



# CHS in the News



## Editorial: Build on efforts of community school

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The local effort — The Nest at Howard Bishop Middle School — has produced promising early results in providing counseling, tutoring and other help to students in need.

Academic struggles are often related to issues outside of the classroom.

Students in high-poverty neighborhoods are sometimes dealing with problems such as hunger, the lack of a stable home, traumatic experiences and untreated medical issues. Yet public schools are expected to improve their academic performance without these problems being adequately addressed.

An increasing number of schools are being used as neighborhood hubs to provide health and social services and other support for children and their families. Cities such as Los Angeles and New York have embraced the concept of community schools in recent years, with some research finding they have led to higher attendance and graduation rates.

The Children's Home Society of Florida has created several community schools across our state in partnership with educational and health institutions. The model is being used in Gainesville at The Nest at Howard Bishop Middle School, a partnership between the Children's Home Society and Alachua County Public Schools, the county health department, Santa Fe College and the University of Florida.

The local effort has produced promising early results in providing counseling, tutoring and other help to students in need. But more must be done to expand the concept at Howard Bishop as well as into the low-performing elementary schools that send students there.

The Sun-sponsored Gainesville For All initiative has recommended doing so through the establishment of the Gainesville Empowerment Zone in the neighborhoods

around Howard Bishop. It would build on the efforts of the community school as well as the nearby Library Partnership Resource Center to better coordinate services offered in the area and fill gaps.

A first step would be ensuring The Nest at Howard Bishop has the resources needed to accomplish its mission. The Children's Home Society is seeking \$5.8 million in state funding from the state Legislature to expand the work being done at community schools and establish new ones. Schools receiving the money would be required to provide a 25 percent local match.

The Nest could use the funding and additional community support. Its mental health counselors are overbooked, programs providing dental care and other health services aren't offered as regularly as needed, and more work must be done to engage parents of students.

In neighborhoods west of Interstate 75, community activists created the Southwest Advocacy Group to address social problems related to poverty. The group's successful efforts in establishing a child-care center, a family resource center and a health clinic have shown the power of community partnerships in making these things happen.

Neighborhoods in east Gainesville deserve a similar commitment. The establishment of a Gainesville Empowerment Zone, centered around an expanded community school at Howard Bishop, would provide a model for improving the well-being of long-neglected neighborhoods.

Alachua County schools are seeking to close the widest racial achievement gap of any school district in the state through a new equity plan. The community must do its part to help through an Empowerment Zone and other efforts to ensure problems outside of the classroom aren't holding students back.