



## The Community Learning Center (CLC) Model as Effective School Improvement Strategy

Schools in Ohio are in an intertwined, inseparable partnership with the communities they serve. Over the last three decades, a model of schooling that cultivates this local partnership to enable the best outcomes for students, parents, and the community is Community Learning Centers (CLCs), also known nationally as Community Schools. These CLCs embody the principles of the [Whole Child Framework](#), where the child is at the center, and the district, school, family, and community support their needs. The CLC approach makes the school the hub of the community where students, their families, and all community members can access enrichments and support. CLCs are also a recognized school improvement strategy positively impacting attendance, behavior, family engagement, test scores, and grades, according to findings from the [Learning Policy Institute](#), that also show a \$15 return on investment for every dollar spent.

The [four main pillars](#) create the foundation of these schools, though how each pillar looks and is implemented is directly in response to community needs: 1) **Integrated student supports** - partnerships with service providers; 2) **Expanded and enriched learning** - opportunities that exist beyond the school day; 3) **Family and community engagement** - support from the community including educators, parents, and community members; 4) **Collaborative leadership** - team-based leadership including resource coordinators.

### Transforming State Trends & Outcomes for Ohio's Students

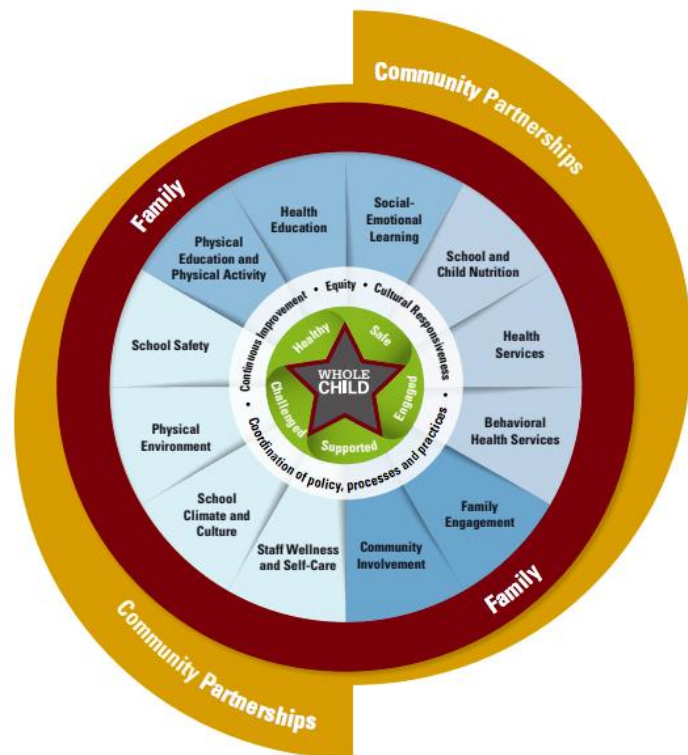
Ohio currently ranks [29th](#) in overall child well-being, lagging in the bottom half of all states. Many Ohio students continue to face barriers arriving at school healthy and ready to engage in learning, especially given continued pandemic challenges and longstanding systemic inequities. Integrating the services students, families, and their communities need to thrive within an evidence based CLC model can help transform state trends and outcomes:

- **Nearly half a million children experience poverty.** One in six children live in households experiencing [poverty](#) - including disproportionately 40.7% of Black children, 30.7% of Hispanic/Latinx children, and 28.3% of children of two or more races. Students qualifying as economically disadvantaged also grew beyond 50% for both Metropolitan and Appalachian regional districts in the 2020-2021 school year.
- **Soaring chronic absenteeism indicates prevalence of unmet basic needs.** From 2020-2021 to 2021-2022, the [statewide rate of students missing at least 10% of their instructional time due to absences](#) nearly doubled since pre-pandemic levels, a rise across nearly all grade levels, district types, and student subgroups, especially those most marginalized. In fact, students experiencing homelessness had a chronic absenteeism rate of a staggering 65% in the 2021-22 school year.
- **Child hunger remains unacceptably high.** One in six children, and as many as one in four in certain counties, lives in a household that faces [hunger](#). Yet, more than one in three kids that live in a food insecure household doesn't qualify for free or reduced-price school meals.

- **Child health declined without increased access to care.** In 2020, nearly one in eight Ohio children received a diagnosis of anxiety, depression or both, up 42% from 2016 – the 10th-highest increase nationwide. But according to the 2020-2021 National Survey of Children’s Health, an estimated 58,000 school-age Ohio children were unable to access needed health care.
- **Student proficiency rates dropped - especially along equity lines.** Data from 2020-2021 shows that eighth grade math proficiency ranged from a low of 4% for students in some Ohio districts to as high as 98% in others, and third grade reading proficiency ranged from 10% to 98%, demonstrating striking disparities based on which school building or district a child attends and how equitably resourced their communities are.

### Foundational Efforts & Policies to Promote Student Wellness & Success through CLC Model

Ohio’s Whole Child Framework was developed in 2019-2020 in response to such alarming trends and data and places the whole child at the center of education in Ohio. The five tenets of Ohio’s Whole Child Framework are five commonly held beliefs reflecting optimally desired student conditions leading to success in life and learning. In the infographic, the tenets are shown in green surrounding the star that represents the whole child. These tenets recognize that students’ basic physiological and psychological needs must be met before they can fully engage in complex learning and social activities. As guidance for educational decision-making in Ohio, the Whole Child Framework uniquely positions Ohio’s schools to promote student wellness and success through implementing CLCs.



**While some well-organized, full-service CLCs meeting the Whole Child Framework currently exist in diverse regions of Ohio, such as Oyler School in urban Cincinnati, a CLC in rural Ashtabula Area City School District, the Family Resource Center established in Wickliffe City Schools, and another in Campbell City Schools, this approach to education needs to be clarified, amplified, and expanded for better educational outcomes.**

Ohio has taken initial steps to formally codify CLCs in 2015 through sections 3302.17 and 3302.18 of the Ohio Revised Code. These define "community learning centers" as schools operated by a city, exempted

village, or local school district or community school established under Chapter 3314. This form of CLC participates in a coordinated, community-based effort with community partners to provide comprehensive educational, developmental, family, and health services to students, families, and community members during school hours and hours in which school is not in session. It is important to note that in every other state CLCs are known as Community Schools. In Ohio, however, “Community School” is the legal name for Charter School. To avoid confusion, we use the term CLC, but nationally, Community Schools is the most widely used term for this evidence-based model.

In addition to establishing their existence in ORC, Ohio has taken steps to partially implement and support CLCs through the Ohio Department of Education's Office for Improvement and Innovation's administration of the 21st Century CLC (CCLC) grant. This federally funded grant program supports high-quality, out-of-school time learning opportunities and related activities for students who attend eligible schools. Recent flexibility from the U.S. Department of Education allows 21st CCLC funds to be used for expanded learning time programming during the school day, week or year in addition to out-of-school time. A limitation of this funding is its dependency on continued federal funds. A comprehensive list of schools that have received funding can be found [here](#).

Another recent funding source for beginning CLC work has been through Governor DeWine's [Student Wellness and Success funds](#). In the last biennium budget, these funds, totaling over \$1 billion, were folded into the Fair School Funding Plan's Disadvantaged Pupil Impact Aid (DPIA) to support districts in providing more robust integrated student supports based on local need.

**Ohio has clearly invested in CLCs. The fiscally responsible path forward for Ohio is to maximize these policies and investments in the whole child and ensure stronger investment in the CLC model as an effective school improvement strategy. This brief offers several recommendations:**

- 1. Ohio should match language used across the country to provide clarity and differentiate community schools from charter schools.** Nationally, “community schools” signifies “community learning centers”. By misrepresenting the term in Ohio, the current terminology creates confusion among districts that leads to missed opportunities and leaves money on the table.
- 2. Transition Family and Community Partner Liaison roles.** These roles were initially established through federal and state COVID relief funds for COVID response and support. Because Ohio is steadily moving away from COVID-specific needs, these positions should be transitioned to become regional CLC Leads, especially in high-needs areas. They should be provided specific training in best practices for developing CLCs and proactively engaging schools in developing them. Ensuring community engagement and buy-in is critical to ensuring local oversight in decision-making and sustainability in the long-term.
- 3. Continue to Amplify CLC Work in Ohio.** While some CLCs are highlighted in Whole Child Framework resources, the Ohio Department of Education should continue to share success

stories of well-developed CLCs in Ohio. This could be done through the website as well as through regional meetings or networks. This should also include a focus on how 21st Century Grants can be linked to workforce development.

4. **Support Ohio School Districts Pursuing Federal Full-Service Community Schools Funding.** Ohio is now well-poised to do this work under the guidance of the Whole Child Framework. There have been federal funding opportunities in the past that enabled schools across the country to implement full-service community schools. Ohio schools have been unsuccessful in the past in applying for these funds and would benefit from additional support and technical assistance.
5. **Prioritize policy, budgetary, and administrative action to grow the footprint of school-based health services in Ohio,** especially for districts with high populations of Medicaid-eligible students. This will increase access to needed mental and physical health services and act as an anchor for quality CLC implementation and effectiveness.

## Conclusion

When considering the data that not only supports the impact CLCs have on student learning, but also the unquestionable need for change to support the children of Ohio, it can no longer be ignored that CLCs are necessary, and the good thing is that this work is already underway. CLCs embody all aspects of the Whole Child Framework and have a proven impact on child health, well-being, families, and communities. Through their implementation, CLCs provide proven growth in student academic success, health, and mental wellness, as well as cost savings and assets gained for the state economy.

It is imperative that Ohio begin taking measures to fully fund and support the implementation of Community Learning Centers. While many school districts have operationalized successful approaches to the CLC model, other districts that would also benefit encounter barriers to implementation with fidelity to national best practice due to the lack of necessary infrastructural investments of the state. With so many foundational components in place, Ohio must act now to maximize this opportunity and improve outcomes for all children and secure the future prosperity of our state.

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## Appendix of Terms Regarding the Community Learning Center (CLC) Model

One critical step towards establishing, expanding, and sustaining CLC's in Ohio is the need to cultivate a common language and shared understanding of key terms associated with this model, especially given the fact that Ohio's terms likely differ from those used nationally. To further this aim, we have created this brief appendix of terms as a supplemental resource to this memorandum.

- **Family Liaisons and Community Partner Liaison.** Individuals in this role provide resources and information regarding the following: Connecting to high-quality family engagement supports; identifying opportunities to connect students and families with community partners and resources; locating direct service providers and community partners and agencies; and supporting local school district staff to serve highest need students and families.
- **Charter School.** A charter school is a tuition-free school of choice that is publicly funded but independently run. While this term is not recognized in the state of Ohio, A charter school is a public school that operates as a school of choice. Charter schools commit to obtaining specific educational objectives in return for a charter to operate a school. Charter schools are exempt from significant state or local regulations related to operation and management but otherwise adhere to regulations of public schools — for example, charter schools cannot charge tuition or be affiliated with a religious institution. In other words, charter schools are publicly accountable — they rely on families choosing to enroll their children, and they must have a written performance contract with the authorized public chartering agency. Charter schools are also autonomous — they have more flexibility in the operations and management of the school than traditional public schools.
- **Resource Coordinator.** The Resource Coordinator builds and maintains partnerships with outside organizations. The resource coordinator is the connective tissue of the CLC model and serves as a link between the academic mission of the school, and all the partnerships, services, and programs happening in the building.
- **Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS).** Full-Service Community Schools provide comprehensive academic, social, and health services for students, students' family members, and community members that will result in improved educational outcomes for children. These services may include: high-quality early learning programs and service; remedial education, aligned with academic supports and other enrichment activities, providing students with a comprehensive academic program; family engagement, including parental involvement, parent leadership, family literacy, and parent education programs; mentoring and other youth development programs; community service and service learning opportunities; programs that provide assistance to students who have been chronically absent, truant, suspended, or expelled; job training and career counseling services; nutrition services and physical activities; primary health and dental care; activities that improve access to and use of social service programs and programs that promote family financial stability; mental health services; and adult education, including instruction of adults in English as a second language.