What is a Community School?

A community school is a *strategy* for organizing school and community resources around *holistic* student success. Community schools often have four pillars: (1) integrated student supports made through community partnerships, (2) expanded learning opportunities, (3) a focus on family and community engagement, and (4) collaborative leadership and accountability. Community schools are not synonymous with neighborhood schools; however, community schools often prioritize their local neighborhoods. There is no official certificate granted to a school for "becoming" a community school. Instead, schools adopt the community school strategy in their policies and practices.

What is a Needs Assessment?

A needs assessment is a systematized process that guides a school's community school strategy through determining its strengths and barriers. The needs assessment helps determine which partnerships, policies, and programs a school should pursue in order to support scholar learning and development. Needs assessments use a variety of data collection methods, including surveys, focus groups, and interviews, with a variety of stakeholders, including students, parents, staff, faculty, and community members. At the end of the needs assessment, a report is produced which outlines the key findings and recommendations. The report is meant to be public and transparent, and shared leadership teams are meant to be created in order to act on the findings. The needs assessment is re-conducted every three years.

Who Participated in East's Needs Assessment?

From July through December 2018, 25 focus groups were conducted with 216 participants. Participation from the following stakeholder groups were included: East clerical, custodial, SSO, counselors, social workers, administrators, teachers, scholars, collaborative partners, community members, EMMA residents, and Beechwood residents. Additionally, 33 phone-based interviews were conducted with East parents/families.

What were the Findings?

The top three findings to the four main focus group and interview questions are summarized below.

Question 1: What are the greatest strengths or most valuable assets of East that support scholar learning and development?	
Finding 1.)	Lots of collaborative partners, programs, and supports
Finding 2.)	East staff is strong, supportive, and goes above and beyond
Finding 3.)	Focus on relationship building and getting to know one another
Question 2: What are the greatest challenges or barriers of East that inhibit scholar learning and development?	
Finding 1.)	Internal and external communication challenges
Finding 2.)	Opportunity to improve school-family relations
Finding 3.)	Need to refine restorative practices and the disciplinary structure
Question 3: What are the greatest strengths or most valuable assets of the surrounding community that support scholar learning and development?	
Finding 1.)	Local neighborhood is safe and supportive
Finding 2.)	Recreation centers
Finding 3.)	Interest in and positivity around East's success
Question 4: What are the greatest challenges or barriers of the surrounding community that inhibit scholar learning and development?	
Finding 1.)	Poverty, violence, trauma, access to affordable housing, incarceration, substance abuse
Finding 2.)	Lack of timely and reliable transportation
Finding 3.)	Need for more community connections

What are the Recommendations?
The needs assessment team creates recommendations based upon the findings. Pursuance of these recommendations is dependent upon one of the key pillars of community schools, collaborative leadership and accountability. There is no one stakeholder group responsible for a recommendation. Ideally, collaborative teams take ownership over a recommendation, creating an action plan and timeline for implementing changes. The needs assessment team is responsible for periodically reevaluating progress towards addressing findings. In theory, the next time the needs assessment is conducted, positive changes should be noted from the implementation of the recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Improve Communication and Sharing Stories

- Establish a central clearinghouse of information for each stakeholder group.
- More fully leverage existing internal communication assets.
- More fully leverage existing external communication assets.
- Designate a communications point person or committee.
- Break down silos of internal misunderstanding.
- Refine method to collect and store parent/family contact information.
- Bring back the "Purple Locker."
- Explore collaboration with UR CUES for "Story Telling."

Recommendation 2: Build School-Family Relations

- Expand the definition of family engagement, and create mechanisms to support engagement.
- Increase social events that bring families together, such as family fun nights.
- Provide and increase access to services for adults.

Recommendation 3: Expand Community Connections

- Increase scholar community service opportunities and a service-going culture.
- Connect with local employers.
- Designate an alumni coordinator or committee to connect with alumni.
- Establish East as a true community center.
- Report neighborhood events back to FACE committee.
- Develop scholar mentorship opportunities.

Recommendation 4: Refine Restorative Practices

- Increase communication and closure loop on restorative practices.
- Increase support of teaching staff through the restorative process.
- Increase understanding of restorative practice for all stakeholders.

Recommendation 5: Increase academic rigor, relevance, and accountability

- Articulate and make transparent what East's curriculum entails.
- Promote a culture that values learning.
- Hold scholars accountable to higher standards.
- Reflect on scholar identification of the effects of "disruptive" scholars.

Recommendation 6: Explore transportation alternatives

Recommendation 7: Acknowledge systemic barriers and social inequality

For More Information…
The full East EPO Community School Needs Assessment Report has futher data and clarification surrouding each finding and recommendation. Contact Jason Taylor, Community Coordiator, with any questions at Jason.Taylor@rcsdk12.org or (585) 288-3130 ext. 2178.