

## 2021 Legislative Session Issue Brief

### Full-service community schools

We all want to advance solutions to help students — no matter what they look like, where they live or how much money their parents make — thrive and lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

Unfortunately, the wealthiest few and their backers are using Minnesota's gross racial disparities and opportunity gaps to push more standardized testing, narrowing curriculum and privatizing our public schools. And these strategies do nothing to improve educational outcomes for our students.

Full-service community schools offer a better, proven path. Communities from Deer River to Rochester are bringing community services into the school and empowering the people closest to students – parents, educators and neighbors – to transform schools to respond to their needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that schools are truly the hubs of our communities. And our full-service community schools were even better equipped to quickly respond to family needs because of the relationships built with their partners.

Education Minnesota supports providing \$90 million in state funding to help the state's existing 19 full-service community schools continue their work and allow other schools to become full-service models as well.

#### What are full-service community schools?

This concept puts social, medical and before- and after-school academic services and enrichment activities where they are most accessible—on the school campus. Instead of treating a range of educational “problems” as separate issues, community schools work to find ways to unite them and solve them together.

This is not a cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all approach. Every school is different based on the needs of the students, families and community. That's why every school does a needs assessment. Here are some examples of programs and services that could be offered:

- Child care, adult education, early childhood education, medical clinics, mental health services, food shelves and family literacy classes.
- Programs that help parents and community members develop deep involvement and leadership in their school.
- High-quality before- and after-school tutoring, college application help and specialized training and professional development for teachers and school staff.
- Services that improve school climate and health. This includes rethinking school discipline and using restorative, trauma-informed practices, training teachers in social and emotional learning, and offering school-based health centers.

#### Why full-service community schools?

They work. If a child comes to school hungry, sick or struggling with trauma, it's hard to focus on learning. And if a family is hurting financially and has unstable housing, it's more difficult for them to support their child's learning.

Community schools across the nation are finding that addressing school culture and non-academic factors can have a significant impact on academic achievement and social emotional health. Brooklyn Center in Minnesota is one of those school districts.

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[www.educationminnesota.org](http://www.educationminnesota.org)

Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.  1760



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Graduation rates are up. About 84.3 percent of Brooklyn Center High School seniors graduated in 2019, up from 74 percent in 2010, according to data from the Minnesota Department of Education. 88.5 percent of Black seniors graduated in 2019 from Brooklyn Center High School compared to 69.9 percent of Black seniors statewide. And at the alternative learning site, 60.6 percent graduated in 2019, up from 22.7 percent in 2015.

Discipline referrals and tardies are down and attendance is high. Attendance rates were at 93.5 percent at the middle school and 92.2 percent at the high school during the 2018-19 school year.

### **What can the Legislature do to sustain and expand full-service community schools?**

- Increase state funding to \$90 million to support existing and new full-service community schools. The funding is used to hire site coordinators, who are key to sustainable, successful community schools. The funding goes to schools in this priority order:
  - *Existing full-services community schools.*
  - *Schools identified under ESSA as needing assistance, as recommended the state's School Finance Working Group.*
  - *Any other districts that apply.*
- Encourage co-location of state-provided services. Encouraging local health and human services branches to collaborate and co-locate as appropriate with community schools would improve service delivery for many students and families.

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# Connecting with Students through Caring Messages

by Rachel Thapa

As Lincoln Park Middle School prepared for the COVID-19 related school building closures last spring, we surveyed our students and learned that their biggest concerns involved food insecurity and loss of connection. We focused our response on these areas by organizing a food drive and inviting

community members to share a caring message with a student. Through the support of our families, staff, and community, we were able to share 2000 pounds/200 bags of food with our families. We also collected dozens of caring messages electronically and wrote these messages out in hand-written cards to send with students.



One student stopped by my office before the building closures. She was struggling emotionally and was having a hard time with the uncertainty, fear of being disconnected, and not being able to get hugs from people due to the physical distancing. I was able to give her a message from a community member and say, "This is a message from a caring adult in our community for you. Even though we aren't able to give hugs right now, I want you to know that there are people who are thinking of you and you are not alone. There are many adults in the community who care about you and all of our students." She cried, thanked me, and put it in her pocket, saying "I'm gonna keep this with me to remember that people care."

In total, over 1000 messages were sent out to our students this spring/summer via food bags, distance learning paper packets, etc. As we began the school-year in a distance learning model, we have continued to prioritize connection and care for our students. This fall, we sent care packages home to each of our 720 students, including a caring message in each one. I've received many expressions of appreciation for these messages from students and parents/guardians.

## Why Caring Messages?

Social connectedness and caring adults contribute positively toward kids' well-being and can help them through stressful times. The current need for physical distancing and an extended period of distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic has required us to be creative with what this looks like. While our teachers and staff have been connecting with students and families in a variety of ways, caring messages have provided an opportunity to connect our community with our students.



There is [compelling research](#) behind the concept of caring messages which demonstrates the power it can have in helping people feel connected and cared for, even in the midst of extremely difficult circumstances. And, as it turns out, caring messages can be beneficial for both the recipient and the sender; [research shows](#) that caring messages can also reduce loneliness in the person sending the message.

**So...what is a caring message?** A caring message is a simple, non-judgmental, non-demanding expression of care. It communicates to the recipient that they are seen, accepted, not alone, and that someone has hope for them.

### **Spread hope and courage...send a caring message!**

We continue to collect caring messages/encouraging notes to share with our students to let them know that adults in their school and community care about them. We invite you to share a message with a student. [Click here](#) to send a caring message to a student--we will make sure your message gets to an amazing kid! ❤️

Some tips for caring messages:

- ♡ Non-judgmental, non-demanding expression of care...let the person know that they are loved and valued.
- ♡ Help them understand that there is someone there who cares and has hope for them...they are not alone.

♥ Express belief in them and in their strengths and abilities...we can do hard things!

**For More Information/Additional Resources:**

[CBS News: How Caring Messages help in Suicide Prevention](#)

[COVID-19: Industry Disruptor, Dr. Ursula Whiteside, Makes Life-Saving Mental Health Skills Accessible](#)

[Curbing Suicide With a Text](#)

[Loneliness and Fighting Back](#)

[Overcoming Loneliness: One Psychologist's Approach](#)

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[Resilience to ACEs](#)

[Responding to ACEs with HOPE \(Health Outcomes from Positive Experiences\)](#)