

By: Senators Elliott, J. Hendren

SENATE RESOLUTION

TO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN
IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.

Subtitle

TO RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY
SCHOOLS IN IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AND
STRENGTHENING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT.

WHEREAS, every child should be able to grow up with the opportunity to achieve his or her dreams and contribute to the well-being of society, and every community deserves a public school system that fully delivers on that promise; and

WHEREAS, according to the most recent data, 63% of Arkansas students, and in some schools as many as 98%, qualify for free or reduced lunch, which means the students live in lower income households; and as a result, some students may face more challenges than others in succeeding in school and in life and need additional support; and

WHEREAS, so students can reach full potential, community schools provide comprehensive programs and services that are carefully selected to meet the unique needs of students and families that may be dealing with a lack of stable housing, inadequate medical and dental care, hunger, trauma, or exposure to violence; and

WHEREAS, since some families cannot afford to provide their children



with enrichment opportunities and additional academic support outside of school, community schools play a vital role in ensuring that all students have access to the learning and enrichment opportunities that support academic and life success; and

WHEREAS, according to a report from the Learning Policy Institute, the 4 key pillars of an evidence-based community schools approach are integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices; and the pillars promote conditions and practices found in high-quality schools, as well as address out-of-school barriers to learning; and

WHEREAS, research shows that community school interventions can result in improvements in a variety of student outcomes, including better attendance, academic achievement, reduction of racial and economic achievement gaps, and higher high school graduation rates; and

WHEREAS, ForwARd Arkansas, the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and the Arkansas Coalition for Community Schools support implementation of community schools as a strategy for school improvement, particularly in areas of high poverty; and

WHEREAS, research shows that these programs offer a strong return on investment, providing up to \$15 for every \$1 invested in community schools; and

WHEREAS, federal funding can be used to support community schools, and research demonstrates that community schools meet the standard under the Every Student Succeeds Act for evidence-based approaches to support schools identified for comprehensive and targeted support and intervention; and

WHEREAS, a community school is a school that includes each of the following:

(1) Integrated student supports, which address out-of-school barriers to learning through partnerships with social and health service

agencies and providers, coordinated by a community school director, including without limitation medical, dental, vision, and mental health care services, and counselors to assist with housing, transportation, nutrition, immigration, and criminal justice issues;

(2) Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, including before school, afterschool, weekend and summer programs, which provide additional academic instruction, individualized academic support, enrichment activities, or learning opportunities that emphasize real world learning and community problem-solving, including without limitation art, music, drama, creative writing, applied learning experience with engineering or science, tutoring, homework help, and recreational programs that enhance and are consistent with the school's curriculum;

(3) Active family and community engagement, which brings students' families and the community into the school as partners in a student's education and makes the school a neighborhood hub providing adults with educational opportunities, including without limitation English as a Second Language classes, computer skills, adult literacy, art, and other programs that bring in community members for meetings and events; and

(4) Collaborative leadership and practices, which build a culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility using strategies which at a minimum shall include a school-based leadership team, a community school director, and a community-wide leadership team, including without limitation other leadership or governance teams, teacher learning communities, and other staff to manage the complex joint work of school and community organizations; and

WHEREAS, a community school is also a school that uses the following mechanisms:

(1) An annual needs and assets assessment of and by both the school and community, including student demographics, academic achievement, school climate, and other relevant school and community-level information, and a review of needs and assets in the 4 key pillars;

(2) A community school plan that sets forth how educators, school staff, government agencies, and community partners will use and leverage all available assets to meet specific student and family needs in order to improve opportunities and outcomes for students;

(3) A school-based leadership team that leads the annual needs and assets assessment and develops and oversees implementation of the community school plan; and

(4) A dedicated full-time community school director at each community school site whose primary responsibilities include leading the needs and assets analysis and facilitating the development and implementation of the community school plan in collaboration with other members of the school-based leadership team; and

WHEREAS, the Arkansas community and family engagement framework was developed to support districts, schools, and communities with engagement opportunities and information to assist schools with implementation strategies for parent involvement plans that may include the community school structure; and

WHEREAS, leaders of Arkansas schools understand that community schools are an evidence-based strategy for improving achievement of all students,

NOW THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

THAT the Senate strongly supports the successful implementation of community schools as an evidence-based strategy to provide students with equitable access to a high quality education, effective family and community engagement, and an improved outcome.