



# Scenario 3: Reconstruction

The need to reconstruct a system that was designed not to benefit all

In this scenario, significant reforms are propelled by a group of diverse stakeholders. This group, assembled in 2019 to address issues plaguing Charleston County's education system, initiates the engagement of thousands of stakeholders from across the county to ultimately reform the system. The community becomes informed, is moved to action, and lobbies to repeal Acts 340 & 388. The Board centralizes control and adopts many of the recommendations made by AdvancED and previous studies and reports. A Culturally Responsive Teaching model is implemented. The District is restructured into four geographic zones. New schools are built while others are remodeled or closed to fit this consolidation model. The budget process is redesigned. Minorities are hired across the system. These changes initially create turmoil among students, parents, and school administrators. However, the new model is ultimately supported by the community, including area businesses, prompting an increase in business partnerships. By 2035, the system is transformed, schools are well funded, race relationships have improved, and teachers and CCSD staff are more diverse and better equipped to properly support students. Data indicates that all the schools in the system are either performing at an above-average-to-high-level or at least demonstrating growth for a majority of individual students.

#### **A CCSD-community partnership**

A group of engaged stakeholders committed to improve the educational outcomes of CCSD get together in early 2019, initiating the engagement of thousands of stakeholders from across Charleston County. A grassroots movement takes hold. Leaders and stakeholders from numerous groups and organizations become informed around the specifics of educational challenges and the steps they can take to improve the system. At first the changes are disruptive and divisive within the community, but trust gradually improves between the com-

munity and the school district. Partnerships are formed between CCSD and community organizations to secure support for proposed reforms. These partnerships become critical in weathering both community anxiety and push back from various constituencies that oppose changes to the current system. The abruptness of some of the reforms leads to periods of confusion and conflict over what should be done next. These challenges are overcome through the persistence of these partnerships. As trust grows, more and more of the community gets involved and begins to support the reform efforts.



“...a community schools strategy is both reasonable and feasible for school district leaders to adopt...”

Building Community Schools Systems  
Center for American Progress

**The community and the School Board take action**

The grassroots movement forces the School Board to take action toward structural reforms that will improve the educational outcomes of Charleston’s children. Reforms are based on a synthesis of the recommendations echoed in multiple reports over the last twenty years. Initiatives are designed to address issues identified as repeatedly failing Charleston’s children. These initiatives aim to address the shortcomings of the CCSD Board and Constituent Boards’ governance structures, allocate resources equitably, reduce the socioeconomic isolation of students, increase teacher diversity, reduce teacher turnover, and improve programs preparing students for college and/or careers.

The community receives detailed plans outlining the structural reforms to be implemented. Information is disseminated through a variety of methods and mediums to school district employees, community members, parents, business owners, faith-based leaders and their congregations, government partners, and students. Many are against the sweeping reforms, since the current system is working for them and their children. To address those concerns, a community-wide process is created to engage Charleston’s citizens in difficult conversations. The conversations focus on the present reality, hard decisions that have been avoided for decades, and how the system can be changed to benefit all children.

**Legislative action ensues**

Stakeholders from across the state begin a campaign to lobby legislators to repeal Act 388 to broaden the source of revenues and each county’s ability to raise revenue to pay for improving educational outcomes. Encouraged by this state-wide effort, Charlestonians are galvanized to lobby the Legislative Delegation to also repeal Act 340. Since both acts impact school governance and the allocation of resources, the community begins to agree that reform within CCSD must start with their repeal. The legislative reform of Act 388 is politically divisive across the state and takes several years to implement. Act 340 only impacts Charleston

**Rethinking Public Schools**

The community schools strategy rethinks public schools in order to provide children in low-income communities with a high-quality education. It centers public schools as hubs for communities and combines a rigorous, relevant educational program with extended learning opportunities, family and community engagement, and an infusion of social services.

Many community schools are operated at the individual school level, often with the assistance of intermediary nonprofit organizations but with little school district involvement. However, in order to educate students in low-income communities at high levels, school districts should and can play a larger role in coordinating and supporting community schools. The community schools strategy offers districts serving low-income communities a way to overcome structural obstacles that make it more

difficult to give children a high-quality education; these include poor access to physical and mental health services as well as to meaningful enrichment opportunities. District engagement can strengthen individual schools and, perhaps even more importantly, help bring this promising strategy to scale.

Source: <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/08/22/454977/building-community-schools-systems/>

and therefore decisions are made more quickly and implementation is more straightforward. Nonetheless, the reform or repeal of Act 340 generates significant local opposition.

Citizen groups also begin to lobby for improvements in other state statutes that negatively impact school districts. These include legislative reforms of pension and healthcare systems in order to decrease the financial burden these systems have. Though ultimately efforts to reform 388 and 340 are successful, the pension and healthcare systems remain unchanged.

### Attendance zones are restructured

In 2021, four geographic zones are created within the county which, together with the start of the Controlled Choice<sup>1</sup> model, are designed to create diverse, academically rigorous schools with equal access to educational resources. The change to zones leads to fewer schools with larger student populations and achieves significant gains in diversity and equitable resource allocation in support of all students. Proceeds from the November 2020 sales tax referendum are used to provide for structural renovations of existing buildings, new schools for consolidation, and affordable housing for teachers. The shift to zones causes the merging of schools and a change in feeder patterns that

1 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED430265.pdf>

results in push back from parents and community members. There is apprehension as students, teachers, and other school staff are required to change schools. Community groups in support of the new direction partner with CCSD to support those who are going through these changes. A coalition is formed, by the communities whose schools are closing, to fight against the proposed closures. The CCSD Board and the community grapple with how to resolve the conflict between the need for more comprehensive schools and the desire to maintain various communities' living history through their schools.

### CCSD learns from national best practices to redesign many of its structures

The Board implements a professional development training program designed to improve its governance and adopt educational best practices. Culturally Responsive Teaching<sup>2</sup> is implemented. The District adopts many of the recommendations made by AdvancED, including effective reading and math curricula that flow from one grade level to the next and are the same in all schools in CCSD. These programs change the conversations around curriculum and student discipline in schools and increase student engagement.

2 <https://www.brown.edu/academics/education-alliance/teaching-diverse-learners/strategies-0/culturally-responsive-teaching-0>

The changes to Act 388 and the passing of the November 2020 sales tax referendum allow the District to raise teacher salaries to the national average. Teaching and administrative positions in Charleston become coveted and easier to fill. The District begins to train 25% of staff in every school and its central office in Culturally Responsive Teaching, gradually extending the program to all of CCSD's staff by 2035. This program changes the way teachers educate and—ultimately—leads to faculty holding a positive perspective of all families and community members, the communication of high expectations for all students from diverse backgrounds, and students learning within the context of their culture. This shift, along with the new CCSD curriculum, transforms classrooms into rigorous learning environments and creates a high impact in all classrooms in all schools. CCSD moves away from developing dependent learners and begins to see students exhibiting the traits of independent learners.

The District redesigns its budget process for fiscal year 2020. Resources are redirected to decrease disparities in school funding. An “inventory of the talent” is taken identifying by school, staff expertise, teaching backgrounds, and years of experience. The district phases in a centralized hiring and staff-assignment

## Rethinking Public Schools (continued)

In order for the community schools strategy to truly be an integral part of the nation's school system, state governments must drive this work. New York's 2016-17 enacted budget created a \$100 million set-aside within the state's funding formula for community schools programming in 225 school districts identified as “high-need.”<sup>7</sup> In order to support a community schools strategy, the statewide commission charged with updating Maryland's school finance system recommended that the state consider the number of students living in poverty when funding school districts.<sup>8</sup> But perhaps the growth achieved by students in Kentucky best demonstrates how an aspect of

the community schools strategy can be integral to educational progress. The state's 1990 education reform law required schools serving low-income communities to have family resource and youth services centers (FRYSC), which help remove nonacademic barriers to learning. Today, Kentucky has 820 FRYSCs operating in 1,166 schools and serving 612,741 students. According to an index that combines multiple educational attainment and achievement factors, Kentucky improved its national ranking from 48th in 1990 to 33rd in 2011.<sup>9</sup>

A community schools strategy is both reasonable and feasible for school district leaders to adopt. This report details the evolution of community schools initiatives, which are increasing in number and are being led by school districts. It first explains how concentrated poverty affects the student populations of high-poverty schools in very low-income neighborhoods. The report then describes the community schools strategy, before

looking at the examples of three case studies: Union Public Schools in Oklahoma, Oakland Unified School District in California, and Hartford Public Schools in Connecticut. These school districts have built and sustained community schools initiatives from the bottom-up, giving students in low-income communities the high-quality education they need to be successful. The report concludes by discussing policy recommendations that district leaders looking to implement a community schools approach should keep in mind. Ultimately, however, state governments must lead in making the community schools strategy a reality for all schools that serve low-income students.

structure. Instead of all personnel being hired for specific schools, a portion of staff is hired and assigned to schools where they are needed the most. These transitions cause teacher attrition, but create the opportunity to strategically recruit diverse personnel and institute programs to retain and support new and current teachers. A system is implemented to mitigate teacher attrition. Ultimately, the result of centralized hiring is increased diversity, both experiential and demographic, in all schools in CCSD. The shift feels chaotic for many and, although school leaders receive training to support faculty during the transition, some resign in frustration at the end of the year. Simultaneous to the inventory of talent, the District inventories all physical assets and develops a plan for their equitable reallocation in the following year.

The District coordinates with community, faith-based, and business partners to deepen the dialogue and provide training on race relations in Charleston. In conjunction, local groups adopt a program to allow people of different backgrounds to learn how to better overcome the barriers erected through historical racism.

### **Structural changes begin producing results**

CCSD adopts a school-by-school intensive data-driven examination of teaching and student performance. The effectiveness of these programs, as well as the reallocation of resources, is closely followed by constant feedback loops and check-in systems. The CCSD Board approves a 200-day school year calendar for schools that are making inadequate progress in student achievement. This measure provides extra school days for students that are behind. These changes are met with resistance in many pockets of the system and in the broader community. Although a positive development, many students also report feeling these changes are being forced upon them. Teachers and support staff that are a part of the program are compensated through a mixture of additional pay, housing subsidies, and bonus pay incentives.

The Controlled Choice model creates more diverse populations at both home schools and choice schools. Increased staffing is provided for Pre K-3 Title 1 schools, offering additional support for those students who need it and a training opportunity for less-experienced teachers by pairing them with experienced ones. The ongoing

recruitment of diverse school personnel is accelerated. A universal 3K and 4K program is designed and implemented in the mid 2020s. This program, together with the adoption of best school-based practices and other ongoing programs, results in a significant decrease in the number of students who are more than two years behind grade-level.

Many improvements to the system are threatened since legislative reform of the state's pension and healthcare systems failed to pass. Seeing that much of what was put in place is in jeopardy, another grassroots movement is launched to push for changes to these systems. CCSD adopts a policy to not participate in any Tax Increment Financing Zone that would lead to lost revenue for the District. By 2035, schools and fruitful partnerships are providing extended services, including those for special needs students to include model demonstration schools in each zone. These schools not only serve special needs students effectively, but serve as a mechanism for training of teachers from other schools. In high poverty neighborhoods, schools are effectively functioning as community centers—offering services for families as well as students.

### **Worse before better in Board and superintendent turnover**

Data shows a higher number of diverse minorities working as administrators, teachers, and other school personnel. CCSD sees two new school superintendents over the course of the late 2020s years, and almost half the incumbent School Board loses their re-election. The reformists, however, retain a bare majority. The ongoing transformation of CCSD begins to provide a glimpse of what a thriving, better integrated school system could look like. As a response to the massive changes, the District contracts with researchers to conduct short- and long-term impact studies of how the institutional disruption of the district is impacting students, the achievement gap, and teacher efficacy.

By the early 2030s, the data is clear that school consolidation was the correct course of action and is recommended as the way to move forward. Students have largely adapted to the new system, yet some don't feel welcome in their new schools. The School Choice process is equitable and is accessible to all students through

the Controlled Choice model, also resulting in stronger neighborhood schools. The following years are characterized by a cycle of refinement.

### **The system transformation is completed**

By 2035, the system transformation is complete. Act 388 has been phased-out allowing schools to be well funded. The repeal of Act 340 ended Constituent Boards. Most of CCSD's decision-making has been centralized. The four attendance zones within the county lead to the creation of new schools with larger and more diverse student populations. School employees' salaries are more competitive nationally and with other professional careers. There has been a renewed investment on teacher development across the district. Race relations have improved. Special needs students are being supported by initiatives such as demonstration schools of excellence resulting from the Controlled Choice model. School staff is both more diverse experientially and racially. Innovative administrative training programs are producing the intended results. Data indicate that all schools are performing at an above-average to high level or demonstrating growth for a majority of individual students. The data also shows that student needs are driving the curricula and allocation of resources. Students who are struggling are assigned interventionists to support their learning. Surveys indicate an increase in student excitement about the new opportunities available to them. The majority of the schools existing in 2018 have been restructured and re-imagined and much of the innovation is proving effective. CCSD has gained new local business partners. The economy is booming, although this is now threatened by population movement, and jobs are becoming more competitive. Despite these improvements, resistance to change remains within actors of the system.