

HARTFORD COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

Alignment in Purpose from the School to the Statehouse Around a Commitment to Community Schools

Hartford's community school initiative probably could have been started by any of the four agencies or organizations represented on the leadership team. But what has made the effort so strong in its relatively short five-year life is that partners from across the city are involved and deeply dedicated to expanding and sustaining a model built on best practices.

Mayor Pedro Segarra's office, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, and the Hartford Public Schools all financially support and participate in the Hartford Community Schools Partnership (HCSP).



“To have all of the partners is a really important commitment,” says Sandra J. Ward, the director of Hartford Partnership for Student Success (HPSS). “At any point we might have had to hit the restart button by having a new leader. But we’ve weathered all that. We had a new mayor and new superintendent since we started this work.”

Forming a Solid Foundation

The initial community schools were chosen as part of the district's efforts to improve outcomes in its lowest-performing schools. As the work was beginning in 2008, the Hartford Board of Education adopted a policy providing a framework to grow community schools in the district aided by funding from diverse sources. This

Awardee At-A-Glance

- **Location:** Hartford, CT
- **School District:** Hartford Public Schools
- **Website:** www.hartfordschools.org/index.php/our-schools/community-schools
- **K–8 Schools:** 6
- **6–10 Schools:** 1
- **Number of Students:** 4,100
- **Race/Ethnicity**
 - Asian/Pacific Islander – 3 %
 - Black/African American – 28%
 - Hispanic/Latino – 57%
 - White/Caucasian – 7%
 - Other – 5%
- **ELL Students:** 26%

About the Initiative

Hartford Community Schools is a strategy for organizing and connecting community resources to schools in ways that support student achievement and family stability and foster health communities. HCS is committed to public-private partnerships to promote excellence at all levels, from the classroom to school- and district-wide initiatives.

framework for community schools required schools to have public-private partnerships, a community school director, and expanded school-based services for students. The district also has a “strategic operating plan” which includes family and community partnerships.

“Schools are really reaching out for partnerships so that educators can be in the business of focusing on education, and the partners provide resources to meet other needs that get in the way of learning,” Ward says.

Meanwhile, the city government had reorganized several departments into a new Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation, which Ward says more closely matches the concept of creating continuity between children's lives in school and out of school.

As the five community schools were getting started, Ward says the directors and agency staff were also "saturated with the best quality training," including from the National Center for Community Schools with the Children's Aid Society in New York, so they would understand the phi-



community schools use a lead agency model in which a partner organization is selected by the school through a competitive process that includes a request for qualifications, a site visit and an interview. That agency then hires the community school director and other staff, and helps integrate other partners into the work. Rather than cre-

ating a new committee to oversee the partnerships and programs at the school level, community school directors, lead agency representatives and other staff sit on each school's governance council, which also includes parents.

The lead agencies and other partners, Ward says, have really shifted away from a competitive relationship to a "more collaborative framework." For example, Village for Families and Children, a lead agency and a mental health partner, helped to secure satellite clinic status for all of the community schools, which allows children and families to more easily access services and not miss school.

To knit the after-school and summer programs to-

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—J. Colon-Rivas, Director, DFCYR

losophies behind community schools.

In the 2001-12 school year, partners leveraged additional funding to support the expansion of the initiative. They were able to add two schools, bringing the current total to seven.

"The success of the Hartford Community Schools partnership is mainly due to the intentional synergy among the various systemic initiatives already in place at our major institutions impacting children, youth and families," says Jose Colon-Rivas, the director of the city's Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation. "Our belief is that all students can thrive under the right conditions, and that learning and outcomes should not reflect differences in race, gender, income, and class."

A Collaborative Framework

In addition to the leadership team, a management team made up of senior managers from the city, the school district, the United Way, the foundation, two agency representatives and two principals also lead HCSP. Hartford

Results

- Between the 2009-2010 and 2011-2012 school years, reading proficiency scores increased by over 10 percentage points
- School attendance for children participating in afterschool programs has increased school attendance by 1% – 3%
- Proficiency across math, reading and writing performance increased or remained the same across all three years for after-school participants, while performance decreased in math and writing for non after-school participants

gether with the school's academic goals for students, each community school also has an educational coordinator, who is often a full-time teacher, but then works on a part-time basis for the lead agency. This coordinator serves as a bridge between the regular school day and out-of-school-time programs by developing curriculum that supports learning goals and reviewing data to determine the needs of students at each grade level. This educator also provides training in instructional strategies to other after-school, youth development staff members to create more consistency for students. Several of the lead agencies also use the same incentives used during the regular instructional day



environment and “integrating it into the culture of the school.” The school’s lead agency, Village for Families and Children, has provided financial literacy programs for parents and teen outreach and service-learning programs in the school’s middle grades to steer students toward “using their leadership abilities for good.” The school also has a

strong volunteer-run reading program.

At another school, Burns Latino Studies Academy, students in the after-school program stay for dinner, residents in the area are involved in neighborhood beautification projects, and parents are becoming more active in leadership roles at the school.

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as part of the schools’ Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports program. At Alfred E. Burr Elementary School, for example, students are rewarded with Burr Bucks that they can spend in the school store or use for other privileges.

A pre-K-8 school, Burr Elementary, Ward says, has been a strong example of building a community school



Monitoring Data

Data is increasingly playing a part in how HPSS tracks its success and plans for the future. Recently, Ward convened a Data Committee on Partnerships, which includes representatives from the city, the school district, community agencies, funders and Achieve Hartford!, the local education fund. The group is looking at how to better monitor the impact that partnerships are having, not just in community schools, but also in out-of-school-time programs. The committee is also discussing how partners will play a role in developing Student Success Plans,



which were mandated by state law and must cover the three areas of academics, college and career readiness and social-emotional development.

HCSP is seeing increases in math, reading and writing scores for students in afterschool programs, as well as greater participation among parents and increases in students' access to health and dental care and mental health services.

Planning for Future Growth

In 2012, the HCSP leadership team created the Hartford Partnership for Student Success (HPSS) to pursue a



“broader agenda.” With Ward becoming HPSS director, a new coordinator of the Hartford Community Schools Partnership came on board in April.

One of the priorities of the agencies and funders involved in community schools in Hartford is improving early-childhood services in the city. To address those needs, the community school initiative is one of six sites in

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the country to receive a Mind in the Making grant funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and administered by the Institute for Educational Leadership. Based on the book by the Family and Work Institute’s Ellen Galinsky on the seven essential skills young children need, the project aims to integrate Mind in the Making lessons into the work community schools are doing in early childhood.

Another goal as HPSS looks to scale up is to replicate elements of the community school model—such as

on-site mental health services and high-quality out-of-school-time programs—at other schools. Leaders also want to expand high-quality afterschool and summer programs that provide academic support, mentoring and social skills development. One challenge, however, Ward says will be maintaining and continuing to expand services at the existing seven schools.

The city’s initiative is also beginning to have an influence at the state level. State legislation was just passed to support full-service community schools. State education leaders last year included community schools as one of the “turnaround” strategies that schools could use under the state’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act waiver plan.

HPSS leaders submitted testimony emphasizing that community schools should connect to a school’s “core instructional program” and offered other lessons they have learned in their work.

“I get a little emotional about it,” Ward says, about how far the initiative has come. “At the end of the day we have a lot of people that are just committed to kids. We’re all in this for the same purpose.”

Partners

Achieve Hartford! • Boys and Girls Club of Hartford • Catholic Charities • City of Hartford • COMPASS • Youth Collaborative • Connecticut State Department of Education • The HartfordHartford Foundation for Public Giving • Hartford Public Library • Hartford Public Schools • Hartford Symphony • Travelers • Trinity College • United Way of Central and Northern Connecticut • United Way Women’s Leadership Initiative • The Village for Families and Children • Wadsworth Athenaeum