

# CommUNITY Schools

Fall 2023

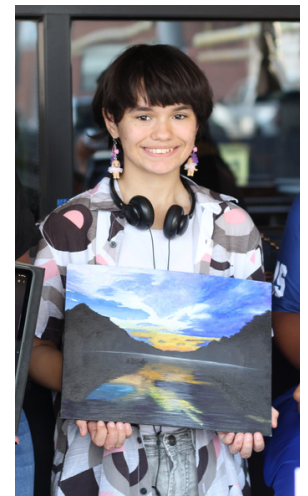


**Northside Neighborhood House**

# Introduction

At its core, the Community School model aims to create a strong partnership between schools, families, and community organizations to improve educational outcomes and enhance the well-being of students.<sup>1</sup> Implemented correctly, Community Schools help ensure that students thrive, with families and school communities benefitting as well.

Modern Community Schools are the result of a late 20th-century resurgence of community investment in schools as a way to build power, improve learning, and address social issues.<sup>2</sup> These early innovators in Community Schools worked to build partnerships between schools and other local entities to create structures, strategies, and opportunities for students and their families. Over time, various models evolved but each integrated social services, health, and community involvement as a way to meet specific needs of their students and communities. The Coalition for Community Schools is the leading organization in expanding the work across the country. They estimate that between 8,000-10,000 schools have adopted the model.<sup>3</sup> This paper will review the Community Schools model and how the Northside Neighborhood House implements CommUNITY Schools, as well as the impacts, challenges, and considerations of operating CommUNITY Schools.



# Community Schools Model

Overall the Community Schools model is centered on the idea that schools should be a hub for the entire community, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment that enhances the educational experience and well-being of all those involved. There are six key practices in the Community Schools model<sup>3</sup>



**Integrated systems of support** ensure students and families are empowered and feel healthy, valued, and safe by removing barriers and creating opportunities that promote individual and collective wellness.



**Rigorous Community-Connected Classroom Instruction** infuses the expertise of the local community into each school to deepen connections within teaching and learning.



**Enhanced Learning Opportunities** to strengthen student skills and solidify understanding through applying academic content in-and-outside of the four walls of the classroom.



**Personalized Culture of Belonging, Safety, and Care** to regard every individual as a valuable contributor with unique skills, knowledge, and history.



**Powerful Student and Family Engagement** opportunities to provide a space for their voices to help shape the priorities of the school environment and culture.



**Collaborative Leadership, Shared Power, and Voice** so that stakeholders are empowered to engage in collective learning, advocacy, and ownership.

## Northside Neighborhood House's CommUNITY Schools

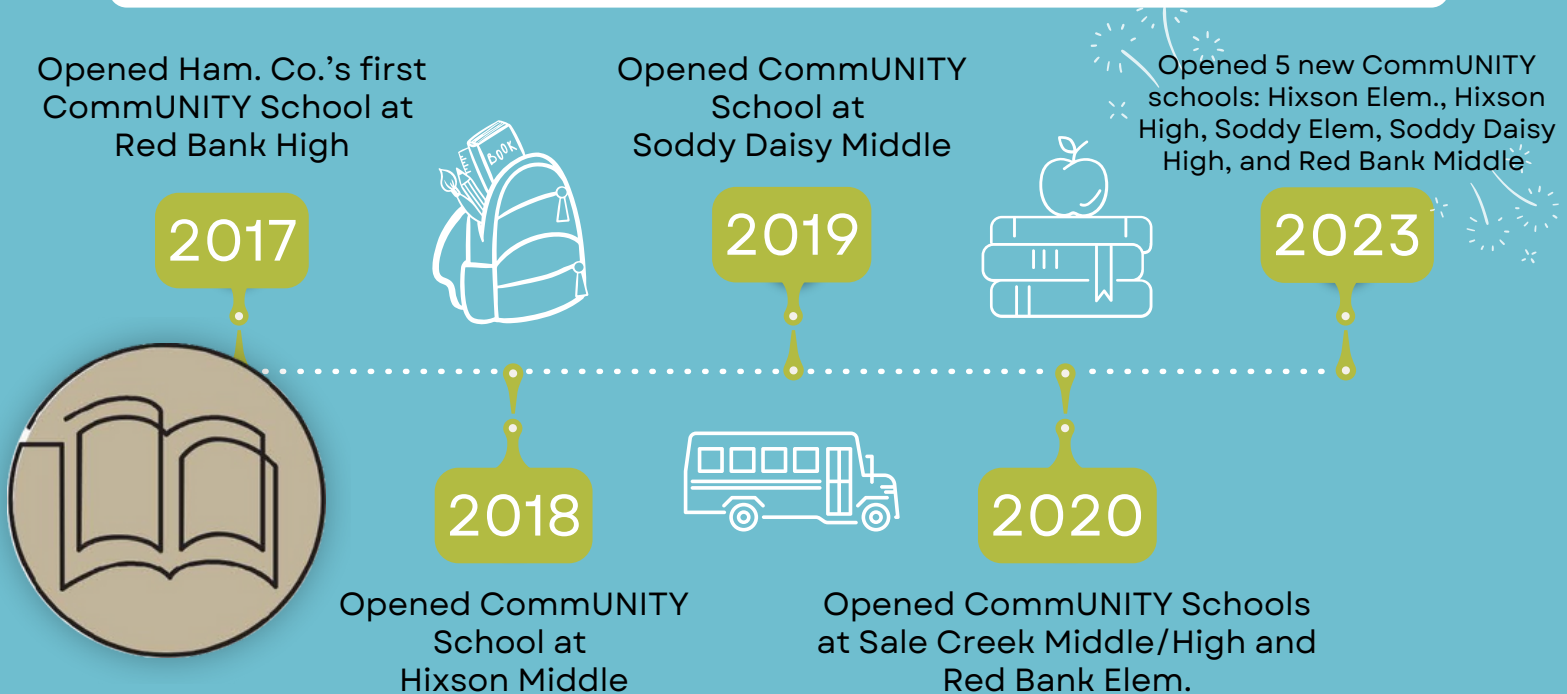
The Northside Neighborhood House has always been committed to supporting students in achieving academic success by providing partnerships and services to aid in creating family stability and providing out-of-school programming. Traditionally, the NNH offered site-based programming for students out of our main agency located in Chattanooga's Northshore. This programming provided a safe space for students to continue to learn and have the opportunity to be involved in extracurricular activities outside of the school.



In 2016, the NNH was approached by Chattanooga 2.0 to implement the Community Schools model and pilot this transformative practice in local schools. Chattanooga 2.0 is a collaboration of businesses, nonprofits, and education institutions with a goal to transform education and workforce development outcomes in Hamilton County.<sup>4</sup> NNH leadership felt that aligning with Chattanooga 2.0 fit well with our mission and vision, and in 2017 we started the first CommUNITY School in our service footprint at Red Bank High School. At the same time, Hamilton County Schools had two staff working to implement this model at schools in the Midtown learning community.

Full-time CommUNITY School Coordinators are located in each school and provide a range of support services and opportunities to students, families, and communities. NNH chooses schools that are located within our service footprint and have the support of the principals. Our focus has been on identifying at least one school in each feeder pattern, with a focus on filling the gap in after-school programming in secondary schools. From 2017-2022, the NNH expanded the CommUNITY School work into five schools in Northern Hamilton County. In 2021, Hamilton County Schools developed the Community Forward Schools Strategy and entered into a partnership with the City of Chattanooga, under Mayor Tim Kelly's leadership. The formation of Community Forward Schools expanded the reach of the Community Schools model into the MidTown footprint and formalized a district-wide approach to supporting the holistic success of students by removing barriers to learning, increasing family and community partnerships and voices, and creating opportunity by design to ensure all students thrive.<sup>5</sup> In 2023, the NNH added five additional schools allowing us to serve three complete feeder patterns (elementary, middle, and high schools) in Red Bank, Hixson and Soddy Daisy.

## Timeline of NNH CommUNITY School Programs



**I love the after school staff, they make me feel safe.**

-NNH CommUNITY School Student

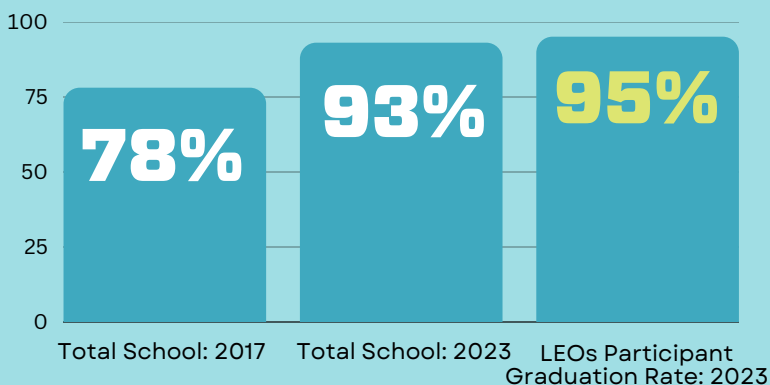
## Benefits of CommUNITY Schools

Community Schools prioritize the holistic development of students by not only focusing on academics but addressing their social, emotional, and physical well-being. This approach helps create well rounded individuals who are better equipped to succeed in various aspects of life. NNH CommUNITY School Coordinators work fulltime in their schools to provide school day supports, connect community resources to the school, and organize community and family engagement opportunities. In the middle and high schools they also operate after-school programming. Common responsibilities of a CommUNITY School Coordinator include:

- Interact with students throughout the school day
- Attend Student Success Planning (SSP) meetings, school leadership meetings, and other school-wide staff meetings
- Support transition camps for rising middle and high schoolers
- Organize family and community engagement events
- Connect families to stability services
- Manage after-school programming

As an active member of the school, the CommUNITY School Coordinator is able to provide social and emotional support for students. Coordinators also serve on the SSP teams and are assigned students that may need extra support throughout the school year to help them succeed. Many small groups are led by Coordinators that meet during the school day and provide a safe and supportive space for students. In the 2022-2023 school year, more than 200 students engaged in small groups at our CommUNITY Schools. Not only do these supports help the individual student, but they promote a nurturing and inclusive school environment. This leads to better behavior, fewer disciplinary issues, and improved student relationships.

### Graduation Rates at Red Bank High School



Program Highlight:  
**In the 2022-2023 school year, 384 students were served in five afterschool programs.**



Hamilton County has after-school programs in elementary schools, but not for secondary schools unless students are engaged in sports or other activities. NNH has been able to fill this gap in our CommUNITY Schools. The after-school programs provide a safe and healthy space for middle and high schoolers to develop social skills and build friendships. In the after-school space, students are introduced to new enrichment activities and are encouraged to participate in new experiences. All programs carve out time for students to focus on their homework or utilize the help of staff if they need extra support. During the 2022-2023 school year, 89% of all students regularly participating in after-school programs passed to the next level on time and 83% had 4 or fewer absences per quarter. By providing relevant and engaging activities, after-school programs lead to increased motivation, attendance, and participation.

The involvement of families and the broader community is essential to CommUNITY Schools. Coordinators organize and support family and community events in their schools in order to help increase family engagement. These events help encourage families to actively participate in their child's education and allow for community members to contribute their expertise and resources to support school initiatives.

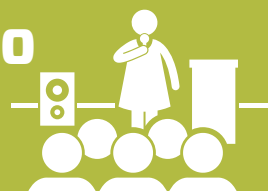
A key focus of the CommUNITY Schools model is to ensure equity and inclusion by addressing disparities in access to resources and opportunities. All services provided by NNH CommUNITY Schools are at no cost to the student or their families. In doing so, CommUNITY Schools ensure that all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, have access to the support they need to succeed.

Outside of school-based activities, CommUNITY School Coordinators act as a resource for their schools by connecting students and families to wraparound services. As an NNH employee, Coordinators are able to directly refer families to our Stability team to provide different services. The NNH provides utility assistance, rent or mortgage assistance, emergency food boxes, thrift store vouchers, and other support for qualifying households. The collaboration between Coordinators and our Stability team ensures that a family's needs are being quickly and sufficiently met.



### Program Highlight:

**During the 2022-2023 school year,  
coordinators hosted 25 community and  
family engagement events with over 3,000  
attendees**



## Program Highlight:



**During the 2022-2023 school year  
CommUNITY Schools referred 82 families to  
the NNH Stability team.**



## Challenges and Considerations

Providing these services at this scale across ten schools requires both creativity and resources.

Successful CommUNITY Schools rely on strong partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community members. The rural location of some of our schools creates a barrier to connect with partners. Some of our schools are located in areas with very few businesses, and it can be difficult to convince people from other areas to commute to provide programming. When there is a lack of community partnerships, NNH CommUNITY School Coordinators create and provide enrichment activities themselves.

CommUNITY Schools aim to serve a diverse student population. The NNH is committed to a diverse workforce to help ensure that students have individuals in their schools to whom they can relate. Recently there has been a growing English as a New Language population in our footprint, and the NNH is focused on finding bilingual staff or volunteers to serve in our CommUNITY School spaces. While this has been a goal for many years, it has continued to be a pain point. Currently, there is one bilingual Coordinator, but there is a need to add more to our programming to better serve all students and families.

Establishing and operating CommUNITY Schools requires resources for staff salaries, support services, and program development. Securing adequate funding can be a significant challenge. Only four of the 10 schools served by the NNH receive Title 1 funding; the other six schools have limited funds available for parent engagement and after-school programs. Each school requires over \$100,000 in investment made by the NNH; this cost is primarily funded by grants and the NNH annual fund. The 2023 expansion was partially funded through a collaborative funding model with Hamilton County Schools. With our recent expansion from five to 10 schools, continued growth in fundraising is needed. While the community's generosity has allowed us to continue to grow our presence in our schools, we unfortunately still have to turn down schools that want to become CommUNITY Schools due to funding limitations.

## Call to Action

Overall, Community Schools offer a comprehensive and collaborative approach to education that recognizes the interconnectedness of education, community, and well-being. By addressing the needs of the whole child and involving various stakeholders, Community Schools play a vital role in creating thriving, inclusive communities. NNH leadership members serve on the Tennessee Community School State Network along with other Community School providers across the state. This network highlights the work of Community Schools and advocates for funding to implement more programs across the state. Highlighting the importance of Community Schools to local and state policymakers can help secure funding to continue the Community Forward Schools movement in Hamilton County by adding more schools.

Coordinators are always looking for new partnerships as gaining community involvement is crucial to the success of CommUNITY Schools. By partnering with a NNH CommUNITY School, local organizations and businesses can help create a network of support that enhances students' lives. Opportunities to be involved include sharing your skills or talents by leading an enrichment program or sharing with a classroom, volunteering to read to elementary school students, or engaging with students in a small group setting. Investing your time and treasures in CommUNITY Schools highlights a commitment to the future well-being of students, families, and the entire community. If you would like to get involved financially or support NNH's CommUNITY School work, please visit our website to find out more.

## The Effect on our Neighbors

Last school year, one of our CommUNITY School Coordinators became aware of a family facing financial hardships and referred them to our Stability team for assistance. The mother, Carly\*, stated that she was recently able to find income-based housing but was still struggling to afford basic living expenses. During her appointment with our case manager, Carly completed a spending plan that revealed a negative balance each month. Upon delving into the family's budget, it quickly became evident that a significant amount was being spent on frequent visits to the laundromat. The expense of keeping clothes clean was taking a toll on Carly's limited resources. Recognizing the need for a solution, the case manager was able to connect with one of the NNH's Thrift Stores and secure a washer and dryer for the family. Carly was no longer burdened with the expense of the laundromat and as a result a significant amount of money was freed up to go towards other critical needs for the family.

\*Name changed to protect client's privacy.



## **About the NNH**

Since 1924, the Northside Neighborhood House has focused on empowering residents north of the Tennessee River to create thriving communities across northern Hamilton County. From ensuring individuals are housed with working utilities to supporting students in achieving academic success, the NNH focuses on creating relationships and connecting individuals to supports that aid them in creating stability for themselves and their families. Our ability to address the varying needs of our neighbors positions us to provide a holistic support approach for individuals at all ages and stages of life. Learn more by visiting our website, [nnhouse.org](http://nnhouse.org).

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