



RECLAIMING THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

Sustainable Community Schools



Illinois Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

ift-aft.org

In recent months, a series of crises have upended our world. From COVID-19 and its resulting economic fallout to uprisings against racial injustice and police violence, these crises have highlighted the educational disparities between students of differing races and illuminated the essential role that schools play in our communities.

Black, Latinx, Indigenous, rural, and low-income populations have borne the brunt of the pandemic's impact because of the failure to address the inequities in their communities pre-COVID. That is where **Sustainable Community Schools (SCS)** come in. Through SCS, we have an opportunity to humanize education in a way that is antiracist and advances equity and justice.

WHAT ARE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS?

You've heard, **"It takes a village to raise a child."** SCS are the embodiment of that saying — they are community hubs designed to provide wraparound academic, health and social support for the entire community beyond the traditional 9 am – 3 pm school day. By leveraging community assets, resources, and external partnerships to provide comprehensive community care, SCS brings students, parents, educators, school

staff, community members, and service providers together in a coordinated effort to promote neighborhood health and well-being. It is a community-led, community-driven approach to educational justice and equity.

SCS are not an unproven program. They are a paradigm shift in how we think about education.

THE PRINCIPLES AND PILLARS OF SCS

SCS are grounded in a foundation of seven principles that guide every school decision. To become a Sustainable Community School, full commitment to these principles is essential:

- ▶ **Racial justice and equity** - SCS center the needs, assets, and voices of those who have been traditionally marginalized in our education system.
- ▶ **Community self-determination** - Decision-making power lies in the hands of those who are directly impacted by SCS policies and practices -students, parents, community.
- ▶ **Valuing community knowledge and wisdom** - SCS rely on the people who live and work in each community to identify their community's unique needs and help their schools thrive.
- ▶ **Shared leadership** - SCS rely on the knowledge and experience of students, parents, educators and community members for communal decision-making and distributed leadership.
- ▶ **Transparency and trusting relationships** - The SCS model requires all stakeholders to work together towards a clear, shared vision of transformative education.
- ▶ **Reflective learning culture** - Assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of practices and policies by those directly impacted is a key component of this antiracist work.
- ▶ **Whole-child/person approach to education** - The SCS model addresses external factors like employment, housing, healthcare and food security because they play a key role in academic success.

THESE PRINCIPLES ARE REALIZED THROUGH SIX PILLARS:

The principles and pillars of SCS make it different from traditional community school models.

- 1** Curricula that are engaging, culturally relevant, and challenging
- 2** An emphasis on high-quality teaching, not high-stakes testing
- 3** Wrap-around supports and opportunities
- 4** Restorative/transformational justice and other positive discipline practices
- 5** Authentic parent and community engagement
- 6** Inclusive school leadership

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT SCS?

Sustainable Community Schools have been shown to promote sustained, transformational change, including:

- Improved health outcomes for students, resulting in fewer missed school days
- Decreased rates of chronic absenteeism and student mobility
- Increased student performance and academic achievement
- Improved school culture and climate, including decreases in school discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions and a stronger sense of connectedness between students and educators
- Greater parent/caregiver/community participation and engagement with educators



WHERE CAN SCS BE IMPLEMENTED?

ANYWHERE! SCS is a community-driven model of education that can benefit rural, urban, and suburban communities.

WHAT DO SCS PROVIDE?

The answer varies. The principles and pillars of SCS provide the structure, but each community's needs and assets determine what services and programs are provided in each school. Some common elements are:

- Academic programs, including tutoring and enrichment opportunities
- Afterschool clubs and programs
- Curriculum development cohorts of educators, parents, and students
- Medical and nutritional services
- Youth and parent leadership development
- Adult education
- Workforce development opportunities

The greatness
of a community
is most accurately
measured by the
compassionate
action of its
members.



Coretta scott king

THIS SOUNDS EXPENSIVE. HOW ARE SCS FUNDED?

It's true that SCS require significant investment, but the short- and long-term benefits are worthwhile. **Research shows that there is a \$15 return on investment for every \$1 spent on SCS** (*Institute for Educational Leadership*).

Nationwide, communities are using a variety of strategies to secure the resources needed to implement SCS, including:

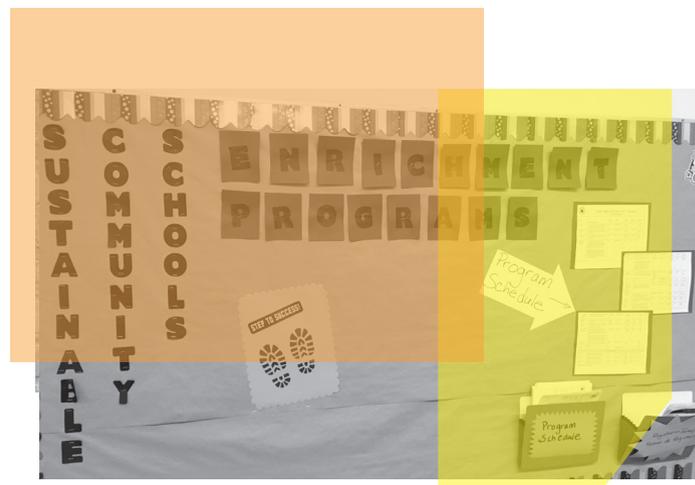
- ▶ **Collective bargaining agreements** (CBAs) - The Chicago and Los Angeles Teachers Unions used their bargaining power to secure millions of dollars annually in their CBAs to transform high-need neighborhood schools into SCS.
- ▶ **Legislation** - Some states are passing legislation to create and expand SCS.
- ▶ **Federal relief aid** - As states attempt to recover from COVID-19, federal relief funds can be used to provide critical SCS programs like mental health services, summer school, childcare, and early childhood education.
- ▶ **Grants and in-kind donations** - Federal and state grants designed specifically for the creation of SCS are available. There may also be local grants and philanthropic opportunities available in your area.

CAN I TRANSFORM MY SCHOOL INTO A SCS?

ABSOLUTELY! Many Illinois schools have adopted a community school structure by implementing fundamental elements of the SCS model. Does your school consistently:

- ▶ Have partnerships with organizations to improve the academic, health, and/or social outcomes for students?
- ▶ Offer programs or services for parents and/or the larger community?
- ▶ Provide programs and services outside of traditional school day hours?
- ▶ Engage in intentional antiracist practices?

If so, your school is already on its way to becoming a Sustainable Community School!



WHAT CAN I DO TO ADVOCATE FOR SCS?

Unions play a vital role in ensuring that our society and our schools live up to the ideals of democracy, equity, and justice. Here's how you can join this movement to reclaim the promise of public education.

- ▶ Work with your local or council to convene a coalition of community partners and labor groups to advocate for SCS and antiracist education.
- ▶ Present the SCS model to your school improvement team.
- ▶ Attend a local school board meeting to explain why SCS are needed in your school/district.
- ▶ Encourage lawmakers to invest in SCS.

SUPPORT FROM YOUR UNION

The IFT and American Federation of Teachers will proudly support your efforts to make your school a Sustainable Community School. Visit ift-aft.org/scs or contact your IFT Field Service Director for more information.

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.



Nelson Mandela



Illinois Federation of Teachers
A Union of Professionals

ift-aft.org facebook.com/iftaft [@iftaft](https://twitter.com/iftaft)

#IFTSTRONG