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TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND BUDGET AND REVENUES PUBLIC HEARING ON FOUNDATION AID

The New York State Community Schools Network would like to thank the Senate Committee on Education Chair Shelley Mayer and Senate Committee on Budget and Revenues Chair Brian Benjamin for the opportunity to submit testimony on providing a well-rounded education and supporting students' wellbeing through Foundation Aid.

All of New York's students should be provided equitable access to a well-rounded education, a policy that must be accounted for in Foundation Aid. A well-rounded education includes supports that ensure students come to the classroom and are ready to learn, such as afterschool and summer programs, health and mental health services, and family engagement opportunities.

Every child deserves to live a happy and healthy life. Unfortunately, we know in historically marginalized and under-resourced communities across the state, our children do not have access to the health services they need. Approximately 4 million children live in New York State, but of them nearly 750,000 children are poor.¹ We know that children living in poverty experience a variety of barriers to healthy growth and development. One of the best and most effective ways to keep kids healthy is by making high-quality physical, mental, vision, and dental health care as accessible as possible. For many communities, schools are uniquely positioned to integrate health care services as they are a hub for the community where children learn, feel safe, and spend most of their time. Furthermore, nationally in two parent households, 63 percent have both parents working.² Opportunities for safe, engaging, and enriching programs after the end of the traditional school day and year are a critical support for youth, families, and communities.

The integration of comprehensive health services and expanded learning opportunities can be maximized through community schools. A community school is a strategy to create the conditions for learning, growth, and success. By developing and integrating partnerships in a school, the academic, social-emotional, and health needs of children and families can be addressed. Key to the success of community schools is having a lead partner who coordinates the services at the school level and also has a full-time presence in the school. With the right resources in place, community schools increase access to health and mental health care, a critical core element of the work. School-based health centers ensure that kids miss as little class time as possible. Additionally, community schools provide expanded learning opportunities through afterschool and summer programs and parent/family engagement support. These services reduce the burden on working parents who know their kids can get high-quality professional care and are safe and learning throughout the full work day.

The community schools strategy is hyper local: it is intended to adapt to the unique needs and context of the community. So, while there are certain standard components and practices, each community school has different partnerships and priorities. The standard components, or "four pillars" of community schools are: collaborative leadership and practices, integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, and active family and community engagement. The community schools strategy is evidence-based and effective for school improvement. The Learning Policy Institute recommends it as an evidence-based strategy that states and districts should consider under ESSA for school improvement.

Community schools are smart investments: for every one dollar invested in a coordinator, the school receives more than \$7 back in value. There is also a social return on investment of as much as \$14 in social value realized for every \$1 invested in the strategy. A study of two of Children's Aid's community schools in Washington Heights found that every dollar invested in the schools yielded between \$10.30 and \$14.80 in social return on that investment.

¹ Children's Defense Fund. "Child Poverty in America 2018." <https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Child-Poverty-in-America-2018-State-Factsheet.pdf> (accessed November 27, 2019).

² United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. "Employment Characteristics of Families Survey." <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.nr0.htm> (accessed November 27, 2019).

The state currently has \$250 million in community schools set-aside as part of foundation aid, which the state should protect and continue to invest in. As a hyper-local strategy, community schools allow schools and districts to determine their own community needs and how best to meet them while providing a framework that supports student success.

Across the state, communities are investing and aligning resources through the community schools strategy. Below are several examples from members of the New York State Community Schools Network:

- This past year, the Monticello Central School District launched a Community Resource Center that offers caseworker meetings with families to offer employment counseling, food resources, parenting skills, and other services.
- This fall, Lyons Central School District partnered with community partners to provide free mammograms to 30 women and over 100 flu shots to Lyons residents.
- In Genesee Valley Central School District, telehealth has been made available for mental health care, where a consultation occurs privately in the school where the student, parent, and doctor can collaborate to form a treatment plan. Comprehensive services may include psychiatry, medication management, and therapy.
- With the help of community partners, Massena Community Schools has seen great success with home visits and other events. For example, they host an annual Ready 4 School event each fall that offers free haircuts, school supplies, clothes, bicycle tune-ups and helmets, and educational tables with resources from community partners.
- The International School for the Liberal Arts in the Bronx was recently recognized for its SNAP registration efforts by the Food Bank for NYC, which cited the school's "selfless and relentless service" and called them a "great example of excellence in service."
- New York State's community schools' services have a direct effect on problems of absenteeism. A study of Children's Aid schools in NYC found that their community schools had higher attendance of students and teachers than in comparison schools.

By integrating health and mental health services, expanded learning, and family engagement in a school through the community school strategy, the work not only leads to increased well-being of our students but expanded student achievement, stronger families and communities, and ultimately a better New York State.

The New York State Community Schools Network supports the continued investments in community schools across the state, currently funded at \$250 million through the community schools foundation aid set-aside. Further, the minimum funding amount of \$100,000 should be maintained to ensure all high-need districts across the state can apply community schools to a wide-range of activities based on their local needs. Protect and continue to invest in the community schools set-aside and fully fund the Foundation Aid formula to allow schools and districts to best meet the needs of their students and families through a well-rounded education and integrated supports.

The New York State Community Schools Network advocates to develop, promote, and sustain community schools in collaboration with government, local school districts, and community partners. Through a diverse coalition of community-based agencies, parents, teachers, and statewide advocates, we champion effective community school policies so that children and families can thrive. Comprehensive health and mental health services are critical to the education and wellbeing of our children in New York State. We are committed to ensuring our children, families, and communities have the resources and opportunity to live happy, healthy, and full lives.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic. Please feel free to contact Alli Lidie, Associate Executive Director at the New York State Network for Youth Success, at Alli@NetworkForYouthSuccess.org with any questions regarding this testimony.