Addressing Non- Academic Barriers to Achievement Through the Community School Model

1) Need for Community Schools

It became clear in the late 1990's and early 2000's that minority and poverty affected students were trailing their more privileged peers due to a number of complex, interrelated disadvantages, and that the gap was widening (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Lee, 2002; Wirt et al., 2002, 2005; Bemak & Chung, 2005). Youth from disadvantaged backgrounds face persistent non-academic barriers (e.g., mental health needs, community violence, lack of access to necessary health care) to educational attainment and it has debilitating effects on their educational achievement, commonly referred to as the opportunity gap (Adelman & Taylor, 2002). Collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities are effective at promoting students' engagement in schools (Trusty, Mellin, & Herbert, 2008). Consequently, educational reform initiatives such as The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the United State's Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods program emphasize increased community and family involvement in schools as a key improvement strategy. One emerging comprehensive plan to reduce non-academic barriers to achievement is a **community school strategy**.

2)What is a Community School?

A community school is a school in which all aspects of a student's well being--physical, socio-emotional, and academic--are addressed through coordinated services provided by numerous community partners physically located in the school building. These partners are aligned to a common agenda of furthering academic success by reducing the myriad non-academic barriers to achievement that particularly affect children of poverty and their families. In this effort, the community school becomes a hub of services and positive interactions for the entire community and is open from morning to night, at least 6 days a week. As a result of its comprehensive plan for meeting the needs of students and families a strong community school drives both student success and community health.

3)Where are there community schools in the United States and whom do they serve? What are some of the services they provide?

The Coalition for Community Schools, based in Washington, DC, considers community schools a strategy rather than a monolithic model. Child Trends, a non-profit, non-partisan research center estimates that more than 1.5 million students in nearly 3,000 public schools in the United States are enrolled in schools engaged in some aspect of this practice which they term Integrated Student Supports, and that 75% of the students being served are high-poverty children of color.

- Examples of successful community schools systems are located across the United States. Some particularly excellent examples include Nashville, Tennessee for which the non-profit organization Alignment Nashville supports the integration of services for 19 schools; there are 34 community schools in Cincinnati, OH called Cincinnati Community Learning Centers; and 21 community schools in the Washington Heights, Harlem and Bronx areas of New York City, are run through a partnership of the Children's Aid Society with the New York Board of Education.

- In Pennsylvania, the Bethlehem Area School District has begun a process of high-level cross-sector collaboration between local universities, corporations, hospitals, and the Lehigh Valley United Way to provide an impressive array of physical, dental, vision and mental health services in four of its schools, with plans to scale up to include eight feeder schools and one high school, Liberty HIgh School. The high-level cross-sector collaboration in Bethlehem lends itself to vibrant career and technical education opportunities for students in partnership with hospitals and other organizations.

- While community schools may look different in their individual operations, common to each community school effort is intensive cross-sector collaboration to support needs assessment, data sharing, integration of services and funding. Community schools can be implemented and led by backbone community-based organizations that work to build a common agenda and convene leadership meetings include the Strive Network in Cincinnati, Children's Aid Society in New York City and Alignment Nashville. They also can be driven by local governments and schools districts, local United Ways or national models such as Communities in Schools.

Services that a community school might offer include:

- Physical Health
- Dental Health
- Mental Health
- Social Services
- Early Childhood Services
- After School Programming
- Parent Resource Center
- English Language Learning
- Youth Development/Service Learning

The Coalition notes that several states, including California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky, and Washington, have passed legislation to support the community schools strategy as a strategy for school improvement, or family and community engagement. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Oakland have used the Elementary and Secondary Education Act Waiver Flexibility as an opportunity to include community schools in their education reform agendas.

4) Key Findings
Child Trends, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research center focused on issues regarding children and youth, conducted a comprehensive and rigorous examination of the theoretical, empirical, practice and evaluation findings that underlie the community school model (termed "Integrated Student Supports" by Child Trends) (Moore & Emig, 2014). Conducting quantitative analysis, interviewing leaders in the Community School movement, as well as examining the empirical research and data on the indicators for school success, the research center identified five key findings in its white paper:

1. *The Community School model's holistic approach to the education of a child is consistent with established child development research.*
Moore and Emig have found that the Community School model aligns with the foundational tenets of child development (2014). The "whole child" perspective recognizes that a child's development encompasses health, education, social and emotional development, and behavior (Moore & Emig). Difficulty in one domain often adversely affects development in other areas; conversely, success in one domain may positively influence other domains (Moore & Emig).

The goal of community schools is to meet the needs of the whole child by being a full spectrum resource for children and families. Schools with "linked services" are able to provide for the non-educational needs of the student, thereby minimizing the impact of these needs on instructional time and, concomitantly, the child's learning (Gomez, Gonzales, Niebuhr, & Villarreal, 2012). The whole child is placed at the center of the ring, with surrounding supports provided by the educational system, families, and community at large.

2. *Community School models are aligned with empirical research on the indicators for educational success.*
A child's success in school is a complex confluence of the child himself, his/her family system, the educational system, and the community combining to yield (or impede) learning and educational success. Indeed, successful schools involve the development of trusting, collaborative relationships and communication among teachers, families, and communities (Parent Advisory Council, 2007). In the Child Trends report, Moore and Emig concluded that the Community School model, and its multi-system approach to education through the provision of a coordinated array of services, is a more effective strategy for student achievement than is a more piecemeal approach to the student's needs (2014).

3. *There is promising evidence that the Community School model contributes to academic achievement.*
Emerging evidence suggests that Community Schools may positively impact student achievement, with the potential to positively impact attendance, absenteeism, and dropout rates (Moore & Emig, 2014). A Community School provides an array of coordinated services for its students, services which the students would not otherwise receive, or which they would typically receive outside the school environment, and often times during the course of the school day, thus taking them away from the educational environment. The Child Trends report indicates that additional research is in progress which, it is believed, will expand upon the hypothesis that Community Schools can be a direct and substantial factor in student outcomes.

4. *Longitudinal studies suggest a positive return on investments in Community Schools.*
In this time of economic hardship within educational systems, assessing the cost effectiveness of Community Schools is imperative. Moore and Emig describe this assessment process as a recent, rapidly evolving field (2014). Three distinct studies have been conducted to date, yet all three conclude that Community Schools, or "integrated supports," have a positive return on the upfront and ongoing investment. Moore and Emig note that while these positive returns may take some time to accrue, the benefit to cost

ratio, even if overestimated, clearly result in significant return (2014). Estimates of return on investment in the three studies range from $4.39 for every dollar invested, to $14.80.

5. *There is a direct correlation between high quality implementation and resulting effectiveness of Community Schools.*
Moore and Emig found that low quality or partial implementation of the Community School model yields no discernable effect. In other words, Community Schools must be implemented with a high level of fidelity or not at all (2014). The Child Trends authors speculate that fidelity may entail a prescribed series of supports, with optional supports added as individual systems require. Conversely, the model may be most effectively governed by best practices in delivering supports and services to students. Ongoing research and study of the Community School model will answer many of these questions.

5) Research Implications/Policy Implications
Education reform leaders and researchers emphasize the importance of community and family involvement in the success of schools (Byrk 2010, Warren, 2005, Sheldon & Epstein, 2002, Bryan, 2005, Henderson & Mapp, 2002, Lareau, 1987, Bryan & Henry, 2008, Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Community and family involvement in schools has been suggested to have positive impacts on educational outcomes. Schools are increasingly challenged by a lack of resources, few enrichment opportunities for students outside of school hours (especially in low socioeconomic status areas), decreasing levels of student engagement, and a striking opportunity gap for racial/ethnic and socioeconomic minority youth. Education scholars are seeing partnerships as a possible antidote to these and other challenges. Although common practice wisdom may agree with this, the important questions are, what makes community and family involvement key to the success of school reform and how do we reproduce it? Recent research suggests that high performing schools commonly have economic and social resources that their struggling counterparts do not (Byrk, 2010). Education scholars are focusing their attention on opportunity gaps and other key educational reform issues, highlighting parent and community involvement in the success of our schools (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

Byrk (2010) identified social capital in neighborhoods as having a significant impact on the success or improvement of its local school. When schools partner with families and community resources they create opportunities for students to learn and succeed. Involving family and community in schools may be a key to successful school reform. Although consistent and rigorous empirical evidence in support of community and family involvement in schools is still largely lacking, researchers are beginning to demonstrate some links to outcomes such as academic performance, school dropout, and school safety.

Academic Performance: Research on family-community-school collaboration has provided us with information about the positive impact of these partnerships on student achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Family involvement in schools has been found to be directly linked to students doing better in school including improved reading, math and writing achievement (Epstein, Simon & Salinas, 1997; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jordan, Snow, & Porsche, 2000; Starkey & Klein, 2000). In his meta-analysis of 50 studies focused on parent involvement and student achievement, Jeynes (2005) found a significant relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. This analysis highlighted the

positive effects of overall parental involvement. Jeynes (2005) also identified that the success of parent involvement on student achievement can be seen across socioeconomic status and race.

School Dropout: Schools that have strong partnerships with community organizations and families have reported lower dropout rates, increases in attendance, and even improvement in teacher attendance and job satisfaction (Dryfoos 2002). Unfortunately, there is limited research on school dropout and community-family-school partnerships, however, a recent study by Ziomek-Diagle (2010), highlights the positive impact school-family-community partnerships have had on dropout-rates in Georgia. Ziomel-Diagle's (2010) research suggests that systematic interventions strengthen students likelihood that they will graduate, in particular the systematic intervention of graduation teams that involve family, schools, and the community.

School Safety: Positive outcomes on school attendance have been linked to orderliness and safety in schools and in the outside community (Bryk, 2010; Bowen & Bowen, 1999). Sheldon and Epstein (2002) report that there are less disciplinary referrals when families and communities are involved in school. Results from this study suggest that improving the quality of schools connections with families and community programs directly affects students' behavior within their school. This study also reported that the schools perceived that family and community partnerships were effective in reducing behavior problems (e.g. classroom disruptions) in the school.

- According to the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (2002) when schools collaborate with community agencies and families, students improve in striking ways such as: (a) earning higher grades and test scores, and enrolling in higher-level programs; (b) grade promotion, passing classes, and earning credits; (c) attending school regularly; (d) improving social skills, demonstrating improved behavior, and adapting well to school; and (e) graduating and going on to postsecondary education."

- Community agencies and families offer a wealth of resources to struggling schools. It is important to recognize these strengths as we move forward as a state to try and address challenges to our educational system. Community based organizations and families offer important cultural and social resources to schools and should be central to school improvement planning (Warren, 2005).

- Increasing social capital in schools can positively impact schools in a variety of ways by creating greater more even access to resources by bridging to community resources and linking families to those resources (Warren, 2005. We can help schools improve by meeting the many needs of children through a holistic approach of community school partnerships by putting health and mental health services in schools and providing educational opportunities for their parents and the surrounding community (Bryk, 2010; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997).

6) Recommendations for Financing Community Schools
- A community school is an investment in the community itself. The community school strategy should be defined in district, local government, state and national policy. It

should be supported by legislation, regulations and guidelines for all programs by making it an allowable use of funds under Title I. Funding for technical assistance and capacity building should be available to speed the learning of grantees and other developing community schools and to support learning among policymakers.

- Policymakers should incentivize partnerships by awarding additional points in grant competitions, rewarding greater flexibility in funding, and setting aside bonus funding for those using a comprehensive results framework, those who demonstrate alignment and coordination of funding streams, and for partnerships and consortia, over single entities.

- The **Site Resource Coordinator** is a major component of the successful community school. This is full-time person who is responsible for ensuring that existing resources are allocated as efficiently and effectively as possible. This allows school administrators the time to focus on instructional improvement. In order to support this necessary coordination functions, we recommend that federal and state agencies that finance opportunities and services for children, youth or families at schools or linked to schools should specify in grant guidelines that a portion of funding may be used to pay for the salary of a community school coordinator or for site coordination.

- In federal grant guidelines, priority should be given to applicants demonstrating how they support a broad results-focused framework with related indicators for the academic, social, emotional, physical and civic development of young people. Local policies should support organizations that have the legitimacy and credibility with local stakeholders to perform key intermediary functions. State policies should support and define clear expectations for Children's Cabinets or state non-profit organizations whose work cuts across agencies as well as public/private boundaries.

- The White House should organize an Interdepartmental Task Force to develop an action agenda for community schools that develops common language to be included in multiple grant programs of federal agencies so that schools and community partners can more readily access and integrate this funding into strong, sustainable, and aligned efforts. Policymakers should consider administrative flexibility in grant funding that would ease the integration of education programs during the school day so that they are more effective and efficient and reduce the administrative burden on grantees.

- The government should fund professional development that enables people working in schools, with community partners, and in federal and state agencies to learn how community schools work. At the local level, school administrators and educators need to know more about how to work with families and community organizations. Likewise, staff of community partners need to know more about how schools work. Title II funds should be used to establish a national center focused on preparing instructional materials and professional development opportunities that assist principals and teachers to work more effectively with community partners and provide a focus on the community where students live.