

## The Palm Beach Post

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### COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS HELP ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

*Andrew Duffell, Children's Home Society of Florida board member*

Economic development is often in the headlines, and is rarely defined. At its core, economic development is about empowering an entire community to create its own opportunities, allowing its citizens – regardless of the hand life has dealt them – to fulfill their ambitions.



With education as a keystone to our strategy, Palm Beach County can achieve sustainable economic development that improves lives and opportunities.

According to the Florida Chamber's Florida Scorecard, Palm Beach County's 2016 graduation rate of 82.3 percent eclipsed the 80 percent

achievement of Florida as a whole. With numbers on the rise, it's time to turn our attention to the stubborn systemic, societal challenges impeding the remaining 18 percent of our youth from graduating and contributing to society.

Part of the solution lies with a proven strategy: community partnership schools, pioneered by Children's Home Society of Florida and its partners. The Community Partnership School model works because it brings a unique focus to meet specific needs of each community – as identified by the community. These schools address major barriers that interfere with education, like homelessness, hunger, untreated and complex mental health challenges, gang exposure, inadequate access to health care, abuse, and neglect.

By bringing solutions and services into the school – meeting students and families where they're at – obstacles are addressed, and students can focus on

learning. That's when they have a chance to change their future – to become positive members of society.

From an economic perspective, this represents an enormous long-term savings to the state; estimated lifetime societal costs for one high school dropout are approximately \$292,000.

In Palm Beach County, we know there's a need for a model such as this. Many teachers struggle to address complex needs of students and families; implementing a strategy like the Community Partnership School model at Gove Elementary, Palm Beach Lakes High School and/or West Riviera Elementary School could provide the resources and access that can help students succeed.

As recent recipients of Schools of Hope grants, these three schools are uniquely positioned to address the myriad challenges faced by students so they may focus on and excel at academics. Our district is also fortunate to have the expertise of Deputy Schools Superintendent David Christiansen, who helped pioneer the Community Partnership Schools initiative when he was the principal at Evans High School in Orlando.

It's my sincere hope, as a resident and professional in Palm Beach County, that our district will embrace the opportunity to implement a community partnership school with the support of our legislative delegation.

Together, we can make strides toward ensuring more children in our community have the opportunity to learn – a most basic right in our country – and fulfill their ambitions without worrying about hunger, bullying, depression or abuse.

