Office of Research and Education Accountability

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Community Schools in Tennessee

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Key points

- Community schools are public schools that form partnerships with community organizations and use additional staff to meet the educational, physical, and emotional needs of economically disadvantaged students, families, and communities. Students and families are connected through community schools to a broad range of services, including food and clothing assistance, mental health treatment, academic enrichment, and adult education.
- OREA identified at least 100 community schools in the Achievement School District, Metro Nashville Public Schools, Hamilton County Schools, Knox County Schools, and Shelby County Schools. Seven community school providers coordinate services to students and their families in these schools.
- OREA identified six common elements that make up the community school operational model: wraparound services, a community school provider, a site coordinator, regular needs assessments, community partnerships, and integration within the school.
- Tennessee law outlines parameters for a community school grant program, but no funding has been allocated for the grant, and no other state funding is specifically dedicated for community schools. Community schools combine public funding from local, state, and federal sources with support from private sources to cover their operational costs.
- The lack of a common evaluation framework used by all community schools, the absence of uniform and consistent data, and the variation among the state's community schools in length of operation, goals and priorities, and data tracking prevented OREA from drawing definitive conclusions about whether all community schools in Tennessee have met their educational and community goals.
- Many national studies have found positive effects associated with community schools. National research shows that community schools can have positive effects on academic outcomes such as math and English/language arts (ELA) achievement, student behavior such as disciplinary incidents, and the physical and mental health of students.
- More research on community schools is necessary, especially in Tennessee, where many community schools are too early in the implementation phase to fully determine the effects they have on students, families, and communities.
- OREA's report considers several best practices for community schools such as broad-based support for the community school model from all school staff, meaningful and strategic partnerships between the school and community organizations, and tracking data on community school performance.

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Introduction

Community schools are public elementary or secondary schools that form partnerships with community organizations and use additional staff to meet the educational, physical, and emotional needs of economically disadvantaged students, their families, and the community. Initiated and implemented at the local level, community schools have existed in Tennessee for several years. As of the 2018-19 school year, there are at least 100 community schools in Tennessee. Rigorous evaluations conducted on community schools in other states, coupled with examples and self-reported data from Tennessee's community schools, indicate that the community school model may improve outcomes for students and families.

Public Chapter 968 (2014) established the framework for a community schools grant program for school districts that planned to form community schools. The law stipulates the minimum components that schools must have to qualify for the grant and the criteria that each grant recipient must meet to remain eligible. The General Assembly has not appropriated funding for the grant program. The law also required the Comptroller's Office of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) to study the formation and operation of community schools, examine whether community schools have met their educational and community goals, and identify best practices that can be replicated by other school districts and schools interested in the community school model. Specifically, the law required OREA to examine whether community schools have improved four separate outcomes:

1. Student learning
2. Family engagement with the schools and the communities
3. School effectiveness in decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate
4. Physical and mental health of the students and other members of the community

OREA used these four outcomes to examine the national research on community schools and to study and report on the effect that community schools have on Tennessee's students and families. OREA drew conclusions about the formation and operation of community schools and replicable best practices but could not draw full and comprehensive conclusions about whether all community schools in Tennessee have met their educational and community goals. The lack of a common evaluation framework used by all community schools, the absence of uniform and consistent data, and the variation among the state's community schools in length of operation, goals and priorities, and data tracking prevented such conclusions from being drawn at this time. In response, OREA developed policy considerations that address the barriers to conducting a full evaluation of community schools.

This report is organized into the following sections:

- **Defining community schools, their formation, and their operational models** – Using definitions from state and federal law, coupled with observations from

interviews and site visits, OREA defined community schools, explained why they are formed, and identified common elements that most community schools share.

- **Findings from national research and Tennessee's community schools** – Drawing from national research, site visits, and data from community schools in Tennessee, OREA examined the effect that community schools have on student learning, family engagement with schools and communities, decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate, and the physical and mental health of students and other members of the community.
- **Best practices** – OREA identified best practices that can be adopted by schools considering the community school model.
- **Policy considerations** – OREA offers policy considerations related to the collection of data by community school providers and schools and how community schools could be evaluated.

OREA's methodological approach

OREA conducted a review of national studies on the effect of community schools on student learning, family engagement with schools and community, school effectiveness in decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate, and the physical and mental health of the students and other members of the community. OREA also examined community school operations at all levels: the state level, the provider agency that funds and implements the community school model within a school, and the individual school level.

State level –OREA identified at least 100 community schools operating in Tennessee in 2018. Using definitions from state and federal law, coupled with observations from interviews and site visits, OREA defined community schools, and identified common elements that most community schools share. These common elements make up the community school operational model, detailed in Exhibit 2.

Public Chapter 968 (2014) tied a state-level accountability framework for community schools to a grant program, specifying minimum components that community schools must have to qualify and criteria they must meet to remain grant eligible. The law also specified services that community schools may offer, including primary medical and dental care, and listed goals that community schools may have, including improving academic outcomes and reducing chronic absenteeism.

Although the law required that community schools maintain measurable data and complete periodic evaluations, the law did not specify a state-level evaluation framework, including evaluation methods, data, and outcomes that community schools must track.[1] Most community schools track some outcomes related to students and families, but without a common evaluation framework, schools examine different outcomes and track different data, often in response to

goals that are unique to certain schools. The lack of consistent data and common outcomes of interest prevented OREA from conducting a comprehensive state-level evaluation of community schools.

Community schools are also difficult to evaluate at the state level because there are inconsistencies in the length of implementation. Some Tennessee community schools implemented the community school model for one or two years and then discontinued the model due to changes in administration or funding. For example, Glencliff High School in Nashville was awarded the 2011 National Community Schools Award of Excellence and served as a model for a district-wide community schools initiative, but it is not an official community school under Nashville's Community Achieves framework.

Provider level – OREA identified seven community school providers operating in Tennessee in 2018. Community school providers, detailed in Appendix B of the report, are school districts or nonprofit community organizations that fund and implement the community school model in one or more public schools. In Tennessee, community school providers work with as few as one and as many as 33 community schools. OREA interviewed all seven community school providers in the state, and noted differences in formation, operation, and organizational goals.

- Agape Child and Family Services, Memphis
- Community Achieves, Nashville
- Communities in Schools, Memphis and Nashville
- Great Schools Partnership, Knoxville
- Hamilton County Opportunity Zone, Chattanooga
- Northside Neighborhood House, Chattanooga
- University-Assisted Community Schools, Knoxville

OREA identified several limitations to evaluation at the provider level. First, similar to state-level limitations, it is difficult to compare providers because they all set different goals and priorities and may not track the same outcomes. For example, Communities in Schools, a provider that operates 33 community schools in Nashville and Memphis, focuses on reducing chronic absenteeism, while Community Achieves, a district-led community school provider that operates 19 community schools in Nashville, focuses on outcomes like family engagement and health and wellness. Providers set goals and collect data in part in response to the organizations that fund them; thus, the specific goals of Tennessee's community schools differ from one another.

School Level – OREA conducted site visits at 17 community schools in Davidson County, Hamilton County, Knox County, and the Achievement School District in Shelby County. Across the state, OREA identified examples of community schools addressing the four outcomes specified in state law as well as best practices for schools or districts interested in the community school model. See Appendix A: Interviews and site visits.

OREA identified several evaluation limitations at the school level. First, it is difficult to evaluate how well individual schools have implemented the community school model. Though most community schools in Tennessee have the common elements in place that make up the model, it is difficult to measure the quality of those elements. For example, a school may have many community partners, but it may be difficult to measure the effect some of the programs and services have on student outcomes.

Additionally, many community schools and community school providers do not track and evaluate student, family, and community outcomes in a way that allows a causal link to be made between the services and supports provided through the community schools model and measurable outcomes. For example, multiple community schools visited by OREA track student attendance to determine the effect their services have on reducing chronic absenteeism. However, few schools or providers compare attendance rates for their community school to a comparable control group, such as a similar school that has not implemented the community school model. Without this type of rigorous evaluation, it is not possible to confidently conclude whether the effects noted by community schools are caused by the community school, outside factors, or random chance.

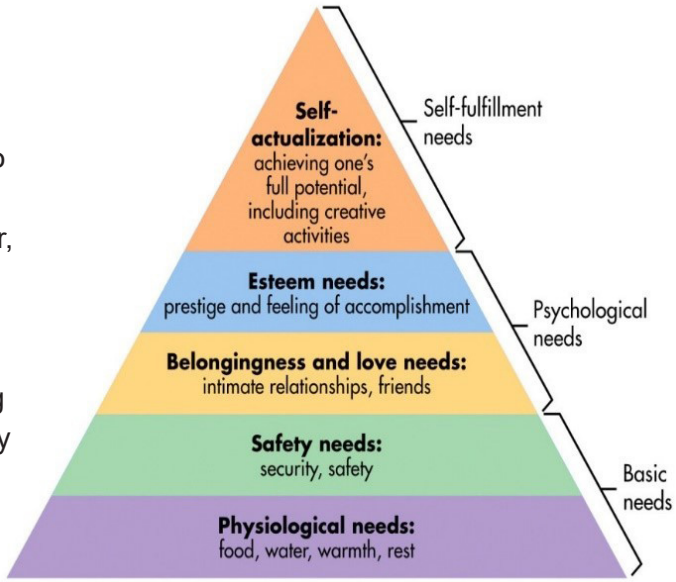
Section 1: Defining community schools, their formation, and their operational models

Community schools operate under the philosophy that before children can be ready to learn, their physical and emotional needs must be met. Community schools provide students and families with additional support with the goal of removing barriers to learning.[2] As of 2017, approximately 35 percent of Tennessee's students are economically disadvantaged. Often, children whose families struggle with poverty experience issues such as lack of food, unstable housing and homelessness, and chronic illnesses, all of which contribute to chronic stress that impacts children's ability to learn and succeed in school.[3] See Exhibit 1.

Research shows that children's exposure to very negative experiences can lead to poor learning outcomes and behavioral challenges. Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, may include abuse (e.g., physical, emotional, or sexual), neglect, or household dysfunction (e.g., violence, incarcerated relatives, and substance abuse). Some newer studies also classify chronic economic hardship and social exclusion by peers to the list of ACEs that impact a child's mental and physical development. In Tennessee, approximately 31 percent of children have parents who lack secure employment, compared to 28 percent nationally. Children who are at or below the poverty line are more than twice as likely as their more affluent peers to have had three or more adverse experiences (excluding chronic economic hardship).[4] Children who experienced two or more adverse childhood experiences were over 2.5 times more likely to repeat a grade in school compared to children without such experiences.[5]

Exhibit 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Student Learning

The early 20th century psychologist Abraham Henry Maslow is best known for developing the "Hierarchy of Needs" concept, wherein human physical and emotional needs are categorized into a hierarchy. Maslow's theory stated that lower-order physiological and safety needs – food, water, shelter, sleep - must be met before a person can achieve one's full potential. Applied to schooling, it is essential for students' basic needs to be met so that they can more effectively focus on learning and succeeding in school. Tennessee's community schools aim to address students' basic needs so that unmet physical and emotional needs do not impede learning.



Community schools offer a range of resources and services to help students and families overcome these barriers, including food, clothing, medical care, mental health treatment, adult education, family engagement programming, and academic enrichment. By using these supports to remove and reduce barriers to learning, community schools enable teachers and administrators to focus on meeting the academic needs of students through teaching and learning. A student whose physiological and safety needs are met is more likely to come to school prepared to focus on learning.

The formation and operation of community schools

Most community schools are formed because a school principal or other educational leader recognizes that a school enrolls a sizeable population of economically disadvantaged students who may need and benefit from additional resources and supports. Many of the resources and supports provided by community schools – though available through outside agencies at other locations in a community – may be most effectively provided in a school because schools are most often centrally located within a community, students are required by law to attend, and many parents and family members may regularly visit.

Because the decision to adopt a community school model is made by school leadership at the local level, objectives and strategies often vary by community school. For example, a school that serves a population of students and families experiencing high levels of homelessness and lack of food may choose to focus primarily on services that address housing and food insecurity. Another school with a high percentage of students who are chronically absent may choose to focus on decreasing high rates of absenteeism through mentoring programs and academic enrichment opportunities before, during, and after school.

The community school operational model

Based on research, site visits, and interviews, OREA identified six common elements that most community schools share. These common elements make up the community school operational model. This section defines each of the six elements listed and provides examples from community schools:

- community school provider
- wraparound services
- site coordinator
- regular needs assessment
- meaningful community partnerships
- integration within the school

Exhibit 2: Community school operational model

Both nationally and in Tennessee, community schools are public schools that choose to partner with a **community school provider**. Community school providers are nonprofit organizations or divisions within a district's central office that fund and implement the community school operational model in one or more public schools. In Tennessee, community school providers serve as few as one and as many as 18 community schools in a district.

Tennessee's community school landscape is diverse. As of the 2018-19 school year, OREA identified and interviewed the seven community school providers in the state. Each operator has a unique mission, diverse methods, and different goals. See Exhibit 3.

Community schools provide a variety of student and family-centered programs, often referred to as **wraparound services**, to some or all students within a school, their families, and the community. Wraparound services target barriers to learning and promote academic success by meeting the holistic needs of students, from health, safety, and housing needs outside of school, to academic and enrichment needs within school.[6] Services can include primary health, mental health, and dental care; family engagement activities and adult education; academic enrichment such as tutoring or clubs; extended learning time; mentoring; or postsecondary education and career option awareness.[7]

Exhibit 3: Tennessee's community school providers

Community School Provider	Districts Served	Organizational Type	Number of Schools	Primary Focus
Agape Child and Family Services	• Achievement School District (Memphis) • Shelby County Schools	Nonprofit	15	Full wraparound
Community Achieves	Metro Nashville Public Schools	District-led	19	Full wraparound
Communities in Schools	• Achievement School District (Memphis) • Metro Nashville Public Schools • Shelby County Schools	Nonprofit	16 (Memphis) 17 (Nashville)	Chronic absenteeism
Great Schools Partnership	Knox County Schools	Nonprofit	18	Full wraparound
Hamilton County Opportunity Zone	Hamilton County Schools	District-led	12	In progress
Northside Neighborhood House	Hamilton County Schools	Nonprofit	1	In progress
University-Assisted Community Schools	Knox County Schools	Nonprofit	1	After-school programming and supports

The community school provider implements the community school model in a school by paying for and staffing an employee, often referred to as a **site coordinator**. Site coordinators are responsible for connecting and partnering with outside organizations such as nonprofits, local and state agencies, businesses, churches, and other organizations that can provide wraparound services and programming to the school and community. Although most site coordinators in Tennessee are full-time, salaried employees hired by the nonprofit community school provider, there are two community school providers in Tennessee – Community Achieves in MNPS and the Hamilton County Opportunity Zone – where the site coordinator is an employee of the school district. Community schools in both these districts are funded and implemented by the district rather than a nonprofit community organization. In most cases, community schools have one site coordinator per school, but some nonprofit agencies, such as Agape in Memphis, employ a site coordinator for multiple grades in a high school.

Site coordinators in many Tennessee community schools have a background in social work or mental health and have established relationships with organizations that can provide services and supports to the students and their families. For example, the site coordinator at a community school in Nashville fostered a relationship with a local sports team that provided the funding necessary to build a new playground. The site coordinator also developed partnerships with local nonprofits like Big Brothers Big Sisters to staff a mentorship program for elementary

school students. One principal of a Tennessee community school expressed the benefits of having site coordinators hired by and reporting to the community school provider – as opposed to reporting to the principal as a regular school staff member – so that the coordinators can maintain autonomy and avoid being assigned roles and duties that are outside of their official roles and responsibilities by school officials.

For more information on Tennessee's community school providers, see Appendix B: Provider profiles.

Needs Assessment

Each school or community school provider has its own approach for conducting a needs assessment. Most schools use their School Improvement Plan (SIP) to inform the programs the school may implement in the upcoming year, but surveys or meetings are also common methods to collect information from students, faculty, families, and community members. The Great Schools Partnership in Knoxville found that engaged families are more likely to provide honest, helpful feedback. At community meetings, site coordinators provided families with "dollars" to vote on specific projects. Each attendee received a few "dollars" to spend on a list of priorities for the school, with more priorities listed than dollars available to implement them. Families voted for the programs and services they felt would be most needed while also connecting the limited amount of resources to the implementation.

Site coordinators work with school leadership to perform an annual **needs assessment** of students, families, the school, and the community. Needs assessments are an analysis of the data that the school has collected – attendance, discipline and behavior referrals, academic performance, and qualification for services such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). School leadership use the information from the needs assessment to communicate to their community school provider and site coordinators the supports and services that are needed by the students, parents, and faculty in the school. Tennessee schools are required by law to create an annual School Improvement Plan (SIP) that outlines specific goals for improvement;[8] many of the community school organizations in Tennessee use the school's SIP in addition to the needs assessment to inform the types of programs and services to be offered during the upcoming year. Schools often collect additional feedback from parents, faculty, students, and community members through surveys or meetings. For example, Communities in Schools surveys families three times each year to determine needs and collect feedback on previous efforts.

Site coordinators use the results of needs assessments to form **community partnerships** with nonprofits, local and state agencies, businesses, churches, and other organizations. Site coordinators ensure that the services, programs, and resources provided by community partnerships are aligned to specific needs identified in the school through the needs assessments and community outreach. Community partners can provide tangible items for students and families, such as weekend food bags, school supplies, toiletries, or clothing. Community partners can also provide volunteers for mentoring and tutoring programs, fundraising efforts, mental

health counseling, and staffing for clubs and programs. These partnerships form the foundation of community schools and allow schools to offer various services and supports to students without requiring teachers and administrators to devote time and energy away from instruction.

Community Partnerships

The Community Achieves site coordinator at one Nashville community school met an employee of a local company at a neighborhood association meeting and set up a time for the company's leadership to tour the school and discuss opportunities for partnership. The school saw the company as an excellent potential partner because of its capacity to provide volunteers and funding to support several community school initiatives. As of spring 2018, 45 volunteers from the company work with students each week in mentoring and tutoring programs. Additionally, the company sends volunteers to all school events, totaling roughly 150 individual volunteers from the company over the course of a year. Volunteers participate in school drives and provide donations to the school supply, clothing, and food closets. Volunteers have helped to fund field trips for students and have paid for enrichment programs, such as a music recording club and garden club.

The supports and services provided through community partnerships are **integrated throughout the whole school**, from the curriculum framework, to intentional scheduling, to services provided during school hours as well as before, after, and on weekends. While principals or other school leadership staff are often the initiators for a school choosing to adopt a community school model, successful implementation requires buy-in from all faculty and staff.

Curriculum framework: Pearl Cohn High School in north Nashville serves a uniquely disadvantaged population of students. The neighborhood in which the school resides has the highest incarceration rate in the country at 14 percent,[9] and in the last six years, 17 students have died from gun violence.[10] School administrators recognize the impacts that extreme poverty and violence have on students and have included a comprehensive social and emotional learning framework in the school curriculum. The framework incorporates preventive and restorative responses for students and their families including a trauma-informed staff who receive ACEs training, and designated spaces throughout the building for de-escalation and crisis management.

Intentional scheduling: Whitsitt Elementary School, a priority school in Nashville, created Power Mondays, a monthly event built into the school schedule that incorporates student enrichment opportunities provided by community partnerships. While students participate in enrichment opportunities during the school day, teachers attend professional development sessions or collaborate with other teachers to plan upcoming lessons. Partnerships with the Nashville Symphony expose students to classical music and instruments; other community partners provide sessions on robotics, golf, and yoga – programming that the school's students may not have access to outside of school.

Support during non-school hours: Several schools OREA interviewed noted the demand for before- and after-school care and programming. Red Bank High School

in Hamilton County is in the early stages of implementing a community school model, beginning with the hire of a part-time site coordinator by the Northside Neighborhood House for the school and the creation of "The Hub," an area in the school's library to provide after-school programming to students.

Some services provided by community schools are available to all students within a school building. These services or programs are usually short-term activities such as career fairs, clothing or school supply drives, financial literacy workshops for parents, and college preparation seminars for high school students and their families. Sometimes these whole school services are preventive, such as the adoption of a curriculum framework that adapts to the needs of students or trauma-informed training for faculty and staff at Pearl Cohn in Nashville.

In many cases, more intensive supports are targeted to specific cohorts of students. These students are often identified for additional support because they may be at risk of dropping out due to poor academic performance, a high absentee rate, or behavioral problems. Supports include individual and group counseling, tutoring, and after-school programs. For example, Communities in Schools targets students for support using attendance data, identifying those students who are chronically absent (e.g., students who have missed more than 10 percent of the school year) or those who are at risk of becoming chronically absent. The CIS site coordinators communicate with those students' parents and provide additional supports for those students – weekly check-ins, counseling, or academic support, such as tutoring or speaking with their teachers. Wooddale Middle School, an Achievement School District charter school in Memphis, decreased its absenteeism rate from 24 percent to 7 percent in 2017 following the implementation by the CIS site coordinator of incentives for case-managed students. Students with perfect attendance earned small celebrations such as a pizza party; every quarter, CIS provided a special breakfast to all students in the school with perfect attendance.

Students may also be targeted for extra support through a school-based referral process. Some community schools allow students to ask for assistance through the referral process, while others have a formal system where a teacher or other school staff can request a coordination of services for a student. For example, school staff as well as students at Pearl Cohn High School in Nashville may submit a referral form to the community school coordinator who, in turn, connects the student with the appropriate person or program. See Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4: Community Achieves collaborative referral process

Areas of concern (check all that apply):

___ At-risk teen behaviors	___ Academic performance	___ Alcohol/Substance abuse
___ Anger management	___ Attendance concerns	___ Bullying issues
___ Conflict resolution	___ Class conduct/attitude	___ Clothing needs
___ Dental needs	___ Food	___ Grief (loss of a friend/family)
___ Home Complications	___ Housing needs	___ Individual counseling
___ Job assistance	___ Abuse Issues	___ Personal hygiene
___ Pregnant/teen mother/father	___ Relational Disputes	___ Self-esteem
___ School supplies	___ Transportation	___ Language Services

Funding for community schools

Although Tennessee law outlines parameters for a community school grant administered by the Department of Education, no funding has been allocated to the grant, and no other state funding is specifically dedicated for community schools.[11] Community schools in Tennessee often combine local funding, state BEP funds, and federal dollars to cover the cost of implementing the community school model. While some community school providers may pay in full for the site coordinator position, some organizations may require the school district to contribute funds for the site coordinator. In-kind donations and financial contributions from community partners may help, but community schools also may contribute to the costs associated with additional staff for after-school programming, family engagement events, or supplies.

Title IV of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) contains two large block grants – Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants and Part B: 21st Century Community Learning Centers.[12] Within these two parts, districts and schools can allocate funding for programming related to a well-rounded education, improving school conditions, and after-school programming that complement the missions of community schools. For Antioch Middle School (AMS) in Nashville, a Community Achieves school, after-school programming funded through Title IV is an integral part of its community school model. AMS partners with community groups and businesses to provide a club for students that meets one hour every other week. The school offers clubs for martial arts, basketball, wrestling, cooking classes, robotics, music classes, and board games. The school uses Title IV funds to incorporate after-school programming to complement the clubs offered during the school day.

Districts may also use Title I funds for community school activities. Communities in Schools is expanding in Metro Nashville Public Schools by partnering with the district to use federal funds to expand the number of site coordinators in Nashville schools. The organization will use Title I set-aside dollars earmarked for parent and family engagement as well as matching funds from private donations to staff site coordinators in 26 schools in 2018-19.

Section 2: Findings from national research and Tennessee's community schools

State law directed OREA to examine whether community schools have improved four separate outcomes: student learning, family engagement with schools and the communities, school effectiveness in decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate, and the physical and mental health of students and other members of the community. Rigorous evaluations conducted on community schools in other states, coupled with examples and self-reported data from Tennessee's community schools, indicate that the community school model may improve these outcomes. For this section, OREA consulted a research compendium that compiled and categorized all studies conducted on the effects of community schools.[13] Only studies that exhibited experimental or quasi-experimental designs, or correlational studies that used

statistical controls for selection bias, were included.

This section summarizes national research on the effectiveness of community schools, and highlights instances where Tennessee's community schools have made progress toward goals related to student learning, family engagement with schools and the communities, decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate, and the physical and mental health of students and other members of the community.

Many studies have found positive effects associated with community schools, though some studies have found contradictory results or no results associated with community schools. In some cases, the most positive effects found by researchers studying community schools in other states were observed in schools that had fully implemented the community school model for longer time periods. More research on community schools is necessary – especially in Tennessee – where many community schools are too early in the implementation phase to fully determine the effects they have on students, families, and communities.

Student learning

National research shows that community schools can have positive effects on math and English/language arts (ELA) achievement, as well as other academic outcomes. For example, researchers studying City Connects, a community school provider in Boston, found that elementary, middle, and immigrant students who attended City Connects schools had higher academic achievement in math and reading when compared to peers in other public schools. Specifically, one study found that elementary school City Connects students with academic deficiencies caught up to (and in some cases outperformed) their peers in other public schools on standardized math and ELA tests after several years. Additional studies conducted on the Communities in Schools model found that case-managed students improved faster on reading and math tests, had higher GPAs, and completed more credit hours than their peers who were not in CIS cohorts. Notably, researchers studying the Harlem Children Zone's Promise Academy found that elementary and middle school students made academic gains in some subjects large enough to close the black-white achievement gap. Across the country, further research in Massachusetts, Iowa, and New York has found that community school models can lead to higher achievement in math and English language arts.

In Tennessee, OREA found only one example of an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation of the effect that community schools have on students' academic outcomes, as measured by standardized test scores. Knox County School's Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA) used a quasi-experimental design to examine the district's implementation and expansion of community schools in collaboration with the Great Schools Partnership, and the effectiveness of after-school services offered at the district's community schools, and published findings in a 2017 report.[14]

Researchers in Knox County focused on staff perception, student health, and academic outcomes at 11 community schools in the district to examine the district's implementation and expansion of community schools. Researchers found that student growth in math and reading in community schools were comparable to non-community schools and noted that reading growth was positive in 10 of the 11 sites. Researchers also found that students who attended community schools performed better than a control group of students on reading and math benchmark exams. Researchers found that students who participated in after-school tutoring performed better than the control group of students on academic benchmark exams, but the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant.

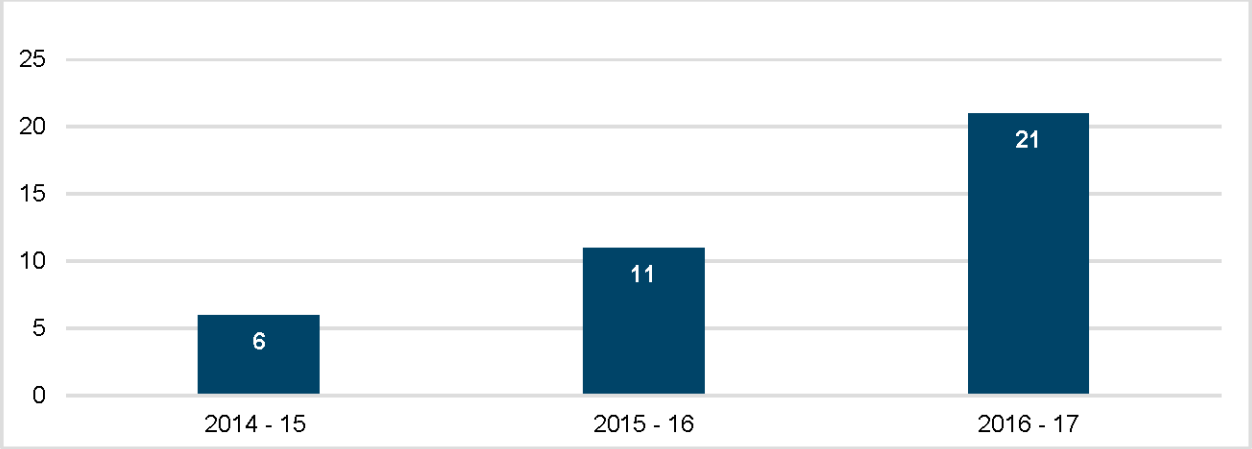
Many community schools in the state provide extracurricular experiences for students' academic enrichment. For example, Pond Gap Elementary, a community school in Knoxville, provides after-school enrichment programs in subjects like music, art, and physical education to a group of at-risk students. These after-school programs operate Monday through Thursday from 2:45-7:00 p.m. Whitsitt Elementary School, a priority school in Nashville, created Power Mondays, a monthly event built into the school schedule that incorporates student enrichment opportunities provided by community partnerships with organizations like the Nashville Symphony, which exposes students to classical music and instruments. Other community partners provide sessions on robotics, golf, and yoga – programming that the school's students may not have access to outside of school.

Family engagement with schools and community

OREA found only one national study that examined the effect community schools have on family engagement with schools and community. The study found that parents of students attending community schools in Baltimore reported school staff helped them connect more with community resources than did parents at other public schools. These parents were also more likely to report that school staff cared about their child. Most of the national studies on community schools and family engagement have focused on the effect that increased family and community involvement has on student outcomes. One study found that outreach by teachers to families of low-performing students in Title 1 schools consistently led to improved student achievement in reading and math. Another study on community schools in Redwood, California, found links between increased family engagement and higher student attendance, as well as higher achievement in math.

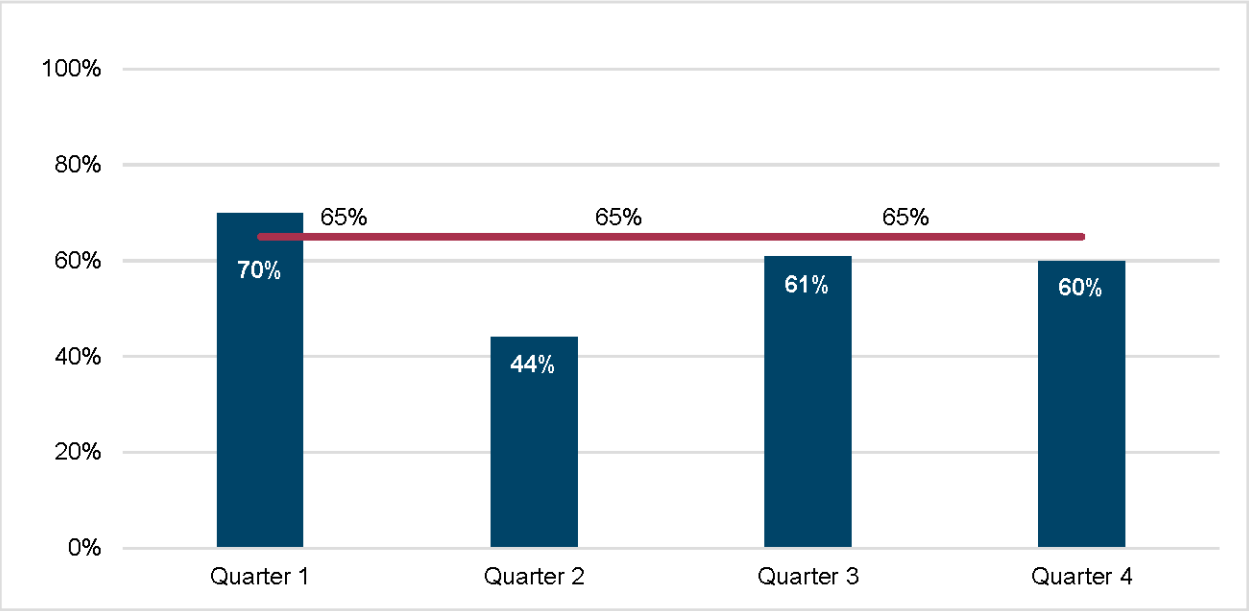
Some community school providers in Tennessee track the number of events to support family engagement. As Exhibit 5 shows, Buena Vista Elementary, a Community Achieves school in North Nashville, has increased the number of events to support family engagement since 2014.

Exhibit 5: Events to support family engagement, Buena Vista Enhanced Option Elementary, 2014-15 to 2016-17



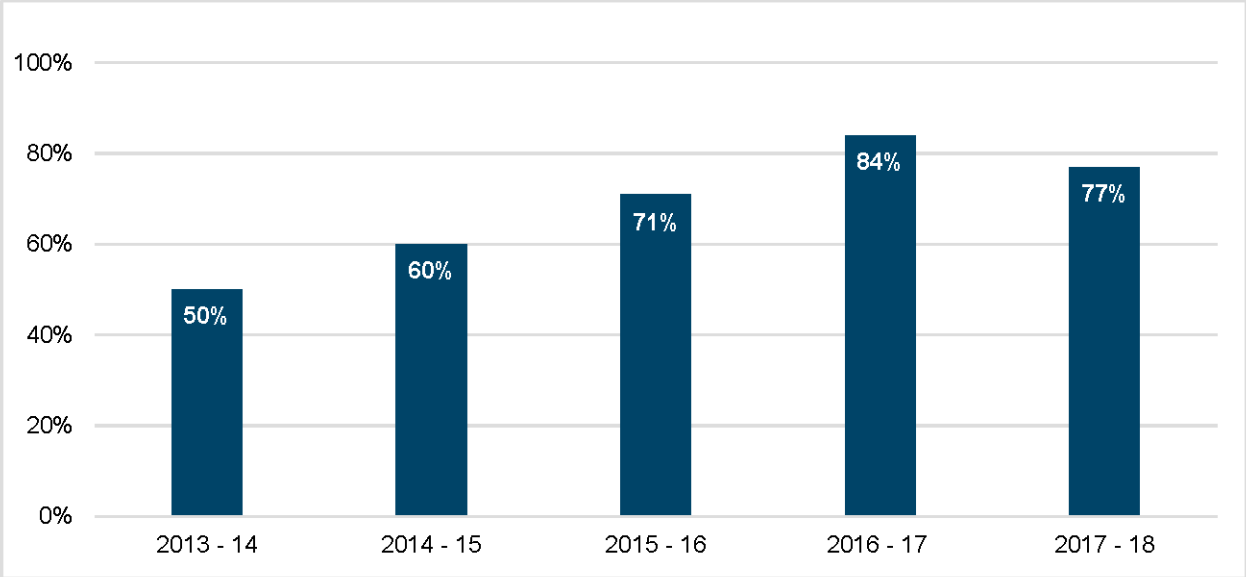
Some community school providers in Tennessee set goals for family engagement and track progress toward those goals. For example, Agape in Memphis strives for 65 percent of parents or guardians of all of Agape's case-managed students to be actively engaged in their child's school and educational programming. (Agape defines "actively engaged" as a parent or guardian having attended one or more meetings or educational events each quarter.) As Exhibit 6 shows, Agape schools met this goal for the first quarter of 2017-18.

Exhibit 6: Agape STARS percent of parents actively engaged in their childrens' school and educational programming, 2017-18



Overall, parental involvement improved for three consecutive years, from 2013-14 to 2016-17, before dipping slightly in 2017-18. See Exhibit 7.

Exhibit 7: Agape STARS percent of parental involvement, 2013-18



In 2015-16, Buena Vista Enhanced Option Elementary School conducted a series of family surveys and focus groups to include more family input in the school's planning and decision-making process. The survey found that 89.5 percent of 143 respondents "always felt welcome," and 75.9 percent of respondents felt that staff "always encourages family and community involvement." The school did note, however, that only 44.1 percent of families felt that parents and teachers looked at student work together "often enough." This response prompted the school to implement Family Data Nights, as well as a literacy-focused Homework Diner series. On the 2015-16 survey of educators, only 14.7 percent of Buena Vista faculty and staff "agreed" that "parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school." The same question in 2016-17 received an agreement rate of 77.4 percent. In the 2017-18 Buena Vista Family Survey, 94.6 percent of respondents felt that Buena Vista staff "always encourage family and community involvement" and 79 percent felt that parents and teachers looked at student work together "often enough."

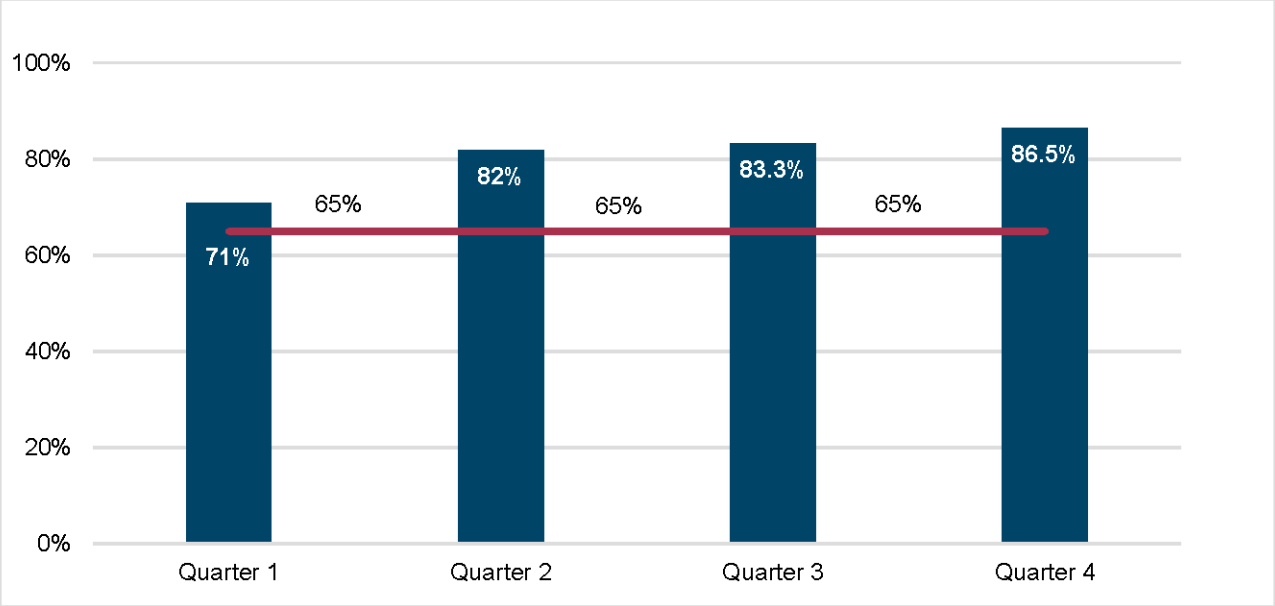
School effectiveness at decreasing the dropout rate and increasing the graduation rate

National research has demonstrated the ability of community schools to increase student attendance and decrease dropout rates. Communities in Schools is a national nonprofit organization focused on decreasing dropout rates in schools that serve large populations of economically disadvantaged students. Several studies have shown that students who participate in the CIS model attend school more often, and are less likely to drop out and more likely to graduate than their peers. More research conducted on community schools in Baltimore found that students who participated in the after-school activities had higher average daily attendance rates and lower rates of chronic absenteeism than their peers. Finally, researchers studying community schools in Portland, Oregon, found that students attending community schools had

higher attendance rates than peers who did not attend community schools.

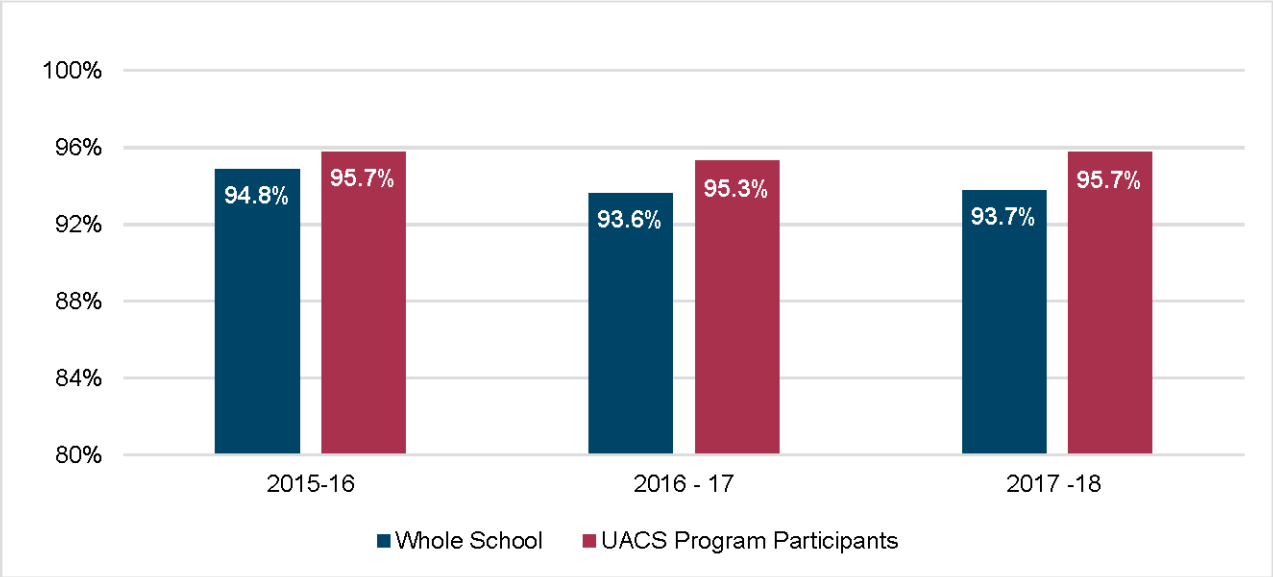
In Tennessee, several community school providers track attendance rates. For example, in 2017, Agape set a goal at the organizational level that 65 percent of all case-managed students would miss less than 10 percent of school days. As Exhibit 8 demonstrates, Agape schools met their attendance goal during all four quarters of the school year, and student attendance increased over the course of the school year.

Exhibit 8: Percent of Agape STARS students who attend school at expected levels (missing less than 10% of school days), 2017-18



The University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) program in Knoxville, Tennessee, also tracks student attendance. As Exhibit 9 shows, between 2016 and 2018, students who participated in community school programming at Inskip Elementary attended school at slightly higher rates than peers who did not participate in community school programming.

Exhibit 9: Inskip Elementary average daily attendance



The mental and physical health of students

National research focuses on the ability of community schools to affect outcomes, such as disciplinary incidents/suspension and students' perceptions of school, adults, and peers. Several studies have found that community schools may improve student behavior and reduce disciplinary incidents. Research has also shown that students who attend community schools have more positive perceptions of school, peers, and adults.

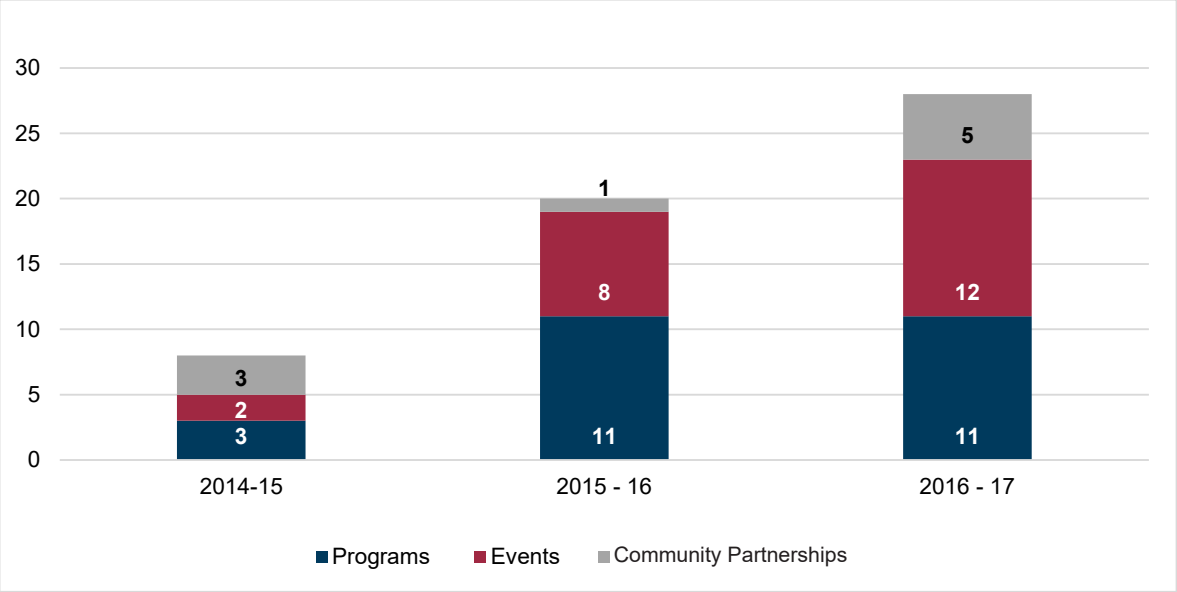
OREA found only one national study that connected community schools to physical or mental health outcomes for students. That study, conducted on students who attended Promise Academy in the Harlem Children's Zone, found that female students were 10.1 percentage points less likely to report being pregnant during their teenage years, while male students were 4.4 percentage points less likely to be incarcerated. The study did not find that Promise Academy students had better outcomes than their comparison group on rates of asthma, obesity, or mental health issues.

Several Tennessee schools have taken creative steps to meet the physical and mental health needs of students. Lonsdale Elementary School, a community school within the Great Schools Partnership in Knoxville, provides health care services to students through a telehealth program, allowing students to meet a health care professional in a different location through Bluetooth technology. Through a partnership with the University of Tennessee College of Nursing, a registered nurse comes to the school once a week to prescribe medication based on telehealth appointments. Lonsdale also partnered with the Elgin Foundation to provide dental screenings for every student and dental services for students who need them. Whitsitt Elementary School in Nashville partners with a local church to provide a mobile health clinic to students and families without access to health care services. In many of the community schools OREA visited, mental health counselors from local nonprofit organizations are staffed within the school full time or offer services on a referral basis.

Some community schools also track the number of services they offer to improve the mental and physical health of students. For example, as Exhibit 10 shows, Buena Vista Elementary, a Community Achieves school in Nashville, has increased the number of programs, events, and community partnerships meant to improve health and wellness of students and families since 2014.

For more information on how rural districts are using existing resources to meet the physical and metal health needs of their students outside of the typical community school model, see Appendix C: Leveraging resources in rural areas.

Exhibit 10: Efforts to improve health and wellness, 2014-15 to 2016-17, Buena Vista Enhanced Option Elementary



A note about time and implementation

Studies conducted on community schools in other states provide policymakers with examples of the positive effects that community schools can have on students and families. One important takeaway from the research is that community school models must be fully implemented over multiple years to achieve consistent, positive results; adopting a community school model does not guarantee immediate positive outcomes in the first years of implementation. For example, two separate studies conducted on community schools in Baltimore found no difference between community schools and other public schools on outcomes such as average daily attendance and chronic absenteeism rates when examining schools in the first several years of implementation. However, schools that had implemented a community school model for five or more years showed more improvement in attendance rates compared to non-community schools. Two other studies conducted on the national organization Communities in Schools found that positive outcomes were much stronger in schools that fully implemented the CIS model, and in schools in the third and fourth years of implementation.

Community schools as a turnaround model

Some community school advocates and organizations urge states to consider the community school model as an option for school turnaround for low-performing schools under ESSA, the federal education law. According to ESSA, school turnaround strategies that use federal funds must be "evidence-based," meaning that the strategies are derived from rigorous, well-designed research studies. ESSA defines "evidence-based" using a tiered model, and turnaround strategies that use federal funds must fall into one of the top three tiers of research: promising, moderate, or strong, with each category referring to interventions that demonstrate statistically significant effects on improving student outcomes.[15] As of 2018, 13 states include community schools as

an evidence-based strategy for school turnaround. Tennessee's ESSA plan does not include community schools as a specific strategy for school turnaround.

Section 3: Best practices for schools and districts considering adopting a community school model

Whether or not a school or district decides to form a community school depends on the unique contexts and needs of the students and community. Through site visits, interviews, and a review of the national literature related to community schools, OREA has identified some best practices for the effective implementation of community schools.

Principal and staff buy-in

Almost all the site coordinators and staff OREA interviewed for this report stated that principal and school staff buy-in is one of the most important factors affecting the success of implementing a community school model. Teachers and staff must be attuned to the needs of their student population – e.g., high poverty rates or a large population of English learner students – and want to find ways to remove or reduce barriers to learning. All school staff must be on board with trying new programs or processes for connecting students with resources.

Meaningful and strategic community partnerships

While it may be tempting to recruit as many community partners as possible, site coordinators warned against quantity over quality. Schools in the early stages of transitioning to a community school model may find it beneficial to identify three to five tangible, obtainable goals and connect with community partners who can provide manpower, time, or material goods to support those goals.

Site coordinators also advised against keeping ineffective programs or partnerships, suggesting that such programs and partnerships should be adjusted or eliminated.

Listen to the community

Schools or community partners may implement a program that is well-intentioned but fails to address the issues and concerns of a community in a meaningful way. Community school organizations

> "The advice I would give is that community school work is not a program or a position, but rather a strategy that must be adopted by the whole school and must come from the top down. Community school work transcends just one person but must be embraced by the entire school. Principals are instrumental in knowing school partners and setting the vision for the community school strategy. Teachers are critical partners in working with volunteers to provide additional supports to their students. Parents are valuable stakeholders whose voices should always be represented when setting school goals. Community school work can happen when led by one person, but it is most successful when all staff understand and adopt the same mentality that schools can and should support the whole child."
> – *Site Coordinator, Elementary School*

interviewed by OREA emphasized the importance of not only conducting meaningful needs assessments, but, when doing so, ensuring that feedback is gathered from as many students, parents, faculty and staff, and community members as possible before reforms are implemented. For an example of this best practice, see Appendix D: Rip out the garden.

> "For five years, our school has offered free after-school services to families to assist those parents who work later shifts and need a more flexible schedule. Additionally, we see [free] after-school programming as essential in providing additional education and enrichment opportunities. For several years, the teachers and staff led the after-school programs, which contributed significantly to staff burnout. In 2017-18, the district's Extended Learning office helped to create a partnership between our school and the Boys and Girls Club to offer a program onsite for our students. The Boys and Girls Club offers programming, which includes dinner, homework time, and enrichment clubs, Monday-Friday from 4:00-6:30 p.m. The Boys and Girls Club served over 90 students this year through literacy-focused tutoring, sports teams, 4H Club, scouting, and more. This is an obvious benefit to our students and families, but also to our staff who no longer were required to work 10-11 hour days for aftercare. It has increased our staff retention rate and employee satisfaction." – *Site Coordinator, Elementary School*

Foster partnerships with institutions of higher education

Officials in some school districts or schools, especially in rural areas, may worry that they do not have many community partner options available to provide resources or services. If local businesses or nonprofit agencies are not readily available, partnerships with institutions of higher education may be able to provide supports in areas such as staffing for after-school programs or tutoring. For example, many of the after-school enrichment opportunities offered by Knoxville's University-Assisted Community Schools are led by UTK students who have been awarded the Haslam scholarship – a selective, service-based, full-tuition scholarship designed to promote and foster civic engagement and community leadership.

Data tracking

The national research on community schools emphasizes a need for meaningful data tracking. Community schools should be clear about their goals, connect goals with measurable outcomes, and track progress toward those outcomes. For example, Community Achieves schools create goals each summer based on the School Improvement Plans at their schools and the initiative's four-point model for collective impact:

- college and career readiness
- family engagement
- health and wellness
- social services

In most cases, schools set goals in the four categories and track the frequency or number of services provided. For example, a school might aim to "increase family engagement," and then track progress toward that goal during the year by measuring the number of family engagement events offered for families, or how many families attend engagement events. At the end of the year, Community Achieves schools compile their data and create and submit reports to district officials showing progress toward goals in the four categories.

Data tracking is important for community school providers, which must show community partners and funders that their services and funds have an impact. Data tracking is also important for improving programs: if student attendance has not improved or has not improved enough, for example, site coordinators and other community school staff can make necessary changes to partnerships and service delivery in an effort to produce better attendance outcomes in the future.

Not all community schools in Tennessee use an organized framework for data tracking and reporting, however, and data tracking and reporting is an area in which many of Tennessee's community schools could improve. (See the data collection-related policy consideration at the end of this report for more information.)

Data tracking in practice

Buena Vista Enhanced Option Elementary in north Nashville offers several programs for students to address social-emotional learning, character development, and student attendance. These programs include Big Brothers Big Sisters, Lunch Buddies, Girls Inc., Girls on the Run, Black Men Run, and Trap Garden Club, among others. These volunteer-supported programs meet weekly for at least eight weeks. Students involved in these programs are tracked as a cohort and school officials monitor metrics around behavior, grades, and attendance. These metrics are used to determine program efficacy and make decisions about program adjustments and continuation. In 2017-18, school officials were concerned with student attendance and were curious to know whether community school programs could effectively increase attendance rates. The data indicated that students were more likely to come to school if involved in a program or mentoring relationship that made them feel more engaged with the school. Students enrolled in a community schools program had an average of 95 percent daily attendance compared to the school average of 92 percent; students in a mentoring program (e.g., Big Brothers Big Sisters or Lunch Buddies) had the highest daily attendance (96.6 percent) over the course of the year.

A districtwide perspective

Many of the community schools in Tennessee formed when a principal took the initiative to adopt a community school model. While some collaboration between the individual community school and the school district may exist, a districtwide perspective on the connection between community schools and non-community schools in the district may be underdeveloped. One community school site coordinator noted that this situation can be an issue for high-need student populations who attended an elementary school that has implemented the community school model and then, because of the district's feeder pattern, transition to a middle school that

has not implemented the model. Such students lose access to the wraparound services that were available at their previous school and their academics, attendance, and behavior may suffer as a result.

Although all the schools in a district's feeder pattern may not adopt a community school model, it may be helpful for these schools' leaders to communicate about the services and supports students may or may not have access to as they progress through the district's schools. Unique to most community school models in Tennessee, Agape's presence in the Achievement School District and Shelby County Schools is a model based on the feeder patterns for the students in the communities that Agape serves. For example, because Agape's model is focused on a neighborhood approach, the organization serves multiple schools within the Hickory Hill, Frayser, and Whitehaven communities, allowing their staff to connect with the same students as they progress from elementary to middle to high school.

Policy Considerations

OREA drew conclusions about the formation and operation of community schools and replicable best practices but could not draw full and comprehensive conclusions about the effect that community schools have on student outcomes, or whether all community schools in Tennessee have met their educational and community goals. The lack of a common evaluation framework used by all community schools, the absence of uniform and consistent data, and the variation among the state's community schools in length of operation, goals and priorities, and data tracking prevented such conclusions from being drawn. While national research studies have demonstrated that community schools can have a positive effect on student outcomes, OREA found that data currently collected on Tennessee's community schools is insufficient to permit the replication of similar studies that might confirm national research findings. In response, OREA offers the following policy considerations:

1. **Should a state-level evaluation framework with a common set of measurable outcomes for community schools be created?**

Community schools in Tennessee create goals based on the unique needs of students, families, and communities, but without a set of common measurable outcomes that are measured and reported in the same way, it is difficult to conduct a state-level evaluation of community schools and determine whether the schools have met their educational and community goals. Tennessee could create a state-level evaluation framework with a common set of measurable outcomes for community schools. Common outcomes could include academic achievement, attendance, behavior, family engagement, and mental/physical well-being. Until all community schools consistently track and measure common outcomes, it is difficult to evaluate whether all community schools have met their educational and community goals. Tracking common outcomes would not prevent community schools from creating other goals and tracking progress toward other outcomes.

In 2014, the Tennessee General Assembly passed Public Chapter 968, which established the framework for a community schools grant program for school districts that planned to form community schools. The law stipulates the minimum components that schools must have to qualify for the grant and the criteria that each grant recipient must meet to remain eligible, but the law did not specify the student and family outcomes that community schools must track. The General Assembly has not appropriated funding for the grant program.

2. **Community schools should employ more rigorous internal evaluation methods.**

OREA found that most community schools in Tennessee do not employ rigorous evaluation methods to determine the effect that the community school model has on students, families, and community. For example, many schools attribute improvements in school-wide outcomes, such as average daily attendance or academic achievement, to the community school model without comparing those outcomes to a control group of similar schools and students.

Community schools should review OREA's report for examples of more rigorous evaluation methods. The national research studies cited by OREA employ experimental or quasi-experimental research designs and use advanced statistical methods to show a cause-and-effect link between community schools and improved outcomes. The study performed by Knox County School's Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (REA), summarized on page 12 of this report, serves as a blueprint for community schools wishing to employ a similar rigorous form of internal evaluation. That study used a quasi-experimental design, including control and treatment groups, to examine the effect of community schools on multiple outcomes.

Schools may improve internal evaluation methods by using control groups to evaluate the performance of community schools. For example, a community school that tracks measurable outcomes, such as attendance, academic achievement, and rates of behavior infractions, could compare such outcomes to a similar group of students who do not attend the community school or receive the community school's services. For example, if a school finds high rates of attendance for a group of students participating in a mentoring program who were previously chronically absent, those students' attendance rates could be compared to the attendance rates for a group of chronically absent students who do not participate in the mentoring program.

Finally, OREA's report references a Learning Policy Institute community schools research compendium that summarizes research on community schools, and grades the strength of research, from the most rigorous experimental studies, to studies that show only correlation between community schools and improved outcomes. After examining internal evaluation methods, schools may consult the research compendium and choose methods for internal evaluation that best fit their unique capacity and context.

Endnotes

[1] *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-6-2401, et. al.

[2] Jeannie Oakes, Anna Maier, Julia Daniel, *Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement*, National Education Policy Center and Learning Policy Institute, June 2017, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Evidence_Based_Strategy_BRIEF.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[3] Anna Maier, Julia Daniel, Jeannie Oaks, and Livia Lam, *Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence*, National Education Policy Center and Learning Policy Institute, Dec. 2017, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_REPORT.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[4] Child Trends Data Bank, *Adverse Experiences: Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being*, July 2013, p. 5, https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/124_Adverse_Experiences-1.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[5] Christina D. Bethell, Paul Newacheck, Eva Hawes, and Neal Halfon, "Adverse Childhood Experiences: Assessing the Impact on Health and School Engagement and the Mitigating Role of Resilience," *Health Affairs*, Vol. 33, No. 12 (2014), pp. 2106-2115, https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2014.0914 (online version, accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[6] Kristin Anderson Moore and Carol Emig, *Integrated Student Supports: A Summary of the Evidence Base for Policymakers* (White Paper), Child Trends, Feb. 2014, https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-05ISS-WhitePaper1.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018); Anna Maier, Julia Daniel, Jeannie Oaks, and Livia Lam, *Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence*, National Education Policy Center and Learning Policy Institute, Dec. 2017, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_REPORT.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[7] National Education Association, *An NEA Policy Brief: Wraparound Services*, https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Wraparound-Services-05142013.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[8] *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-1-613.

[9] Adam Looney and Nicholas Turner, *Work and opportunity before and after incarceration*, The Brookings Institution, March 2018, p. 17, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/es_20180314_looneyincarceration_final.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[10] Jason Gonzales, "Nashville must address the plague of gun violence, Mayor David Briley says during Pearl Cohn High visit," *The Tennessean*, March 23, 2018, https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/education/2018/03/23/nashville-must-address-plague-gun-violence-mayor-david-briley-says-during-pearl-cohn-high-vi/450888002/ (subscription required, accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

[11] *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-6-2405.

[12] *Tennessee Code Annotated* 49-6-2405.

[13] Learning Policy Institute, "Online Research Compendium – Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement," https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/online-research-compendium (accessed Oct. 9, 2018).

[14] Knox County Schools, Department of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, *2017 Compendium of Research and Evaluation, 2015-16 School Year*, May 2017, https://www.knoxschools.org/cms/lib/TN01917079/Centricity/Domain/1044/2017%20CORE/2017%20Compendium%20of%20Research%20and%20Evaluation%20SY1516.pdf (accessed Sept. 20, 2018).

[15] Adam Looney and Nicholas Turner, *Work and opportunity before and after incarceration*, The Brookings Institution, March 2018, p. 50, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/es_20180314_looneyincarceration_final.pdf (accessed Oct. 10, 2018); Elizabeth Mann Levesque, "School Turnaround under ESSA: Progress, but not a silver bullet," Brown Center Chalkboard, The Brookins Institution, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2016/10/31/school-turnaround-under-essa-progress-but-not-a-silver-bullet/(accessed Oct. 10, 2018).

Appendix A: Interviews and site visits

OREA interviewed at least one staff member from each provider and school listed below. Schools marked with an asterisk* indicate a site visit as well.

Agape Child and Family Services, Memphis

*Georgian Hills Elementary School (Achievement School District, Memphis)
*Martin Luther King Jr. Prep High School (Achievement School District, Memphis)
*Westside Middle School (Achievement School District, Memphis)

Communities in Schools, Memphis and Nashville

Dupont Tyler Middle School (Metro Nashville Public Schools)
KIPP Academy Middle School (Metro Nashville Public Schools)
*KIPP Collegiate High School (Metro Nashville Public Schools)
Kirby Middle School (Achievement School District, Memphis)
Wooddale Middle School (Achievement School District, Memphis)

Community Achieves, Metro Nashville Public Schools

*Antioch Middle School
*Buena Vista Enhanced Option Elementary School
*Two Rivers Middle School
*Pearl Cohn High School
*Whitsitt Elementary School

Great Schools Partnership, Knoxville

*Lonsdale Elementary School
*Westview Elementary School

Grundy County Schools

Pelham Elementary School

Hamilton County Opportunity Zone, Hamilton County Schools

*East Lake Academy of Fine Arts
*Orchard Knob Elementary School
*Orchard Knob Middle School

Northside Neighborhood House

*Red Bank High School

University Assisted Community Schools, University of Tennessee – Knoxville

*Pond Gap Elementary School
*Inskip Elementary School

Other interviews:

Jonas Barriere, Executive Director, UnifiED, Chattanooga
Pat Conner, Executive Director, Safe and Supportive Schools, Tennessee Department of Education
Indira Dammu, Senior Policy and Research Analyst, SCORE TN
Laura Haddleston, Mark Miller, and Lindsey Vincent, Centerstone, Chattanooga
Lynn Hoyt, Community School Advocate, Nashville

Appendix B: Provider profiles

OREA identified seven organizations in Tennessee that implement the community school model in the state's four largest urban school districts:

- Agape, Memphis
- Community Achieves, Nashville
- Communities in Schools, Nashville and Memphis
- Great Schools Partnership, Knoxville
- Hamilton County Opportunity Zone, Chattanooga
- Northside Neighborhood House, Chattanooga
- University-Assisted Community Schools, University of Tennessee, Knoxville

OREA met with organization leaders and school-level site coordinators to discuss the way each organization implements the model in their respective schools. Each of the providers has a similar overall mission for the schools and communities they serve – to provide resources and services to students and their families to overcome the negative effects of poverty. All seven providers include the common elements of a community school in their operations; however, their organizational structures and how they implement the community school model is unique to each provider.

Agape, Memphis

Founded in 1970 as a nonprofit focused primarily on foster care and adoption, Agape provides support to families and schools with the primary goal of reducing poverty in the Memphis communities of Fraser, Hickory Hill, and White Haven. Along with services to connect families with employment and housing resources, the organization expanded its scope in the early 2000s to intervene with "cradle to career" supports to help children avoid the foster care system.

Though Agape has worked with Memphis-area families for over 40 years, its role as a community school provider is new. In 2017, the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) approved grant funding for Agape to pilot a two-generation, place-based model for reducing poverty. This model became the foundation for Agape's work as a community school provider. As of the 2018-19 school year, Agape serves as a community school provider for 15 schools in Memphis. Within each of its community schools, Agape typically staffs two to three site coordinators – known as "Stars Connectors"– who each serve a caseload of up to 25 students. Stars Connectors determine the reasons a student may be chronically absent or tardy, and typically meet with students at least once a week for 30 minutes to discuss challenges in the classroom or home that make it difficult for the student to attend school. Stars Connectors then contact students' parents or guardians and offer additional supports and services. Stars Connectors also foster communication between students and parents with teachers and school administrators to make sure students have the tools they need to be academically successful.

Community Achieves

Community Achieves is a district-led community schools provider created by Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) in 2011. The model places a district-employed site coordinator in each school who coordinates wraparound services for students. While some students may receive targeted services based on specific needs, Community Achieves uses community partnerships to provide full wraparound services to all students and families before, during, and after school. To bring about consistency among the district's Community Achieves schools, MNPS created a set of standards as well as a framework of four core areas of support (college and career readiness, family engagement, health and wellness, and social services) to be implemented at all sites.

District leadership selected some schools to become Community Achieves schools due to their academic performance or their geographic location in the district; school leaders at other schools elected to become Community Achieves schools after determining the community school model could help address barriers their students faced, such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) or extreme poverty. As of the 2018-19 school year, Community Achieves serves 19 schools in MNPS.

Communities in Schools

Communities in Schools (CIS) is a nationwide nonprofit community school provider that works in over 2,300 schools in 25 states. As of 2018, CIS has chapters in both Nashville and Memphis. Since the passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the organization has provided evidence-based interventions to chronically absent students living in poverty with the goal of reducing dropout rates and increasing on-time graduation rates. CIS Nashville is part of a $150,000 grant award from the Together for Students Initiative for expansion of student-centered initiatives in MNPS for the 2018-19 school year. The initiative is a joint effort among the Coalition for Community Schools, Communities in Schools, and Strive Together to recognize 10 communities in the U.S. that demonstrate strong partnerships between the school district and community partners. CIS relies on its model of Integrated Student Supports – placing a CIS-employed site coordinator in schools to provide case management to select cohorts of students – to address chronic absenteeism. As of the 2018-19 school year, CIS employs a site coordinator in 33 schools in three districts: MNPS (17), Shelby County Schools (9), and the Achievement School District (7).

Great Schools Partnership

The Great Schools Partnership (GSP) is a community school provider that has operated community schools in Knoxville since 2012. The organization serves as a community "catalyst, think tank, incubator, start-up funder, and operational partner" for Knox County Schools (KCS). Created in 2005, GSP complemented KCS programming by leveraging money for supplemental programs. Since 2012, however, GSP has become an operational partner with KCS, employing site coordinators – known as "resource coordinators" – in the district's community schools who connect students and their families with services and resources, such as mental health counseling, access to medical and dental care, after-school programming, ACEs screenings, clothing and food assistance, tutoring and mentoring programs, and adult classes for literacy, parenting, and citizenship.

GSP is a public/private initiative, receiving funding from the city of Knoxville and Knox County as well as from private donations. As of the 2018-19 school year, GSP employs resource coordinators in 18 community schools in Knox County.

Hamilton County Opportunity Zone

The Hamilton County Opportunity Zone, launched in 2017, is the newest community school provider in the state. The Hamilton County Department of Education (HCDE) created the "Opportunity Zone," funded through the district's budget, to better support the 12 lowest performing schools in the district. The 12 schools located within the Opportunity Zone receive more targeted support to promote equitable academic outcomes. Targeted support includes access to more staff, including two community school coordinators, and Title 1 funded Family Partnership Specialists in some schools, a district-level position focused on fostering engagement with families and other members in the community.

Five of the 12 total Opportunity Zone schools are also on the state's priority school list.[A] The five priority schools within the Opportunity Zone make up the "Partnership Zone," a joint effort between the Tennessee Department of Education and HCDE that serves as an alternative to state takeover and placement of the schools within the Achievement School District. The five Partnership Zone schools are co-governed by the Tennessee Department of Education and HCDE.

The 12 schools within the Opportunity Zone are in different phases of implementing the community school model. Unlike more established community schools in other districts, the Opportunity Zone schools do not yet have individual site coordinators at each school (though Opportunity Zone officials hope that a full-time site coordinator will be stationed at each school once funding is available). Instead, each school has its own site-based leadership team. Each school's team consults the school improvement plan to create strategies for how to best meet the needs of the students and community. As of 2018, the district is also encouraging outside agencies to apply for federal Title IV 21st Century Community Learning Centers grants to fund after-school and summer programs, secure part-time site coordinators, and fund needs assessments to fully implement the community school model.

Northside Neighborhood House

Northside Neighborhood House is a nonprofit organization that supports residents of north Chattanooga through programs providing financial and food assistance, and education support (e.g., tutoring, adult courses, and enrichment programs). Proceeds from the sale of items in the organization's thrift stores also support community schools programming. As of January 2017, Northside staffs a full-time site coordinator at Red Bank High School. The site coordinator at Red Bank has developed partnerships with other local nonprofit agencies to provide services to students identified as needing additional support.

Northside Neighborhood House has partnered with UnifiED and Chattanooga 2.0, two advocacy and funding groups in the Chattanooga area that support the community school movement in Hamilton County Schools. As of 2018, Red Bank High School is the only community school in Hamilton County operated by Northside Neighborhood House, though the organization plans to expand to additional schools in the future.

University-Assisted Community Schools, University of Tennessee – Knoxville

The University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) program is a partnership between the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) and Knox County Schools. UACS currently serves two schools in the district, Pond Gap Elementary and Inskip Elementary. Both UACS schools use a referral-based system that analyzes behavioral, attendance, and academic data to identify students with the greatest needs; these students then participate in the community schools programming. UACS staff have meetings at both schools where site coordinators bring referrals and work with faculty and staff to assess the needs of students on the referral list.

Many of the services provided by UACS are delivered during after-school programming, which operates Monday through Thursday from 2:45-7:00 p.m. UTK students, faculty, and staff, as well as community volunteers, provide tutoring in academic subjects and enrichment opportunities in extracurricular activities, such as music, art, and physical education, to

[A] Under Tennessee's new federal education plan, developed under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there are three pathways for identifying priority schools:

1. Schools in the bottom 5 percent of all schools, based on state assessment results.
2. High schools with a graduation rate below 67 percent.
3. Continued status as a focus school (i.e., if a focus school remains on the focus list for the same subgroup for three consecutive years and fails to meet targets for that subgroup for three consecutive years, it will be re-designated as a priority school).

participating students. After-school enrichment opportunities are often provided by UTK students who have been awarded the Haslam scholarship – a selective, service-based full tuition scholarship designed to promote research and foster civic engagement and community leadership. All Haslam Scholars are required to work in one of the two UACS schools as part of their service learning requirement, and these students serve as assistants and instructors for the various clubs offered after school. Other clubs are staffed by instructors from the community. In addition to academic and extracurricular after-school programming, UACS connects identified students to wraparound support services such as food assistance and mental health counseling. As in other community schools throughout the state, a full-time site coordinator oversees the delivery of services and supports located in each school.

Appendix C: Leveraging resources in rural areas

Leveraging resources: addressing community needs in Grundy County

As of 2018, Tennessee's community school providers are partnering with schools only in the state's large urban districts. Schools in rural districts may be able to replicate the community school model by using existing resources such as Coordinated School Health and Family Resource Centers.

Family Resource Centers

Created in state statute in 1993, Family Resource Centers (FRCs) complement the community school model. Like the site coordinators for community schools, FRC directors work to create collaborative partnerships with parents, communities, state and local service agencies, and public and private organizations.[A] Unlike most community school site coordinators, who are usually hired and paid for by private, nonprofit agencies and typically work within one school, FRC directors are employed by the school district through state grants of $29,612, with a minimum local match of $20,389 per center and may serve multiple schools.[B] FRCs have common goals with the community school model, addressing issues such as:

- attendance and truancy
- partnerships and collaborations
- behavioral health and social personal learning
- family support
- family training and education
- family engagement

FRC directors submit SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time) goals to the Tennessee Department of Education to clarify what is expected for their centers and the measures used to determine success.[C] As of 2018, there are 103 FRCs serving students in 78 school systems in 65 counties.[D]

Coordinated School Health

Tennessee passed the Coordinated School Health Act in 2000 to address the health needs of students and improve academic opportunities. The mission of Coordinated School Health (CSH) is to improve student health outcomes as well as support the connection between good health practices, academic achievement, and lifetime wellness. Based on eight standards, CSH complements the efforts of community schools to educate the whole child. Community schools and CSH programs can overlap in areas such as school counseling, psychological, and social services; healthy school environment; and student, family, and community involvement.[E]

[A] Tennessee Department of Education, Family Resource Centers, https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/family-resource-centers.html (accessed Oct. 1, 2018).
[B] Tennessee Department of Education, School-Based Resource Centers: General Information and History, https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/special-education/frc/frc_general_information.pdf (accessed Oct. 1, 2018).
[C] Tennessee Department of Education, Annual Family Resource Center Report: 2016-17 School Year, https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/family-resource-centers.html (accessed Oct. 1, 2018).
[D] Tennessee Department of Education, Family Resource Centers, https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/family-resource-centers.html (accessed Oct. 1, 2018).
[E] Tennessee Department of Education, Coordinated School Health, https://www.tn.gov/education/health-and-safety/coordinated-school-health.html (accessed Oct. 1, 2018).

Grundy County Schools

In Grundy County, the Coordinated School Health director performs similar duties as a community school site coordinator in connecting students and their families to services and programs. Although Grundy County Schools has not implemented a community school model through a provider, it has used an existing resource – its director of Coordinated School Health – to address an ongoing and serious issue for their students: chronic health concerns.

Many students living in rural Grundy County lack access to basic health care. The school district provides medical and mental health care to students through telemedicine and telehealth programs. Telemedicine allows students to be examined, diagnosed, and treated remotely by a licensed nurse practitioner. The telemedicine program is coordinated through the Erlanger Children's Hospital and Ronald McDonald Care Mobile, a large moving van outfitted as a medical clinic.

School nurses in Grundy County use a stethoscope with Bluetooth technology that allows the remote nurse practitioner to examine students alongside the school nurse. The telemedicine technology allows for quicker diagnosis and treatment without requiring students to seek health care away from the school. By treating students in school, the program closes gaps in accessibility to health care.

Telehealth is a grant-funded program that provides remote mental health counseling to students. Students who are referred for counseling sessions teleconference with a licensed school counselor, located in Cleveland, Tennessee. The grant staffs two "Integrated Care Managers" who travel between schools and coordinate counseling sessions. The care managers are trained in suicide prevention, recognizing adverse childhood experiences, and youth mental health first aid. Therapy sessions for students, groups, and families are also provided through the grant program. A licensed child psychologist located in Franklin, Tennessee, can prescribe medication if necessary. The entire process – from intake paperwork to the parental signature process – is entirely electronic.

Appendix D: Rip out the garden

The following story was provided to OREA by a site coordinator at Lonsdale Elementary, Great Schools Partnership, Knoxville:

During our school's first years as a community school, food insecurity within the community emerged as a top priority for the initiative. To address this issue, the community school – with the help of several area partners – designed and constructed a community garden. The garden was located on school property, on a stretch of land directly in front of the school. The garden was open to all community members, as was the food it produced. A university partner also offered to implement afterschool programming centered around the garden. Over the course of its first year, the community garden was used regularly by students and partners working after school. Guided lessons allowed students to participate in growing and harvesting food that they were given to take home to their families. The community at large, however, failed to show any interest in the many raised garden beds. Eventually, the community garden fell into disrepair, as the university partner was not able to secure another grant to continue to offer programming through the summer or the following school year.

I began hosting a monthly "family breakfast" at the school. Parents and guardians dropped off their students and were invited to join me and the school principal to hear updates from the school and to share concerns or questions with us. During one of our earliest sessions, I asked families, "If you could change anything about our school, what would you change?" There was a long silence before one parent, cautiously, raised his hand to ask if it might be possible to get rid of the community garden out front. It was an eyesore, he said. Other schools had beautiful entryways and we had an unkempt bed of weeds and leftover tomato plants. His concerns were echoed by others in the room. Parents asked why they should be expected to grow their own food when other neighborhoods had access to grocery stores. They worked two and three jobs. No one had time for gardening. Besides, the garden was located right in front of the school. Classroom windows looked directly out onto the garden beds. Who wanted to walk across the school lawn to go pick berries in front of a group of ogling kindergarteners? The location was uninviting and the idea of community gardening as a solution to food insecurity was insulting.

It was the most feedback I had ever managed to get from our families in a single setting. Later that afternoon, I collected a group of volunteers, and we ripped out the railroad ties and started digging up the plants that day. It took some time, but we eventually managed to remove all remnants of the garden from the front of the school. By that time, I had become known as "the girl who tore out that garden." It wasn't really the moniker I had in mind when I started the job, but it was a starting point.

Once the garden had been entirely removed, I hosted another meeting to ask families what they would prefer to see in front of the school. Over 200 people attended. The overwhelming consensus was that our families wanted their school to look nice, well-kept, and inviting. I contacted the University of Tennessee's Landscape Architecture department and found some doctoral students to work on a plan for us. Families were involved in every step of the planning process: from the shape of the landscaping, to whether we used natural barriers or railroad ties, to the type of plants we put in. When the mulch arrived, and we began planting, a small group of families showed up, volunteering to help. They called their friends, and a larger group of community members joined us for the workday the next weekend.

What began as a failure in communication and engagement has grown into one of our community school success stories. This endeavor continues to serve as a reminder that: (1)

economically disadvantaged communities should not be expected to work harder for amenities that are readily available to higher-income communities, and (2) no project should be pursued without the support and direction provided by the community it seeks to benefit. Our families have more trust and faith in the school and our initiative because they have witnessed, firsthand, our commitment to involving the community.

It's been three years since we dug out the garden and food insecurity continues to be a concern in the neighborhood. But, instead of asking our parents to grow their own food, we have invested in partnerships with Second Harvest to provide weekend food assistance, and we have arranged to offer dinner at the school in addition to breakfast and lunch. We help coordinate an International Food Market in the park that meets on the second Saturday of every month, and we're working with the city of Knoxville to develop a food hall in the community that would make a lack of access to food a thing of the past for the Lonsdale community. Each of these directives is led and directed by members of our community, to assure that we never repeat the early mistakes of our community garden project.

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