



## **Time for Improvement: Research-Based Expectations for Implementation of the Community Schools Initiative in New York City**

### **Context: A National Perspective on New York City's Community Schools**

Drawing on whole school reform research, this brief puts the Community Schools Initiative in New York City into the national context of recent efforts to transform struggling public schools. It identifies key factors that influence whether schools that serve students from low-income communities of color and immigrant communities succeed or fail. These students face tremendous challenges related to concentrated poverty and other external factors that can hamper their ability to learn in the classroom.

The research cited by experts at the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder reveals how efforts to rush school transformation efforts often fail because they can lead to high teacher turnover, large numbers of inexperienced teachers, administrative instability, poor school and classroom climate, and socioeconomic segregation. By contrast, successful school transformation efforts are grounded in sustained improvement over many years. In the first three to four years, schools generally achieve only partial implementation of their change goals. Full school transformation efforts often take five years or longer.

A major challenge in turning around schools is that external factors like concentrated poverty and family instability can account for twice as much of the variation in student outcomes as internal school factors.

### **Conclusion: Three Key Factors Will Impact New York City's Community Schools**

The New York City Community Schools Initiative can effectively serve its students and communities if they are given the time and resources that a growing body of national research and evidence demonstrates are needed for success. Community schools in New York City are well-positioned to improve student learning by reducing barriers to academic achievement created by external factors like concentrated poverty. These schools are committed to engaging families and community members in the process of school improvement and providing comprehensive supports to students.

National research on school improvement efforts highlights the importance of policy based on three understandings : (1) school improvement is a process, (2) full implementation of a whole school transformation requires meaningful support and can take five years or longer, and (3) measuring school reform success should take into account and measure multiple factors such as improvements in school climate; the growth of school and family partnerships; as well increased teacher knowledge, cooperation, leadership and ownership, alongside diverse indicators of student academic progress.

These insights are especially relevant right now, given that the New York City Community Schools Initiative has been given only three years to succeed and city government is now allowing funding for 12 schools in the Community School Grant Initiative to expire. The national research cited by experts at the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado Boulder clearly shows that community schools, like other school transformation efforts, need at least five years or more to succeed and reduce barriers to achievement in a measurable way.