

## **Mercer Street Friends' Community Schools Initiative in Trenton Public Schools Looks to Expand**

[Mercer Street Friends](#) leads the Community Schools Initiative within the Trenton School District, incorporating its long-standing food and family services with the cornerstone elements of a model community schooling program. Each of the three Trenton community schools has a building site coordinator and an assistant site coordinator dedicated to identifying and meeting the unique needs of their school.



Nigel Johnson, Assistant Director of Community Schools at Mercer Street Friends, and second grade students at Gregory Elementary School studying conflict resolution.

The community schools in Trenton offer students expanded learning time, including Summer Bridge programs, after-school clubs for the arts, STEM, and sports, and elementary-age reading intervention programs. Families are engaged regularly throughout the year with inclusive family events, parenting and adult education classes, direct support for accessing social services and obtaining aid, and access to three School-Based Choice Food Pantries.

Mercer Street Friends serves as the Food Bank of Mercer County, and has established innovative programs to connect students, their families, and the broader community with consistently accessible food. This includes initiatives such as the Send Hunger Packing program, which provides food insecure

### **In This Issue**

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A \$2.2 million boost for community-driven education in Trenton.

#### **Institute Insights**

Updates, new initiatives, internal milestones, and upcoming events from NJICS.

#### **National Moves**

News about community schools across the country.

#### **NJ Happenings**

Updates on policy, funding, legislation, and budgets that impact NJ education.

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### **Action Items**

#### **Tell Congress to Fund Community Schools**

#### **Help Restore Funds to NJ's Child Care Assistance Program**

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### **Resources**

#### **[ELC's Federal Revenue Tracker](#)**

#### **[Introduction to Community Schools](#)**

students with meals over the weekend, and the expanded Community Food Bags program, which has offered 4 million meals since it began in 2020.

Through key partnerships with community organizations, the community schools in Trenton have become neighborhood hubs, where students and their families can access a wide range of resources provided by members of their own community, including physical and mental healthcare, social services, mentoring, and learning opportunities beyond the classroom. As the NJ Institute for Community Schools brings together initiatives for community schools across the state, Mercer Street Friends is excited to pool experiences and wisdom as it expands its reach with new funding to bring in three additional schools, in Trenton, Hamilton, and Ewing, to the Community Schools Initiative.

## Institute Insights

### ***Institute Highlights Importance of Collaborative Leadership as Key to Community Schools***

In September, NJICS participated in a panel discussion on “Schools as Centers for Collaborative Governance” as part of the Participatory Budgeting Project’s “Our Time Our Power” conference in Orange, New Jersey. The panel was moderated by Philippa Rizopoulos, author of [“Community Schools & Co-governance: Lessons from Los Angeles and San Diego.”](#)

The Institute’s Dr. Greg Stankiewicz emphasized the importance of collaborative leadership as one of the six key practices that make up the community school framework. He also highlighted the Public School Collaborative Leadership Initiative, led by Institute partners Dr. Saul Rubinstein and Dr. Charles Heckscher of Rutgers University’s School of Management and Labor Relations. The initiative currently includes 32 urban, suburban, and rural districts across New Jersey, with evidence showing [significant gains in student achievement and reductions in teacher turnover](#) in districts adopting collaborative leadership practices.

Fellow panelists Rosie Grant of the Paterson Education Fund and Linda Reid of the Parents Education Organizing Council provided on-the-ground perspectives on the power of community schools. Rosie and Linda spoke eloquently about the importance of community and parent leadership in strengthening Paterson’s community schools. They also described their work spearheading the roll-out of [restorative justice in Paterson’s public schools](#), training school leadership teams, administrators, and community members in this collaborative, non-punitive approach to school discipline.

# Newly Launched Community of Practice for Site & Family Engagement Coordinators

We're excited to introduce a new Community of Practice (CoP) designed for Site Coordinators and Family Engagement Coordinators. This space will bring coordinators together to share ideas, exchange strategies, and support one another in strengthening community school practices across the NJICS network.

## CoP Meeting Dates for the 2025-26 School Year:

2025

**October 22, 11:00 AM**  
Virtual Kickoff (Zoom)

**December 5**  
In-person at Saint Elizabeth University  
(following the NJICS Convening)

2026

**January 21, 11:00 AM**  
Virtual (Zoom)

**March 13**  
In-person at Saint Elizabeth University

**May 20, 11:00 AM**  
Virtual (Zoom)

We encourage all coordinators to take part in this collaborative space.

**[SIGN UP HERE](#)** to join the **Community of Practice**  
and be part of the conversation.

## Other Upcoming Events

### Visit us at the NJEA Teachers Convention!



Heading to Atlantic City for the NJEA Teachers Convention? Be sure to stop by the NJICS booth to learn more about our work and connect with our team in person.



Wednesday, Nov 6th



Atlantic City Convention Center



Booth # 2228

Save the Date:

# NJICS Winter Convening

## December 5th, 2025

Join colleagues, partners, and community leaders at NJICS Winter Convening 2025. This year's event will spotlight progress in advancing community schools across New Jersey, highlight collaborative leadership strategies, and set the stage for the year ahead.

*Don't miss this opportunity to connect, collaborate, and chart a shared vision for the future.*



Friday, Dec 5<sup>th</sup>



Saint Elizabeth University

## National Moves

### California's Community Schools Show Early Success

A major new study from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) offers strong early evidence that community schools are making a measurable difference for students in California. The report—[Community Schools Impact on Student Outcomes: Evidence From California](#)—analyzed data from nearly 460 schools participating in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) and compared them to demographically similar schools without CCSPP funding.

#### Key Findings



- **Chronic Absenteeism** declined by **30% more** in CCSPP schools than in comparison schools.
- **Suspension Rates** fell by **15% on average**, with especially strong results at the secondary level.
- **Academic Growth** was substantial: Black students at CCSPP schools gained the equivalent of **130 days** in math learning and **151 days** in English Language Arts compared to peers.
- **Equity Impact**: The largest benefits were observed among English learners, low-income students, and other historically underserved groups.

California's investment in the CCSPP appears to be paying off. State leaders are pointing to the program as a cornerstone strategy for educational equity and school transformation.

### *Why It Matters for New Jersey*

These findings provide powerful data points to share with policymakers and partners in New Jersey. As the evidence base grows, it strengthens the case for investing in integrated student supports, robust attendance strategies, and deepened school-community partnerships here at home.

## ***Advocates Push for Federal Support of Community Schools***

Meanwhile, on the federal level, the National Coalition for Community Schools and partners are mobilizing to protect and expand community school funding in Washington, D.C.

In a recent sign-on [letter to Congress](#), advocates urged leaders to sustain and scale programs like Full-Service Community Schools, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, and family engagement initiatives. The letter highlights the critical role these programs play in enabling schools to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students.

### **How You Can Help**

**Contact your congressional representatives to voice support for robust community school funding!**

Click [HERE](#) for tools and sample language.

The New Jersey Community School Coalition, Save Our Schools NJ, and Our Children Our Schools coalition have already added their names, with NJICS expected to join shortly.

### *Why It Matters for New Jersey*

National advocacy ensures that the momentum we're building in New Jersey is echoed in federal budget conversations. Unified state voices create a stronger push for stable, long-term funding.

## **NJ Happenings**

### ***ACNJ Leads Effort to Restore Child Care Assistance***

**Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ)**, a key NJICS partner, is leading the push to **restore access to the Child Care Assistance Program**, which froze new enrollment on August 1, 2025 after the **state lost \$360 million in federal funding**.

Although this year's budget included state dollars for the program, it also allowed enrollment to be capped if federal funds were cut. Now, State Senators Britnee Timberlake and Teresa Ruiz are working to secure an **additional \$30 million** to lift the cap and reopen enrollment.

Behind the numbers are families directly affected by the freeze. Parents are speaking out about the hardship of losing access to affordable child care:

**“My heart goes out for the moms, and for myself, to just figure out ‘what can we do?’ Because at the end of the day, we’re hurting the babies.”**

**— NJ parent**

## How You Can Help

**ACNJ is calling on supporters to [sign their petition](#) and share their stories to highlight the urgent need for child care assistance.**

Visit the [ACNJ website](#) to learn more about the issue and additional ways to take action.

## Proposed Federal Cuts Threaten NJ Education

Alongside the loss of federal child care funding, other proposed cuts at the federal level could have **major impacts for New Jersey schools and families.**

The **Education Law Center (ELC)** has created an interactive **advocacy tool** that lets you explore how reductions in different federal funding programs would affect each state. Use the “Trump 2.0 Federal Revenue Tool” to **see potential impacts for New Jersey** and inform your advocacy efforts.

If these Title I programs are reduced by 20%, New Jersey will lose

**\$93,063,728**

in federal revenue.

For New Jersey to maintain all programs funded through these Title I allocations, the equivalent of

**1,555**

entry-level teacher positions would be lost.

Example output from the ELC “Trump 2.0 Federal Revenue Tool,” demonstrating the loss in funding and entry-level teaching roles if Title I programs were to be cut by 20%.

**[Explore the ELC Federal Revenue Tool](#)**

## Join the Community Schools Movement!

Whether you're an educator, policymaker, community partner, or advocate, there's a role for you in strengthening New Jersey's community schools.

To learn more, [join our mailing list](#), or reach out at [info@njinstituteformcommunityschools.com](mailto:info@njinstituteformcommunityschools.com).

