



OUR INAUGURAL
ISSUE!

The New Jersey Institute for Community Schools Newsletter

THE HEART OF EDUCATION BEGINS HERE

The newly launched **New Jersey Institute for Community Schools (NJICS)** is more than a new initiative; it's a statewide commitment to reimagining what school can be when students, families, educators, and communities work together. Backed by rigorous academic research, NJICS offers resources and support grounded in proven strategies for success.

In our first official newsletter, we're ✨ **introducing NJICS** ✨ and breaking down:

- ◆ **What** community schools are.
- ◆ **Where & Why** they're transforming the lives of thousands of students and families.
- ◆ **How** you can be part of the movement reshaping public education nationwide!



Rooted in local momentum and a growing national movement, the NJICS launches at Saint Elizabeth University to help support student success and community well-being across the state.



JOIN OUR

MAILING

LIST!



A Long-Term Vision Comes to Life:

INTRODUCING THE NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

NJICS is the culmination of years of collaboration among education-focused organizations, all working together toward a common purpose: **fostering the growth and sustainability of community schools across the state.**

Anchored by Saint Elizabeth University's [Center for Human and Social Development](#), NJICS aims to provide long-term infrastructure and statewide coordination for this proven approach to school improvement.

3 CORE STREAMS FEED THE NJICS CURRENT:

TAC

Research & Learning Hub

Community of Practice

Technical Assistance Center (TAC)

Modeled after successful initiatives in states like California, this center will offer targeted guidance to help schools launch, expand, and sustain high-quality community school strategies.

Research and Learning Hub

Drawing on the expertise of New Jersey's higher education institutions, NJICS will document and share what's working—providing data, stories, and analysis to inform both practice and policy.

Community of Practice

NJICS will bring together educators, school leaders, coordinators, and partners to share insights, solve problems, and learn from one another in a sustained and supportive network.

INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

What Are Community Schools?

Community schools are not one-size-fits-all programs, but **an evidence-based approach that positions public schools as hubs for student, family, and community well-being.**

Every Community School is:

- ◆ Built on strong, intentional partnerships.
- ◆ Shaped by local needs and strengths.
- ◆ Grounded in shared leadership and community voice.

With guidance from **on-site coordinators**, these schools bring together supports like health care, tutoring, and family engagement under one roof.

Why Is There a Growing Community Schools Movement?

The community schools movement has gained traction across the U.S. as more educators, families, and policymakers recognize that **helping students thrive means looking beyond academics.**

Backed by national research, the proven benefits of the community school approach include:

- ✓ **Increased safety.**
- ✓ **Reduced chronic absenteeism.**
- ✓ **Raised teacher retention (amid statewide shortages).**
- ✓ **Boosted academic outcomes.**
- ✓ **And much more!**

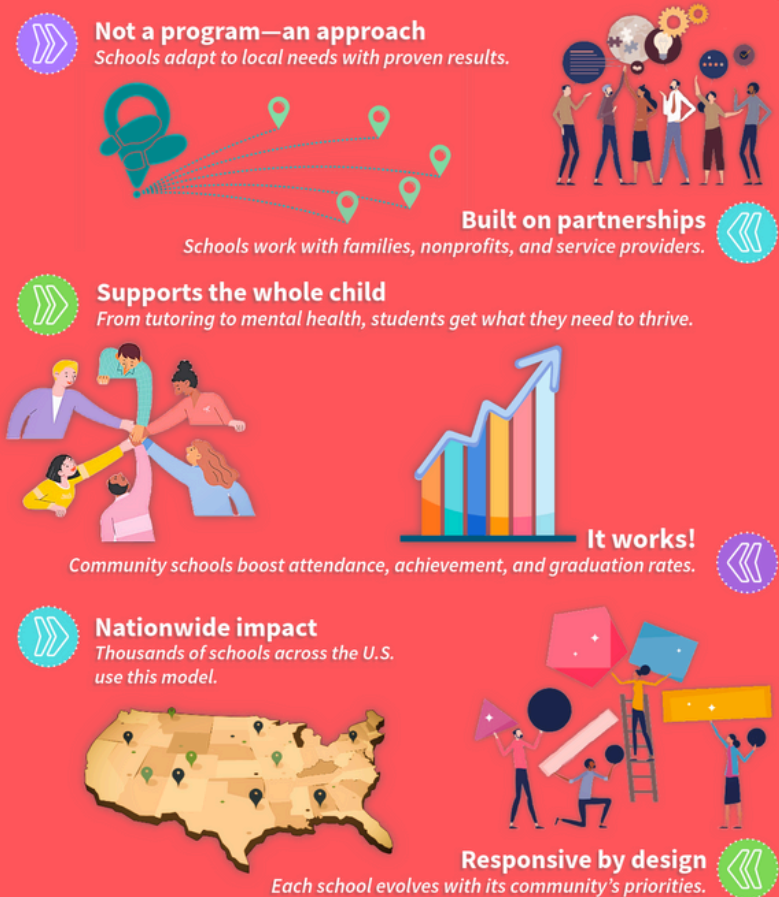
When schools offer whole-person supports, build strong partnerships, and engage families as co-creators, they become powerful hubs for equity and community change.

Where Do Community Schools Already Exist?

Community schools are growing across the country, from small rural districts to large urban systems, demonstrating their flexibility and success in diverse settings.

Check out our "[Mapping Momentum](#)" section on page 5 to learn more about states and cities leaning into the Community School approach!

Community Schools 101



A National Framework for Lasting Impact:

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS FORWARD SETS THE STAGE

In 2022, national leaders in education research came together to launch **Community Schools Forward (CSF)**—a collaborative effort to support and expand the community school movement. The group codified **six key practices** that help schools put students, families, and communities at the center.

With shared principles, proven strategies,
and growing support nationwide, CSF
provides the foundation for NJICS to thrive.

The **CSF Framework** is backed by research and
three trusted partners:



Click [here](#) or scan the QR code to learn more!

MAPPING MOMENTUM

AROUND THE NATION



Through the *California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP)*, **California** has invested over \$4.1B in planning, implementing, and expanding community schools. As of 2025, \$3.4B has been allocated, supporting over 2,500 schools across the state.



Maryland currently supports 621 community schools through grants funded by the *Blueprint for Maryland's Future*. Despite proposed budget cuts, lawmakers recently voted to continue expanding the program statewide.



Launched in 2014, **New York City's Community Schools Initiative** now includes 421 schools across all districts. Research shows improvements in attendance, grades, and graduation rates, especially in high-need schools.

Chicago Public Schools adopted the *Sustainable Community Schools* model in 2016 with \$10M in startup funds. Schools partner with local organizations and leadership teams. Ongoing support comes via Title I and Supplemental Aid allocations.



ACROSS THE STATE

Districts with Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS):

4

Organizations Actively Supporting Community School Expansion:

13+

Positive Outcomes Reported:

- ✓ Increased student attendance (up to +13%).
- ✓ Improved GPA (up to +8%).
- ✓ Higher teacher retention (up to 95%).
- ✓ Reduced chronic absenteeism (down 18%).
- ✓ Fewer suspensions (down 17%).

NEW JERSEY HAPPENINGS

State Budget & Community Schools Funding

In April, the **New Jersey Community Schools Coalition** formally requested that the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee approve a \$3 million line item in the FY2026 state budget that would support the NJ Department of Education in launching a grant program for community school expansion. The request is still under discussion as budget hearings continue.

Federal Mental Health Funding Cuts

On May 1, **Gov. Phil Murphy responded** to the U.S. Department of Education's **cancellation of nearly \$1 billion in school-based mental health grants**. New Jersey was in year three of a \$15 million, five-year initiative to expand access to school-based mental health professionals—now set to end prematurely, despite continued need.

Legislative Initiatives Impacting Education

STATUS

◆ **Public Education Innovation Fund (S-3141)**

Would create a **public education innovation fund** and provide tax credits to businesses making qualified education donations.

Still under discussion.

◆ **Expanding Early Child Education (S-3910)**

Proposes guaranteed **free, full-day kindergarten** statewide and a structured expansion of **universal preschool** access.

Amended and passed by Senate Education Committee; advancing toward full vote.

◆ **Chronic Absenteeism Task Force (S-3776)**

Seeks to create a **state-level task force** to examine and address the root causes of chronic absenteeism.

Passed by Senate Education Committee; advancing toward full vote.

◆ **Cost-Benefit Analysis for PILOTs (S-4069)**

Would require applicants for long-term tax exemptions to submit **financial impact assessments**, including effects on public schools.

Amended and passed by Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee; advancing toward full vote.

◆ **Higher Education Funding Concerns**

The proposed FY2026 budget includes **significant cuts to higher ed operating aid and student financial aid**—changes that would likely **hit low-income students the hardest**.

Included in proposed budget; final decision pending.

HELP MAKE EDUCATION THE HEART OF NEW JERSEY COMMUNITIES



Community schools are more than a model—they're a mindset.

One that puts students at the center and surrounds them with a full circle of care, opportunity, and belonging.

That mindset only works when schools are deeply connected to the communities they serve.

NJICS exists to help districts strengthen those connections by offering direct support, building professional networks, and aligning local efforts with statewide strategy and resources.

To ensure that students achieve and families and communities thrive.

JOIN THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS MOVEMENT!

Whether you're an educator, policymaker, community partner, or advocate, there's a role for you in strengthening New Jersey's community schools.

To learn more, [join our mailing list](#), or reach out at info@njinstituteforcommunityschools.com.

