

Promising Practices: The SUNY System Advances the Growth of UACS and Explores Statewide Implementation

***“The fate of universities, their local communities,
and cities are intertwined.”***

- Ira Harkavy, Netter Center for Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania.

Target Audience: State and University Leaders

On June 24, 2024, Binghamton University Community Schools, in collaboration with the State University of New York (SUNY) and SUNY Chancellor John King, Jr., hosted the first SUNY Convening on Community Schools: *The Promise of SUNY-led University-Assisted Community Schools to Transform Education in New York State*. The event saw participation from over 25 universities and colleges from the SUNY system, bringing together college presidents, deans, faculty, and other government and community partners. Together, participants learned, networked, and strategized on how to create the nation’s first public university system of University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS).

Community Schools are inclusive, placed-based strategies that utilize the assets in their local communities to improve student outcomes and community well-being. They transform a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive.¹ As mentioned in the [Building](#)



¹ Community Schools Forward. (2023). Framework: Essentials for community school transformation. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>

[a Community Schools System Guide](#), Community Schools are most effective when they cultivate a collaborative leadership structure where different entities work together toward a shared vision.

In University Assisted Community Schools, universities “serve as the lead partner in providing broadly based, sustained support. Academic partnerships connect the university and school’s curricula through a focus on helping to solve local community-identified problems.”² Since their missions are aligned to the PK-12 education system, and as anchor institutions in local communities and regions, they can leverage human, social, and financial capital at scale. This mutually beneficial approach contributes to improved student learning and development and increased community well-being.

Binghamton University Community Schools (BUCS), an initiative of Binghamton University’s College of Community and Public Affairs, has led a UACS initiative locally for nearly 20 years. They are a primary partner to 10 local school districts in New York’s Southern Tier region and lead one of three technical assistance centers in New York serving over 700 Community Schools. They also lead the fifth UACS Regional Training Center in partnership with the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania. As a national exemplar of what effective university and PK-12 partnerships can look like, BUCS is committed to social justice and bridging university classwork with real-world experiences in the community. As stated by Chancellor King, former Secretary of Education during the Obama administration, “part of what is so important about Binghamton’s approach is that it offers us a path for the entirety of the SUNY system,” and affirmed that UACS is “an aspiration worth pursuing.”

The Opportunity:

As one of 64 SUNY institutions, Binghamton University Community Schools seeks to engage SUNY campuses across the state to expand University-Assisted Community Schools. Recognizing that 93% of New Yorkers live within 15 miles of a SUNY campus, and nearly 100% live within a 30 miles radius³, both Binghamton University Community Schools and Chancellor King believe Community Schools can significantly expand its reach and impact to a majority of New Yorkers if deployed through the SUNY system. After all, the SUNYs train many of the future teachers, social workers, school leaders, and business owners who live in communities across the state. The SUNY network of campuses could be utilized to transform PK-12 student outcomes statewide through its infrastructure and assets, such as a motivated college student population who are committed to community engagement, service, learning, and research.

² University-Assisted Community Schools (2024) Netter Center for Community Partnerships. Available at: <https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/what-we-do/university-assisted-community-schools>.

³ History - SUNY. Available at: <https://www.suny.edu/about/history/>.

If key leaders in the SUNY system regularly convened and examined the various entry points for PK-12 system integration, there would be greater alignment to meet the needs of communities through the implementation of UACS, effectively accelerating student success and community well-being. SUNY could lead the nation as the first statewide system of University-Assisted Community Schools.



Convening Overview:

The Promise of SUNY-led University-Assisted Community Schools to Transform Education in New York State convening featured two panels that included school leaders, university faculty, SUNY administration, and community partners. Two superintendents described their experience collaborating with university partners and how they have partnered through university student engagement, faculty coursework and research, and service-learning experiences. Dr. Laurie Miroff, who directs the Public Archaeology Facility at Binghamton University, described how she brought hands-on experiences in archeology to students in rural areas through UACS. Leaders from United Community Schools/United Federation of Teachers and New York State Network for Youth Success spoke about how UACS helps to advance professional preparation for school practitioners and leaders and

how linking to higher education can help sustain Community Schools in the state. To encourage planning and generating next steps, participants gathered in role-alike “huddles” facilitated by leaders from Binghamton University, Binghamton University Community Schools, and the Netter Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania.

Ongoing support for SUNYs interested in UACS will be provided by Binghamton University Community Schools through a variety of engagement strategies including a SUNY community of practice about UACS implementation, direct one-to-one support, and site visits to Community Schools throughout the state.

Themes to Replicate

While there are many ways to convene universities, Binghamton’s meeting structure offers an example of community-building and ideation that can illuminate experiences and create a shared action toward the implementation of University-Assisted Community Schools. Key components of the convening included:

- **Opening Remarks:** Binghamton University President Harvey Stenger, SUNY Chancellor John King, Jr., and other state leaders “make the case” on why they support Community Schools and encourage collaboration.
- **Grounding & Context:** Highlight relevant data on national issues impacting youth and college students; establish a common language by sharing what University Assisted Community Schools are and a brief synopsis of their impact. Click [here](#) for an example.
- **The What - UACS Origin Story:** Define UACS and how they connect to the founding missions of American public education and colleges and universities.
- **The Why - Panel on Aligned Interest & Responsibility:** National and state education leaders provide an overview of the state education landscape and emphasize why institutions of higher education-PK-12 schools-community are interconnected, and the opportunity to develop mutually beneficial relationships.
- **The How - Panel Highlighting Existing Partnerships & UACS:** Superintendents and University staff share what their partnership looks like and how it has enhanced both institutions, assumptions to avoid, and tips on how to engage with one another.
- **Breakout Discussions:** Organized by role, (Presidents, Deans, IHE Partnerships & Outreach Offices, Faculty, and School-District related) participants share how they can support the UACS strategy and discuss what’s needed to establish mutually beneficial relationships between higher education and school districts.

- **The Opportunity - Panel Discussion:** Highlight existing University-Assisted Community School initiatives and uplift opportunities for better alignment and coordination with universities. For example, educator pipelines and community-based curriculum. Also, provide an overview of relevant policy and funding mechanisms.
- **Remarks from Dignitaries:** Policymakers are recognized for their support and encourage further collaboration and advocacy. They also recognize how UACS fit their goals and benefit constituents.
- **Mobilizing Next Steps:** Encourage participants to identify a campus UACS point person and share ways in which local universities can learn more about the strategy and receive direct implementation support. Click [here](#) for an example.



Dr. Naorah Rimkunas, Assistant Professor of Community Schools at Binghamton University said, “This is the first convening of what we hope are many to unite the SUNY system around Community Schools. It’s important to make the time to bring everyone together to learn, strategize, and co-create a SUNY-wide UACS approach. The potential is unlimited to make a meaningful difference across the state for youth, families, and communities.” Dr. Laura Bronstein, Dean of CCPA and Founding Director of Binghamton University Community Schools is excited to help lead this critical work for the state

and is working collaboratively with Dr. Rimkunas and other BUCS faculty and staff, the SUNY Chancellor’s office, and the Netter Center to support ongoing efforts with interested SUNYs on the path to UACS implementation.



Learn More:

To learn more about *The Promise of SUNY-led University-Assisted Community Schools to Transform Education in New York State*, click [here](#) and [here](#), or contact Dr. Naorah Rimkunas, Assistant Professor of Community Schools, co-chair of [Coalition for Community Schools Research Practice Network](#), and Associate Director of the Netter Center's University-Assisted Community Schools National Network, at rimkunas@binghamton.edu.

To learn more about University Assisted Community Schools (UACS), click [here](#), or contact Cory Bowman, Director of the UACS National Network and UACS Regional Training Centers programs of the Netter Center at the University of Pennsylvania at bowman@upenn.edu.

To get connected with the Coalition for Community Schools, check out our [various role-based networks here](#), or [contact your regional director here](#).