



October 4, 2018

Dr. Sonja Santelises
CEO, Baltimore City Public School System
200 E. North Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21202

Dear Dr. Santelises:

The overhaul of Maryland's educational funding formula is a once in a lifetime opportunity to change the trajectory of education for a new generation of students. Engaging public and political will to fully fund the proposed recommendations will require coordinated advocacy. When advocates lead an action to fight for resources for our schools, most of the buses headed to Annapolis are packed with Community School leaders, students, and parents. As we prepare for the necessary organizing that lies ahead, we want to make sure we are speaking with one voice to the legislators.

After reading the Baltimore City Public School System's ("City Schools") letter submitted to the Commission on September 14, 2018, we found both points of agreement and critical points of disagreement between your comments and best practices within the Community Schools field in Baltimore. The comments appear to conflict with the adopted Community School Policy and the student wholeness approach outlined in the City Schools Blueprint. Student wholeness is described "as meeting students' needs, hearing their voices, and building partnerships with their families and communities." Lead agencies and community partners are essential allies in effectively meeting these goals.

The letter also presents an underestimation of the contributions, commitment, leverage, and still untapped potential of Baltimore's diverse non-profit, social services, and higher education resources. During the 2017-2018 school year, Community Schools received an initial investment of \$6.4 million dollars from Baltimore City. With the aid of community-based Lead Agencies, they **leveraged \$29 million dollars** of programming and services to provide more engaging, safe, and supportive environments that foster student well-being and academic success.

Some of the key concerns that were raised by City Schools Board members at the September 25th meeting were that:

- We do not have enough data or evidence to show that the Community School Strategy is having a meaningful impact in Baltimore.
- Partners need to be held accountable because not all partners are the same and we cannot put all partners in the same pot.
- It is not clear who owns the accountability and success of partners.
- The case has been made for Community Schools, we've got them, and they're staying. Now we need to figure out how to evaluate and expand them.

- The running tab for Kirwan is already extremely high. Providing categorical funding for community schools is too costly. We should focus our attention on securing funding for the essential resources and supports.

Community School Lead Agencies hear these concerns and would like to provide evidence for the impact of their work and offer recommendations around evaluation and data sharing that require increased investment from City Schools. Additionally, we are interested in providing more context around the strategy and leadership that are integral to the Community School Strategy and which support student and community well-being.

In short, we believe that:

- I. Categorical funding for Community Schools, including monies for a Community School Coordinator and health services practitioner, is essential to provide students living in areas of concentrated poverty the necessary services and supports they need to achieve academic and life success.
- II. Lead Agencies and local community partners have the capacity and expertise to deliver much-needed supports to schools, students, families, and communities.
- III. Successful implementation of a Community Schools Strategy requires both a school-based needs assessment and a greater level of systematic planning and coordination by City Schools.

I. CATEGORICAL FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

The Community School Strategy is specifically designed to remove barriers to learning created by concentrated poverty. Over the past two years the Maryland Coalition for Community Schools has worked with the National Coalition for Community Schools to bring both locally and nationally recognized experts to brief the Kirwan Commission on the national Community Schools movement, the progress made across four counties here in Maryland, and the potential for expanding and strengthening the strategy to better serve communities in concentrated poverty statewide. Because of the evidence and testimony, Working Group 4 of the Commission has been recommending for the past year that all schools in concentrated poverty implement a Community Schools Strategy, including funding for a Community School Coordinator. Since all schools in that category would benefit from a Community School Coordinator and the school-based health staff, the recommendation was that funding would logically be categorical. In addition to the categorical funding that the concentrated poverty working group recommends, they propose a per pupil allocation to provide resources to implement the strategy. The Commission itself recognizes that a Community School Coordinator, without additional financial support, would struggle. Even though most schools in Baltimore City are situated in areas of concentrated poverty and would receive most of the total funding, City Schools “strenuously” objects to this funding strategy. It suggests that City Schools is not committed to a full expansion of Community Schools across the district and does not believe this strategy is an impactful investment for all schools in concentrated poverty.

We agree that a Community School Coordinator position is not a stand-alone remedy. Just as a strong Principal, acting alone, cannot be a catalyst for change without the support of their school, its families, and the community. However, the Community School Strategy, with proper investment and district-level support will be the keystone to unlocking the full system of success in addressing the educational needs of students facing the barriers created by concentrated poverty. The Community School Strategy is not just a collection of “wrap around services.” A true Community School Strategy is not a program but a philosophy that the school building is and should be a community resource. The Learning Policy Institute designed an infographic to provide a visual representation of the “Four Pillars of A Community School in Action” (See Figure 1). Those pillars are (1) Integrated student supports, (2) Active family and community engagements, (3) Collaborative leadership and practices, and (4) Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities.

This approach requires distributive leadership where shared accountability and decision making engages and empowers community members, students, families, teachers and administrators to embrace opportunities and address challenges together. Many of the schools and school leaders that are recognized as making the greatest gains around attendance, behavior, and academic achievement are employing this philosophy of integration and

shared resources. The award-winning principals from the annual Heart of the School awards all shared how their success requires that all members of their school and surrounding community are engaged, included, and valued.

The research and evidence done on both a local and national level support Community Schools as a successful, even transformational, strategy. Categorical funding will ensure individual schools have the flexibility required to implement a Community Schools model that targets the specific needs of their students. Without dedicated funds, schools will be disincentivized to participate in the application process outlined in the City Schools' Community School policy. Schools will use piecemeal programming that is not as economically efficient or effective as a statewide strategy.

II. LEAD AGENCIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

As thought leaders, systems builders, and practitioners of the Community School Strategy, Lead Agencies, advocates, and connected partners not only share the mission of Baltimore City Public Schools, but also operate as your critical partners in implementation.

Baltimore's nationally recognized and award-winning Community School Strategy utilizes the commitment, passion, and expertise of the broader Baltimore community to provide a web of support, opportunities, and love for City Schools students, their families and communities. The Community School Strategy facilitated by Lead Agencies, Principals, and connected partners brings millions of dollars and countless additional resources to these schools every year. Looking at the results through the lens of individual schools provides insight into how local partners can use the flexibility built into the Community School Strategy to transform the lives of students and families living in communities in and around the schools.

Callaway Elementary School

Each year, City Schools administers a survey to determine stakeholders' perceptions of school environments, relationships, teaching and learning practices, and school safety. If you compare the parent surveys from years 2016-17 and 2017-18, you will see a stark improvement across the board in areas like administration, physical environment, learning climate, family involvement, school resources, and overall satisfaction with the school. Notably, parent's satisfaction in the administration increased from 66.9% to 86.2%. Likewise, parents reported a 10.9 percentage point increase in satisfaction for their children's' learning environment and a 24.9 percentage point increase for school resources. Finally, parents' satisfaction with the school rose 14.3 percentage point in one year.

With their strong, intentional partnerships with community-based organizations, Callaway has seen an increase in community engagement and support. They received \$50,000 in funding to remodel their computer lab from the Baltimore Orioles, \$10,000 for technology purchases from Toyota, and another \$10,000 from the Boys and Girls Club and other community partners. Callaway also receives about \$12,000 annually to support school-wide enrichment programs and field trips for their students. Two community partners recently provided paint, supplies, and volunteers to beautify the school. It is reported that the total yearly leverage of partnership funds is at least \$100,000.

The Boys and Girls Club serves an average of 100 children a day after school, including providing dinner. Parents and community volunteers average 100 in-school hours a week. Additionally, 300 students are provided backpacks and school supplies at the start of every school year. Callaway has been able to provide free vision screening and eyeglasses. The school has also began implementing a restorative practices approach which has contributed to an improvement in school climate.

The increased support and community partnerships has helped the school achieve a 20.9% gain in literacy scores and a 10% increase in math scores. These gains place Callaway as number one in the district for literacy. The school has reduced chronic absenteeism after identifying the issue in their needs assessment and increasing home visits to families.

Callaway's partnerships have also helped the families of students at the school and the greater community. Partner programs have stabilized homeless families in the school and parents have obtained employment after having access to the school's computer lab to apply for jobs and build their resumes. Callaway has also facilitated job placement by hiring volunteers to full time positions at the school.

Tench Tilghman Elementary School

The school partnered with Southeast CDC, to integrate a family stability program, out-of-school-time programs, and obtain funding for school renovation. The integration of support programs created a marked improvement in funding, parent participation, and attendance. In their first year as a Southeast CDC Community School, Tilghman raised \$20,000 with the help of their community partners.

The school saw a 15% increase in parent participation in the same year. The significance of this increase can be seen in their school survey results. Students, parents, and staff all reported higher feelings of satisfaction in the areas of physical security and safety and school connectedness. Notably, there was an almost ten-point jump in the area of respectful relationships, which measures the extent to which there is mutual esteem and deference between students and teachers, in one year.

They also saw a daily average attendance of 97%. With 550 hours of volunteer time each month, they've been able to distribute over 2,000lbs of food and provide comprehensive after-school programming for 100 students. The low chronic absenteeism and the strength of the community-based programming led Tilghman to an increase in the number of students who met or exceeded PARCC scores in mathematics. Importantly, there were significant increases for African American students and economically disadvantaged students. The percentage of African American students who met or exceeded expectations for math almost doubled.

The school has also been able to provide new opportunities for its students to grow and develop. In February, they launched their first edition of *The Tilghman Times* written and edited by 8th graders students. They also have a Robotics Team where STEM education can come to life. Despite only being founded a few months ago, the team placed in the top 10 in two tournaments.

III. NEEDS ASSESSMENT, SYSTEM-LEVEL PLANNING AND COORDINATION BY CITY SCHOOLS

We disagree with City Schools' recommendations to replace a school-level needs assessment with a district-level approach. Both levels of assessment have a place. A systems-level assessment would allow for developing an understanding of gaps in services, building economies of scale, and providing additional coordination between schools and agencies.

Community Schools are as unique as the students they serve. They often adopt different models of implementation based on the individual school's needs as expressed in their needs assessment. The systems-level assessment would be incomplete without both identifying the unique needs of schools and school populations, and without mapping out resources and potential partners within geographic proximity of the school. Identifying local and proximal partners in no way negates identifying and incorporating additional partners that are not geographically adjacent—should they be best able to address the identified and unique needs of the school.

We also agree that implementing a high-quality Community School Strategy will require a greater level of systematic planning, coordination, support, data collection and accountability at the district level. We believe the Community School policy adopted by City Schools on October 25, 2016, should serve as a guide for how to develop a comprehensive data collection and accountability plan that would address the needs and concerns of both community partners and City Schools. A plain reading of the policy makes it clear that the Community School Steering Committee ("CSSC") is responsible for collecting and reviewing data. Likewise, the policy intends for Lead Agencies and community partners to be an integral part of those functions. We ask that we be

allowed to facilitate the development of a data collection and accountability procedure as intended by the district's progressive policies.

City Schools is attempting to hire a Community Schools Specialist to act as a liaison between the district and the individual Community Schools and their Lead Agencies. We believe that this position should be elevated to reflect the increasing workload that will come as more and more schools are designated as Full-Service Community Schools. We also believe this position should be given a seat on the CSSC to aid in the development and implementation of a systems-wide assessment plan.

In summary, we ask that Baltimore City Public Schools renew their support for the Community Schools Strategy by:

- supporting categorical funding for Community Schools within the funding formula;
- working with the CSSC, Lead Agencies, and other Community Schools partners to develop and implement a systems-wide plan of support and data collection to ensure high quality programming and measure impact; and
- creating a high-level position for Community Schools within the district.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these recommendations. We welcome the occasion to meet in-person to discuss opportunities for partnership and collaboration. Community School Lead Agencies are committed to continuous quality improvement and would be interested to learn what evaluation metrics City Schools sees as most valuable, and what kinds of data and evidence City Schools would require to be a fully supportive partners of the Lead Agency model for Community School expansion.

Sincerely,

Access Art	Maryland Coalition for Community Schools
Afyra Baltimore	MOST Network
Child First Authority	Park Heights Renaissance
Civic Works	Promise Heights (University of Maryland School of Social Work)
Elev8 Baltimore	Social Work Community Outreach Service (University of Maryland School of Social Work)
Johns Hopkins University Center for Adolescent Health	Southeast Community Development Center
	Strong City Baltimore
Koinonia Baptist Church	Y in Central Maryland

cc: Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners
Kirwan Commission Members
Mayor Catherine Pugh
Baltimore City Council Members

ADDENDUM
FIGURE 1:

