Executive Summary

As part of the National League of Cities’ (NLC) multi-year initiative to engage mayors and city leaders in creating a Culture of Health, its Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) led a Mayors’ Institute on Advancing Education and Health through a Community Schools Strategy on May 2-4, 2017, in Philadelphia. This Mayors’ Institute was the second in a series that runs through May 2019 with generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The YEF Institute is committed to building upon the lessons learned from the convening to support mayors and city leaders in developing effective strategies to ensure that all children and families develop the skills needed to thrive in the 21st Century workforce.

About the National League of Cities

NLC is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Through its membership and partnership with state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource and advocate for more than 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans. The NLC Institute for Youth, Education, and Families helps municipal leaders act on behalf of the children, youth and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

About the Authors

Numerous members of the YEF Institute staff – including Sue Pechilio Polis, Audrey M. Hutchinson, Bela Shah Spooner, Alyia Gaskins, Miles Sandler and Nicholas Wallace – contributed to the lessons and observations summarized in this report. The findings were also made possible by the insights shared by participating mayors and city team members from Philadelphia, Brooklyn Center, Minnesota; Caldwell, Idaho; Houston; Rancho Cucamonga, California; and Toledo, Ohio, as well as the faculty and partners listed in Appendix A.

Acknowledgements

NLC is grateful to Johan Uvin, Martin Blank, Reuben Jacobson and Bernice Butler at the Coalition for Community Schools, housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership, for their partnership in this effort and to Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney and the City of Philadelphia Mayor’s Office of Education, especially Otis Hackney, Chief Education Officer, for hosting the Mayors’ Institute. The YEF Institute also extends special thanks to Sharie Wood, Michelle McClean and former Boston University Menino Fellow Alessia Riccio for their support in the planning and implementation of this event.

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Impetus for Action

Disparities in life expectancy exist in every region and community. Often visible in neighboring zip codes and sometimes within the span of a mile or even a handful of city blocks. These disparities reflect unequal access to resources and services - such as high-quality education and health care services - that can promote physical and mental health. To address these disparities, growing numbers of communities are directing attention to the importance of forging school and community partnerships with the goal of improving both educational and health outcomes. Partnerships with health organizations can be extremely valuable to school districts and school leaders, given that poor academic outcomes are often rooted in health issues. These partnerships are mutually beneficial, as efforts by health organizations to address the social determinants of health (the economic and social factors that influence how well and how long we live) often require deep collaboration with school districts and educators.

Mayors and other city officials can shape health and education policies and priorities to support these important relationships in many ways. Municipal leaders increasingly recognize that achieving health equity and educational equity are not distinct challenges. Acknowledging that when children and youth are healthy - both physically and mentally - they are better prepared to learn and have greater educational achievement, leaders in many communities are supporting schools’ partnerships with local health care and public health organizations.

However, the notion of engaging community-based health partners has not yet become an integral part of educational reforms in many communities, and school leaders often struggle with how they can make such partnerships a reality. Mayors and other city leaders can help children and families overcome barriers to good health and educational achievement by fostering collaborations between school districts, health systems, school and community-based health providers, public health departments and other community partners.
Advancing Education and Health through a Community Schools Strategy

NLC SELECTED SIX MAYORS THROUGH A COMPETITIVE APPLICATION PROCESS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE MAY 2017 MAYORS’ INSTITUTE, INCLUDING:

- The Honorable Jim Kenney (host)
  Mayor | City of Philadelphia
- The Honorable Paula Hicks-Hudson
  Mayor | City of Toledo, Ohio
- The Honorable L. Dennis Michael
  Mayor | City of Rancho Cucamonga, California
- The Honorable Garret Nancolas
  Mayor | City of Caldwell, Idaho
- The Honorable Sylvester Turner
  Mayor | City of Houston
- The Honorable Tim Willson
  Mayor | City of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

During the Mayors’ Institute, mayors shared case statements outlining their specific goals and challenges at the intersection of education and health. Mayors structured their case statements around five key themes essential to building a culture of health: data and metrics, financing strategies, equity, the role of parent and community engagement and sustainability. Each mayor’s case statement presentation was followed by a strategy session that included an exchange of ideas regarding effective policy approaches and implementation strategies, with a particular emphasis on the community schools strategy. The dialogue also included robust participation by city team members who accompanied each mayor and expert faculty (see Appendix A).

Following the Mayors’ Institute, city teams participated in a Health Impact Assessment workshop hosted by The Pew Charitable Trusts and a site visit to two Philadelphia community schools organized by the Philadelphia Mayor’s Office of Education, which provided a firsthand look at local innovations to improve student health, well-being and academic performance.

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

Using Mayoral Leadership to Put Community Schools atop the City’s Agenda

Following his election victory in November 2015, Philadelphia Mayor James Kenney announced his signature initiative to create 25 community schools in the city over the course of four years. In Philadelphia, community schools are public schools that receive a designation through an application and selection process and are supported by funds associated with the city’s recent tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. These schools receive a full-time, city-employed coordinator who works with the entire school community — students, parents, teachers, administrators, service providers and neighbors — to identify the community’s most pressing needs, such as expanded medical services, afterschool programming and job training. Coordinators work with community schools staff, service providers and city agencies to bring these resources directly into the school. The Mayor’s Office of Education works closely with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health to focus on programs that support preventative health practices and promote healthy lifestyles for children and families and access to healthy food and physical activity.

The City of Philadelphia conducted a comprehensive needs assessment and engaged over 2,500 residents, families and local organizations in the first year of the initiative to inform the needs of each school and the decision-making process. To expand on the efficacy of their community schools strategy, the Philadelphia Mayors’ Office of Education developed a “stress index,” a digital city map displaying hot spots of poverty, drug crimes, access to healthy food and education levels. The goal of the index is to help each community schools identify their needs and intentionally tailor their offerings to meet the needs of their diverse populations. The city is also working to evaluate the impact of the community schools strategy in improving health and education outcomes for children.
Adverse experiences such as trauma and abuse have long-lasting implications for child development.

The exchanges among faculty and peers that occurred during the Mayors’ Institute focused on the five key themes that guided development of the case statements.

Major findings from these discussions include:

**DATA AND METRICS**

The effective use of data and metrics is essential for cities in tailoring and targeting interventions and evaluating their impact. In the areas of education and health, several key areas for future data collection and analyses by cities and school districts emerged:

**Chronic Absenteeism**

Defined as missing 15 school days or more in a school year, chronic absenteeism limits educational success. Children who are chronically absent from school due to health problems miss essential learning time and quickly fall behind their peers. Many health problems contribute to chronic absenteeism, including asthma, poor oral health, mental health challenges and acute illnesses.

**Access to Healthy Food and Stable Housing**

Food insecurity undermines children’s academic performance and development of social skills. Additionally, students who live in homeless shelters have significantly lower rates of school attendance than students with some type of stable housing.

**Exposure to Violence and Trauma**

Adverse experiences such as trauma and abuse have long-lasting implications for child development, including delays in neurological and psychosocial development and poor academic performance.

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**CITY OF CALDWELL, IDAHO**

**Leveraging Community Health Needs Assessments to Better Understand Health Barriers to Learning**

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) requires that nonprofit, tax-exempt hospitals conduct a community health needs assessment every three years. Commissioned by the United Way of Treasure Valley and funded by a Trinity Health System “Transforming Communities” grant, the 2016-2017 Health Conditions Assessment evaluated over 21 health and economic indicators across all census tracts in Caldwell. The HCA helped the City of Caldwell identify Census tracts 212, 213 and 215, home to Sacajawea Elementary School, as a “health hot spot” that features a disproportionately high percentage of households at or below the Federal Poverty Level, higher rates of unemployment and substandard housing, and a large uninsured population. The identified census tracts have few safe spaces for walking and biking, and lack easy access to public transportation and medical, dental, vision and behavioral health services. The needs assessment was the catalyst for the City of Caldwell choosing Sacajawea Elementary School as its Community Schools pilot site.
Advancing Education and Health through a Community Schools Strategy

Screening for Health Barriers to Learning

Untreated or undiagnosed health conditions can prevent kids from learning and reaching their full academic potential. Hearing loss, undiagnosed vision challenges, uncontrolled asthma, dental pain, exposure to lead, among other health issues, often keep kids out of school and impact their ability to fully engage in classroom teaching and activities. Annual, systemic screening can ensure better management of conditions, and ultimately should promote utilization of tools and inter-agency, cross-sector communication systems to consistently identify and track HBLs.

“There’s no question that wellness and education are inextricably connected. When a child is healthy, when they are able to eat, when they feel comfortable, when they’re not stressed, when they’re not dealing with trauma, they learn better.”

MAYOR GARRET NANCOLAS
Caldwell, Idaho

Free Care Rule

Based on clarification from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in 2014 specific to the Free Care Rule, cities can work with their state Medicaid Directors to seek reimbursement for health care services provided in school settings for Medicaid eligible children. State Plan Amendments (also known as SPAs) are required to ensure reimbursement can be provided to schools. Mayors can support state policy efforts and can have a critical voice in informing the process to file SPAs and working to ensure health improvement for millions of low-income children in cities throughout the country.

Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA)

Cities, schools and hospitals can collaborate on local Community Health Needs Assessments that nonprofit hospitals are required to conduct under provisions of the federal Affordable Care Act and seek to direct community benefit spending by hospitals to community schools initiatives.

Pay for Success Efforts

Based on a growing body of evidence, city leaders should explore whether and how Pay for Success models can be advanced in their respective cities.

New Sources of Revenue and/or Dedicated Taxes

Cities can provide funding to community school efforts and, to the extent permitted under state law, also raise new revenues to support education and health efforts or dedicated funding through the passage of local tax levies, such as the sugar-sweetened beverage tax used by the City of Philadelphia to fund its community schools initiative.

FINANCING

Innovative financing approaches can support the development of new education and health strategies. City teams discussed the following specific funding options to support their programs:

- New Sources of Revenue and/or Dedicated Taxes
- Pay for Success Efforts
- Free Care Rule
- Innovative financing approaches

CITY OF BROOKLYN CENTER, MINNESOTA

Engaging the Community to Foster and Inform City Strategic Priorities

In 2009, Brooklyn Center Schools District began implementing full-service community schools (FSCS), including developing partnerships to offer comprehensive academic, wellness and enrichment programs to ensure the success of all students. Since then, there has been a decrease in crime rates during after school hours, an increase in academic success, an increase in the capacity of students to become productive adults and gain 21st Century skills, and an increased number of students connecting with school and the surrounding community.

The city provides oversight and support to the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance for Youth (BBAY), an organization in Brooklyn Center whose work complements and supports the community schools model. To better understand the most pressing issues facing children and youth in Brooklyn Center, the city partnered with the BBAY to conduct a youth survey in 2016. Young people were engaged in the design of the survey and hired to survey their peers. The survey revealed that failure was the top reason young people said they lose motivation in school, followed by family issues and exposure to trauma.

In response to these findings, Brooklyn Center’s City Council adopted “Strengthened and Empowered Youth” as one of its strategic priorities for 2016-2018. Community schools are one strategy that the city is investing in to achieve this goal and advance a coordinated system of high-quality, accessible opportunities and resources that that lead to an increase in high school graduation, as well as improved mental health outcomes for children. This includes increasing funding for the Brooklyn Center Community Schools’ Health Resource Center (HRC). The HRC offers medical clinic health services at the school, as well as on-site mental health, dental, vision, health care access assistance, health education and counseling, wellness/nutrition education and resource referrals. With additional support for this work, the HRC has been able to connect approximately 3,000 children per year to free and low-cost health and mental health services to better address health barriers to learning and improve children’s hope, positive mindset and other social emotional skills.

In 2009, Brooklyn Center Schools District began implementing full-service community schools (FSCS), including developing partnerships to offer comprehensive academic, wellness and enrichment programs to ensure the success of all students.
Advancing Education and Health through a Community Schools Strategy

“We cannot expect our children to succeed academically if they come to school hungry, sick, or too traumatized to learn,”

MAYOR JAMES KENNEY
Philadelphia

EQUITY
City policies and programs that improve health equity can also augment efforts to advance educational outcomes. The following strategies can help mitigate local disparities:

Focusing on Local Approaches
By considering the full range of challenges and opportunities in specific neighborhoods surrounding schools, cities can craft more effective and equitable approaches that respond to the needs of local communities.

Training School Staff
City leaders can ensure that learning encounters within the school are relevant to and effective for students by supporting: intensive training for staff and teachers on social determinants of health; policy and practice changes to address both physical health issues and mental health, such as the impact of trauma and stress on learning; and supporting teacher participation in planning and implementation of new health-based strategies.

Incorporating Community Voice
Cities and their partners are well positioned to engage and empower the community to have an active, meaningful voice as part of the decision-making process.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
In order for these efforts to work, parents and the larger community must be engaged stakeholders in the process. The following strategies can support increased community and family engagement:

Developing Targeted Programs
Cities can work with their school partners to develop and provide educational programs that are distinctly designed for adults in the community and foster parent participation and civic engagement.

Hosting Parent Workshops
Parent training workshops can help families learn about child development and how to support student academic learning. Workshops may cover a wide range of issues, including language development and learning styles, parent nurturing and discipline strategies, child abuse prevention, and nutrition and health practices. Parents can play a critical role in recognizing health barriers to learning and advocating to encourage interventions to address them.

Convening Community Gatherings
Cities can host events that bolster a sense of community and bring together families, residents, local businesses, faith-based organizations and other partners. Enhanced visibility of these efforts can help build public awareness and understanding of the important role communities play in the success of effective collaborations.

Cities and their partners are well positioned to engage and empower the community
Advancing Education and Health through a Community Schools Strategy

CITY OF RANCHO CUCAMONGA, CALIFORNIA
Aligning City Resources to Remove Barriers to School

Launched by the City Council in 2008, Healthy Rancho Cucamonga (Healthy RC), is a citywide initiative aimed at reducing health disparities and inequities, and engaging all community sectors in health improvement initiatives to achieve a collective impact on some of the community’s most serious health problems—childhood obesity, suicide rates, heart disease and diabetes, among others. Healthy RC strategies address changing systems, policies and practices to target social determinants of health such as community safety, jobs, housing and environmental conditions.

To ensure that all children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn, the city is exploring how it can better align Healthy RC efforts and resources to ensure that all children and families have equitable access to health promoting resources and services where they live, learn and play. City leaders are partnering with the Cucamonga School District to formalize collaborative efforts and build a community-wide framework of supports that is reflective of community needs. In order to transform and encourage schools as places where community building happens and improve health and educational outcomes, a needs assessment will be conducted to identify opportunities and gaps, and align resources to address disparities. Parent empowerment will also be incorporated as it is a critical component to the success, sustainability and accountability of the community schools strategy.

SUSTAINABILITY
Cities and their partners constantly face challenges when seeking to ensure that their efforts to improve the health and well-being of students and their families are sustainable. Municipal leaders can address these challenges by:

Utilizing Health Impact Assessments
City leaders and other key stakeholders can use local health impact assessments to assess the potential and real impact of policies, plans and projects in communities and thereby bolster the sustainability of their efforts.

Aligning Partners and Programs
Mayors and city leaders can work to ensure strong alignment between city agencies, local partners and community schools by using their ability to convene stakeholders and strengthen collaborative initiatives.

Developing Comprehensive Youth Master Plans
To ensure all children and youth have the ability to learn and thrive in school and throughout their lives, mayors and city leaders can work with multi-sector stakeholders to develop youth master plans that include a focus on leveraging all assets throughout the community.

Further Reflections on the Role of Mayors and City Leaders

Over the course of the Mayors’ Institute, Health Impact Assessment workshop and site visits, mayors and their city teams explored and shared important lessons and insights about the challenges and opportunities associated with local efforts to increase the number of children who are healthy and ready to learn. Noteworthy insights emerging from these discussions include:

PROVIDING LEADERSHIP
Although mayors often do not play a direct role in governing their school systems, there are numerous ways in which they can leverage their influence and use their bully pulpit to improve health and educational outcomes (e.g., https://beta.phila.gov/departments/mayors-office-of-education/community-schools/). With the ability to guide a city’s agenda, mayors can include a community schools strategy as part of their policy platforms, and inform and/or guide the hiring of designated community schools coordinators under the jurisdiction of the Mayor’s Office, a school district or a nonprofit partner entity (e.g., United Way, YMCA, etc.) to improve collaboration.

HARNESSING DATA AND ALIGNING RESOURCES
The most promising community schools strategies engage multiple stakeholders, across city governments and within communities, to access and harness data regarding the unique health needs of individual students, families, schools and neighborhoods. Mayors and city leaders can ensure better alignment through cross-sector/cross-agency efforts that include school districts and other city or county agencies (e.g., local health departments and emergency medical services). Sharing data
can ultimately result in better leveraging of assets through the blending and braiding of resources. Mayors can also support attendance initiatives and improved tracking of chronic absenteeism across schools, using these data to tailor and target interventions for the most at-risk children and families.

**MEETING THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS**
The community schools strategy can help city leaders work more closely with schools to address the physical, mental and social health needs of children. Support staff, such as social workers and counselors, play a critical role in recognizing and supporting children who have faced traumatic events. Also, if a school has a school-based health center, support staff can also play a critical role in identifying social and emotional needs of students.

Addressing these issues and meeting broader social and emotional needs, including mental health services, can support a child’s success at school while also contributing to the adoption of trauma-informed approaches citywide.

**COLLABORATING WITH HOSPITALS, HEALTH SYSTEMS AND OTHER ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS**, INCLUDING UNIVERSITIES
Municipal leaders have many opportunities, often unexplored or underdeveloped, to collaborate with health systems and hospitals to better support schools in addressing health barriers to learning. As part of the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) process, mayors, school leaders, community and school-based health providers, public health departments and other agencies can work more collaboratively to inform planning and implementation of community health improvement programs and more effectively targeted local initiatives to the needs of students. These same partners can also proactively work to advance the inclusion of school-based health centers within schools, to better meet the health-needs of students.

Large employers in communities, also known as anchor institutions, such as hospitals and universities, can be partners on research, data, among other efforts to inform, guide and support approaches needed to better address health barriers to learning and broader community schools initiatives. Mayors and city leaders are well positioned to convene stakeholders, including local anchor institutions, to look for overlapping priorities based on CHNAs to determine issues of mutual interest and alignment to spark more significant partnerships to address persistent health and well-being related issues and challenges.

**CITY OF TOLEDO, OHIO**
**Exploring the Linkages Between Education, Health, and Neighborhood Revitalization**
After a strong effort from the Toledo City Council to Pass a Lead-Safe Ordinance in 2016 to address hazards within the home that negatively impact health and children’s ability to thrive in school, the city continues to explore the intersections between education, health and neighborhood revitalization efforts.

Of the 21,584 students enrolled in Toledo Public Schools (TPS), 95 percent are Medicaid eligible. The primary health needs for TPS students are lack of access to health services to manage and decrease the incidence of chronic illnesses and inadequate mental health supports. Toledo has been implementing their “Schools as Community Hubs” plan, in partnership with the United Way, over the past several years, with a focus on building health and education partnerships to better connect children and families to health care services to decrease chronic illness. Current efforts are centered around increasing mental health supports for students, providing robust expanded learning opportunities that incorporate activities that promote healthy lifestyles and growing the utilization of local food resources. Further efforts are being made to integrate the efforts of Toledo Public Schools to improve the health of students, the resources of the community to meet these needs and the priorities of the City to serve the residents of Toledo.

“We need to have children in the seat so they are able to learn and ultimately become productive citizens.”

**MAYOR PAULA HICKS-HUDSON**
Toledo, Ohio
Advancing Education and Health through a Community Schools Strategy

CITY OF HOUSTON
Advancing “Complete Communities” To Better Serve Children and Families

On April 17, 2017, Mayor Sylvester Turner announced his Complete Communities initiative, which seeks to leverage partnerships and resources from corporate, nonprofit and community organizations to better address the safety, education, and health needs of historically underserved communities. The initiative will focus on providing residents access to quality affordable housing, education, transportation, healthy food options, green spaces, economic opportunity and well-maintained infrastructure.

As part of this effort, the Mayor’s Office of Education is utilizing data from the City of Houston’s Health Department “Community Health” profiles, as well as the Houston Independent School District (HISD), to map educational and health disparities in Houston. The Mayor’s Office of Education is also partnering with HISD and the Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy to survey students, parents and teachers to establish a baseline of the physical, social and mental health of children enrolled in HISD. Using these data, the Mayor’s Office of Education hopes to better connect schools to resources and partners as well as align capital improvement and economic development projects that are being completed through the Complete Communities initiative to better address the specific health needs of children so that they can thrive in school.

Conclusion

A child’s health significantly impacts his or her overall quality of life, ability to attend school on a regular basis and capacity to take full advantage of learning opportunities in and outside of the classroom. Removing health barriers to learning is critical to ensuring that children grow into healthy, productive adults who can contribute to the economic vitality and vibrancy of cities. By working in partnership with students, families, and community stakeholders, mayors and other municipal leaders can help schools increase the number of children who are healthy, ready to learn and able to reach their full potential in school and beyond.

Community schools show great promise as a way to help integrate academic, social and health services, to better respond to the needs of students, families and community members and, in the process, to boost educational achievement, reduce health and educational disparities, and improve outcomes for all children and youth. Mayors and other city leaders are uniquely positioned to promote the community schools model and help ensure that all children receive the extra supports they need to succeed.
Appendix

A: FACULTY/PARTNERS

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Executive Director
New York City Department of Education, Office of Community Schools

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Endnotes

1 Health Barriers to Learning (HBL) include uncontrolled asthma, uncorrected vision problems, unaddressed hearing loss, dental problems, persistent hunger, certain untreated mental health and behavioral problems, and effects of lead exposure. Left untreated or undermanaged, HBLs can adversely affect children’s ability to see, hear and pay attention in the classroom, their ability and motivation to learn, their attendance, their academic performance, and even their chances of graduating from high school. www.childrenshealthfund.org


3 Pay for Success (PFS) is a relatively new way of financing social services to help governments target limited dollars to achieve a positive, measurable outcome. Under PFS models, a government agency commits funds to pay for a specific outcome that is achieved within a given timeframe. The financial capital to cover the operating costs of achieving the outcome is provided by independent investors. In return for accepting the risks of funding the project, the investors may expect a return on their investment if the project is successful; however payment of the committed funds by the government agency is contingent on the validated achievement of results. In this way, the PFS model shifts the burden of investment risk from the government to private investors, effectively creating a social investment market where the government only pays for results. (Source: www.doleta.gov)

4 Anchor institutions are enterprises such as universities and hospitals that are rooted in their local communities by mission, invested capital, or relationships to customers, employees and vendors. As place-based entities that control vast economic, human, intellectual, and institutional resources, anchor institutions have the potential to bring crucial, and measurable, benefits to local children, families, and communities. www.democracycollaborative.org.