

United
Way



United Way of Erie County



going the distance



Tim NeCastro, Endowment Leadership Cabinet Co-Chair

“Learning is THEKEY to opportunity, and community schools are aimed squarely at leveling the playing field, making opportunities available to all.”

Lisa NeCastro, Endowment Leadership Cabinet Co-Chair

“Community schools are important for Erie County because they help to remove the nonacademic barriers faced by low-income children, which levels the playing field and creates a positive learning environment. Regardless of their economic means, every child deserves a chance.”

REIMAGINING OUR ROUTE

Founded in 1914, United Way of Erie County (United Way) served as a charitable funding conduit functioning as a pass-through fundraising entity and directed funds to a select number of agencies in the community.

That changed in 2017. Why? A staggering **27%** of children in Erie County live in poverty, one of the worst rates in Pennsylvania and well above the national average¹¹.

The futures of our children and the entire community are at risk.

United Way’s leadership recognized the urgent need for dramatic change. We embarked on a journey to transform into an organization that leads efforts to break the cycle of generational poverty.

How? Education. Education. Education. We knew we had to focus on increasing student academic achievement to reach this bold goal because success in school equals, undeniably, success in life.

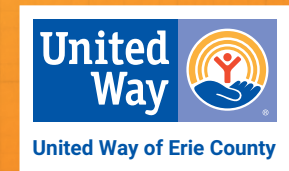
Since its launch, the powerful equity strategy known as the **Community School Model** has expanded to serve more than 8,800 students and their families in 16 schools across four districts in Erie County. Community schools are in areas of extreme poverty, targeting our most vulnerable youth and aiming to level the playing field for their success in school and in life.

We are seeing results and the promise of more children growing toward academic proficiency with every year. But this is not a quick fix and requires a long-term commitment from the entire community.

THIS IS A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT.

To secure the Community School Model for this and future generations, we are embarking on an ambitious funding campaign for the long-term sustainability of this transformational work, which is simply too important to be subject to annual fundraising fluctuations and uncertainty.

OUR COMMUNITY’S CHILDREN DESERVE NO LESS.



“When you are everywhere, you are nowhere. That is why United Way’s strategic focus on community schools is critical to making the most impact.”

— Lorianne Feltz, Endowment Leadership Cabinet



ERIE'S CHILDREN ARE FACING A CRISIS OF POVERTY.

In the city, the child poverty rate is double that of the state and national average, followed closely by the county rate.

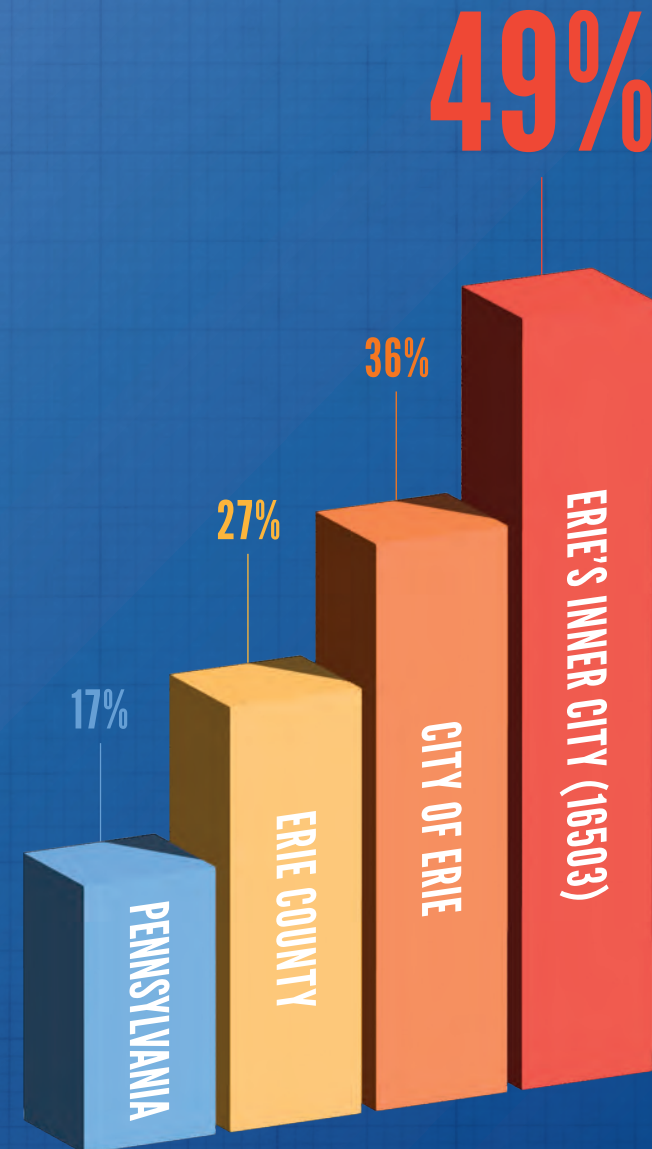
- 17% Pennsylvania
- 27% Erie County
- 36% Erie City

At its most basic level, the Community School Model brings resources into the school building to remove nonacademic barriers that low-income children attending public schools in our community face every day.

Nonacademic barriers range from basic needs, such as clothing, food and school supplies; to mental and behavioral health challenges; to unmet vision and dental needs; and a lack of family engagement, to name a few.

Expecting children who struggle with nonacademic barriers daily to come to school, be attentive and focus on academic curriculum is simply unrealistic. Students are facing barriers preventing them from attending school regularly and, as a result, are falling behind.

CHILD POVERTY RATE BY GEOGRAPHY:



IMAGINE ... Sophia, a second grader who has to walk a mile to school in the November rain in hand-me-down worn out shoes. When she gets to school, she's cold, shivering and tired.



While students in Erie's Public Schools have a long way to go, they are moving in the right direction.

Since launching the Community School Model in 2017, Erie Public Schools rose from the bottom rankings to one of the top 10 school districts in the state for academic growth.

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Below are a few examples of what is happening in our public schools as a direct result of the Community School Model. The strategies are broken into **four key pillars** in the Model.

POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR WELLNESS AND LEARNING

After hitting a peak of unexcused absences during the pandemic, one community school (Strong Vincent) decreased their number of unexcused absences by 43%.

EXPANDED LEARNING TIMES AND ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

At Edison Elementary, one out of every four students participated in afterschool programming during the 2022-23 school year.

AUTHENTIC FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

In the first three years of the Model, on average a community school sees a 55% increase in family engagement.

COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD PARTNERSHIPS

Across United Way's 16 community schools, there are 80 programs offered by 39 community partners.

These four pillars work together toward academic growth leading to academic proficiency, our ultimate goal.

That's how we set students up for success.
It's proven. It's working.



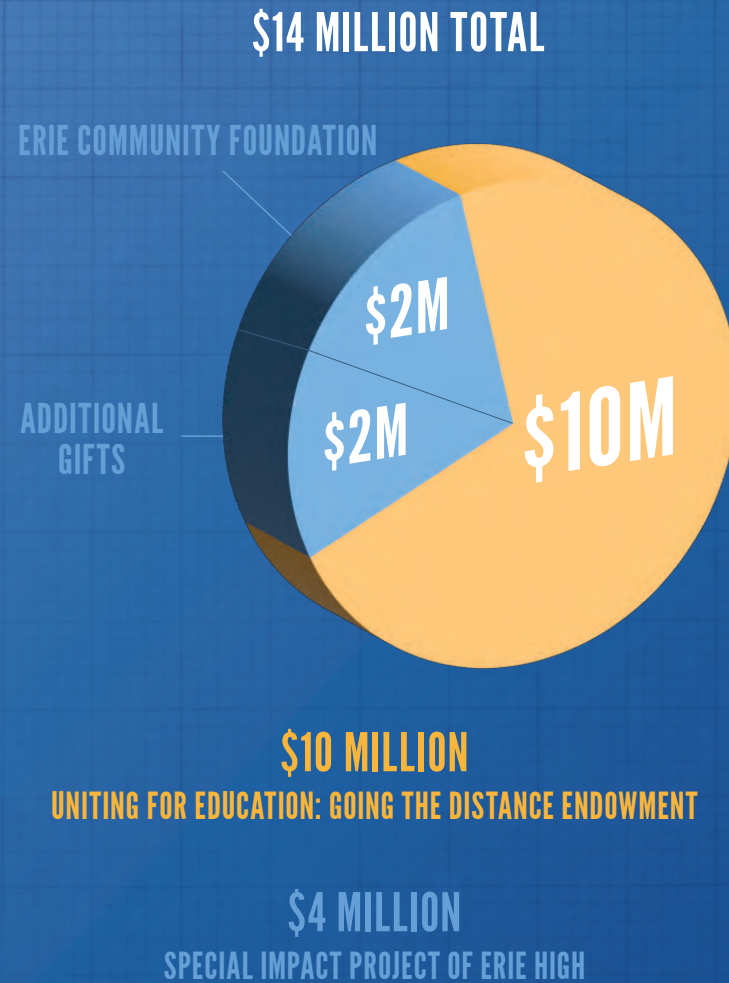
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SUSTAINABLE AND UNITED FOR THE FUTURE

UNITING FOR EDUCATION: Going the Distance will be successful when funding is stable and sustainable and not subject to annual conditions or fluctuations outside of United Way's control.

We need your help to ensure all current United Way community schools continue to develop the youngest learners and middle schoolers while completing the continuum of the Model at Erie High. To ensure the expansion and sustainability of the Community School Model, we must increase our endowment distribution.



“This transformational grant from The Erie Community Foundation marks a substantial step forward in our vision to create a united, vibrant and thriving region for all. Our collective goal is to impact our next generation – many of whom are students at Erie High.” – Karen Bilowith, President and CEO, The Erie Community Foundation





ESTABLISHING ERIE HIGH, A UNITED WAY COMMUNITY SCHOOL

“Over the last several years, we have expanded the Community School Model to all our elementary and middle schools, and our students and families have come to rely on the supports provided by the Model. We need to ensure that same level of support continues in high school.” – Brian Polito, Superintendent, Erie’s Public Schools



Erie High has an immediate and critical need to identify, address and remove significant nonacademic barriers. **The Community School Model is the solution.**

Currently, all three feeder middle schools are part of United Way’s Community School Model, meaning 8th grade students are receiving supports and targeted resources to help them succeed academically. Annually, c. 750 students graduate from 8th grade and move on to high school.

Currently the continuum of community school supports and care ends after a student exits 8th grade – and **you can change that.**

With your support at Erie High, we expect:

- *Decreased behavior incidents*
- *Improved attendance rates with reduced chronic absenteeism*
- *Programs for students to help them plan their futures, build confidence and create relationships with community mentors*
- *Increased parent and guardian engagement*
- *Increased student exposure to local workforce opportunities*
- *Improved staff retention*
- *Increased student access to physical and mental health resources*

In 2017, Erie’s Public Schools consolidated three high schools into one, creating Erie High. More than 2,300 students attend Erie High, coming from all neighborhoods across the city. The Erie High campus spans the equivalent of ten city blocks and 17.5 acres.

***AT ERIE HIGH:**

- *83% of students are economically disadvantaged*
- *13% of students are English Language Learners*
- *27% of students are categorized as Special Education*
- *The graduation rate is 70% – nearly 17% below the state average*
- *Erie High students are below the statewide average for reading and math achievement by more than 30%*

DURING THE 21-22 SCHOOL YEAR:

- *There were 8,000+ behavior incidents reported ranging from violent fights to disrespect in the classroom to ditching class*
- *30% of students received detention for behavior incidents*
- *19% of students were suspended for behavior incidents*
- *Only 38% of students were present for 90% or more of school days – the state average is 82%*
- *More than half of the students were chronically absent, missing 10% or more of school days*

*At time of printing



THE TIME IS NOW

Erie's Public Schools administration and United Way leadership have made it a top priority to bring the Community School Model to Erie High. The time is now and we as a community must come together to ensure the future success of thousands of students.

United Way, as the backbone organization, will lead and facilitate a multiphased planning process. As the work will occur simultaneously with UNITING FOR EDUCATION: Going the Distance, a five-year budget of \$4M will ensure there will be sustaining funds beginning in year six.

Leveraged with tax dollars funding public schools to offer high-quality academic instruction, community school funds accelerate academic growth and student success by removing the barriers faced by the children most in need.

WITH YOUR SUPPORT, IMAGINE A WELCOMING, SUPPORTIVE AND POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT KNOWN FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE WITH ASPIRATIONAL GOALS OF:

- *100% graduation rate*
- *100% academic achievement and growth*
- *100% regular school attendance*

"Erie High represents the entire Erie community. The Community School Model will allow us to expand what we are currently doing by strategically providing more resources so our students can be successful."

— Don Orlando, Principal, Erie High



PUTTING ERIE ON THE MAP

Our neighborhoods, businesses, manufacturers and schools have all suffered from the harmful effects of poverty in our community. Yet, it's our most vulnerable who are most impacted by generational poverty — children. There is no quick fix, but you can be part of making systemic change by investing now. What better return on an investment than to see our local children successfully graduate from public school as thriving, prepared, caring, vibrant and thoughtful members of the community.

A key factor in cyclical poverty is failure in school. United Way's work in Erie has been nationally recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Coalition for Community Schools.

There's long been a conversation about school choice. Public schools should be, and must be, part of that choice. By expanding and sustaining United Way's Community School Model, public schools will have the resources and supports to achieve academic excellence for their students.

Consequences of intergenerational poverty include food insecurity, birth and developmental issues, unsafe living conditions and increased risk of violence, incarceration and victimization.

Ballard Brief, Intergenerational Poverty in the United States, 2021

4 DISTRICTS | 16 SCHOOLS | 8,800+ STUDENTS



1. IROQUOIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

2. DIEHL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

3. EDISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

4. JOANNA CONNELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

5. EAST MIDDLE SCHOOL

6. MCKINLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

7. LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

8. WOODROW WILSON MIDDLE SCHOOL

9. PFEIFFER-BURLEIGH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

10. JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

11. UNION CITY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

12. PERRY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

13. GROVER CLEVELAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

14. STRONG VINCENT MIDDLE SCHOOL

15. HARDING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

16. ELK VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“Community schools are important for Erie County because the school becomes a hub for the school community and the surrounding neighborhood as a whole. They provide vital services, programs and resources to remove barriers hindering academic success, such as food insecurities, clothing, basic hygienic products, mental health, vision and dental wellness.”

— Katrina Byrd,
Community School Director, Strong Vincent Middle School

16 *“The impact often starts with the tangible, such as handing a student a new coat, connecting a family with secure housing, providing a program experience to tap into a new skill. But when you really think about the intangible impact that can be made, such as a student feeling more confident and warmer in a new coat, a family feeling safe in a new home or a student recognizing a new passion — that is the real work of a community school!”*

— Amy Grande,
Community School Director, McKinley Elementary School

“Our students deserve the same experiences and opportunities as students in any other school, in any other city, and we are making that a reality. Our students deserve nice things. Being able to put a brand-new backpack in a child’s hands or a new sweatshirt may seem like something so small, but it has the ability to not only light up a child’s face, but eliminate stress on the family.”

— Shanna Potter,
Community School Director, Harding Elementary School

“Research shows that student success directly correlates with the overall health of a community. The more successful our students are, the healthier our community, and vice versa. Student success and community well-being go hand in hand, and because of that, student success needs to be a community responsibility.”

— Meghan Easter,
Community School Director, Pfeiffer-Burleigh Elementary School





WE NEED YOU

You can make a significant impact to lift thousands of students across Erie County out of generational poverty.

By investing in community schools, you will ensure children will have the resources needed to achieve academically starting on their first day of kindergarten.

And your impact won't stop here.

The fact is, no one is as capable or motivated to deliver such a profound change on a local level as we are together.

It's time to step up like never before. We need your support to continue to crush poverty through education today and for generations to come.





"I know if I didn't have the community school, I wouldn't have my kids right now ... they would be in foster care. They made sure every step of the way I was on point to where I needed to be to take care of my kids the right way. This school is saving hundreds of kids day by day, they're saving families and they're saving the entire community."

— John, a Community School parent