

Q & A about the Full-Service Community Schools Act of 2011

Q: What is a full-service community school? Full-service community schools are public schools which coordinate and integrate academic and non-academic supports, such as health services, parental involvement and service-learning opportunities, for students and families through collaborations with community-based organizations and public-private partnerships. These schools can use federal, state and local dollars more efficiently and more effectively produce results.

Q: What would the Full-Service Community Schools Act do? The bill would authorize a U.S. Department of Education grant program to significantly expand the number of full-service community schools across our nation. The bill would fund grants for local partnerships between school districts and community-based organizations, and would also fund grants for states to expand the full-service community school model at the state level. Based on new research, the bill also includes set-aside funding for rural school districts, which have historically faced challenges in accessing nationwide competitive grant programs.

Q: Why full-service community schools? Over the last decade, research on full-service community schools consistently shows positive outcomes in student achievement and attendance rates, a decrease in dropout rates, reductions in disciplinary actions, as well as increases in parental involvement and access to preventative health services. Full-service community schools take an innovative approach to educating America's children by utilizing community resources to provide for the seamless integration of academic, health and personal development services to benefit the well-being of students, their families and communities.

Q: What types of services are coordinated at full-service community schools? Schools may offer primary, dental and mental health care; activities to increase literacy; career counseling; expanded-learning opportunities; early childhood education; and nutrition education including Women, Infants and Children (WIC) classes, among many other services. To increase the opportunity for family participation, full-service community schools generally remain open long after school hours and operate during weekend hours, as well.

Q: How would at-risk students benefit from a full-service community school? Community schools look at the whole picture of a child's educational experience. They do not separate academics from non-academic factors that spill over into the classroom: physical and mental health, financial problems, safety, housing, and other issues. Community schools are equipped to respond to these challenges by providing the resources and referrals to assist families. With this support network, students come to school each day healthy, prepared to learn and succeed.

Q: Who supports the full-service community school model and this legislation? This bill is supported by the Coalition for Community Schools and many members of the education community including the American Federation of Teachers, Children's Aid Society, Communities in Schools, National Education Association, the National Association of State Boards of Education, National Assembly for School-Based Health Care, higher education institutions, and many others.

Q: Why does this bill include funding for rural school districts? In September 2010, Center for American Progress released a report emphasizing how the community schools model could be especially beneficial for rural school districts, in which the public school is often the community center already. However, rural school districts face unique challenges when applying for competitive grant programs at the national level. For instance, they may not have the resources to write a competitive grant application compared with their better-funded urban counterparts. Therefore, this legislation includes a set-aside funding stream for school districts designated as eligible for the Rural Education Assistance Program.

Over the last three years, \$20 million has been appropriated to fund 21 community school projects across the U.S. Below is a list of the types of services coordinated at these community schools.

Remedial education and academic enrichment

Parental involvement and family literacy

Parenting education and parent leadership

Mentoring and other youth development

Mental health and counseling services

Early childhood education

Community services and service learning opportunities

Programs for truant, suspended, or expelled students

Primary health and dental care

Adult education

Job training and career counseling services

Nutrition services