

## Leveraging the Community Schools framework to advance NC DPI & SBE Strategic Plan: Achieving Educational Excellence

August 2025

Community Schools -an evidence-based school improvement strategy- began scaling statewide in 2023 with a grant from the Department of Education and coordination by the NC Community Schools Coalition (NCCSC). By fall of 2026, NCCSC aims to be supporting approximately 23,000 students in 46 schools across 28 districts.

Community schools qualify as an evidence-based approach to improving chronically low-performing schools under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Community schools emerged as a theme from the Mo Wants to Know [Listening Tour](#) and is included as an action to advance Pillar 3 of DPI and the SBE's Strategic Plan. Examples from national research and community schools leaders across NC demonstrate community schools' impact and alignment to all 8 pillars of the Strategic Plan. **The scaling of community schools statewide has the potential to accelerate and deepen our state's progress toward reaching the ambitious and essential vision laid out by DPI and SBE leaders.**

### What the research says...

### What NC community schools leaders say...

#### Pillar 1. Prepare each student for their next phase of life

"Comprehensive community school interventions have a positive impact... showing improvements in student outcomes, including attendance, academic achievement [and] high school graduation rates." (source: [Learning Policy Institute](#) (LPI))

In state ratings, P.W. Moore Elementary in Elizabeth City, NC improved from an F to a C over its first two years of community schools implementation.

"If we want schools to work for students, they must be shaped by students."

Joy Wright, Community School Coordinator at Vance County High School, NC

#### Pillar 2. Revere public educators

"For the 2022–23 school year, PS #23 in Jersey City, New Jersey was able to retain 95% of its teachers — as the state as a whole experienced a growing teacher shortage. (source: [In the Public Interest](#) (IPI))

In 2017 a Durham, NC elementary school had 32% of teachers leave their school. Four years after implementing community schools, teacher turnover was 5%.

"To know the teachers are supported by administration and also supported by colleagues, it makes me feel connected to the school. Honestly, I don't want to work anywhere else."

Abby Exum, teacher, Lakewood Elementary, Durham, NC

"The findings from the science of learning and development are crystal clear and they show us that students achieve better outcomes when they have strong relationships with caring adults and peers ... and when they are in environments that are supportive.

**Community schools do exactly what the research says — they put schools at the center of their communities."**

*Cindy Marten, Former Department of Education Deputy Secretary*

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### Pillar 3. Enhance Parent, Caregiver, and Community Support

In the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, school staff and families called on community school Coordinators to convene and coordinate resources to address critical, basic needs of students. Because of the community schools infrastructure, Owen Middle School in Swannanoa was able to connect with all 441 of their students after the hurricane.

"[After hurricane Helene] community schools became true hubs of emergency services and resources. When shit hits the fan, community schools will be the place where families can go."

Ginny Allison Volunteer Engagement Manager,  
United Way of Asheville & Buncombe County

### Pillar 4. Ensure safe, secure learning environments

After its first year implementing the community schools model, Northeastern High School in Elizabeth City, NC reduced total discipline incidents by 72% - from 205 incidents to 56 incidents - and reduced Out of School Suspension days by 82% - from 1,080 days to 195 days.

"Behind every behavior is trauma. When there's no healing, there's no learning."

Ervin Jones, Resilience & Learning Coach and restorative facilitator, Elizabeth City Middle School, Elizabeth City, NC

### Pillar 5. Optimize Operational Excellence

"Research on the economic returns from community schools suggests an excellent return in social value on investments into schools providing wraparound services and other community school supports, ranging from \$3 (excluding economic benefits) to \$15 in savings for every dollar invested." (source: [LPI](#))

"Community Schools brings the ability to connect and utilize community resources to make them efficient and effective and put them where they need to be."

Dr. Melanie Shaver, Superintendent, Hyde County Schools, NC

### Pillar 6. Lead Transformative Change

"Community schools are a research-based, comprehensive school transformation strategy in which educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development." (source: [Brookings](#))

"I have been a Superintendent for 19 years and have tried to piecemeal support together for my schools but not until now have I had an intentional system, a vision of intentional systems. This is powerful."

Dr. Atkins, Superintendent, Northampton County Schools, NC

"Based on our evidence, full-service community schools in Tulsa are simply better places to teach and learn. These are schools that aren't just implementing a program, they're restructuring the organization of teaching and learning. They are creating the conditions that optimize student learning. **Deeper learning is stronger in full-service community schools**"

*Curt Adams, Associate Dean at University of Oklahoma, Tulsa*

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## Pillar 7. Celebrate why public education is the best choice

During 2023-24, Clarke Elementary School in Vance County, NC was under enrolled with 369 families asking to transfer out of Clarke. One year after becoming a community school, there are 418 students enrolled and a 50 family waiting list to transfer in.

“Clarke is not just a school, it’s a launch pad, and the journey has only just begun.”  
Krystle Gray, Community School Coordinator at Clarke Elementary, Vance County, NC

## Pillar 8. Galvanize Champions to Fully Invest + Support Public Education

Northeastern High School in Elizabeth City, NC hosted a Business Expo night with 47 local businesses participating. At the event over 30 students and parents were interviewed and offered jobs on site.

“Community schools are a century-old strategy to transform public school buildings into neighborhood hubs that foster community pride in their local public school and engage partners to support thriving communities”  
Alec Greenwald, Director of the Southeast Regional Coalition for University-Assisted Community Schools

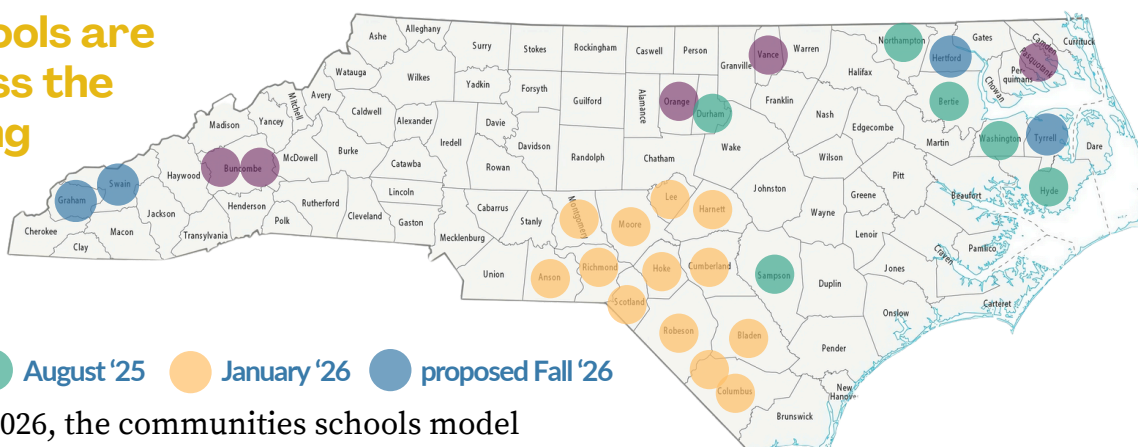
**“You have to be in it for the long haul — consistent and constant.** I saw some questions come up about ‘how would it work in this situation and that situation?’ The fact that it is a strategy, not a program; the fact that it is based on a community schools coordinator who is in the community and can identify the hyperlocal needs of that building ... allows it to work in all different places.”

*Mark Gaither, principal at Wolfe Street Academy, Baltimore, MD*

“I hope what comes out of this is that families and students feel connected to their school. It’s really important that they have voice and ownership in their education. I really believe this is going to improve outcomes for the kids all across our region. **I hope that this becomes a model for our state so we can see this more widespread throughout North Carolina.**”

*Kelly Batts, Regional Director, Sandhills Region, NC Department of Public Instruction*

Community schools are expanding across the state, prioritizing rural schools identified as low-performing



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