

# Hartford Community Schools Initiative: Theory of Change

## Contextual Factors

**Strong Leadership:** Strong community leadership and interest in the Community School partnership, including the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Hartford School District, United Way, and Hartford Office of Youth Services.

**Emphasis on Reform:** Hartford Public Schools and the city – with the support of the mayor and current superintendent – are pursuing an extensive education reform agenda including: the transition of middle schools to K-8 schools, development of academies, changes to the management structure (e.g. autonomous schools), and community schools.

**Committed and Dispersed Funding:** Secured funds for three years for core program implementation, technical assistance, and evaluation through a variety of individual funding stream.

**The Afterschool Initiative (ASI):** Three of the five pilot schools have been part of ASI and have already begun developing partnerships and programs that support transitioning to a community school model.

**School District Turnover:** The School District has had seven superintendents in nine years, leading to inconsistent leadership and engagement with schools up until now.

**Economic Climate:** Like many other school districts, Hartford Public Schools has had to make cuts due to the current economic recession.

**Unique School Capacities:** Due to schools' different involvement in ASI, service of different grade levels, and community differences, all five schools are implementing a community school model at different phases of development.

**Community Indicators:** External factors, including neighborhood- and family-level characteristics, affect the students & families these partnerships are trying to help (ex., drugs, violence, etc.).

## Assumptions

Why community schools?

- By supporting the needs of the whole child through extended services, schools, teachers, and students themselves will remove barriers to and provide conditions for increased academic achievement.
- Hartford students will reap academic, social, & health benefits from partnerships & school-based support, services, & opportunities.

Why a city-level partnership?

- A city-level partnership will help steward and support the development of a new community school model so that pilot schools are successful and that this pilot will become a District-wide reform effort.
- A city-level partnership is necessary to influence systems-level policy changes, ensure adequate investment in the project, and develop a cohesive community school effort.

Why school-level partnerships?

- There is a need for schools to work with local agencies and for local agencies to align their work with schools to help Hartford students & families achieve academic, social, economic, and health benefits. One organization cannot do it all.

Why technical assistance?

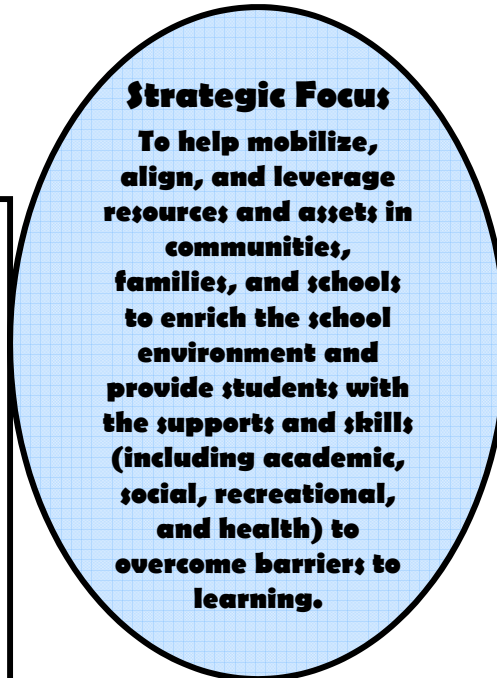
- Ongoing technical assistance & training that draws on research and best practices, about programs and partnership development, will help leaders of community school efforts develop knowledge & skills to implement high-quality programming.

Why evaluation?

- Data collection (OMG's evaluation data including qualitative and quantitative data) will support ongoing learning among partners and guide decisions about how to implement, assess, and refine program activities at the city and school levels of the community school efforts.

How will partnerships operate?

- Partners at both the city and school levels will have different priorities, but transparent conversations and joint commitment will help partners to identify common areas of interest to focus efforts and drive change for students.
- By establishing common outcomes, partners can align activities to achieve these outcomes and leverage other projects and resources with community school efforts. This is a process that will take time and effort among partners.
- Capacity exists at all levels of the partnership (CBOs, schools, partner organizations and institutions) to operate and support community schools.



Increase capacity of city-wide partners to support the implementation of a community school model

Develop a learning network for community schools to build capacity together

Support the development of school-based partnerships, systems, and programs to implement the community schools model



Increase capacity of city-wide partners to support the implementation of a community school model

**ACTIVITIES**

**Establish Community Schools infrastructure:**

- Hire and support Director of Community Schools
- Develop and delineate roles of School Community Partnership vis-à-vis Director of Community Schools
- Director and partners act as spokespeople for community school, individually and collectively
- Support capacity building at all levels of community schools development (TA, training, and evaluation)
- Develop a communications strategy and protocols
- Develop a marketing strategy to build awareness (e.g. events, media)

**Build partnership**

- Identify and secure engagement of partners integral to the long-term success of community schools
- Identify and build connections with corporate community and CBOs to include their input
- Formalize partnership purpose and structure
- Determine operating procedures and individual partner roles

**Monitor program development and quality:**

- Ensure data collection and management systems to inform the work of the partners and school-based programming

**Ensure sustainable funding and resources:**

- Commit core funds and leverage additional resources to ensure sustainability and expansion of community schools, especially from corporate sources
- Align resources and integrate funding to support community schools model
- Advocate for changes in policy to support community schools model

**INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (Years 1-2)**

**Staff capacity:**

- Director of Hartford Community Schools is in place and leading Hartford Community Schools.
- The Director and partners have clear understanding of individual roles and joint goals.

**Partnership development:**

- Vision: Partners have a common vision for their work and can articulate clear roles and responsibilities.
- Membership: The partnership has a diverse set of active members and has added new members on the basis of identified needs.
- Administrative Support: Partners share decision-making and management responsibilities, depending on their resources and constraints, such as legal responsibility for oversight of funds, fundraising capability, technical expertise, potential conflicts of interest, and other considerations
- Program Improvement: Partners establish protocols and mechanisms (e.g. data sharing agreements, mechanisms for student, parent, and community feedback) for engaging ongoing reflection, feedback, program refinement, and quality control.
- Policy Obstacles: Partners identify and address policy challenges
- Fundraising: Partners develop and implement a fundraising plan with diverse funding sources.

**Commitment:**

- Policymakers are increasingly engaged in and refer to community school efforts independently.
- Partners allocate and distribute resources to support community schools.
- Additional funding partners are committed to the community schools.
- Community members, parents, etc understand and view community schools as a school change strategy.

**LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (Year 3+)**

**Secured commitment of internal partners and external stakeholders at an institutional level to community schools:**

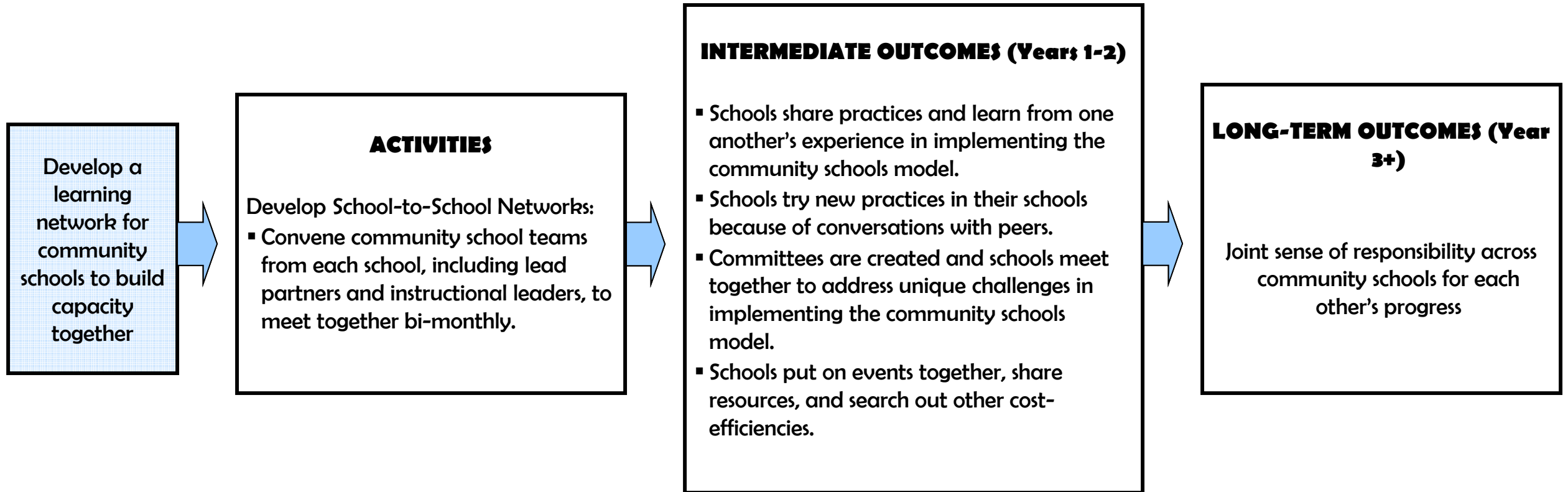
- Community and partner involvement is broad and diverse in order to achieve the multiple objectives of community schools.
- District and city leadership perceive community schools as an integral strategy in achieving high-performing schools.
- Hartford Foundation and others perceive community schools as an integral strategy to achieving youth development and community development outcomes.
- HCS is set as a priority by multiple levels of leadership in the city.
- The responsibility for developing community schools is understood and shared by the community at large (including the School District, lead agency organizations, the business community, other partners and funders).
- Other initiatives, programs, and funding sources in Hartford align with and strengthen community school outcomes.
- Barriers to community schools are addressed and resolved

**Consistent use of data for performance management:**

- Data collection systems are well-established and data is used to inform planning and programming regularly.
- Data-driven advocacy is used to illustrate the power of community schools to expand the number of schools and to maintain and secure additional funding.

**Sustained funding and resources:**

- Partners ensure adequate financial support for community schools as a strategy.



Support the development of school-based partnerships, systems, and programs to implement the community schools model

## ACTIVITIES

Develop school-level partnerships:

- Create school-based team that includes lead agencies, school leadership, & site coordinators in each of the five schools.

Develop and refine research-based program plans:

- Develop needs assessment and resource inventory of school
- Develop and continually refine school-level implementation plans
- Identify & align research-based supports & services for students that include core instructional programs & out-of-school time services.

Develop the capacity of school staff to implement community school programs:

- Provide necessary school-level technical assistance, training, and capacity building to principals, teachers, and other school-based staff

Develop data collection systems:

- Develop mechanisms to track program implementation
- Develop data collection systems to track student outcomes including interim outcomes (e.g. homework completion, work habits)

## INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES (Year 1-2)

CBO and School staff begin to integrate efforts:

- School-based community school teams meet regularly.
- Principal and/or Assistant Principals have relationships with lead partner staff and coordinators in the building.
- School staff can articulate the community schools strategy and many are involved in community school activities.
- Lead agency staff are knowledgeable about school-day activities and supportive of school staff.
- School staff have access to more PD opportunities.

Schools show evidence of thoughtful program planning and implementation:

- School and lead agency staffs are clear about their roles.
- Mechanisms for student and community input are operational, & inform community school programming.
- Implementation and student data, along with stakeholder input are used to evaluate, develop, and refine school-based programming with intentionality (new program strategies target need identified by data).
- Schools begin to shift programming in response to student and community needs.

Students begin to access more services – more students and more often:

- Students have greater access to health, academic enrichment, and recreation services.
- Students access these services more often.
- A greater number of students access these services.

Student outcomes improve:

- Students attend school more regularly.
- Discipline incidents decline.
- Students feel more connected to schools.
- Students feel more connected to teachers and lead agency staff.

## LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (Year 3+)

Sustained and comprehensive programs exist in schools:

- School-based programs are sustainable & include family resource centers, early childhood development programs, & coordinated health/social services.

Greater community access to school-based services:

- Community members know about and access community school-based programs

Positive perceptions of community schools in the larger community:

- Parents want to send their kids to community schools
- Teachers, parents, and staff see direct connection between community school efforts and school changes.

Students show increases academic achievement and positive social interactions:

- Higher GPAs – especially in core subjects
- Improved work habits
- Increased homework completion
- Higher promotion rates
- Improved social skills
- Greater civic competency
- Greater conflict resolution

Greater family support of students:

- Parents are more engaged in students' learning
- Parents are more connected to school and visit more often (for PTA meetings, student conferences, etc).

Positive shifts in school culture:

- Teachers have higher expectations of students
- Teachers attendance levels increase
- Students have higher expectations of themselves
- Students have more interactions with caring adults