Speakers

Brian Polito
Former Superintendent,
Erie's Public Schools

Mike Jaruszewicz
Executive Vice President,
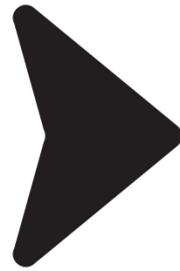United Way of Erie County

SESSION OUTCOME

Learn key elements for successful partnerships between Community School backbone organizations and school districts.

Session Overview

Background to Erie's Public Schools and United Way

Community Schools in Erie, PA

Key elements of a district/backbone partnership
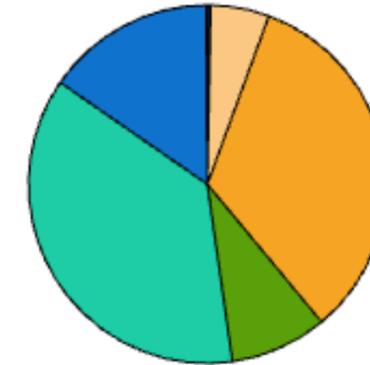
Q&A

BACKGROUND

Erie's Public Schools

- Urban
- **10,500** Students

Percent Enrollment by Student Groups

Economically Disadvantaged	88.7%
English Language Learner	10.8%
Special Education	23.3%
Foster Care	NA
Homeless	2.6%

Percent Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.3%
Asian	5.3%
Black	33.4%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.1%
Hispanic	8.8%
White	36.9%
2 or More Races	15.3%

United Way of Erie County

- Issue focused
- Mission is to break the cycle of generational poverty through education
- Serves as the backbone organization for Community Schools in Erie County
  - Employs Community School Directors
  - Leads the data collection and evaluation
  - Facilitates strategy development to remove non-academic barriers
  - Coordinates partner alignment
  - Leads resource development efforts
  - Leads the marketing and brand management
  - Facilitates collaborative meetings and difficult conversations
  - Leads and supports systems-level change

Community Schools in Erie

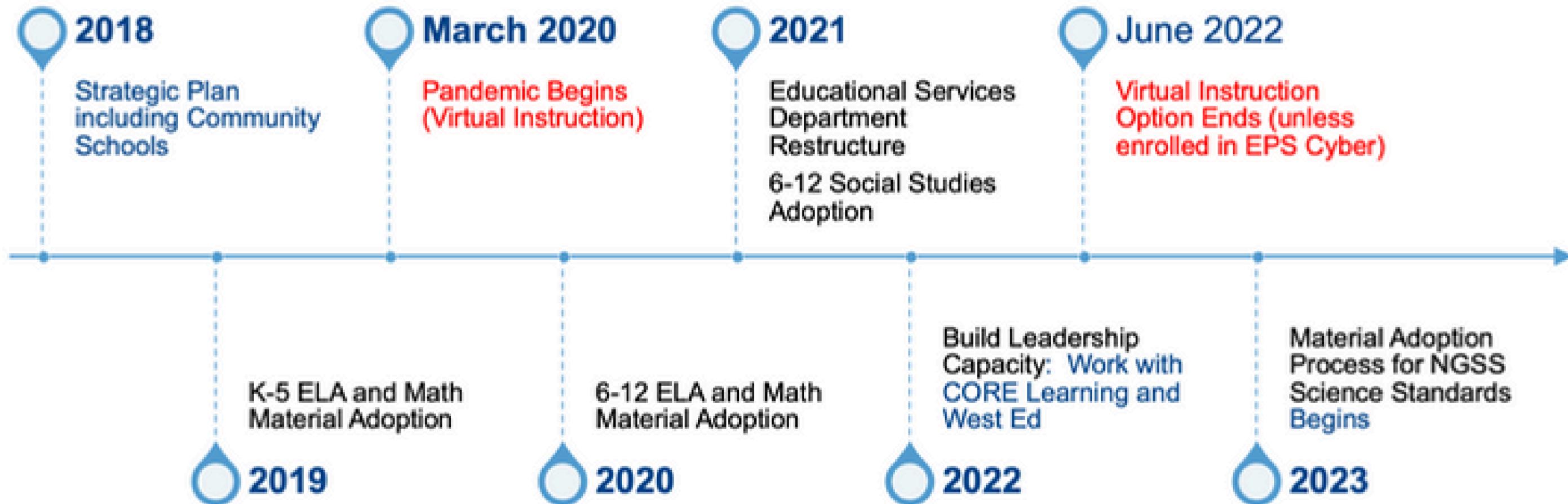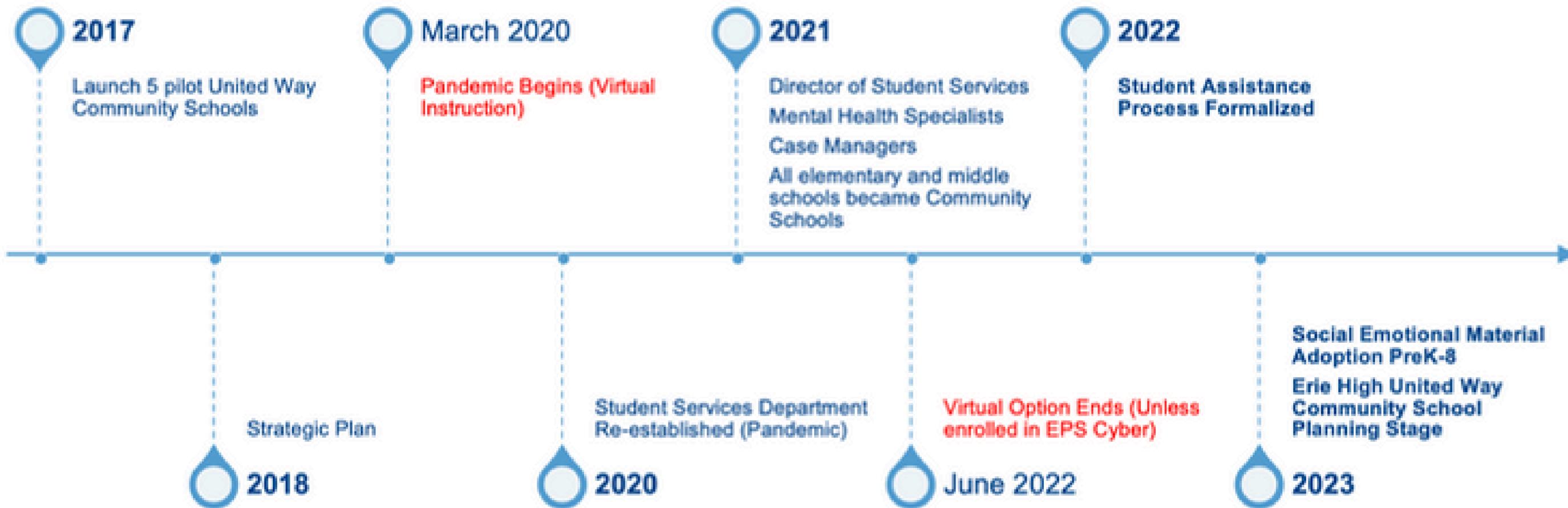# It is working!

- Established a formalized framework for implementing the community school model in Erie County
- Alignment of dozens of impact partners to strategically address non-academic barriers
- Securing millions of dollars in new funding to support the work
- Successfully removing non-academic barriers and improving student academic growth and proficiency

Empowering Infrastructure: Educational Services

2018
Strategic Plan including Community Schools

March 2020
Pandemic Begins (Virtual Instruction)

2021
Educational Services Department Restructure

6-12 Social Studies Adoption

June 2022
Virtual Instruction Option Ends (unless enrolled in EPS Cyber)

K-5 ELA and Math Material Adoption
2019

6-12 ELA and Math Material Adoption
2020

Build Leadership Capacity: Work with CORE Learning and West Ed
2022

Material Adoption Process for NGSS Science Standards Begins
2023

Empowering Infrastructure: Educational Services

2017
Launch 5 pilot United Way Community Schools

March 2020
Pandemic Begins (Virtual Instruction)

2021
Director of Student Services
Mental Health Specialists
Case Managers
All elementary and middle schools became Community Schools

2022
Student Assistance Process Formalized

Strategic Plan
2018

Student Services Department Re-established (Pandemic)
2020

Virtual Option Ends (Unless enrolled in EPS Cyber)
June 2022

Social Emotional Material Adoption PreK-8
Erie High United Way Community School Planning Stage
2023

Key Elements of our Partnership

COMMITMENT, COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Commitment

Commitment from both the district and backbone organization is essential

Examples from EPS include:
- Inclusion of community school expansion in the district's most recent strategic plan
- EPS directed ESSER funding to support the expansion of the model to more schools
- School Board adopted a policy in support of Community Schools in January 2025
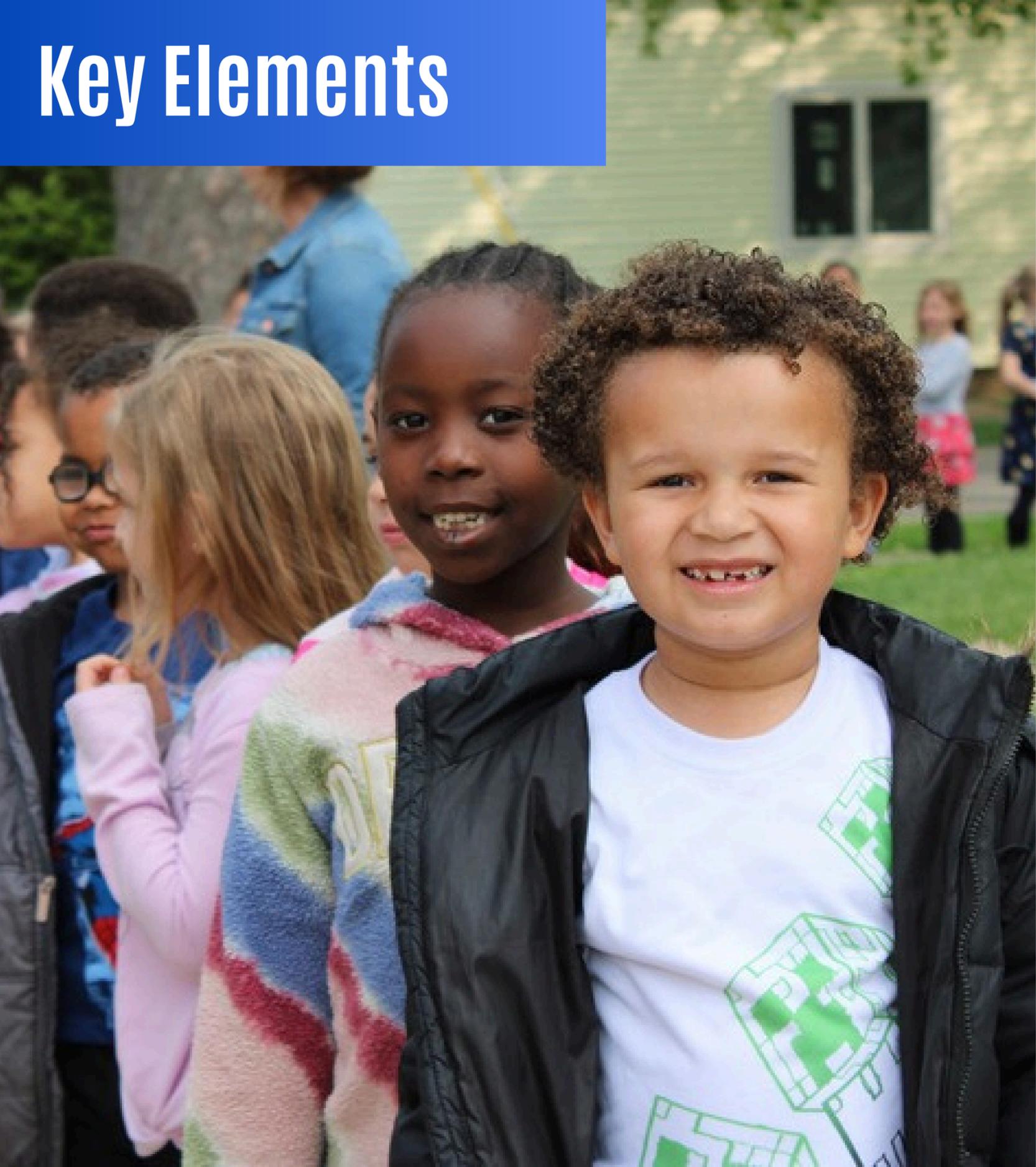- Sustaining FSCS case management program

Commitment

Examples from UWEC include:
- Community Schools has become UWEC's primary focus
- Restructured the entire organization to serve as the backbone organization for Community Schools
  - Departments
  - Staffing
  - Funding
- Board and committee service
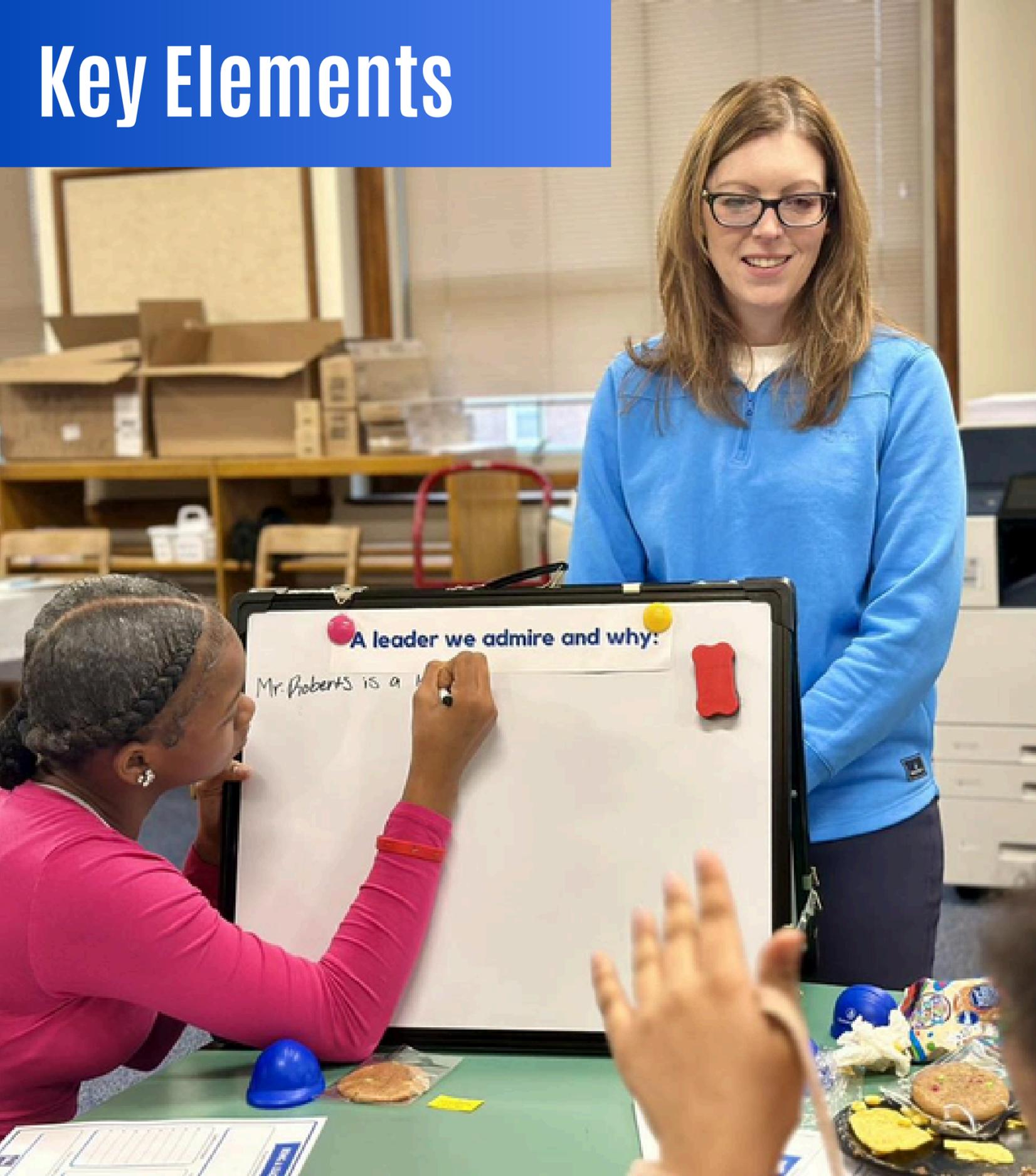- Agreements with school districts

Key Elements

Communication

Strong lines of communication between school districts and backbone organizations is critical

- Helps ensure the work continues at a steady pace, that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and that resources are strategically aligned

Communication

Examples:

- Weekly planning meetings with senior leadership to share status updates and to discuss opportunities and challenges
- Ad hoc planning meetings to focus on specific topics (e.g. process improvements)
- Community school annual progress reports, school board presentations, in-service day presentations, etc.

Collaboration

Hiring Processes
- Joint participation in relevant staff hiring committees and evaluations

Data Sharing
- United Way CSDs and Data Mgrs. access the SIS
- Collaborative survey processes for stakeholders

Resource Development and Leveraged Funding
- Resource development meetings and community school tours
- District funds used to support community schools
  - ESSER
  - Title I
- Collaborative grant applications to fund key initiatives
- United Way funding

Collaboration

Marketing and Strategic Communications
- Coordinated messaging
- Joint outreach to city and county governments
- Joint press events
- United Way staff help administer school social media pages and parent communciation app

Policies and Procedures
- Significant overhauls to related district policies and procedures
  - Student Assistance Program
  - Volunteers
  - Data collection and use
  - Program partnership agreements

2025 COMMUNITY SCHOOLS CONFERENCE

Q&A

SCAN FOR RESOURCES

THANK YOU!

#CommunitySchoolsInAction

follow & tag us on social media!   @unitedwayerie