

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

HOW DISTRICT LEADERS START AND SUSTAIN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Washington, D.C.

Monday, November 14, 2022

INTRODUCTION:

REBECCA WINTHROP

Senior Fellow and Director, Center for Universal Education, Brookings

PANELISTS:

Moderator: REUBEN JACOBSON

Director, Education Policy and Leadership Program, American University

Co-editor, "Community Schools: People and Places Transforming Education and Communities"

ADRIENNE BATTLE

Director, Metro Nashville Public Schools, TN

DANIEL A. DOMENECH

Executive Director, American Association of School Administrators

LESLIE TORRES-RODRIGUEZ

Superintendent, Hartford Public Schools, CT

INGRID WILLIAMS-HORTON

Director of Community Schools, Prince George's County Public Schools, MD

* * * * *

Rebecca Winthrop [00:00:23] Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening, everyone.

Thank you so much for joining us on this great timely panel called How District Leaders Can Start and Sustain Community Schools. I wanted to give a big shout out to what I call the National Superintendents Association but is really called the American Association of School Administrators, AASA, they are our co-hosts, they have been our partner this year. This panel is launching a report that we've co-published with the same title authored by Reuben Jacobson, who I will turn to in a minute to lead us through this event. If you have questions and haven't yet submitted them in advance, please feel free to do that by Twitter hashtag CS District, Community School District.

And briefly, just to set the scene of what we're going to talk about and why this event is so timely and so important is because the gaps, equity, inequality gaps, both the learning gaps coming out of COVID— quote unquote, out or learning to live with COVID— as well as the well-being gaps in terms of children's holistic development and mental health, also have not, continue to grow, are huge. And so we at the Center for Universal Education are very committed to thinking fresh, thinking about fresh strategies, how do, how do we really help close those gaps in education and equality, both the wellbeing and the learning gaps and, and what are ways that are cost efficient and practical and doable? I always say that every education problem has been solved somewhere in some corner of the globe in some incredible school. The, the major problem, though, is how do you take these solutions and scale them and do them system wide? And that is what we're going to be talking about today.

In many ways, the community school strategy is a strategy that meets the moment we are in. It's incredibly timely. It's an old strategy. It has its roots in 100 years ago in John Dewey's sort of ideas and experiments around schools, social centers, and Jane Addams sort of leadership around social work for, for, for communities and young children. But we are at a moment, which is very exciting, where the strategy is really cohering across the U.S. and where I think we could be at a real tipping point for sort of take up. You can call the strategy whatever you want. The main thing is that the elements are there. And for us, when we talk about a community school strategy, we're really talking about schools being the hub for young people's learning and development, which, of course means rigorous and relevant teaching and learning, of course, that's connected to the community they live in and makes sense and makes, gives them insights about their everyday lives, but also leans in heavily on partnerships, first and foremost, partnerships with families to ensure that it's not just academic

development that schools take care of, but all of, all of children's developmental needs. And then, of course, does deep partnerships with a range of institutions in the community from, from health, health care providers to museums and every, everything in between.

And we know that this strategy can be highly effective, both cost effective, because you can blend and braid financing sources and also highly effective because kids get sort of a more organized, well-rounded approach to their learning and importantly, their whole child's development. I am really pleased to be partnering this year with three other organizations to host the Community Schools Forward Task Force, which is looking at how we can really help cohere the community school strategy and help ultimately, the end goal will be to make it easier for people to use across systems, across the districts in the, in the U.S. And my other, other co-conveners of this National Task Force, which has over 45 of the leading community schools organizations on it, are the Coalition of Community Schools, the National Center and LPI. And we will be hosting this, this event is the first in several to be, to forthcoming.

So in addition to this report, which you're going to hear a lot about, which is really sort of tips and tricks for, for district leaders who want to take up the community school strategy, we also will be launching on January 12th in another public event, a host of Community of Task Force Products, which includes a framework that draws and really draws commonality across multiple community schools, frameworks that we looked at across, across the country and really look for what you know, where the evidence base is on what's essential in that framework. And the framework also includes sort of central outcomes that one might want to track progress against for implementing the strategy. And also, so that's the first thing. It also includes a series of guidance documents, one on technical assistance, what are the needs of districts for technical assistance and really thinking about how to meet those needs.

The other is stages of development. How might a district, a school or a district really go from sort of zero community school strategy to 100? So to speak, you know, what are the different sort of stages of really taking on this strategy? It's a framework that, that's useful guidance. And lastly, the fourth real product that we'll be launching together is how to think about, you know, cost and guidance on financing the community school strategies. Because, of course, one needs to be creative when thinking about how to blend and braid financing and what the costs will be.

So with that, that is sort of a background of what, what we've been up to at the Center on the Community Schools work, especially over the last year. I've been really grateful to Reuben Jacobson, who's on the task force. He is the director of Education Policy and Leadership, the Education Policy and Leadership Program at American University, a longtime community schools thought leader. And his work with, as I said, AASA in this report, I am going to hand over to him in a moment. He will moderate. He will lead us through a discussion with our very esteemed panelists, and then we'll have some time for audience Q&A. I really want to say thank you to all our panelists who are incredibly busy, especially on a Monday morning for the education community. Huge thanks to Daniel Domenech, the executive director of AASA, for joining us. Huge thanks to Director Adrienne Battle, the director of the Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee. Huge thanks to Superintendent Leslie Torres-Rodriguez from Hartford, Hartford Public Schools in Connecticut, and big thanks to the director of community schools, Ingrid Williams-Horton, out of Prince George's County Public Schools in Maryland. So Reuben, with that, I hand over to you and thanks, thanks to everyone for joining us.

Reuben Jacobson [00:08:22] Thank you so very much, Rebecca. And I want to thank you and your whole team at Brookings for hosting this webinar today. For everyone who's participating, wherever you are in the world, watching these leaders speak about community schools, I'd like to thank the district superintendents and leaders that I spoke with to help develop this report and the guidance that they have, and wisdom they're sharing with us. And as well, the Community Schools Task Force that Rebecca mentioned. The Community Schools Task Force has brought in some really great new voices into the community schools field and is developed, is developing these key resources that that Rebecca previewed. So stay tuned for all of those.

I'm really excited to be here talking about community schools at this time. Community schools have grown significantly over the past 20 years. Federal, state and local policies and decisions have all led to more and more effective community schools. At the federal level, there is a federal full-service community school grant program that has given awards to, across 84 awards across 26 states. Community schools are included in guidance, federal guidance, and has support from the Biden administration and Congress. At the state level, Maryland has decided to make every high poverty school a community school. California is investing billions of dollars in this strategy. And of course, at the local level, local leaders, institutions of higher education, community groups and others

are continuing to band together to figure out how to solve local problems. And oftentimes that ends up being a community school strategy.

On top of all of this, we know that we're faced with tremendous challenges, continued violence in our schools, the pandemic, other health issues. And we've been looking for another way to do school. So if community schools are going to take a big step to become the way we do school, to transform, to reimagine the way we think about schools, then superintendents and other district leaders are going to play an essential role. To that end, together with Brookings and AASA, who I'd also like to thank, I reached out to districts of all sizes to speak with their leaders about why they decided to start and sustain community schools.

And I'm excited that we're going to have some of those leaders with us today so if the panelists would please turn on your videos. We'll get the panel started. These district leaders, along with others, shared ten key lessons for community schools that are written up in a new resource on the Brookings website. We're going to talk about some of those lessons today. I've got some questions for the panelists and then thank you to the whole audience for submitting, those of you who submitted questions, we'll get to those soon as well. And as Rebecca mentioned, you can always continue to send us questions through the magic of technology. I'll somehow get them and we'll, we'll address those as well. But I wanted to start with you, Dr. Battle in Nashville, and ask a centering question for everybody and we'll go around, why did you, your district, start community schools and how have your community schools evolved over time?

Adrienne Battle [00:11:29] Well, good morning, Reuben, and good morning to everyone who's a part of the stream this morning. Such an exciting topic to talk about and I think I have a pretty unique perspective. I'm a product of Metro Nashville Public Schools, and just about all of my professional career has been serving in, here in Nashville. And so thinking about and reflecting on early on, schools for Nashville, we just simply wanted to make sure our students and families were getting the supports and services that they needed and that they deserve. We knew that we needed our community partners to truly be partners with us in this work. And I think, you know, if you're a professional educator and been serving in any level of leadership within a school district, you learn pretty early on that you just simply cannot do it by yourself. It takes very powerful and impactful community partnerships to make sure we're able to provide the critical wraparound services and supports that our students and our families need and deserve.

And it's not just about a student approach. It's about making sure our families are thriving and that they are really connected to their school community. And when we initially launched our Community Schools initiative here in Nashville back in 2012, I was an executive principal, principal of the high school, actually second largest high school here in Nashville. And that event took place on my campus. And the reason that we were kind of the hub of that kickoff was our understanding that we needed to do some asset mapping and we needed to be transparent and communicate with our community around our academic needs and our social emotional learning needs for our students. And so that was our why. We knew we needed to expand those services, those wraparound services for our students without delay so that our students could have the foundational supports met, so that we could accelerate the learning outcomes for all of our students. And that's been our why for the last ten years. And we're very fortunate that that why could be used to be taken to scale in schools all across our district.

Reuben Jacobson [00:13:45] Thank you, Dr. Battle. Dr. Torres-Rodriguez, tell us about Hartford and the journey that your district has been on.

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez [00:13:52] So first, thank you for having me. And, you know, I was fortunate that I came to Hartford Public Schools like Adrienne mentioned, so I was a product of the school system. And actually, my, so my, my personal experience as a newcomer to the city and how my family, my mother had to leverage community resources, coupled with the fact that there was already a strategy at play back in 2007 in Hartford Public Schools. So I came in in 2017, ten years after, and realized that as I engaged the community, there were several resounding themes that emerged when we were right sizing the district. And one was the inequity that some of our partners, families and even staff and teachers felt some of our schools were not able to access those community-based resources that were so clearly supporting students in some of the community schools. And so that became the driver for how we expanded, if you will. We found a way to make our community school framework more systemic and systematic as well. Those seven schools were serving students.

However, as some of us know, there's often variance in how frameworks and strategies are operationalized. And so we decided to systematize our approach. And the way in which it has evolved is that we are now a system in which all schools are a community school. And what that means is that we try to apply our equity lens just like we do when we tier supports for students, we tier our

community school framework and the resources that we allocate to schools based on their level of need. And so we have a, a leveled approach to serving our schools that have a community school approach to it. We'll give you a quick example. So we start with the foundational level, which is every one of our 39 schools has a staff member that is dedicated for supporting family and community engagement. Every one of our 39 schools has a higher ed partner, at least a higher ed partnership. Attendance strategies, collaborative leadership practices, asset mapping and needs assessments are done across all of our schools. And as you go up in the levels based on the level of need in the school, we continue to add. An example, the next level up would be intentional community partnerships that are there for an identified need that that school and that local community has identified. You go up another level and then we have expanded learning opportunities. And then if you think about the highest level, which entails the wraparound supports, that entails integrated student supports, where we have clinical supports during the school day after school for students, their families, physical and mental health and wellness clinics in our schools. And so we had to take a very equity-based approach and systematic approach where we now have a codified framework across all of our schools. And of course, we have to create the conditions for success, which is ensuring that not only our partners, but that our school leaders are supported in how they implement and continue to improve our strategy.

Reuben Jacobson [00:17:17] Well, so much work that's been done really across the whole district. Ingrid, tell us about Prince George's County public schools and how you've rapidly grown community schools there.

Ingrid Williams-Horton [00:17:30] So good morning and good morning to everyone here. And we at Prince George's County Public schools have grown, as you said, Reuben, rapidly since 2019, and community school and the community school strategy. With House Bill 1300, it stated that any school at that time with a 80% concentration of poverty, must become a community school. So at that time in Prince George's County, we had 45 schools out of the 204 schools that qualify for community school. So at that time in our district, we had an office of community school where we had a director and we had our community school coordinators who were monitored, or who implemented the community school strategy by a lead agency. So we evolved over time where the lead agency no longer monitored or implemented the community school strategy with the community school coordinators. And we moved them over to becoming part of our school system so they could better

understand how the school system would integrate the community school strategy into the fabric of the work of our students and our families. And so we moved from 2019 to 2021-22 school year to 65 schools to presently, we have 96 of our 204 schools that are community schools.

We also in our central office as a support, we have me as the director and I have four wonderful community school specialists that support the community school coordinators in the schools to support not only the families and the students, but also to the support administrators in implementing this strategy, understanding how to support the students and the families in the communities, but also to bring the partners that need to help the students and the families to get the resources needed to help them thrive in the communities. So we also want to ensure that the needs assessments are conducted, that we have an implementation plan, that we monitor the data.

But we also want to ensure that the steering committee is available because our students, our families and the staff have a voice in what should be occurring within their community so we can know what they need, and the resources needed in order to ensure that they thrive. So we have evolved tremendously over time, but not only have we evolved, but we have ensure that the students and families have what they need to thrive and to become successful in new ways. And the CSCs, I'm sorry, the community school coordinators, have implemented those strategies, the community school strategies and found the resources to ensure that that occurs.

Reuben Jacobson [00:20:22] It's amazing to achieve that scale so quickly. I want to talk, we're going to get back into what it looks like when we look under the hood and what the, how the district is organized. And Ingrid, thanks for previewing that and those, your important role in the office, but I want to then level up again just to vision because of course we have district leaders here, all of your district leaders and represent other district leaders and the vision that you set, people listen to. Both inside your offices and in the community. So talk to me about how you work. This is community schools, how you work with community, with parents, with students to set a vision for a community school district. And how do you sustain that community involvement? Dr. Torres-Rodriguez, can we start with you?

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez [00:21:06] Sure. So the scale, systemic vision, it really was rooted in what our community said they needed. And by community, I mean right, deep engagement with our our, our staff our administrators, our families, our caregivers, our community partners, higher ed, the entire compliment. And that one trend that was resonating was, you know, how is it that we're going to

meet the needs that exist? Yes, academic outcomes and, right, the social, academic, the psychosocial needs, human development needs of our young people. And through our development of the office, you know, like Ingrid spoke about, we, we did also have to expand the Office of Family Community Partnerships. We have a team of parent teacher organizations. We also have our school governance councils across all of our schools. I have a, my superintendent, my Family and Community Advisory Council, which, you know, allows families and our partners a space to share how it is that we're tracking toward the implementation.

But also, you know, how it is that things are evolving within the community as well. We know that we are out in our community, but we consider our partners, our families, our caregivers, are experts in, in what they need as well. And so we have to make sure that we create those conditions for them to have a seat at all tables and to co-create with us. And then we have students that work with our community-based organizations in school that also help frame the types of programs that are needed to not only offer, but that we have to continue to sustain. It is part of our continuous improvement process, our monitoring, it happens at the school level it certainly happens, you know, at the senior executive level with me when we monitor the implementation of our strategic plan and there's a cadence for our community school strategy at the board level as well, when we do our progress monitoring so that we can have, right, the monitoring, the improvement and the sustainability of the implementation at all levels of our system.

Reuben Jacobson [00:23:16] It really sounds like at the systems level, you're changing the way business is done through that vision, but then implementing it so that it's touching all different, lots of different decision makers who are involved in the process. So it's not just one person's thing, but it's the community's approach. Dr. Battle.

Adrienne Battle [00:23:34] Well, thank you for that, Leslie. I think what I'm hearing kind of resonate is that districts who've taken on community, community schools, they're very, excuse me, they're very similar, right. When you're, when you're thinking about the structures and the prioritization around what's necessary to accelerate outcomes for our students. So we work with schools and our communities to make sure their supports meet the specific needs of the student population that they're serving. So just like, I will just previously mention, we leverage our school improvement plans to identify and to show and demonstrate where we have needs and where we can use those community partnerships and parental engagement in order to move the needle. We focus specifically

on four different pillars: college and career readiness, family engagement, health and wellness, social services, and adult development. And what we've heard back from our partners consistently since we launched back in 2012 is that they appreciate the clarity and us being really explicit around each school community and what their needs are. And so the conversations are just so robust and the co-creating just has created safe spaces for schools to articulate the need and to get true buy-in from the community that they're, that they're serving. So we sustain our community involvement through aligned goals, our vision setting all the way through our district level and through our support hub. It's our version of our central office. So we see that consistency from our school teams all the way through our board development and their goal setting as well.

We also again require that all of our schools have those school-based teams of stakeholders, various stakeholders, to lend a voice and be a part of the vision setting for their school community. Excuse me. At the district level, we also have a partnership with an organization that we have locally called Alignment Nashville and Alignment Nashville helps us create kind of an oversight, a team of MNPs, Metro Nashville Public Schools employees, but also our community leaders who come together on a quarterly basis to progress monitor, to continue to innovate around our four pillars and meeting the specific needs of our families.

Earlier I mentioned our asset mapping. We're continually going back to just see what's available, where we have gaps and where we have opportunities to make sure we're being responsive to our students and our families given the community in which they're being served. And so our community involvement is really what's made our community schools sustainable. Our community wants to be a part of our schools, and they're definitely being responsive because we have so much more clarity around where they can plug in, where they can partner and where they can help us accelerate the outcomes that we all desire and vision for all of our NMPS students.

Reuben Jacobson [00:26:43] Because of course, we know the challenges that we have. And what I hear you saying is that the community wants to help. But now we have, I think you said, clarity. There's a way, there's a strategy, there's community schools. So, Dan, help us think about this across the country. You have worked for many years with superintendents from all size districts, all types of leaders. You've been a tremendous advocate for superintendents and for students and families. Why are you seeing now this time for community schools? Why are superintendents and other district leaders increasingly interested in this approach?

Dan Domenech [00:27:15] Well, let me say that I've been part of the community schools movement since the 1970s. That goes back a long time. In the 1970s, I visited Flint, Michigan, who at that time was one of the leaders in this whole community school movement. And so even when I became a superintendent of schools in Fairfax County, I brought into the county, the organization Communities in Schools, which I am currently a board member both at the National and in Virginia. And so it's a movement that's been around for quite some time. But today, more than ever, as we've heard three outstanding models of the work that's going on, today more than ever, we can't anymore, put the walls up around the buildings and say, everybody stay out, if you want our kids after they leave school, go ahead and do whatever it is that you want to do with them. That is not going to work anymore.

Now more than ever, public education needs the support of parents. We see in all the surveys that are done that the majority of parents love the school that their children attend. They love their teacher. They love their principal. They're not so crazy about education at the national level or even within the district. But the school that the children attend, they're all for that. We have to take advantage of that. We have to recruit that support on the part of parents and the agencies that are in the community that are wanting to provide support. And the teachers can't do it alone. The counselors can't do it alone. All of these additional services that students require come from organizations outside the school. So this is the perfect time and the perfect opportunity to make the community schools movement a must in every school in America. And we're seeing that happen.

And I think that the best part of it is that we have models like this, three districts that are represented here that are doing it in their communities and are doing it well, because it does require special attention. It does require a person in the building that coordinates the activities that are taking part from communities, the organizations outside the school. So these things are important. I'm delighted to say that as I talk to our superintendents around the country, that they're all for it. The question is that there there is still some resistance. There's still the principal there that wants to lock the door and say, no, no, no, not in my building. You know, I want to take care of things myself. That doesn't work and that cannot happen. And we have to open the doors. We have to be supportive. There are lots of organizations out there, like I mentioned, Communities in Schools, and there are other organizations as well that can help in smaller districts because here, we have three examples of large school systems. But when you talk about smaller rural districts or smaller, smaller suburban

districts, they may not have the wherewithal to bring about the kind of programs that an organization like Communities in Schools or others that are out there can help to provide.

But no question about it, this is the right time. This is the right moment. And for sure, we're going to see the results because our kids right now and the three administrators that are here know that the behavioral issues with our students today is incredible. The need for these students to be fed, the need for these students to get the kind of social emotional attention that they're not getting. All of these things are necessary services that cannot be provided by the school alone. And that's where the community schools movement is so critical.

Reuben Jacobson [00:30:56] Thanks, Dan. You talked about the school district and schools being siloed or walled off sometimes, and this is a different way of doing things. But of course, we've all been a part of experiences inside of districts where an initiative might come down and it sits in this office or with this, you know, assistant superintendent, or it becomes siloed within the district itself. Ingrid, talk about how community schools in Prince George's County is not siloed, that it's drawing across, and it's working. And I know there are challenges in every district, in every community, but so tell us those as well. But how are you breaking down those silos across departments, across leaders within the district? And then I'll turn to our superintendents as well.

Ingrid Williams-Horton [00:31:40] Thank you Reuben for that question. So in Prince George's County public schools, we have made an intentional effort of breaking down silos. So we have what we call a my job, your job and our job. And so when we meet with district offices across our district, we are intentional about that opportunity because at the core of what we do, our students are our focus every day in and out of what we do in our purposes when we come into our school system. So for example, we work with the Office of School Nursing and the Office of School Health because immunizations has been very critical. And so trying to reduce the number of children coming to school without their immunizations, we realized that our community school coordinators didn't know the importance of the school nurse and how could they collaborate with the school nurse? So what we did was we brought the community school coordinators and the school nurses together, and we had the office of school nurses talk about not only their job as the school nurse as far as immunizations, but the impact of so, not the physical, mental, as well as the how they can bring vision and dental services to the schools, because that also impacts attendance. So then we brought the professional counselors in. So the counselors, the professional school counselors and the office of Professional

School Counselors, the Office of School Nursing, as well as the community school coordinators. We had to all come together for the betterment of our students.

So we are very intentional about providing professional development opportunities for our community school coordinators to see the interconnectedness of all of our offices working together because that affects the students' attendance. Then we talk about how do we bring everyone together to support the families? So then we go into other agencies as far as social services because we have a lot of families facing transitional housing and couch surfing. So how can social services come in and help? And not only couch surfing, but they're also connected to attendance. They're also connected to health services; they're also connected to social workers and things like that. So we show how all these agencies can come together. Internal and external agencies can better support the students and the families, because if we do that, everyone is thriving and working toward the betterment of ensuring that our students are successful. And if our families are healthy, then our students are successful. And we can ensure not only that their social and emotional well-being is being taken care of, but then we can ensure academic success.

Reuben Jacobson [00:34:38] Dr. Battle, I know you talked a little bit about how the district is working across departments, but is there anything that you want to add, specifically the focus on learning?

Adrienne Battle [00:34:48] Yeah. I think when I think about the strength of our community schools model, I'm going to take us back for just a moment to March of 2020. Of course, that was a very unique and complex time for for school districts specifically around responding to the pandemic. Here in Nashville, the week before, we had to close down our school buildings for the remainder of the year due to the pandemic. We had a devastating tornado ripped through our city. And we had many of our families who were relocated. We had some of our schools that were extremely damaged. And immediately our response was to turn to our community schools. They already had a structure in place by which they had identified the needs of their families. They had strong relationships with their community, and we were able to quickly respond to the needs of all of our communities. And it is such a foundational component of the way in which we deliver a high-quality public education to our students that we didn't lose any time. We were able to respond to the needs of our families immediately, which in turn allowed us to get our students back in our school buildings quickly so that

we could again refocus on developing the whole child and, and providing the wraparound services that they needed.

Likewise, when I think about kind of breaking down the silos and the foundation, that strong foundation that community schools set for our schools— our response to the pandemic. We've been fortunate that we've been able to kind of push against some of the trends we're seeing in academic and other data points for our students as we've been able to close some gaps and accelerate coming out of the pandemic. And again, part of that was our ability to leverage the strong partnerships and the connections we have within our communities to meet those basic needs of our students and families out in the community, but also within the schools, so that we can focus on the specific needs of our students. And coming out of the pandemic, our mantra has been every student known. And that has grown out of our work with our community schools model. We are intentional about creating pathways for every student, every family that we meet them where they are, we understand their needs and we can rapidly respond to those needs so that we can transition our students and make sure that they prepare for their post-secondary experiences. And so when I think about that question, it just takes me back to the prioritization of one, scaling our community schools within our district, but also just a key lever as we're responding to not only the day to day, but when we have really drastic measures or or happenings that impact the daily lives of our students and our families.

Reuben Jacobson [00:38:00] I unfortunately can think of no better, any better example of how community schools are responsive to the community than when the pandemic hit and the example that you gave, Dr. Battle, and really a way of showing how schools do things differently and are prepared to serve the community. I want to transition to funding, just because I know we're getting questions from the audience, and everyone wants to know. So, Dr. Torres Rodriguez, I want to turn to you about how you're funding your community school strategy, federal grant, state grants, how you're blending resources that already exist and planning for sustainability.

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez [00:38:33] Yes. So the initial framework implementation was through a braiding of resources where a set of institutions convened, for example, Hartford Public Schools, the city of Hartford, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the United Way, key organizations came together to braid resources. And as we were now entering the pandemic, we realized that we could leverage our pandemic relief funding. And so this has been the second year in which the district has fully funded community schools. We went from 7 to 17, our community schools,

and we're in the process now of, through our strategic planning strategies, identifying what are financially, you know, our, our sustainability strategy is going to be. And so we envision going back to some type of braiding of supports.

What we yet have to determine is how the community school model will continue to evolve. We are in the process of yet another asset mapping, right, coming out of the pandemic. We want to make sure that we understand fully what everyone in our community is able to provide and be enabled to align the, what it is that we find through the asset mapping, with what the other strategies that we're going to have to implement. We know that serving the whole student, the whole child is, is at the center of what we do. We also know that the way in which our students were experiencing education was not meeting all of our students' needs. And so there's still yet a piece for us to still unpack as to what else can our community partners and our community school strategy address for student needs post-pandemic. So we've not figured that out yet, Reuben, because that will play into our financial sustainability strategy. But I do believe that there are still opportunities for us as a larger community, right from a macro perspective, to further cohere and align on our first, our resources and then service delivery model within schools.

Reuben Jacobson [00:40:45] So there are a lot of resources coming out about funding community schools also. And I think part of what I heard you say, and I see across the, across the country is that, you know, community schools can help to leverage additional dollars. If we're thinking about community schools doing things differently, we don't think about community schools funding as just funding the coordinator. But, you know, if we're learning as a part of community schools, which it is, how is that funding being leveraged to support the broader community schools strategy with it to improve to improve learning outcomes, really.

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez [00:41:14] And Reuben, just if I can add, that is one way that our current lead partners, for example, right, approach the work, where we certainly fund a level of the work, but they also, right, they have their grants, they're supporting, their resources that they identified, for example, to meet the clinical needs of some of the students that, that they're serving in our school. So it is an intentional, integrated approach to not only service delivery, but resource identification and allocation.

Reuben Jacobson [00:41:44] Another new resource coming out from the task force in January on costings so just stay tuned. Dan, I want to, I want to turn to you about policy makers as

someone who represents superintendents. What do, what do superintendents want policymakers at the federal level, state level to know, to help them support community schools? Yes, with this broad funding that we were talking about. But, but in other ways as well. What should policymakers know?

Dan Domenech [00:42:12] Well, if I can jump in on that, Reuben, obviously what I'm loving and hearing in this, these discussions is that throughout all of the discussions, the focus has been on the whole child and the social and emotional needs of the children. We have not addressed, which is such a hot topic in the media, the loss of learning. And what are we going to do? We saw the NAEP results and how horrible they were. And, and the achievement gap has expanded. All of those things are true. But I think what we're seeing happening is that the research has traditionally pointed to the fact that children won't learn if they're hungry, they won't learn if they're sick, they won't learn if they're coming from a dysfunctional family. All of these factors that affect that child affect their ability to learn. And so if we don't take care of the needs of the child first, that gap is not going to happen. It's not going to be shut down.

So districts are, we've seen a significant amount of dollars from ARP funding that are available for schools to use. But we know that those funds are going to run out. So it's important for schools to begin, as we see these three districts already exemplify, begin allocating their own dollars to provide for the needs of these students. And I think from a policy perspective, what we're doing at AASA is continuing to push Congress and the Department of Education as they develop their budgets. That, dollars have to continue to be in this area. They have to continue to be available at the federal level to provide for the kind of support mechanisms that we see districts are employing and successful.

So that's something that we're pushing for at the national level. And it's going to be critical with all of our state affiliates that the same thing be done at the state level so that there is an allocation of funding there, not just temporarily but forever, to provide districts with the monies that they need. Because we're finally beginning to recognize, although the evidence has been there forever, that the needs of the whole child are critical if we want to educate our children.

Reuben Jacobson [00:44:26] Thanks, Dan. So we're getting some questions from the audience. And I want to turn to results about, Mary Beth in Harford County in Maryland was asking about, and others asking about, oh, sorry, that was about funding. She was asking about funding. But our friend Janita in Charlottesville at the University of Virginia and Janita we're thinking about you and

your whole community today, asked about outcomes. And Ingrid, what are the, what, so let's start with you. The framework that you in Prince George's County are using to create and evaluate the outcomes of community schools that you're thinking about. Because community schools are not just about partnerships for partnerships' sake as nice as they are, but they're, we're driving towards results. How are you starting to think about a focus on outcomes as part of your work? And then we'll turn to our superintendents for some of the outcomes they've achieved as well.

Ingrid Williams-Horton [00:45:16] Yes. So thank you, Reuben, for that question. So we look at our strategic plan and then after looking at our strategic plan, we also look at our needs assessments and then we create goals every year and we develop those goals. In looking at those goals, we determine what will be, how we're going to measure our outcomes for the year. So we've had some great outcomes for community schools, for Prince George's County. So for example, last year, chronic absenteeism coming out of the pandemic was very like one of our number one things that we wanted, topics that we wanted to address. So that was one of our goals. So out of the 77 schools, we looked at 34 of our schools that had high chronic absenteeism, they had over 30%. And so of those 34 schools that we had with chronic absenteeism, we wanted to reduce them at least by 3%. All three of those schools made their goals last year. All 34 of those schools made those goals last year.

So we were very pleased because coming out of a pandemic and trying to reduce that chronic absenteeism, we had to ensure that we touched those children, those families. Some of the schools went door knocking in the pandemic to find out where their children were. How could we help the families? What was it they needed to ensure that we got them in school? So they were very great at that and addressing that. Our pre-K students, we wanted to ensure that pre-K students were ready for kindergarten. So we were utilizing Ready K 4 and because we found out some of our families were not aware of what those kindergarten students were required to know coming into kindergarten. So Ready K 4 is a program that we use and currently we have about 1600 families utilizing the Ready K platform, Ready K 4 platform to prepare their kindergartners for, I mean pre-K students for kindergarten. So we're very pleased about that.

Based on our needs assessment, one of the top three barriers for our families was food. Food scarcity is a huge barrier. So what we did is we set up three sites, food distribution sites. In four months, we distributed over 7000 boxes of food to students and families to help with the barrier of

food wanted. So that was one of them. We also found out, we did a survey of our community coordinators to find out what they needed in order to build their capacity. And so they wanted to build their leadership skills because inclusive leadership is one of our pillars for community schools. And so with our partnership with the United Way National Capital Area, we created a leadership program for them. And so every month they, every other month, bimonthly, they create, they participate in a leadership capacity building program. And based on the survey from that leadership capacity program, we develop, or we come up with topics to address how to increase their professional development and leadership skills.

We also work in collaboration with the Prince George's County Department of Social Services to help our families at home with their little scholars. So we created a program called Tots, Taking Off to Success, and they go into the homes. We're piloting this program to work with families in their home to prepare their little scholars before they come to school. And not only that, to address workforce development with their families, social, emotional learning with the families, anything the family needs to thrive with their children. They work with them at home. So we're piloting that program to see how successful that will be with them. Last year we started a food bank in three of our schools to see how successful that would be with the Capital Area Food Bank. And this year we will be increasing our food banks to 17 schools. So it will be at the school food bank or either a marketplace in the schools. So that's just a few of the many things that we've been doing.

The final thing was that one of our community school coordinators had been using DoorDash quite frequently. And so DoorDash has become a partner with our school, and we can have free delivery to any of our 96 schools as long as it doesn't have a heartbeat and doesn't have blood. So we can deliver food, we can deliver products, anything to our families at no charge. So that's some of the things that we've been doing, a s some of the results and what's happening to ensure that we break down barriers and ensure that we reach and touch our families for Prince George's County.

Reuben Jacobson [00:50:17] Incredible how much has been put in place. Dr. Torres-Rodriguez, hit us with some results.

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez [00:50:23] I can, I can share a few of them. So most recently, given that we have a coordinated approach to engaging with families, especially for students that have not been engaged or have not shown up to school regularly, attendance has been a focus not just of the district, but our entire community for several years. And so I'll give you an example where we started

the year with about 2000 out of about of our 17,000 students, about 2000 that were just, we just couldn't find them initially, were not showing up to school that first week. And so through the partnership, not only of the family and community support staff at schools, but also with our community partners, we got that number down to about 150 students after week six of the school year. So that's a clear indication that we have a wraparound support to identify not just where the student is and the family is, but right, those additional supports that are needed.

If I think about it more, more broadly and think about the attendance strategy and the fact that our community partners in our community school strategies at the center of that, pre-pandemic, we were trending to have a 2% decrease in chronic absenteeism. And for those of us that are, are dearly connected to this data set, we know that 2% is a significant increase in one year, a reduction in one year. And when we look at our current data for attendance and chronic absenteeism, we see that in our K-8 schools, especially the ones that are community schools, we can see the average of a 7% reduction in chronic absenteeism compared to where we were last year. And so we know that our, our partners are at the center of that.

And one thing that I will also talk about, you're talking about results, but I will share that there is a, a pain point with regard to data not, not data sharing, but how we can support and build capacity in our community school partners to leverage data to also align and further cohere on our efforts. So that's just work that we know we have to collaboratively improve upon.

Reuben Jacobson [00:52:32] Thank you for that. Okay, Dr. Battle, we have a question from Maria in Rio Vista, California, about what, and then Dan referred to this earlier about principals, the school leaders of which you are, you are one in a community school. What do you, what kind of support and capacity building should the district or do, does your district provide to school leaders at the community school site?

Adrienne Battle [00:52:56] Yeah, that's a great question. And I am, I'm consistently kind of changing hats as a classroom professional teacher, as a principal, as director of schools, and actually this year as a parent of a student in my own school district. And so I'm constantly thinking about stakeholder empowerment and engagement and really equipping everyone with what they need. One of our core tenets here in Metro Nashville Public Schools is that we will equip and empower our leaders at all levels. And we're serious about this work. And we've piloted first with our school leaders, our school principals. And what we do is we bring our principals together on a monthly basis. We call

them our principal leadership networks. And we start with kind of where we are. I mean, our commitment is to know where we are, but not stay there. So when were we thinking about our data points and building out our strategic plans or school improvement plans, we're, we're really constantly training our leaders around, getting into the data and really understanding, digging deep and also using multiple forms of data to really identify where their school is and what their next steps are.

Our next step of work is really drilling down in every way to the student level because we can stay at the high level all day, but that won't help us move the needle in a way that really embraces our all-student approach. And so we're training our principals around just the data analysis, the continuous improvement model, but also bringing in strong examples of our community schools and their commitment to their pillars and their stakeholder engagement. And we're seeing the movement. I mean, your last question was about outcomes, and I can go to pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, post-pandemic, with our navigators, during the pandemic, we've identified and connected every one of our 80,000 plus students with a caring adult who checks in with them, who gives them feedback. We've seen our collaborative referral process shoot through the roof. The amazing part of that data point is that we're able to respond to those collaborative responses, referrals that are coming from our school teams.

But post-pandemic what we're seeing—and we started to see this trend before the pandemic—our highest need schools in particular in our, they call them our schools of innovation or our priority schools, we have leveraged our community schools approach, particularly in those schools early on. And what we're seeing is those schools being able to close achievement gaps and actually move off of that targeted list. And so we're sharing examples of that. And we're talking about closing the achievement gap academically, but also around things like chronic absenteeism. Also, when it comes our social emotional learning targets around discipline and exclusionary practices and disproportionality. And so just tying it back to the original question here around training our leaders, we're training our leaders around that data analysis, those high leverage strategies our community achieves approach and how we can bring the community in to the conversation, to the plan and the execution to give our students what they deserve.

Reuben Jacobson [00:56:18] Well, so much to be proud of the work you've done. And I hear and know from all of you as leaders the work that is yet to be done. So I wanted to ask one final question as we say goodbye and, and thank you in advance for your leadership, for what you do for

students and families in your communities across the country, Dan, and for joining us today. But this report and our webinar is about starting and sustaining community schools, and you all have tremendous experience in that. What's a high-level note that you want to give to a superintendent or district leader that wants to start and sustain community schools? And Dr. Battle, we'll start with you.

Adrienne Battle [00:57:04] Yeah, I think what I would encourage here, it's, as a district leader, we're constantly kind of balancing out the sense of urgency, right? There's a sense of urgency that we're maximizing every day, every moment with each of our students. And again, all means all when we're thinking about our equity lands. And sometimes there's hesitation on the sense of urgency with maybe implementing a new strategy or structure. My experience has been with our community schools model is that it is sustainable and it is inspiring to our local community. The one conversation that our school teams— we're a student-based budgeting district —and when budget time comes around, I haven't named it as a non-negotiable, but it is a non-negotiable in my community that we shift away from our community schools model. And so I think what I would speak to is don't allow paralysis around that decision making point keep you from moving forward with community schools. It, again here in Nashville, we're celebrating our ten-year anniversary, universe, excuse me, anniversary with our community schools. And we're continuing to expand. We don't plan on slowing down anytime soon.

Reuben Jacobson [00:58:30] Wonderful. Ingrid, quick tip for somebody starting sustaining community schools.

Ingrid Williams-Horton [00:58:36] My quick tip would be our CEO, Dr. Golson, has given us the theme of the power of one. So my tip would be there's power in the power of one. If you have a district leader and as a district leader that believes in community school, you have the power to make it spread from one, from the top down. And that's so important. So if you believe in it, it can spread and it can become contagious. And that's, that's my tip, make it contagious, because if you believe in it, it will spread and it will just travel throughout your district.

Reuben Jacobson [00:59:10] Thank you, Dan.

Dan Domenech [00:59:15] Well, we at AASA and so our coalition are certainly more than ready to help superintendents that are ready to begin their organization, as I mentioned, Communities in Schools is one of them that are ready and available to help district get started. And we have models. Outstanding districts that are doing the work. It can be done. It will be done. It must be done.

Reuben Jacobson [00:59:37] Thank you, Dan. And Dr. Torres-Rodriguez.

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez [00:59:39] I would share a prioritized, meaningful and ongoing engagement with families and community members and also establish systems and structures of support to make that happen and leverage, leverage the collective expertise of all stakeholders to collaborate on that shared vision to proactively address the needs of the students. And then I would say, right, educators and community providers can provide a well, structured learning opportunities not only during school, but after school. We know that learning doesn't happen in isolation. It doesn't happen in isolation for adults, and it certainly doesn't happen in isolation for young people. And so if we are truly intentional about ensuring that our young people are seen, valued, heard and supported, then we will know that through a community school approach, right, we are honoring and serving the whole, the whole child.

Reuben Jacobson [01:00:37] Thank you. Thank you all for your tips, your advice, for the work that you do, for joining us on this panel. Thank you to the audience. Thank you to AASA for your partnership and Brookings for hosting. And I wish everybody a good week. Take care.