



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Let's Finish What We Started: The Case for Sustaining Community Schools

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Public schools are an ideal setting to deliver services beyond education to vulnerable children and their families. This year, six DC grantees started a process to become “community schools,” a model that uses the school as a hub for services delivered by a host of community partners and nonprofit organizations. Unfortunately, next year’s proposed DC budget does not include funding to sustain this effort. We think it makes sense to finish what was started: to continue funding the development of the six community schools, while planning for strategic expansion to additional school sites.

Community Schools bring trained and caring adults into a school to focus on issues such as truancy prevention, parental involvement, early childhood services, or youth development. The partners often connect students and their families with outside supports, including medical, dental and mental health services. A city-wide staff position, the Community School Coordinator, is responsible for mobilizing community resources and providing guidance to grantees.

Around the country, Community Schools have helped increase graduation rates and narrow achievement gaps between students. So, it doesn’t make a lot of sense to stop DC’s Community Schools initiative before it really gets off the ground. Much of the first year as a Community School, grantees are busy cultivating leadership and building relationships with community organizations. It would be unfortunate to stop this work.

The FY 2014 budget included \$1 million for OSSE to implement Community Schools programs through six groups of partners in the District. For example, the Mount Pleasant Community School Consortium is a partnership between a public charter, a DCPS school, a health service provider, and four community-based organizations. Together, they offer students and their parents access to a wide range of supports, such as health care, child care, afterschool activities for youth, and adult education programs. A full list of this year’s grantees can be found [here](#).

If the budget can add \$3 million next school year, the program could expand from 6 to 12 grantees, at about \$200,000 each. This would pay for the citywide Community School coordinator and other costs like mental health staff or a mobile dental bus that will increase access to services. Some resources would also go toward technical assistance and program evaluation.

The long-term success of Community Schools depends on a number of factors, including stable leadership, solid relationships with community partners, and a sustained financial investment. Sites can be funded with a blend of public and private resources, but private funders will want to see the District is committed to scaling up this pilot phase before committing their support for future years. DCFPI hopes the District will continue its support for Community Schools and give sites the time to make a difference for our neediest students and their families.