

Community Schools United Media & Storytelling Toolkit

Community Schools United is a community-wide strategy led by United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley that brings schools, families, and community partners together to remove barriers to student success. Launched in 2020, the strategy places a dedicated Community School Coordinator at each participating school to build relationships, connect resources, and bring the strategy to life on the school campus. Together, schools and community partners coordinate academic enrichment, family engagement, community partnerships, and integrated supports so students have what they need to attend, engage, learn, and succeed.

Today, Community Schools United serves five schools across the Chattahoochee Valley:

- Brewer Early Innovation Academy
- Dorothy Height Elementary School
- **NEW (2026-2027)!** Eddy Middle School
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School
- Phenix City Elementary School

BY THE NUMBERS*

13.43% reduction in chronic absenteeism

18.08% increase in student readiness

280,000+ hours of afterschool programming

1,472 coordinated family referrals

27,337 participants engaged through family workshops

106 community partners

1,600+ volunteer hours

*Data through Spring 2026

WHAT DOES A COMMUNITY SCHOOL LOOK LIKE?

INTEGRATED STUDENT SUPPORTS

When barriers arise, support comes closer.

Connecting students and families to resources that help remove barriers to learning and support the whole child.

ACTIVE FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Families + community have a seat at the table.

Building trusted connections among families, schools and community partners around student success.

EXPANDED & ENRICHED LEARNING

Learning doesn't stop when the school day ends.

Creating opportunities before, during and after school, in summer and beyond the classroom.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP & PRACTICES

The school doesn't have to do it alone.

Bringing school leaders, families, students and community partners together to identify priorities and work toward shared goals.

MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

STUDENT AND FAMILY STORIES

1. **Headline: How Community Schools United Helped a Dorothy Height Family Move Forward.** When an unexpected housing crisis forced Ms. Kizzie and her family from their home, her daughter Jerni, a student at Dorothy Height Elementary School, was able to keep showing up to school and focusing on learning because her Community Schools team was there to help. United Way connected the family with temporary housing and, through ongoing support and community partnerships, helped them secure a stable home. Along the way, Ms. Kizzie completed a job readiness program as the family worked toward greater stability. Today, Jerni is an honor roll student with perfect attendance, and her family is looking toward the future with renewed confidence.

Potential story/photo opportunities: Existing photography and [video](#) of Ms. Kizzie and Jerni; interviews with Community Schools United staff about the family's experience and the role of coordinated support in helping students stay engaged in school.

SCHOOL/COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

1. **Headline: Expanding the Community Schools Model: Community Schools United expands to Eddy Middle School in Columbus.** For the 2026–2027 school year, Community Schools United expanded its work into middle school with the launch of a new Community School at Eddy Middle School. The expansion builds on the strategy's work in elementary schools while adapting the Community Schools Strategy to fit the need of middle school students and families. The site is focused on maintaining strong family connections, strengthening student support, and ensuring resources and opportunities continue to follow students as they grow.

Potential story/photo opportunities: Eddy Middle School grand opening/launch event; students and families participating in Community Schools programming; interviews with school leadership and the Community School Coordinator.

2. **Headline: PAW Store: Connecting Attendance with Family Support.** At Dorothy Height Elementary, the PAW Store connects consistent school attendance with access to essential items such as clothing and household goods. The initiative addresses practical barriers that can make it harder for students to attend school consistently while giving students and families another point of connection with their school community.

Potential story/photo opportunities: PAW Store, students/families participating, interview with school staff, Community School Coordinator.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

- **Sidney Houck, Senior Director, Community Schools United, United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley** -- Available to discuss the Community Schools United strategy, its expansion, partnerships, impact and priorities.
- **Ben Moser, President & CEO, United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley** -- Available to discuss United Way's investment in Community Schools United, the broader community strategy and its role in advancing student success across the Chattahoochee Valley.
- **School Leadership** -- Principals and school leaders from participating Community Schools are available for interviews about their school's experience with the Community Schools model.
- **Community Partner, Organization** -- Available to discuss their organization's role in the Community Schools strategy and the impact of bringing community expertise, resources, and opportunities into schools through partnership. Potential stories include Valley Healthcare's school-based health services, Food Mill's Farm to School and nutritional security work, higher education partnerships supporting workforce development, and the broader network of 100+ community partners.

EVENTS & PHOTO OPPORTUNITIES

Community Schools United offers opportunities for media to see the work in action, including:

- **Family Workshops & Events** – Cooking Matters, family dinners, parenting classes, resource fairs, and other family-centered activities.
- **Community Resources in Action** – Dental RV unit visits, mobile market shopping, Paw Store openings, resource fairs, and other activities connecting families with resources and support.
- **Student Enrichment & Learning** – Farm to School lessons, Rotary Readers, Teddy Bear Clinic lessons, Roll Call Rover, and other partner-led experiences.
- **Everyday School Connections** – Car Rider Line interactions, Community School Coordinators in their Resource Rooms, and other moments that show the strategy woven into daily school life.

Contact us to learn more or coordinate a visit.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is Community Schools United, and what does it look like in a school?

Community Schools United brings the **Community Schools strategy** directly into schools by placing a dedicated, full-time United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley employed, Community School Coordinator in each partner school. Coordinators work alongside school leaders, teachers, students, families, and community partners to connect people to the resources and opportunities they need to support student success.

- **One dedicated coordinator:** A consistent, trusted presence in the school five days a week, all year long.
- **Four areas of focus:** Integrated student supports, collaborative leadership, expanded and enriched learning, and active family and community engagement.
- **A school-based approach:** Each school's work is shaped by its own students, families, strengths, and priorities.
- **A community hub:** Resources, services, enrichment, and partnerships are brought closer to students and families through the school.

What does Community Schools United actually provide for students and families?

Community Schools United connects students and families to **resources, relationships, and opportunities** based on what each school community needs. The goal is not to provide the same program at every school, but to make the right support easier to access.

- **Basic needs:** Food, uniforms, school supplies, hygiene items, and other essential resources.
- **Community resources:** Connections to healthcare, transportation, housing, employment, education, and other services.
- **Student opportunities:** Literacy, mentoring, social-emotional learning, attendance supports, after-school programs, and enrichment.
- **Family engagement:** Workshops, family dinners, resource fairs, and other opportunities that strengthen relationships between families, schools, and the community.
- **Everyday connection:** The coordinator is there to help families navigate resources, build relationships, and stay connected to the school.

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MEDIA RESOURCES: Logos, photos, video, boilerplate and additional information: unitedcv.org/press

Learn more: unitedcv.org/community-schools

Why does this approach matter for student success?

Community Schools United recognizes that **students cannot always separate what is happening outside the classroom from what happens inside it.** Challenges with food, transportation, healthcare, housing, or other basic needs can affect attendance, engagement, and readiness to learn. By connecting students and families to support while also expanding academic and enrichment opportunities, the strategy helps create stronger conditions for students to succeed.

- **Removes barriers:** Connects families to resources that can affect attendance and readiness to learn.
- **Strengthens learning:** Pairs academic and enrichment opportunities with the supports students need to participate fully.
- **Builds confidence and skills:** Provides mentoring, social-emotional learning, leadership, and other experiences that support students beyond academics.
- **Measures progress:** Community Schools United tracks indicators such as attendance, literacy, and academic readiness to understand the impact.
- **Builds a stronger support system:** Schools, families, and community organizations work together rather than addressing student needs in isolation.