



Community Schools Communications Toolkit

The Coalition for Community Schools, an initiative of the Institute for Educational Leadership, has developed this communications toolkit as the go-to resource for materials for effectively communicating the transformative impact of Community Schools. As advocates for comprehensive and community-driven education, the Coalition understands the importance of clear, compelling messaging. This information can guide organizers and supporters of the Community Schools movement in outreach to communities and lawmakers.

The resources included in this document draw on a wealth of knowledge, data, and experience from experts in the field and are designed to empower our partners, supporters, and stakeholders with the tools needed to amplify the success stories, key messages, and critical data that showcase the value of Community Schools. Together, let's tell the story of how Community Schools are shaping the future of education and fostering thriving communities nationwide.

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Coalition for Community Schools Overview One-Pager

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) has a long and distinguished history supporting communities to accelerate system change and expand educational and workforce opportunities for young people and their families. Through the Coalition for Community Schools, IEL is coordinating a national effort to expand Community Schools in urban, rural, and suburban communities. IEL provides national leadership to help build learning systems that unite communities, families, and schools to accelerate the improvement of student outcomes.

Community Schools are public schools that combine local resources and individuals to expand learning opportunities and support for all students. They serve as learning hubs that unite families, educators, and community partners around a strategy and the resources needed to promote equity-centered practices that improve long-term life changes of today's students. Community Schools are an effective and proven strategy for improving education while using culturally informed strategies that help all students reach their potential academically and in the future. There are currently an estimated 4,200 Community Schools across the United States, with that number growing quickly.

The Coalition for Community Schools is made up of over 1,000 partners across the country, and is supporting existing or developing Community School State Coalitions in 40 states and territories.

[Click here to learn more and download the one-pager.](#)

Bi-Partisan Messaging: Communicating about the Value of Community Schools

These key messages can be utilized in communicating about the benefits of embracing and advancing the Community School strategy, and are meant to help garner bipartisan support at the local, state, and national levels.

Guidance on the differentiated messaging colors:

- Blue messages have been developed with progressive or left leaning audiences in mind.
- Red messages have been developed with more conservative audiences in mind.
 - The term “Community Schools” can be used or replaced with terminology more appropriate for your region.

IEL is a trusted national organization leading a Coalition for Community Schools.

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) works with communities to accelerate system change and expand educational and workforce opportunities for young people and their families.

- IEL is leading a national effort to expand a Coalition for Community Schools in urban, rural, and suburban communities.
- IEL provides national leadership to help build learning systems that unite communities, families, and schools to accelerate the improvement of student outcomes.
- The Coalition helps support Community School advocacy, making sure all voices, particularly those of marginalized groups, are elevated and heard.
- The Coalition is a leading resource for information, research, and data on Community Schools.
- The IEL and the Coalition partner with communities to create systems tailored to local communities to support new ways to learn and work.
- The Coalition provides technical support at all stages of a Community School, from increasing awareness, to facilitating community alignment for sustainability, to accelerating improved outcomes through implementation.

Key Talking Point: Introducing and defining Community Schools

Community Schools provide students and their communities with innovative learning environments and support systems that young people need to thrive in school, college, and the workplace.

Community Schools unite schools and families around access to quality education that prepares students for success in the workplace and in our communities.

- Community Schools are public schools that combine resources and people throughout a community to expand learning opportunities and support for all students.
- Community Schools provide a local engagement strategy for creating and coordinating opportunities with public schools to accelerate student, family and community success.
- Community Schools are learning hubs that unite families, educators, and community partners around a strategy to promote equity-centered practices that improve long-term life changes of today's students.
- Community Schools are growing in popularity because research shows they can improve student outcomes, while also being cost-efficient and locally controlled.
- Schools and communities are stronger together.

Key Talking Point: Community Schools have momentum

Schools and communities are uniting to transform learning and bring greater opportunity and equity to school systems across America.

Communities and schools are teaming up to create learning environments that focus on improving efficiencies of academic and non-academic resources, to accelerate student outcomes.

- In a Community School parents play an active role in their children's education.
- Student needs have grown beyond what traditional schools alone can meet.
- Communities have untapped resources that can help schools meet the learning needs of all students and give them the skills and inspiration to thrive.
- Today, there are more than (##) Community Schools in (##) states across the nation providing new support and options for children in cities, suburbs, and rural areas.
- Community Schools can go by different names, but they share a common theme of uniting communities to accelerate student success.
- Community Schools focus on making sure each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.
- Schools need all the resources available in a community to provide fair and equitable learning options and ensure children's needs are adequately met in and out of school.
- Community Schools provide locally-determined resources and support for students outside of the classroom – such as counseling services, nutrition programs, and targeted instructional strategies – so students can thrive in the classroom.

- Political differences fade when communities become equal partners in student learning.

Key Talking Point: Community Schools improve outcomes and opportunity

Community Schools are an effective and proven strategy for improving education while using culturally informed strategies that help all students reach their potential academically and in the future.

Community Schools are an improvement strategy incorporating all factors that impact learning for better student outcomes.

- Community Schools support the whole child so that they are ready to focus and learn when they are in school.
- Communities that unite with their schools can expect higher attendance, greater family engagement, better conditions for learning, and improved confidence in schools.
- A community school strategy makes it easier to focus teaching and learning to connect classroom curriculum to real-world community issues, student interests, and learning opportunities.
- Academic success is accelerated when community resources focus on student health, tutoring, after-school and summer enrichment, mentorships, and other supports.
- There are many examples of Community Schools producing impressive gains for students and their communities:
 - After five years of using a Community Schools strategy, Webb Middle School in Austin, Texas became the city's highest-performing middle school.
 - One Orlando, Florida, high school increased enrollment by more than 500 students while cutting disciplinary incidents in half and more than doubling industry certifications.
 - After eight years as a Community School, an elementary school in Baltimore, Maryland, ranked second in the city academically and reading proficiency reached 95% for 5th graders.

Key Talking Point: Community Schools are cost-effective

Community Schools are cost-effective stewards of public and private funds, maximizing student support and delivery of services to meet student and community needs.

Community Schools are cost-effective, efficient, and promise returns on our investments for schools, students, and our communities.

- Community Schools bring funding and resources into schools that would otherwise not be available.
- Community Schools can increase funds and other resources for students by catalyzing public investment and combining funding and resources.

- Community Schools secure mixed short- and long-term funding from multiple sources to develop a sustainable funding base.
- Diverse funding and resources come from public and private sources to support both infrastructure and key services as well as costs for starting up and adding programs.
 - One case study shows that each \$1 invested in a Community Schools Coordinator returns over \$7 in net benefits to a community.

Key Talking Point: Community Schools effectively engage families and communities

Community Schools authentically engage families, community organizations, and others to advance student learning and outcomes.

Community Schools foster environments where parents and caregivers become equal partners in guiding their child's education.

- Parents and communities have more input into the operation, direction, and outcomes of Community Schools.
- Community Schools are positioned to serve as a vehicle for hyper-local decision-making that responds to the unique needs of each community.
- Learning can happen anywhere and at any time in communities that partner with schools.
- Local educators, partners, families, and community members collaborate to guide learning through a shared understanding of local needs and assets.
- Communities work together in innovative ways to find and use new and existing resources to support learning and address local issues in a local context.
- Community Schools create space for hyper-local decision-making between parents, communities, and educators to make it easier to meet the needs of each learner.

Amplification Message Map: Communicating with Community Schools Audiences

Below are specific asks, considerations, and messages to utilize when talking with external audiences. These messages can be utilized when building out your materials and talking points for meetings with key audiences.

Audience	Key Ask 1	Key Ask 2	Key Ask 3
Policy Makers/ Ed Leaders/ District Officials Link to Message Map	Support funding for Community Schools	Support legislation that bring Community Schools to more districts	Encourage your colleagues to support Community Schools legislation
Candidates Link to Message Map	Include support for Community Schools in your platform	Visit Community Schools on campaign stops to talk to members and understand why they're important	Encourage leaders and peers to support Community Schools
Thought Leadership Organizations Link to Message Map	Help build awareness around the effectiveness of Community Schools	Develop/publish policy briefs with recommendations informed by Community Schools research	Encourage leaders to support Community Schools in your advocacy work
Journalists Link to Message Map	Use IEL as a trusted source for when learning and writing about Community Schools	Cover policy decisions and funding decisions surrounding	Report on the impact of Community Schools in localities and regions

Coalition Members	Use and/or cite IEL as a resource for information and expertise when presenting or writing about Community Schools	Help share and disseminate information shared by IEL about Community Schools	Share IEL messaging and/or invite IEL leaders to collaborate as part of high-profile presentations
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Audience: Policy Makers / Ed Leaders / District Officials

Key Ask 1: Support funding for Community Schools	Key Ask 2: Support legislation that brings Community Schools to more districts	Key Ask 3: Encourage your colleagues to support community school legislation
Key Message 1: Community Schools are a bipartisan, effective and efficient strategy for improving education and supporting student success.	Key Message 1: A Community Schools strategy is designed and well-suited to address urgent student, family, and community needs in times of crises, as we've seen during the global Coronavirus pandemic. Community Schools offer comprehensive recovery plan in an environment where education must evolve.	Key Message 1: Districts and states want to adopt this strategy. By encouraging your peers to consider or learn about Community Schools make them more inclined to support future legislation.
Key Message 2: Significantly increasing public funding for the Full-Service Community Schools program would enable hundreds more communities to coordinate the assets of their schools, families, and community partners for students' immediate and long-term success.	Key Message 2: Community Schools are hyper-local. A Community Schools strategy puts more power in the hands of parents and families. Significantly increasing public funding for the Full-Service Community Schools program would enable hundreds more communities to coordinate the assets of their schools, families, and community partners for students' immediate and long-term success.	Key Message 2: By signaling support - you can make Community Schools policies topiCommunity Schools of conversations on key committees like education and appropriations
Key Message 3: Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Community Schools were able to mobilize quickly and effectively to support the social, emotional, physical, and learning needs of students and their families.	Key Message 3: Community Schools operate in a dynamic, changing environment. Through a guiding framework, technical support, and the right resources and infrastructure, local educators, partners, families, and community members engage in a deep and collaborative process to develop a comprehensive understanding of local needs and assets.	Key Message 3: Showcasing model Community Schools in your area can help set the bar/set an example for others and establish you as a leader in reimagining public education success.

Audience: Candidates

Key Ask 1: Include support for Community Schools in your platform	Key Ask 2: Visit Community Schools on campaign stops to talk to members and understand why they're important	Key Ask 3: Encourage leaders and peers to support Community Schools
<i>Key Message 1:</i> Community Schools are hyper-local and are a great way to reach grassroots constituents.	<i>Key Message 1:</i> A Community School strategy is designed and well-suited to address urgent student, family, and community needs in times of crises, as we've seen during the global Coronavirus pandemic. It's a comprehensive recovery plan for our current, unprecedented environment. By visiting you'll witness the work first hand.	<i>Key Message 1:</i> By using your voice to put pressure on leaders - you can help move the needle in the direction of policies that support Community Schools.
<i>Key Message 2:</i> A Community Schools strategy puts more power in the hands of parents and families	<i>Key Message 2:</i> The media is a powerful tool to bring attention to Community Schools.	<i>Key Message 2:</i> Community Schools are a solution longstanding equity issues in education
<i>Key Message 3:</i> Education is a priority issue for voters, and voters know that our public education system needs improvements to best value taxpayer investment and best support student success. Community Schools establish a new model to get the most out of investments in education.	<i>Key Message 3:</i> Challenge other candidates to explain how and why their approach to education will better support student success, invite them to learn more about Community Schools.	<i>Key Message 3:</i> Surface leaders in Community Schools to discuss benefits and showcase solutions in forums and perhaps joint op eds.

Audience: Thought Leadership Organizations

Key Ask 1: Fund / conduct research of effectiveness of Community Schools	Key Ask 2: Partner with the Coalition of Community Schools to Develop/publish policy briefs with recommendations informed by Community Schools themselves	Key Ask 3: Encourage leaders to support Community Schools in your advocacy work
<i>Key Message 1:</i> There have been local case studies we use for proof points, but further research is needed to fully understand the nationwide impact and potential for Community Schools and Community Schools policy	<i>Key Message 1:</i> The Coalition of Community Schools has X Number of schools across the country where researchers can learn directly from practitioners.	<i>Key Message 1:</i> Where research shows that Community Schools policy is a promising solution to education issues, include them in recommendations
<i>Key Message 2:</i> Understanding how Community Schools systems can tackle disparities in education makes them viable solutions for state leaders, policy makers, and future candidates	<i>Key Message 2:</i> Issue briefs can help build awareness and lead with objective data and results.	<i>Key Message 2:</i> Where appropriate - when communicating with leaders, share concrete examples or case studies that are relevant or comparable to their communities
<i>Key Message 3:</i> Data can help affirm the effectiveness of Community Schools and research briefs can serve as proof points for funders and policymakers.	<i>Key Message 3:</i> Paired with research, storytelling can allow voices of those within and impacted by Community Schools to be an active force in developing the movement's future.	<i>Key Message 3:</i> Consider pledges and joint efforts to commit resources and planning power to spread Community Schools locally and regionally.

Audience: Journalists

Key Ask 1: Use IEL's Coalition of Community Schools as a trusted source for when covering stories of Community Schools policy	Key Ask 2: Cover policy decisions and funding decisions surrounding Community Schools	Key Ask 3: Cover Community Schools discussion in future races, ask candidates about them directly
Overarching message: If you cover education then you should learn about, understand, and cover Community Schools. They are a solution for the vexing challenges facing education today.		
The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is the home of the Coalition for Community Schools, acting as the intermediary between the Coalition's national intermediaries and place-based networks. IEL supports the work throughout the entire organization and intentionally staffs the Coalition to facilitate the development and implementation of a shared strategic plan.	Significantly increasing public funding for the Full-Service Community Schools program would enable hundreds more communities to coordinate the assets of their schools, families, and community partners for students' immediate and long-term success.	The Learning Policy Institute and National Education Policy Center conducted a review of nearly 200 studies of Community Schools and concluded that it meets the criteria for an evidence-based improvement strategy in the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Community Schools Graphics

The following graphics have been created to amplify the key talking points in the bi-partisan messaging. Utilize the PNG files in [this folder](#) in your communications materials and social media posts.

The graphics pull from these talking points:

Why Community Schools?

1. Schools and communities are stronger together
They are public schools that combine community resources to expand learning opportunities and support for all students.
2. Community Schools offer hyper-local solutions.
In a Community School, collaborative leadership and local partnerships help meet the unique needs of each community.
3. Community Schools improve student outcomes and opportunities
They see higher attendance, greater family engagement, better learning conditions, and improved confidence in schools.
4. Community Schools are cost-effective
They braid and blend funding to maximize student support and meet community needs.
5. Community Schools bring families and schools together
They authentically engage families to play an active role in their child's education, and partner with community members to support learning and other outcomes.
6. Community Schools support the whole child
They focus on making sure each student is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

Community Schools Footprint

7. There are 4200 Community Schools across the country — and counting.
See why the Community Schools strategy is growing at communityschools.org

Coalition for Community Schools Footprint/Join a Network

8. The Coalition for Community Schools is made up of over 1,000 partners across the country, and is supporting existing or developing Community Schools State Coalitions in 40 states and territories.

Are you part of a Community School?

Join a Coalition for Community Schools network!

Visit <https://www.communityschools.org/link/join-a-network/>

Communicating Your Story: What Makes a News Story?

Before writing your story or pitch, think about your idea the way a reporter would. Is the idea relevant to the outlet's audience? Is it a new story or a new angle on previous coverage? Do you have supporting data? As you proceed, your odds of coverage will increase if your idea addresses one or more of the following:

Importance/Significance:

Why should the outlet's readers care about this article enough to read it? And remember, what's obvious to you likely will not be obvious to the reporter or editor, so be clear about why the story matters and include details to back up your pitch. Ask yourself if and why someone in your family would be interested in the story you are pitching.

Impact:

What impact does your subject/theme have on people and communities covered by the outlet you are pitching? Are attendance rates on the rise? Are reading scores up/down? Is teacher turnover down? These impact points often are the news hook that will get a reporter interested. Highlight the impact that the pitch has had or could have on the outlet's audiences.

Proximity/Local Appeal:

How is the story you are pitching connected to the area covered by the publication or outlet? Does someone or something you are pitching offer a local angle for news coverage? Similarly, are you pitching a story about a program or person that is prominent nationally but little known locally? Make the connection to the coverage area.

Timeliness:

Is your pitch an immediate news story? If so, provide as much information as you can in advance or as close to the news event as possible. Is your pitch connected to local or national news cycles? It's often effective to pitch a local example of something that is in the news nationally or statewide. Are there natural news cycles you can tap into, such as holidays, test core releases, beginning/end of school years? Add urgency and/or relevance to your pitch by highlighting the timeliness of the proposed piece.

Originality and Freshness:

Some stories meet little of the above criteria, but can get accepted because they are original stories that have not been covered. Or, they have been covered locally but are ripe for a national mainstream or trade pitch. These often are hidden gems that are of interest to broader audiences. If something catches your eye because it's new, interesting, alarming, or original, a reporter might have the same reaction.

Human Interest:

These stories can be obvious, such as the grandparent who earns a degree alongside her grandchild or daughter. Others are less obvious but of equal interest: the community that pools its resources to buy supplies to help local students head off to college with everything they need for early success. Are there parents and/or students affected by a new policy or practice? Find stories that inspire, celebrate, raise concern, educate, or simply entertain.

Tips for Telling Your Story through an Op-Ed

How to write and place op-ed?

- Express an Opinion: The op-ed pages let experts make compelling arguments. The stronger your opinion, the more likely it will be published.
- Have a News Hook: Write about something in the news, preferably stories covered daily and appearing on the front page.
- Know Your Audience: Research new organization's recent op-eds, news coverage, and editorial philosophy. Make sure you are writing about an issue they care about. Reference their coverage. Counter an argument made in a previous editorial or op-ed. Don't duplicate a recent op-ed.
- Know Your Limits: Every publication has writer's guidelines that list word limits, which are between 600 and 1,000 words. Yes, that's short. But follow them. Many editors automatically reject submissions over the max.

What is the outline of a successful op-ed?

- A compelling first paragraph that captures attention and explains why the issue is important.
- A "billboard" paragraph that explains your argument (aka a thesis)
- Give context that explains why the issue is worthy of attention
- Evidence and data are respected sources with anecdotes to show the impact on a real person or community.
- An acknowledgment of a counterargument and then refute it
- A conclusion that is a call to action

Tips for Media Outreach:

1. Send a short pitch — no longer than 200 words that includes information for a spokesperson — to local media about events or potential stories.
3. Set up google alerts to monitor any coverage so you can amplify it on the regional office's social media, and share coverage with your networks
4. Consult your regional director if you think something might be press worthy but you aren't sure. If not, share the information with your network through an email or newsletter. Include language for board members, champions, and contacts to copy and paste for social media sharing.
5. Ongoing: Engage with media contacts regularly, even if you don't have something newsworthy. Check in with the press about what's happening in your region quarterly, without the expectation that they do a story

Tips for Using Social Media

Social media can be a great tool to reach families and communities—not just for events, but general awareness of the importance of community schools.

Value of Social Media

- Amplify the organization's reach
- Expand network of contacts
- Engage with target audiences on specific issues
- Create a dialogue online
- Build partnerships with partners and stakeholder groups

Instagram

- Emphasizes photo and video sharing
- Users can take, edit, and publish visual content for both followers and non-followers, as long as accounts are public
- Users can interact with your content via likes, comments, shares, and saves.
- Very visual platforms. Videos do very well on Instagram.
 - Share video stories from families in the community
 - Share video stories from trusted community leaders
- Advertise upcoming events
- Stories are popular on Instagram — vertical content of the above alongside graphics work best

Facebook

- A platform for sharing and conversation
- Posts can be longer than Twitter—but not too long
- Advertise upcoming events
- Share videos
- Communicate through groups such as alumni pages

TikTok

- Shorter is better—7 seconds is the ideal length of a TikTok for attention but can go up to 3 minutes
- Demonstrate what the community school experience is like

- Feature youth voice
- Advertise upcoming community events

X (formerly Twitter)

- Both a sharing platform and a listening platform
 - Listening: Follow people and organizations that interest you. Watch their posts to hear what they have to say. When you agree or like them, retweet or like the post.
 - Sharing: blog posts, news and other links, videos, photos.
- Advertise upcoming events

Snapchat

- Similar content to Instagram stories
- Share video stories and graphics from families in the community

LinkedIn

- LinkedIn is a professional network, so its content reflects that:
 - Profiles are like a resume
 - Posts and videos are related to professional topics
 - Groups

Overall Recommendations for Posting Across Platforms

- Aim to post 2-3x/week
- Develop posts that are very visual
- Identify opportunities to use community partners to share stories/updates of their placement and activities
- Feature youth and families impacted by community schools
- Hashtags: #CommunitySchools #FamilyEngagement
- Tagging/linking to partners (such as IEL!) is a great way to build community
 - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/IELconnects> / <https://www.facebook.com/CoalitionforCommunityschools>
 - X (formerly Twitter): [@IELconnects](#) / [@CommSchools](#)
 - LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/institute-for-educational-leadership/>