be evaluated by the South Carolina Department of Education

with respect to criteria developed by the South Carolina Department of Education. These criteria shall, include, but not be limited to the following:

No later than August 30th of the year following the first full year of operation of the Community School Grants Program and each year thereafter, the South Carolina Department of Education shall report to the Governor and the Legislature on the impact of the Sustainable Community Schools strategy. This report shall be made publicly available at covered school sites and on the South Carolina Department of Education website. All data featured in the report shall be made available in machine-readable formats.

- (a) This report shall include analysis and recommendations related to the potential to replicate the best practices of grantees in non-grantee public school.
- (b) This report shall include a calculation or estimate of cost-savings, including budget savings at the state, local and federal levels in areas such as public health, public safety and public education resulting from investment in community school programming.

Each Community School will employ a Community School coordinator (CSC) that will serve on the leadership team of the school.

All Community Schools will be required to undergo a 4-6 month needs/asset assessment process. The Community School coordinator will lead a process to develop a plan to engage at least 100 percent of all educators and staff, 75 percent of families, 75 percent of students, and community members/entities, which includes residents, non-profits, businesses, government entities, and civic associations. The Community School coordinator's role, at this stage, is to facilitate the successful implementation of plans to reach the stakeholder engagement goals, which includes working with the leadership team to find stakeholders that are able and motivated to achieve the engagement goals. It is not the primary role of the coordinator to conduct the needs/asset assessment with the individual members of stakeholder groups – stakeholder leaders should do that. All Community Schools will be required to do 1-on-1 interviews, focus groups, and surveys with all stakeholder groups. Each school will determine the depth of stakeholder engagement and how to use those strategies to accomplish their engagement goals. Every 7 years Community School will be required to conduct a new needs/asset assessment as outlined above.

The Community School coordinator will then work with those stakeholders to form problem solving teams dedicated to finding solutions to the problems found in the needs/asset assessment process and will coordinator the work of the teams. The teams will use the [Deming Cycle](#) improvement science instrument, also known as the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) Cycle, for pursuing solutions or an equivalent problem solving methodology. As solutions come into focus, the CSC will work to form partnerships with non-profits, government entities, businesses, universities, health care entities, faith organizations, and other entities to strategically fill needs. All partnerships will be memorialized with an MOU between the school, the district, and the entity.

Resources

Over the past decade, Congress has dedicated funding for several programs that support community schools, and ESSA provides more funding than did NCLB. These programs include ESSA-authorized Full-Service Community Schools, 21st Century Community Learning Centers that use community-school partnerships to address out-of-school learning barriers and improve schools, and Promise Neighborhoods.

- Title I (\$15 billion)
 - Allowable uses: community school coordinator, coordination of school and community resources
- Title IV
 - 21st Century Community Learning Centers (\$1 billion)
 - Allowable uses: Afterschool programming, community school coordinator,
 - Student Support and Academic Enrichment (\$1.6 billion)
 - Allowable uses: Dollars can go to Community School Coordinators and various other uses.
 - Full Service Community Schools (\$5 million)
 - FSCS is administered via a competitive grant process. School districts and schools and Community School coordinators apply to federal government

CONCLUSION

The SCEA's recommendation for the use of the community school concept to improve education in our state is based on evidence-based programs that have provided outstanding results in all the environments that have used it. With South Carolina's recent ranking of 50th in education by U.S. News and World Report, we must make substantial investments now to provide for the state's children and all of our long term financial stability.

While community schools are not a new concept, its current utilization has helped urban and rural areas transform their education systems to provide results that are best for all its students. Studies have indicated that a positive return on investment of \$10 to \$15 for every dollar invested is something we can expect. The returns derive from improvements in education, employment, health outcomes, as well as reductions in crime and welfare.

The SCEA looks forward to continued dialog on using community schools to help improve South Carolina. We stand ready to partner with the South Carolina General Assembly on this important endeavor.

Appendix

1. Learning Policy Institute and the National Education Policy Center, which published the brief *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement* http://www.greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Oakes-Community-Schools.pdf
2. Kentucky FRYSC Impact ReportSpotlightchfs. www.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/560826CF-9C34-46B3-947B-9988A763558E/0/ImpactReportSpotlight2016.pdf

Endnotes

¹ <http://chfs.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/560826CF-9C34-46B3-947B-9988A763558E/0/ImpactReportSpotlight2016.pdf>

² Rogers, J.S. (1998). Community schools: Lessons from the past and present. Unpublished manuscript. Kirp, D.L. (2011). Kids first: Five big ideas for transforming children’s lives and America’s future. New York, NY: Public Affairs.)

³ Day, Richard E. and Ewalt, Jo Ann G., “Education Reform in Kentucky: Just What the Court Ordered” (2013). Curriculum and Instruction Faculty and Staff Scholarship. Paper 34. http://encompass.eku.edu/ci_fsresearch/34

⁴ http://www.communityschoolsintitute.org/uploads/1/0/1/9/101990890/community-schools-report_e.pdf

⁵ http://www.communityschoolsintitute.org/uploads/1/0/1/9/101990890/community-schools-report_e.pdf

⁶ William H. Hoyt, An Evaluation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act., http://cber.uky.edu/Downloads/kentucky_education_reform_act.htm

⁷ http://www.communityschoolsintitute.org/uploads/1/0/1/9/101990890/community-schools-report_e.pdf

⁸ http://www.greatlakescenter.org/docs/Policy_Briefs/Oakes-Community-Schools.pdf