COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES AND STRENGTHEN OUR COMMUNITIES

- The National Education Association strongly supports a Community Schools strategy as a powerful approach to advancing NEA’s vision of a great public school for every student.

- When implemented with fidelity, a Community Schools strategy enlists the organized support of communities and the many untapped or underutilized resources they possess to complement and reinforce the efforts of educators to improve student learning and other outcomes. Such an approach benefits students, families and communities, uplifts and honors educator voice, experience and expertise, and is a key provision of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which creates a full service community schools program to address health, nutrition, and other needs that if not addressed can be barriers to student learning and development. More info: www.nea.org/ESSAbegins

- Debunking Myths: Community Schools are not new. They are a proven strategy. Transformational Community Schools* are not just about “wrap around” services.

- NEA wholly supports the Full Service Community Schools Strategy. This is exemplified at the highest levels of leadership through the grassroots work at NEA’s local association level. NEA President Lily Eskelsen-Garcia was the opening plenary speaker and moderated a panel focusing on Learning within the Community Schools Model at the 2016 Coalition of Community Schools Conference (CCS), held April 6-8, 2016 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. NEA is advocating this strategy as a positive improvement or “turnaround” option for all schools as states move to implement ESSA.

- New NEA Resources: Website- http://www.nea.org/communityschools;

- Each community school is unique, responsive to and reflective of the needs and aspirations of students, families, and communities within its reach. A Community School becomes the heart and hub of the community. It is a mean to advance community and economic development.
  - http://neatoday.org/2016/04/11/community-school-model/ (How the Community School Model Transformed a Texas School)

- Community Schools address and support the needs of the whole child. NEA and its partners in this work, such as the Center for Popular Democracy (CPD), the Southern Education Foundation (SEF), and the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools (AROS), support
the **SIX PILLARS FOR SUCCESSFUL, EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:**

1. **Strong and Proven Curriculum:**
   Educators engage students with challenging, culturally-relevant material, providing tools to analyze and learn. Classes or programs offered by or coordinated through the school can include Advanced Placement, Honors, languages, arts, physical education, English Language Learner, special education, before and after-school, career and technical education, GED prep, and job-training for students, parents, and other community members.

2. **High-Quality Teaching:**
   Standardized tests are not the focus; instead, the emphasis is on teaching problem-solving, critical thinking, and reasoning skills. Educators spend time together analyzing student work and improving their skills and approaches.

3. **Inclusive Leadership:**
   Leadership is a responsibility shared by the school principal with the **Community School Coordinator** and the **Community School Committee** of parents, community partners, school staff, youth, and other stakeholders.

4. **Community Support Services:**
   These schools are the hubs of the community, in support of student learning. They are responsive to student needs by providing meals, healthcare, mental-health counseling, and other services before, during, and after-school.

5. **Positive Discipline Practices:**
   Fostering positive, healthy school climates, helping students to learn from their mistakes by moving away from zero-tolerance policies that promote suspension, expulsion and toward “restorative” practices to address behavioral issues and improve school climate.

6. **Family and Community Engagement:**
   Families/Parents and other community members are partners with Educators whose expertise and experience are valued and respected, and together with other partners they all have a voice in the learning community.

*Transformational Community Schools* achieve success by implementing the Six Pillars through the following mechanisms: *An asset and needs assessment* of and by both school and community; participants in the assessment process include parents, students, community members, partners and school; *A strategic plan* that defines how educators and community partners will use all available assets to meet specific student needs and get better results; *The engagement of partners* who bring assets and expertise to help implement the building blocks of Community Schools; *A Community Schools Coordinator* whose job is to facilitate the development and implementation of the strategic plan in collaboration with school and community members/partners to ensure alignment of solutions to needs. NEA Centers for Great Public Schools and Organizing