

Community Schools: An Overview of the Evidence

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Community schools can improve student outcomes and reduce racial and economic opportunity gaps, but implementation matters.

Effective community schools have four research-based components:¹

- 1) Integrated student supports** are wraparound services that address out-of-school barriers to learning, such as health and human services, job training, housing assistance and nutrition programs. These supports can address students' non-academic needs and cultivate trusting relationships.
- 2) Expanded learning times and opportunities** can involve afterschool, summer, and weekend programs that augment learning during the school year. These opportunities can provide additional time for students to learn, individualized support and mentoring, and real-world learning that helps students build connections with their communities.
- 3) Family and community engagement** can build stronger, trusting relationships with parents and families. Family engagement strategies include involving parents and communities in school-level decision-making, actively involving parents in their child's learning (e.g., homework help, volunteering), and providing adults with educational opportunities (e.g., computer skills).
- 4) Collaborative leadership and practice** is when teachers, staff, and others collectively make decisions and share responsibility around a shared vision of student learning. Strategies for fostering collaborative leadership include site-based leadership teams and teacher learning communities.

Community schools can lead to improvements in several student outcomes outlined in the Maryland Blueprint.²

Most research on community schools finds statistically significant, meaningful improvements in students' academic outcomes (e.g., GPA, test scores, high school graduation) and behavioral outcomes (e.g., attendance). A research synthesis of 143 studies found that the evidence base for community schools meets all criteria of rigor required by the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Some research studies find that community schools are a promising strategy for reducing racial and economic opportunity gaps.³

Community schools typically serve low-income and students of color. Existing research also identifies some community school models that successfully reduced opportunity gaps (e.g., City Connects in Boston Schools). This research suggests that community schools may close opportunity gaps for low-income families, dual-language learners, and students with disabilities.

Existing research on community schools' economic returns, although limited, suggests a positive return on investment.⁴

Schools providing wrap-around services and other supports provide social value and economic benefit that range from \$3 to \$15 for every dollar invested.

Research on community schools in Maryland is promising but limited.⁵

Recent quantitative evidence on Baltimore community schools finds mostly positive behavioral outcomes, including higher attendance rates and lower chronic absence rates. Qualitative research in Baltimore finds that community schools provide academic, health, and social services to students and communities. Other qualitative research suggests that one area of growth is strengthening family engagement. However, more research is needed on Maryland community schools' impact and implementation outside of Baltimore.

High-quality implementation is linked to improved student outcomes; existing research provides guidance on implementation.⁶

Implement all four components of effective community schools: 1) Integrated student supports, 2) Expanded learning time and opportunities, 3) Active family and community engagement; and 4) Collaborative leadership and practices.

Establish a shared vision centered on teaching and learning. Align four components with teaching and learning goals. Out-of-school barriers to learning and classroom teaching and learning are both important.

High-quality implementation takes sustained investment and time. Building effective community schools may require ~3-5 years. Students benefit from sustained investment in in-depth wraparound services.

Community schools should be locally developed, owned, and adapted based on communities' strengths and needs. Community schools are not one-size-fits-all. Rather, schools can assess local assets and needs and guide what services and programs should be offered.

Shared decision-making and accountability around clear goals. Collaborative leadership teams made up of a community school director, site-based leadership teams, families and community members can use data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement.

Create a supportive district and state infrastructure that provides intentional, coordinated supports such as funding, resources, professional development and technical assistance. States can build technical assistance systems that use differentiated supports to build staff capacity around implementation.

Methods for Rapid Evidence Review

We searched online databases for research on community schools. We prioritized systematic reviews and meta-analyses, because they condense a large body of research and mitigate bias from single studies. As necessary, we also reviewed individual studies. We also prioritized recent evidence in the last ten years.

References

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