



Community Schools:

Hearing from the Community



MAYOR'S OFFICE
OF EDUCATION

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: HEARING FROM THE COMMUNITY

In early 2016, the Mayor's Office of Education launched a public outreach effort to learn more about how the City of Philadelphia should develop our administration's new Community Schools initiative in order to better support children, families and school communities.

Between January and June, we spoke with more than 750 people from across the city through individual and group meetings, small roundtable discussions, and large town hall forums. We met with parents, teachers, community organizations (large and small), service providers, elected officials and more. In addition, more than 260 people completed a survey, sharing their feedback on what factors should be prioritized when selecting community schools.

As we partner with the School District of Philadelphia to improve access to vital programs and services for students and their families, we want to know what Philadelphians consider to be the most important issues in their neighborhoods; challenges when it comes to supporting children and families; and what ways we can work together to make their school communities stronger. So we asked.

OUR GUIDING QUESTIONS WERE:

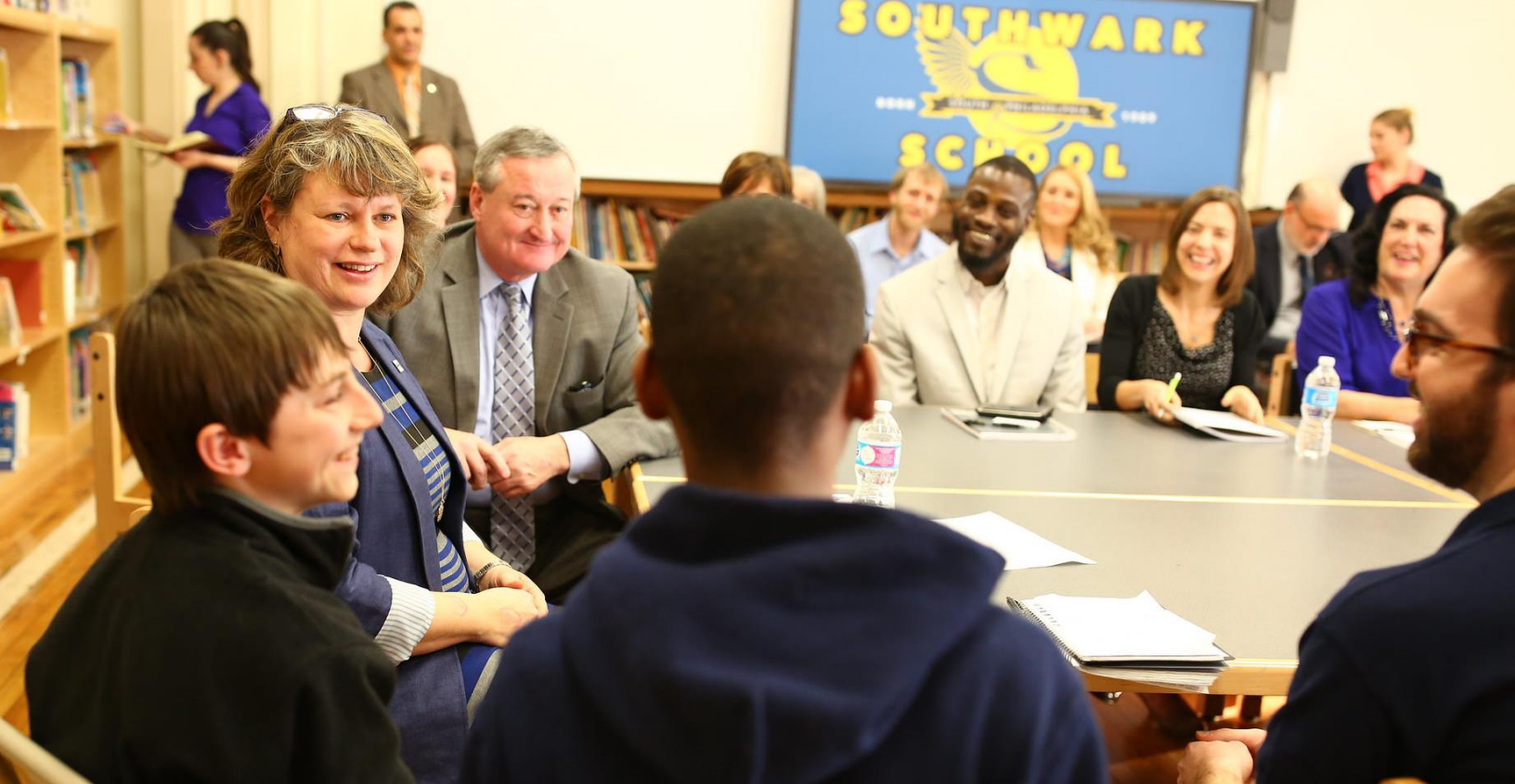
- What does the community schools strategy need to do to help address the issues our children and communities are facing?
- What factors should we consider when identifying locations to develop community schools?

We heard back. People shared their perspectives on the daunting set of responsibilities that are placed on schools to meet the many needs of children, and how the trauma of poverty affects learning conditions. We also heard about the effects of budget cuts on the capacity of schools and organizations to offer quality programs.

More importantly, we heard that people believe there are opportunities for growth and that neighborhoods are stronger when schools are stronger. We heard about the value of community-based supports and the need to expand them. We heard that these issues are challenging, but not impossible. We heard that people want the City to make progress on improving living and learning conditions and that people believe every child has a right to grow up safe and healthy.

A FEW SPECIFIC THEMES EMERGED:

- Strengthen City Support for Schools
- Empower Parents and Community Members
- Increase Access and Opportunities



WHAT WE DID

We engaged in a mission to collect public input from as many stakeholders as possible to inform decisions. To achieve this, we:

- Hosted 14 roundtable discussions with principals, teachers, students, parents, guidance counselors, nurses, researchers, policy experts, social workers, public health professionals, concerned citizens, service providers, coaches, and elected officials
- Participated in 7 town halls forums
- Held 6 large group meetings with school principals
- Attended 4 conferences to learn best practices
- Met with City Council members, State Senators and State Representatives
- Met with more than 60 different service providers to learn about what types of programs and services they offer
- Visited dozens of schools for tours, meetings, special events, and classroom activities
- Developed a survey, which was accessible both online and on paper, to gather feedback about the community schools' selection criteria and process

SCHOOL SELECTION SURVEY: We created a survey that asked teachers, parents/family members, community members, school partners, service providers, principals, and students to prioritize the factors they consider most important when choosing community school locations. The results from 263 survey respondents revealed that the most important community factors to consider were the child poverty rate of an area and health factors like the prevalence of asthma and diabetes. The most important school factor was the willingness of the principal and staff.



WHAT WE LEARNED – COMMUNITY SCHOOL OUTREACH THEMES

Regarding what people actually want to get from their community schools, we found that the majority of responses fit into three key themes:

- (1) Strengthen City Support for Schools**
- (2) Empower Parents and Community Members**
- (3) Increase Access and Opportunities**

STRENGTHEN CITY SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

“There are a lot of children living in poverty that need food, health services and emotional support. The more help they get the better because the youth are the future of our country.”

– Janeé L., Student

A driving force behind the community schools initiative is to align City services in a way that enhances and builds upon the great things that are already happening in schools. We heard from students, parents, teachers, principals, and community members that they are lacking access to critical services – many of which the City can provide. Schools have historically been underfunded and understaffed, which has led to limited capacity in many schools to offer students the services they need.

Philadelphians are asking how the City can better support schools, and they view the community school strategy as a means to improve access to programs and services. Through our outreach, we learned that educators and communities have significant concerns about the need for more mental health services. Principals are grappling with how to provide much-needed services to students and family members.

People believe community schools can help play a role in:

- Helping students and family members access mental health services
- Improving health services and programs for children
- Ensuring that English language learners have access to quality supports
- Offering adult education and job training programs
- Supporting trauma-informed initiatives at schools

WHAT IS TRAUMA INFORMED CARE?

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration a trauma informed approach realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies; procedures and practices; and seeks to actively resist retraumatization.

EMPOWER PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

“Community schools offer an important opportunity for parents and teachers to meet and bring together diverse groups and neighborhoods.” – Rebecca W., Parent

People had questions about the role of parents and community members in community schools, and how community school coordinators would work with families. We shared that community members and families are expected to make decisions together about the priorities in the community school plan and their participation is critical to a successful community school implementation.

Based on this, community members recommended that community school coordinators work with existing parent/school groups like the many School Advisory Councils, “Friends of” groups, and Home and School Associations that exist across the city. They also recommended that community school coordinators receive training on family engagement and community organizing, and partner with the District on their work. Additionally, it was important to many attendees that community school coordinators come from the communities where they would work, or be able to build strong relationships with people in the communities where they are placed.

Trauma informed care or a trauma informed approach was highlighted frequently by diverse stakeholders as an important focus for community schools. Recommendations included providing training to coordinators on trauma informed care, working to identify partners for schools that use trauma informed methods, and helping schools develop trauma informed practices.



Overall, people believe that community schools can help:

- ✓ Connect families to schools and schools to families
- ✓ Strengthen existing school/parent groups or create new ones
- ✓ Help meet the needs of parents and neighbors

INCREASE ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES

"As a community member, I would like to see fully functional partnerships that use organizations in the community to provide services that connect parents to their children's experience at school."

– Nancy N., Community Member

In addition to our public outreach, we met with more than 60 service providers. Philadelphia has a large network of skilled partners and service providers that work with children and families, but we have heard that there is a significant need for students and families to connect to more resources in their neighborhoods. Some of the most requested services fall in the categories of healthcare, adult education and employment, English Language Learner support, and out-of-school-time programming for students.

- **Healthcare and Health Programs:** Physical and mental health, behavioral supports, counseling services, food access, nutrition
- **Adult Education and Employment:** Employment services and support, adult basic education and GED preparation, financial literacy
- **English Language Learner Support:** English as a Second Language classes for children and adults, homework help, expanded supports after school
- **Out-of-School-Time Programming:** Tutoring, leadership development, music and art education, summer programming



OTHER FINDINGS

In addition to these themes, many people also asked how they can have a greater impact on school curriculum, climate, and culture. The School District of Philadelphia remains committed to quality instruction and a positive, inclusive school culture, and the City is dedicated to helping parents, students, and community members learn how to get involved in these important school components.

WHAT'S NEXT

Through this extensive public engagement process, we've heard what matters to the public as our office sets out to create 25 community schools over the next five years. Service needs identified during the community outreach process are being used to create the community schools needs assessment and strategic planning process. We are also using community feedback as we develop trainings for community school coordinators and begin working with City agencies, convening stakeholders, and engaging community organizations.

By implementing a community school strategy, we will address how the City can better support schools, families, and educators to reduce barriers to learning, and how the City can work with the District and individual schools to empower parents and community members to meaningfully engage with schools. The City will also address how we align and provide services with partnerships that directly meet the needs of students and families in Philadelphia.

To learn more or get involved, contact the Mayor's Office of Education at education@phila.gov or (215) 686-0333.

Thank you to the many parents, teachers, students, service providers, elected officials and community members who hosted and participated in meetings and events over the past six months. Our special thanks to the staff of the School District of Philadelphia. Your feedback and input has been invaluable as it has helped shape the direction of the community schools initiative. We'd like to acknowledge the following organizations who participated in or helped organize the activities described in this report. We value your feedback a great deal and look forward to collaborating again as we expand the community schools strategy in Philadelphia.

46th Street Baptist Church	Mayor's Commission on Literacy	Promise Zone Organizations
ACHIEVEability	Media Mobilizing	Read by 4 th !
Action United	National League of Cities	Research for Action
Alliance for Community Service Providers	Netter Center for Community Partnerships at University of Pennsylvania	School District of Philadelphia
Arcadia University	Nicetown CDC	Southeast Philadelphia Collaborative
After School Activities Partnership	Office of Innovation and Technology	Share Food Program
Corporate Alliance for Drug Education	Office of Parks & Recreation	SteppingStone Scholars
Center for Popular Democracy	Office of Supportive Housing	Stiletto Network Leadership Academy
City Life Neighborhood Clinics	Opportunities Industrialization Center	Sunrise of Philadelphia
Coalition Against Hunger	Philly Coalition Advocating for Public Schools (PCAPS)	Take Back Your Neighborhood
Coalition for Community Schools	Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY)	Temple University
Communities in Schools	Pennsylvania Department of Education	The Alliance of Community Service Providers
Community College of Philadelphia	Penn State University	The Fund for the School District of Philadelphia
Community Legal Services	People's Emergency Center	The Schott Foundation for Public Education
Department of Behavioral Health	Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND)	United Way
Department of Human Services	Philadelphia City Council	University of Pennsylvania
Drexel University	Philadelphia Delegation, PA State House and Senate	University of Pennsylvania's Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research
Education Voters of PA	Philadelphia Education Fund	Vetri Community Partnership
Education Law Center	Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT)	Women Against Abuse
Episcopal Community Services	Philadelphia Youth Commission (PYC)	Wordsworth Academy
Families Forward	Philanthropy Network	YMCA
Food Trust	Philly Student Union	Youth United for Change
Friends of Neighborhood Education	PhillyCore Leaders	Zhang Sah
GreensGrow Farms	Public Health Management Corporation - Direct Services	
Health Department	Public Health Management Corporation – Out of School Time	
HELP USA		
Hunger Coalition		
Keystone First		
LaSalle University		
Lenfest Center		
Local 274		
Mantua Civic Association		

If your organization is not represented and should have been, please know that it was an oversight and your participation is greatly appreciated.



**MAYOR'S OFFICE
OF EDUCATION**

Otis Hackney
Chief Education Officer

Susan Gobreski
Director for Community Schools

