

# A. Proposed Policy Statement on Community Schools

*To be considered and acted on by the 2018 Representative Assembly*

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## Introduction:

Consistent with NEA's core values that "public education is the gateway to opportunity," and that "all students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character,"<sup>1</sup> and recognizing that opportunity gaps in our society have resulted in an uneven and unjust public education system where some communities have public schools that provide "individuals with the skills and opportunities to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy"<sup>2</sup> and some do not, NEA believes all schools should use research-backed school improvement strategies designed to support a racially just education system that ensures that all students and their families have the support needed to thrive and grow. The Community School Model (CSM) has a strong track record of closing opportunity gaps, supporting a culturally relevant and responsive climate, and causing significant and sustained school improvement. NEA supports the use of the Community Schools Model in public schools where the local staff and community are supportive.

## Definitions:

**Public Community Schools:** Public community schools are both places and partnerships that bring together the school and community to provide a rigorous and engaging academic experience for students, enrichment activities to help students see positive futures, and services designed to remove barriers to learning. Students engage in real-world problem solving as part of their curriculum. Community schools involve and support families and residents in the public school community and organize the wealth of assets that all communities have to focus on our youth and strengthen families and communities. Public schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone.

**Community School Model:** Any public school can use the community school model, which is intended to be tailored to the specific needs of an individual school's students, staff, families, and community members. The community school model advanced by NEA is based on Six Pillars of Practice as implemented through four key mechanisms.

**Stakeholder:** Stakeholder refers to anyone who is invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students, including administrators, educators, students, parents, families, community members, local business leaders, and elected officials such as school board members, city councilors, and state representatives. Stakeholders may also be collective entities, such as local businesses, organizations, advocacy groups, committees, media outlets, and cultural institutions, in addition to organizations that represent specific groups, such as associations, parent-teacher organizations, and associations representing superintendents, principals, school boards, or educators in specific academic disciplines.<sup>3</sup>

**Partners:** Partner refers to external organizations and individuals that form informal and formal relationships with a school that is using the Community School Model to fill strategy needs. These organizations can include local businesses, advocacy groups, educator associations, parent-teacher organizations, religious organizations, schools, universities, nonprofit organizations, and other types of organizations that local stakeholders determine fill a strategic need.

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<sup>1</sup> NEA Core value on Equal Opportunity. "We believe public education is the gateway to opportunity. All students have the human and civil right to a quality public education that develops their potential, independence, and character."

<sup>2</sup> NEA Core value on Democracy – "We believe public education is the cornerstone of our republic. Public education provides individuals with the skills to be involved, informed, and engaged in our representative democracy."

<sup>3</sup> Great Schools Partnerships. Glossary of Education Reform. Stakeholders.

1 The Six Pillars include:

- 2 1. ***Strong and Proven Culturally Relevant Curriculum:*** Educators provide a rich and varied academic  
3 program allowing students to acquire both foundational and advanced knowledge and skills in many  
4 content areas. Students learn with challenging, culturally relevant materials that address their learning  
5 needs and expand their experience. They also learn how to analyze and understand the unique experi-  
6 ences and perspectives of others. The curriculum embraces all content areas including the arts, second  
7 languages, and physical education. Teachers and ESP are engaged in developing effective programs for  
8 language instruction for English learners and immigrant students. Rigorous courses such as Advanced  
9 Placement or International Baccalaureate are offered. Learning and enrichment activities are provided  
10 before and after the regular school day, including sports, the arts, and homework assistance. The needs  
11 of parents and families are addressed through English-as-a-Second-Language classes, GED prepara-  
12 tion, and job training programs.
- 13 2. ***High-quality Teaching and Learning:*** Teachers are fully licensed, knowledgeable about their  
14 content, and skillful in their practice. Instructional time focuses on learning rather than testing.  
15 Individual student needs are identified and learning opportunities are designed to address them.  
16 Higher-order thinking skills are at the core of instruction so that all students acquire problem solving,  
17 critical thinking, and reasoning skills. Educators work collaboratively to plan lessons, analyze student  
18 work, and adjust curriculum as required. Experienced educators work closely with novices as mentors,  
19 coaches, and “guides on the side,” sharing their knowledge and expertise. ESP members take part in  
20 professional learning experiences and are consulted and collaborate when plans to improve instruction  
21 are developed,. Together, educators identify the methods and approaches that work and change those  
22 that do not meet student needs.
- 23 3. ***Inclusive Leadership:*** Leadership teams with educators, the community school coordinator, and  
24 other school staff share the responsibility of school operations with the principal. This leadership team  
25 ensures that the community school strategy remains central in the decision-making process.
- 26 4. ***Positive Behavior Practices (including restorative justice):*** Community school educators empha-  
27 size positive relationships and interactions and model these through their own behavior. Negative  
28 behaviors and truancy are acknowledged and addressed in ways that hold students accountable while  
29 showing them they are still valued members of the school community. All members of the faculty and  
30 staff are responsible for ensuring a climate where all students can learn. Restorative behavior practices  
31 such as peer mediation, community service, and post-conflict resolution help students learn from their  
32 mistakes and foster positive, healthy school climates where respect and compassion are core principles.  
33 Zero-tolerance practices leading to suspension and expulsion are avoided.
- 34 5. ***Family and Community Partnerships:*** Families, parents, caregivers, and community members are  
35 partners in creating dynamic, flexible community schools. Their engagement is not related to a specific  
36 project or program, but is on-going and extends beyond volunteerism to roles in decision making,  
37 governance, and advocacy. Both ESP and teachers are part of developing family engagement strate-  
38 gies, and they are supported through professional learning opportunities. Their voices are critical to  
39 articulating and achieving the school’s overall mission and goals. When families and educators work  
40 together, students are more engaged learners who earn higher grades and enroll in more challenging  
41 classes; student attendance and grade and school completion rates improve.
- 42 6. ***Coordinated and Integrated Wraparound Supports (community support services):*** Community  
43 school educators recognize that students often come to school with challenges that impact their  
44 ability to learn, explore, and develop in the classroom. Because learning does not happen in isolation,  
45 community schools provide meals, health care, mental health counseling, and other services before,  
46 during, and after school. Staff members support the identification of services that children need.  
47 These wraparound services are integrated into the fabric of the school that follows the Whole Child  
48 tenets.<sup>4</sup> Connections to the community are critically important, so support services and referrals are  
49 available for families and other community members.

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53 <sup>4</sup> A **whole child** approach, which ensures that each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged, sets the standard for comprehensive,  
54 sustainable school improvement and provides for long-term student success.

1 Public Community School Implementation: Implementation of the Community Schools Model requires that  
2 dedicated staff and structures use proven implementation mechanisms.

- 3 1. **Community School Coordinator:** Every community school should have a community school coordi-  
4 nator that plays a leadership role at the school, is a member of the school leadership team, and is a full-  
5 time staff member. The CSC has training and specialized skills that supports building and managing  
6 partnerships in diverse communities, creating and coordinating an integrated network of services for  
7 students and their families, and optimizing both internal and external resources. The CSC connects  
8 students and their families with services in the community.
- 9 2. **Needs and Asset Assessment:** The foundation for the community school model is a school-based  
10 needs and asset assessment that assesses including academic, social, and emotional needs and assets  
11 (including staff expertise and community supports of the school and surrounding community). The  
12 needs and asset assessment, facilitated by the CSC, is an inclusive process in which families, students,  
13 community members, partners, teachers, ESP, administrators, and other school staff define their needs  
14 and assets. Problem-solving teams are established based on the needs determined in the needs and  
15 asset assessment.
- 16 3. **School Stakeholder Problem-solving Teams:** Every community school should have teams of school  
17 staff and community stakeholders (families, parents) dedicated to solving problems that are identified  
18 in the needs and asset assessment. The solutions identified by the stakeholder problem-solving teams  
19 change the way things are done in and outside of school hours and, at times, involve partnerships  
20 with outside organizations and individuals.
- 21 4. **Community School Stakeholder Committee:** The community school stakeholder committee  
22 (CSSC) coordinates between school staff, partners (organizations, businesses, town and city service  
23 providers), and stakeholders to ensure goals are achieved and obstacles are surmounted. The CSSC,  
24 which includes families, community partners, school staff, students, and other stakeholders from the  
25 school's various constituencies, works in collaboration with the school leadership team and supports  
26 coordination across and among community schools within a school district.

## 27 28 **The Role of the Association in Advancing the Community School Model**

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30 **Awareness.** NEA believes that there must be increased awareness among its members and the public about  
31 the large body of evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of the Community School Model in supporting  
32 racial justice in education and closing opportunity gaps to achieve measurable school improvement gains.  
33 NEA encourages schools and districts to use the community school model.

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35 **Advocacy.** NEA has a responsibility to advocate for community school policies and procedures, legislation,  
36 and practices that will result in school improvement gains. As educators, NEA is in the best position to  
37 advance the adoption of community school policies.

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