

Community Schools Insights:

An Opportunity to Catalyze Transformational Change for Schools and Communities

Introduction

The need and corresponding call for a whole-child, community-grounded approach in public schools could not be greater today. Educators, education leaders and policymakers have looked to the community schools model as a key approach to addressing the impact of growing economic and racial inequalities on families tied to lack of access to quality education, healthcare, healthy foods, and economic prosperity. With the additional challenges COVID-19 created for schools, the demand for our public education system to go beyond academics to meet the socioemotional, health and physical needs of students, families, and surrounding communities has only increased.

Though the pandemic raised interest and recent investments in the community schools model, the model has been a longstanding approach in Los Angeles. One of the first community schools dates back to the Los Angeles Education Partnership's work with a

federal Full Service Community School Grant for the Valley Neighborhood Collective in 2008, and their ongoing work in school-community partnerships since the 1990s.¹ Grassroots organizing efforts initiated the launching of other community schools alongside local organizations, like Proyecto Pastoral's work with Mendez High School in Boyle Heights in 2010 using a federal Promise Neighborhoods planning grant.² Federal, state, and local investments have grown single-school efforts to a large-scale initiative with more than 50 community schools in the Los Angeles Unified (LAUSD) Community School Initiative alone.

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of the community schools approach in Los Angeles including the selection process and current funding opportunities, and spotlight an exemplary Los Angeles community school, Mendez High School, that demonstrates the opportunity to catalyze transformational change for schools and communities.

¹ Los Angeles Education Partnership. *Our Story*. <https://www.laep.org/who-we-are/our-story/>

² Promesa Boyle Heights. *Our Beginnings*. <https://www.promesaboyleheights.org/copy-of-our-story>

What is a Community School

Community schools are both a place and a set of partnerships between the school, its community, and local service providers like nonprofits or government agencies. The primary goal is to move beyond the traditional role of a school that focuses solely on academics to provide the support needed to reach academic success by addressing the barriers that tend to limit students from achieving their potential. Community schools seek to more holistically understand the needs of students and the community, and design a set of partnerships and strategies within the school intended to meet the academic, social-emotional, and physical health needs of the full school community. Community schools are rarely identical in approach because they are designed to meet the needs of their particular school community. Each tends to orient itself around a specific set of services and extra supports needed by its school community, oftentimes identified and defined with the community itself. For Mendez High School, this first entailed a focus on restorative justice and improving graduation rates and has evolved to include a public wellness center, parent center, arts and leadership development.

Benefits of the Community School Model

Research on community schools has found they can reduce racial and economic achievement and opportunity gaps, as well as improve attendance, behavior, social

functioning, academic achievement, and graduation rates. They promote higher levels of trust among staff, students and parents, and more positive reviews of school climates.³ In addition, the evidence on return on investment is strong, with some research finding \$15 in benefits for every \$1 spent on school-based wraparound services⁴, and another report finding a benefit of \$7 in return for every \$1 spent on a community school coordinator salary.⁵

Research on the first few years with Los Angeles Unified's initiative found that increased numbers of elementary school teachers felt their school offered collaborative practices. Meanwhile, parents at middle schools noticed a higher level of activities and high school parents felt more included in decision making. In self reviews, 34% of schools in the first three cohorts of LAUSD community schools felt they had transformed integrated student supports, and 22% felt they had transformed family and community engagement. Indicators across cohort schools demonstrated improved attendance (up 4%), decreased absenteeism (down 8%), improved DIBELS scores (improved average of 6% in grades 1-2), and much improved volunteer application rates (370% increase in submittals). School experience surveys found increased teacher collaboration (5.5% increase) and improved opinion of high quality instruction among parents (7% increase).⁶

³ Maier, A, Daniel, J., Oakes, J. & Lam, L. (2017). Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report>

⁴ Maier, Daniel, Oakes & Lam (2017).

⁵ Bloodworth, M and Horner, A. (2019). Return on Investment of a Community School Coordinator: A Case Study. Community School Partnership. https://www.communityschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/11/ROI_Coordinator.pdf

⁶ Cora Watkins. (2023, October 26). Community School Initiative [Presentation]. LAUSD Board Committee of the Whole Meeting. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/10-24-23COWAagendaPacket.pdf>

Though the approach is rarely identical across community schools, there are several features that are common strategies in the CS model captured by:

The Learning Policy Institute's Four Pillars of Community Schools:

- 1** Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities,
- 2** Integrated student supports,
- 3** Collaborative leadership and practices, and
- 4** Active family and community engagement.

The four pillars are defined below along with some of the benefits they offer schools, grounded in the community school research for each pillar.

Table 1. Opportunities for Success Through Community School Pillars

Key benefits from expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities

Pillar Definition	Benefits of Effective Implementation
<p>Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities including after-school, weekend, and summer programs, provide additional academic instruction, individualized academic support, enrichment activities, and learning opportunities that emphasize real-world learning and community problem solving.</p> <p><i>*Research shows this pillar has the strongest positive effects on student academic outcomes</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently positive effects on attendance, course completion, and student behavior, as well as some impact on student achievement Studies have found benefits of expanded learning time, spent in the right ways, has the strongest effects on positive outcomes among students of color, students who are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch, and students who performed poorly on standardized tests Enables student development academically, socially, emotionally and physically outside the regular school day or year Opportunities for schools to teach beyond a focus on testing Increases school-based access to activities for students in lower income communities that are often more available to students in higher income communities via their parents' coordination⁷ <p>The Learning Policy Institute's 2017 Review of the Evidence on community schools offers extensive evidence on the benefits and examples of implementation for all four pillars.</p>

Key benefits from integrated student supports

Pillar Definition	Benefits of Implementation
<p>Integrated student supports address out-of-school barriers to learning through partnerships with social and health service agencies and providers, ideally coordinated by a dedicated professional staff member. Some employ social-emotional learning, conflict resolution training, trauma-informed care, and restorative justice practices to support mental health and lessen conflict, bullying, and punitive disciplinary actions, such as suspensions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By addressing the non-academic needs of students, community schools enable their students to focus more on academic goals, increasing educational equity Extensive research finds the benefits of wrap-around services for students, and the benefits are particularly evident among students with social-emotional problems Studies have shown effective implementation of integrated student support had positive effects on attendance, grade retention and drop out rates, math and reading achievement, and math scores, as well as school behavioral problems⁸

Key benefits from collaborative leadership and practices

Pillar Definition	Benefits of Implementation
<p>Collaborative leadership and practices build a culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility using such strategies as site-based leadership/governance teams, teacher learning communities, and a community school coordinator who manages the complex joint work of multiple school and community organizations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success with this pillar is critical to building the conditions for implementing the other pillars Studies on collaborative leadership implementation find it provides the conditions for improving both student outcomes and school-community relationships, including an increase in feelings of trust and teacher efficacy Strong, collaborative relationships help schools to better identify barriers to learning affecting their students and develop solutions in tandem with the community Studies have found that collaborative leadership and practices increase the social capital of students and families, teacher-peer learning, and the school's overall capacity for academic improvements⁹

Key benefits from family and community engagement

Pillar Definition	Benefits of Implementation
<p>Active family and community engagement brings parents and other community members into the school as partners with shared decision-making power in children's education. Such engagement also makes the school a neighborhood hub providing adults with educational opportunities, such as ESL classes, green card or citizenship preparation, computer skills, art, STEM, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved family and community engagement creates more positive conditions for learning among students Studies show family and community engagement is associated with improved academic outcomes and long-term success, more positive school climates, and reduced absenteeism Research has consistently found positive changes in social behavior and development, substance abuse rates, and families' ability to address housing, food, and financial issues, as well as lower incidences of crime in communities Collaboration among schools, families, and communities has been shown to improve the capacity of that school to address issues rooted in local conditions, interests, and values One study found that community partnerships increased schools' capacity for improving student outcomes and school principals' relational and political leadership¹⁰

⁷ Maier, Daniel, Oakes & Lam (2017).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Community Schools Implementation at Los Angeles Unified

In 2017, the LAUSD Board of Education passed “Embracing Community Schools Strategies in Los Angeles Unified School District,” establishing a Community Schools Implementation Team to create a plan for a systematic community school transformation process and framework.¹¹ Some schools in the district were already operating on a community school model or close to it; this plan intended to support those schools and expand the opportunities the model offers to others.

This resolution defined community schools as those utilizing an annual asset and needs assessment of both the school and community, a strategic plan for utilizing identified assets, partners engaged for their assets or expertise, and a dedicated staff member to facilitate the development and implementation of the strategic plan. It highlights the community school framework as a method of systematically addressing many priorities and programs already established by the board, such as restorative justice, social emotional and trauma-informed

practices, wellness centers, community engagement and culturally relevant curricula, and professional development.¹²

The initial funding for the LAUSD Community Schools Initiative was established through an agreement between LAUSD and UTLA.¹³ In 2020, the school board passed another resolution, “Charting Progress and Expanding Support for Community Schools,” which called for the creation of a five-year plan for expanding the Community Schools Initiative and extending funding for the first cohort.¹⁴ In 2021, the resolution “Sustaining, Deepening, and Expanding the District’s CS Initiative” committed to selecting 70 community schools in total and funding support until 2025. By 2022, the district had established a full Community Schools office to improve centralized support. Most recently, in 2023, the new collective bargaining agreement between LAUSD and UTLA agreed to expanded support infrastructure and committed to \$250,000 in annual funding for community schools through the 2025-26 school year.¹⁵

Cohort I-IV Community School Initiative Schools, by LAUSD Board District							
	Board District 1	Board District 2	Board District 3	Board District 4	Board District 5	Board District 6	Board District 7
CSI Schools	13	13	2	6	7	8	6

¹¹ LAUSD Board of Education. (2017). Embracing Community School Strategies in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Res-098-16/17). National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/06-13-17RegBdRes098CommunitySchoolsFinal6-14-17.pdf>
¹² LAUSD Board of Education. (2017). Embracing Community School Strategies in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Res-098-16/17).
¹³ LAUSD. Community Schools Initiative History. <https://www.lausd.org/Page/17426>
¹⁴ Thompson, Charlie. (2021, August). Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School: A Community School That Honors Its Neighborhood’s Legacy of Educational Justice. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/shared-learning-mendez-brief>
¹⁵ Baez, Frances. (2023, October 26). Community School Initiative [Presentation]. LAUSD Board Committee of the Whole Meeting. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/10-24-23COWAagendaPacket.pdf>; United Teachers Los Angeles. (2019). Tentative Agreement 2022-2025.

Los Angeles Unified Bright Spot: Mendez High School

Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School (Mendez) in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles was one of the first LAUSD Initiative community schools. However, Mendez was operating as a community school for years ahead of the LAUSD initiative, with nonprofit Promesa Boyle Heights serving as their coordinator and one of their partners. From the beginning, Mendez was the product of grassroots community organizing, born of student walkouts against overcrowded schools. Leaders point to this origin when asked about the approach at Mendez, emphasizing that the history of local activism is foundational to how the school operates in tandem with its community.¹⁶

Mendez was advanced as a community school compared to many of the schools that joined the LAUSD initiative, having already developed partnerships with many local organizations and specifically followed much of the standard community school model. Leaders say that joining the district initiative provided more structure and a systematic approach to their partnerships, helping them to capitalize on the relationships most helpful to their community. It enabled Mendez to have a full-time community school coordinator, who has the time and position to more carefully conduct outreach and workshops. Similarly, the assets and needs assessment process helped school leaders isolate more clearly what stakeholders really wanted, especially coming out of the pandemic, which enabled the school to increase its focus on mental health, food, and technology.¹⁷

The focus on helping schools develop structures and tools, providing coaching, and the network of other coordinators to share practices are all key parts of the Community School Initiative and benefits Mendez leaders point to as critical. Becoming a district community school increased

“What’s added to the school and climate since we’ve become an [LAUSD] community school is ...having more resources to support the different student populations.”
– Community School Coordinator at Mendez

¹⁶ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Staff Interview.; Thompson, Charlie. (2021, August). Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School: A Community School That Honors Its Neighborhood’s Legacy of Educational Justice. Learning Policy Institute.

¹⁷ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Staff Interview. Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interview.

the resources available to Mendez, allowing them to support more distinct student populations. This includes efforts like bi-weekly support groups for new students, a full-time visual and performing arts program instead of external arts partnerships, immigration support, and comprehensive and inclusive sexual education, among others. Partners say the school has also developed a deeper level of intentionality around services, with better ability to look at trends in services and needs and target more effectively.¹⁸

In the early years, Mendez and its partners focused on attendance, graduation rates, and academics, which partners point to as a struggle at the time.¹⁹ As of 2022, the graduation rate at Mendez reached 93%.^{20,21} In recent years, partners say the focus evolved to include social emotional needs, parent engagement, and post-secondary equity and success. From 2018 to 2021, the college-going rate of Mendez students has been between 58-60%; in 2015, the earliest year available, it was 47%.²² In 2022, 88% of staff reported teaching of social-emotional skills occurred regularly at Mendez, versus 73% of LAUSD teachers overall.²³

Parent and family engagement was raised as one element in particular that joining the district initiative improved, thanks to more coordinated efforts. The newly opened parent center is a recent innovation, offering resources and workshops for families. School leaders hope this center will help the school community recover further from the disconnect they say arose during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another key initiative at Mendez is their wellness center, opened in 2022. Every partner we spoke with highlighted the decade-long grassroots community investment in opening the center, from students to community partners and families. It is open to the entire community, not just students. It helps Mendez provide an increased focus on not just physical but mental health, which was first identified as a need in their assessment process and further emerged as a key need after the pandemic.²⁴ Other community partners at Mendez supplement the mental health care services available through the center, from outpatient and school-based mental health care via Enki Health Services, to free counseling and substance abuse prevention support from Alta Family Services.²⁵

Restorative justice is also a key element of the approach at Mendez. The community school coordinator was a teacher at Mendez before becoming the restorative justice coordinator, a role she now fills in tandem with community school coordinator. Mendez has long emphasized

¹⁸ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Staff Interview. Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interview.

¹⁹ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interview.

²⁰ California Department of Education. (2022). 2021–22 Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate [Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School Report 19-64733-0119966]. DataQuest. (Accessed 11/02/23).

²¹ California Department of Education data is not directly comparable before and after 2016. However, in 2011, the earliest year available, the graduation rate was 66%. The Learning Policy Institute additionally reported that community organizers estimate the graduation rate in the founding year (2009) to be around 45%. (California Department of Education. Cohort Outcome Multi-Year Summary Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School Results. (Accessed 11/03/23). <https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/cohortmulti/CohortMultiYear.aspx?Aggllevel=S&cdscode=19647330119966> ; Thompson, Charlie. (2021, August). *Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School: A Community School That Honors Its Neighborhood's Legacy of Educational Justice*. Learning Policy Institute.

²² California Department of Education. (2022). 2020–21 College-Going Rate for California High School Students [Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School Report 19-64733-0119966]. DataQuest. (Accessed 11/02/23).

²³ Los Angeles Unified School District. (2022). LAUSD School Experience Survey results 2021–22. (Accessed 11/02/23).

²⁴ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interviews. Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Staff Interview.

²⁵ Felicitas & Gonzalo Mendez High School. Health & Wellness. (Accessed 11/03/23).

this approach, from stopping random searches before the district mandated that change to eschewing police presence on campus. They rely on the connections formed with students to help identify and address root issues, rather than punitive measures.²⁶ There have been zero expulsions at Mendez since 2011.²⁷ Promesa Boyle Heights, the prior coordinating organization at Mendez and an ongoing partner, also employ a restorative justice approach in their work. They emphasize the benefits of identifying students' needs and steering them to appropriate service providers to support them. This has often involved directing students to the wellness center at Mendez since it opened.²⁸ Another partner, InnerCity Struggle, runs youth leadership political and leadership development groups on campus and focuses on restorative practices and decriminalizing youth. They work to support students struggling academically or with social emotional wellness, as well as train students in organizing principles. In turn, Mendez students report higher opportunities for participation and leadership than the district average. Most students at Mendez feel they have lots of opportunities to get involved (83%), it offers a supportive learning environment (78%), and are happy to be there (65%). Sixty-one percent believe that students have a voice in decisions at the school, compared to 50% of LAUSD students overall.²⁹

One key learning raised by a Mendez community partner is the benefit of their willingness to try new things and learn from those efforts. If one program or partner isn't meeting the needs of students or the community as intended, a willingness to evolve and try another approach instead is essential to a successful, sustainable community school model.³⁰

Mendez stakeholders emphasized the collaborative culture and deep relationship building among staff, students, and families as well as across the community. Leaders point out this is evident in not only the long-standing community partners at the school, but also in high teacher and staff retention. Partners praised how deeply staff and teachers care about students and their families. Likewise, staff at Mendez pointed to partners going above and beyond, volunteering to help with other programs and workshops. During remote schooling throughout COVID-19, Mendez staff and volunteers from community partners conducted home visits for struggling students, an example of the level of commitment to the community which multiple partners raised up. Partners are invited to join any campus events, from volunteering efforts to club and career days. This trust and collaboration among partners and school leaders is something partners point to as key to Mendez's model.

One partner noted that at Mendez, there is a clear sense that partners, parents and students are a pivotal part of the decision-making process. This includes not just involvement in events and programs, but also listening sessions to help leaders understand the values and needs of parents and students directly.³¹ The overlapping timeline of the Community Schools Initiative and the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on education make it challenging to accurately evaluate

²⁶ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Staff Interview. Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interview.

²⁷ California Department of Education. (2022). 2021–22 Expulsion Rate [Felicitas and Gonzalo Mendez High School Report 19-64733-0119966]. DataQuest. Accessed 11/02/23.

²⁸ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interview.

²⁹ Los Angeles Unified School District. (2021). LAUSD School Experience Survey results 2020–21. (Accessed 11/02/23).

³⁰ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interview.

³¹ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Staff Interview. Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Partner Organization Interviews.

how joining the initiative changed things. However, parents at Mendez have consistently reported both a higher rate of feeling that teachers take their concerns seriously (94% versus 83% in the district overall in 2023) and a larger increase in this belief over the last few years (an eight percentage point increase compared to three points since 2020). They are also much more likely to feel included in decisions at their school (at 95% in 2023, compared to 81% of district parents overall). In the years since joining the Community Schools Initiative, this metric has increased eight percentage points at Mendez, while in the district in general it increased only two points over the same period.³²

Though much of the culture of collaboration and community integration at Mendez existed prior to the Community School Initiative, the lessons can be applied to any school developing their community school approach.



³² Los Angeles Unified School District. (2023). LAUSD School Experience Survey results 2022–23. (Accessed 11/02/23); Los Angeles Unified School District. (2020). LAUSD School Experience Survey results 2019–20. (Accessed 11/02/23).

How to Become a Community School at Los Angeles Unified

All schools in LAUSD are eligible for the program, regardless of their school governance model (e.g., traditional, affiliated charter, or pilot). A Community Schools Steering Committee developed the application and the selection process.

As of fall 2023, the Community School Initiative has four active cohorts, and the selection process for the fifth cohort takes place during fall 2023. Fifty-five schools in total made up the first four cohorts. The district expects to select 15 schools in the fifth cohort. Those schools will apply for the next round of CCSPP grants in February 2024 and begin their planning process in July 2024. This is more reflective of school-level interest or eligibility than any strategic choices from the district itself, as each round is open to all schools who express interest. The district does some recruiting, encouraging schools involved with the Black Student Achievement Plan in particular to apply, as well as focusing on developing feeder school patterns.³³

The basic criteria include that schools must be in a High Need Area in the Student Equity Need Index and they must demonstrate readiness to transform into a community school via sufficient alignment to the four pillars.³⁴ The application and criteria have evolved with lessons learned in each cohort. Initiative leaders stress that schools are not required

to already operate as a community school; they just need to sufficiently demonstrate compatibility and community, and leadership buy-in to the goals.³⁵ The LAUSD Community Schools Initiative operates somewhat unusually in this respect, with community school selection based on interest from the schools rather than district-led selection, because of the importance of vision alignment among leadership to the success of the program.³⁶

Support and Planning Process

The Community School Initiative offers an array of support programs to community schools in the planning and implementation phases. The support during the application process is detailed in the Selection Process section below. Once selected, the Steering Committee established two subcommittees to help guide schools through the process and support the collaborative leadership pillar:

- The Community School Professional Learning Community supports coordinators through bi-monthly workshops, assisting with duties, issues, and meeting process benchmarks.
- The Community School Assistance and Action Team reviews learning needs identified by the Learning Community and helps with professional development needs, through training curriculum development and leadership mobilization.³⁷

³³ Los Angeles Unified School District. Community School Initiative. <https://www.lausd.org/csi>; Baez, Frances. (2023, October 26). Community School Initiative [Presentation]. LAUSD Board Committee of the Whole Meeting. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/10-24-23COWAgendaPacket.pdf>; Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

³⁴ LAUSD. (2019, June 26). LA Unified Community Schools [Powerpoint Presentation]. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1297/June%2026%202019%20Community%20School%20Presentation.pdf>

³⁵ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

³⁶ Martinez, Esperanza. (2023, October 26). Community School Initiative [Presentation]. LAUSD Board Committee of the Whole Meeting. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/10-24-23COWAgendaPacket.pdf>; Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

³⁷ Los Angeles Unified School District. Community Schools Initiative History. <https://www.lausd.org/Page/17426>

The first step for selected schools under the LAUSD model is hiring a Community School Coordinator to lead the implementation of a stakeholder engagement process, which informs a deep Assets and Needs Assessment (ANA). The ANA is the starting point for schools to develop their top priorities as a community school, based on the needs and interests of their community.³⁸ It aims to reach 75-100% of stakeholder groups, including students and parents, faculty and staff, and community partners. The ANA process includes surveys, individual interviews, street data, and existing data such as the School Experience Survey.³⁹ This process offers schools the opportunity to tailor their approach to their community and maximize benefits from the process, as well as establish a clear understanding of the resources already available in their community.

Community School Coordinators are a critical part of the model in LAUSD. They are a requirement of funding, and are elected by UTLA members at a school site following the principal's recommendation.⁴⁰ The coordinator position, though more specified in the LAUSD model, is a standard element of community schools more generally. A

manager role is necessary to coordinate community partners and resources to maximum effect. The Community School Initiative provides workshops and coaching to help guide coordinators.⁴¹

The school site leadership committee must be composed of parents, students, teachers and community members, in addition to the coordinator.⁴² Beyond hiring a coordinator, schools have more flexibility in utilizing their funding for integrated student supports.

There are also supports in place outside the Division of Instruction, which houses the Community School Initiative itself. Beyond the Bell and the CTE/Linked Learning programs both support schools on the expanded learning time and support pillar. For integrated student support, schools work with Student Health and Human Services Division, the Educational Transformation Office & the Black Student Achievement Plan. Finally, for support on building active family and community engagement, schools are directed to the Student, Family & Community Engagement Branch & Division of Adult and Career Education. They also receive ongoing professional development from the district.⁴³

³⁸ UNITE LA. (2021, June 16). Press Release: Community Schools Initiative. <https://www.unitela.com/community-schools-initiative-061621>

³⁹ Los Angeles Unified School District. Community School Initiative. <https://www.lausd.org/csi>

⁴⁰ LAUSD. (2019, June 26). LA Unified Community Schools [Powerpoint Presentation]. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1297/June%2026%202019%20Community%20School%20Presentation.pdf>

⁴¹ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁴² L.A. Compact Stewardship Group. (2019, March 15). Embracing Community Schools in LA Unified. [Powerpoint Presentation]. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1297/Embracing%20Community%20Schools%20March%202019%20Presentation.pdf>

⁴³ Baez, Frances. (2023, October 26). Community School Initiative [Presentation]. LAUSD Board Committee of the Whole Meeting. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/10-24-23COWAgendaPacket.pdf>

Community School Selection Process

The selection and implementation process in LAUSD has evolved each year of the program, in part because of the expedited nature of the first few cohorts' funding. The Community School Initiative now has a department within the Division of Instruction, a staff of coaches to assist community school coordinators, instructional coaches, and a data coordinator. The latter two positions are recent expansions, beginning in July 2023. Though the process has always been open to any schools that express interest, the Community School Initiative leadership began recruiting schools to apply in recent years.⁴⁴

For schools in the LAUSD Community Schools Initiative, letters of interest for the upcoming cohort were due in October 2023. Schools will submit the full applications by December and be notified of their status in January 2024. The district intends to continue the program, but timeline details for future cohorts are not certain as they will be linked to the next round of state grants, which are not yet public. The request for proposals for the next round of state funding, in February 2024, will be open to Cohort V schools; the subsequent grant period is not yet announced.⁴⁵

To start the process, schools submit a letter expressing intent to apply, signed by the principal and a union representative, directly to Cora Watkins, the Community School Initiative director. Schools are also encouraged to include a parent leader and, if a secondary school, student leadership on the letter, to demonstrate the community

is already involved. Schools can also reach out to Watkins' UTLA counterpart Esperanza Martinez. Once notified of a school's interest, the Community School Initiative will guide the school through the application process.

The district application process starts with two pre-boarding sessions to discuss what transformation to a community school model would look like and to evaluate where the school's system and infrastructure already aligns with the model, if at all. The application itself includes a rubric, which the pre-boarding sessions examine to help schools realistically assess their readiness. Schools then submit the application itself and the Community Schools Steering Committee scores all applicants and makes recommendations to the superintendent. The application has changed for each cohort, as the program develops. Broadly, it aims to identify whether schools' resources, experiences, structures and needs align with the community school framework and process. Schools are asked to speak to existing partnerships and partnerships they envision, how they build in collaboration with families and the community, and what their decision-making authorities and processes look like.

Once the schools are selected to join the cohort, LAUSD includes them in the next round of CCSP grant applications. The final step after designation is a formal acceptance, which requires a stakeholder vote and must demonstrate that the school community is engaged and interested in the process. The

⁴⁴ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

number of schools selected is based in part on how well equipped the district is to help with growth.

The state funding starts with the fiscal year, on July 1. The Community School Initiative provides budget training and guides cohort schools to hire two critical positions ahead of receiving funding: a full-time community school coordinator and a full-time community school community representative. The coaching for coordinators provided by the Community School Initiative has increased over the years, from online access to

National Education Association coaching initially, to now a full-time staff of four local coaches in LAUSD alongside guidance from national experts.⁴⁶ The preparatory phase is critical in setting schools up for success. Though summer is a busy time for school administrators, ensuring the school is ready to start the process on time by hiring for those positions in advance, and launching the community collaboration effort, is key. Schools that start the preparations in late May or June, one expert said, have very different outcomes than the ones that delay hiring and planning until September.⁴⁷



⁴⁶ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Community Schools Funding

At the state level, California has invested a total of \$4.1 billion in community school support. In 2021, the state invested \$3 billion in community schools via the California Community Schools Partnership Act. The program intended to provide enough funding for planning, implementation, coordination and technical assistance to help every high-poverty school in the state to adopt a community school model within seven years.⁴⁸ The act mandated at least \$2.69 billion of those funds go towards establishing and expanding community schools supported by either local education agencies (LEAs) (i.e., school district, charter school, or county level office of education) or consortiums of community schools, while the remainder could be put towards technical assistance centers and county level coordination.⁴⁹ In 2022, the legislature extended the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) to 2031 and added another \$1.1 billion in funds to support the same goals.⁵⁰ One expert noted that, when the state authorized this \$4.1 billion, “it went from playing small at the national level to really scaling overnight.”⁵¹

CCSPP funds are disbursed via several grant programs, detailed in the Funding

Opportunities section of this piece. The program prioritizes demonstrated need for integrated services, as well as schools with at least 80% “unduplicated students,” meaning foster youth, English learners, or students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. State Superintendent Thurman’s office, which directs the program, also prioritizes high poverty schools, defined as schools with a poverty threshold at 68% or higher (58% or higher for rural schools).⁵²

District Support for Community Schools

In 2017, the LAUSD Board of Education passed a resolution to create a community schools plan, establishing a Community School Implementation Team (CSIT) to do so.⁵³ In 2019, LAUSD committed to funding a three-year community school pilot program. This program, called the Community Schools Initiative, committed to funding \$150,000 per school for as many as 20 schools in an inaugural cohort in 2019-20, and the same for up to ten schools in a second cohort. It also included \$250,000 for each of those schools in the second year of their cohort.⁵⁴ In 2020 and 2021, the Board approved further investment in the program through 2025.⁵⁵ In 2023, the district’s collective bargaining agreement with

⁴⁸ Los Angeles County Office of Education. Resources for Schools. <https://www.lacoe.edu/services/student-support/community-schools-initiative>; Maier, A, and Rivera-Rodriguez, A. (2023, April). State Strategies for Investing in Community Schools. Learning Policy Institute <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/state-strategies-investing-in-community-schools-report#:~:text=California%20made%20a%20historic%20%244.1,California%20Community%20Schools%20Partnership%20Program>.

⁴⁹ California Community Schools Partnership Act, 2021. [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=1.&title=1.&part=6.&chapter=6.&article=).

⁵⁰ California Department of Education. California Community Schools Partnership Program. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/ccspp.asp>; California Department of Education. Budget Act for 2022–23: Information. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fr/eb/ba2022-23.asp#:~:text=The%202022%E2%80%9323%20budget%20package%20expands%20the%20California%20Community%20Schools,and%202021%E2%80%9322%20Budget%20Acts>.

⁵¹ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁵² California Department of Education. (2023, May 18). State Superintendent Thurmond Awards \$750 Million in State Board-Approved Community Schools Implementation Grants. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr23/yr23rel40.asp>

⁵³ L.A. Compact Stewardship Group. (2019, March 15). Embracing Community Schools in LA Unified. [Powerpoint Presentation]. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1297/Embracing%20Community%20Schools%20March%202019%20Presentation.pdf>

⁵⁴ Los Angeles Unified School District. Community School Initiative. <https://www.lausd.org/csi>

⁵⁵ Baez, Frances. (2023, October 26). Community School Initiative [Presentation]. LAUSD Board Committee of the Whole Meeting. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/10-24-23COWAagendaPacket.pdf>

the teachers' union committed to increased support for community schools.⁵⁶

Funding Opportunities for Community Schools

Currently, state funding through CCSPP grants offers the most robust opportunities for community schools in Los Angeles, and LAUSD's Community School Initiative is oriented around funneling schools toward those opportunities. LAUSD schools would have to apply through the district.

Implementation grants award \$150,000 to \$500,000 annually for up to five years, for new community schools or the expansion and continuation of existing ones. Funds must be matched to a third of the total by the LEA (which is provided for in LAUSD through 2025). The amount of the grant is determined by school enrollment.⁵⁷

The third round is expected to close in February 2024; the LAUSD Community School Initiative will be applying for funding for its fifth cohort of schools in this grant round. There are further rounds of funding expected in the future, but the number and timeline are not certain.⁵⁸ The application process for schools outlined above accounts for this.

Extension grants award up to \$100,000 annually each, for recipients of CCSPP Implementation Grantees, to extend funding another two years. The first year these will be awarded will be fiscal year 2025-26, and the application information is not yet available. The current process for these is not yet public.⁵⁹

How LAUSD Community Schools are Funded

Schools in the Community School Initiative are funded through a combination of district level funding and CCSPP grants. The initial commitment from the LAUSD board funded two years of the first two cohorts, and a second board resolution committed \$250,000 per cohort school through 2025. CCSPP grant funds secured by the district in the first round of implementation grants supported the first three cohorts, and a grant awarded in the second round of state funding went largely towards schools in cohort IV.⁶⁰ Schools interested in joining a future cohort, whether already operating on a community school model or not, can submit a statement indicating their interest to begin the process.

However, CCSPP funding and LAUSD funding is finite in both dollars and years; so schools must eventually seek out other support to ensure their sustainability. Some schools may look to federal funding like the Full Service Community School Program.⁶¹ The act establishing the CCSPP highlights potential funding from the "LEA Medi-Cal Billing Option Program, School-Based Medi-Cal Administrative Activities program, and reimbursable mental health specialty care services provided under the federal Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment program."⁶²

In the LAUSD Community School Initiative, schools are similarly encouraged to look for ongoing funding from Medi-Cal to sustain wellness services after initial seed money, as well as Department of Health and Human

⁵⁶ Baez, Frances. (2023, October 26). Community School Initiative [Presentation]. LAUSD Board Committee of the Whole Meeting. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/10-24-23COWAgendaPacket.pdf>; United Teachers Los Angeles. (2019). Tentative Agreement 2022-2025. <https://utla.net/app/uploads/2023/04/UTLA-LAUSD-TA-2022-2025-CBA-Signed-4-24-23.docx-1.pdf>

⁵⁷ California Department of Education. CCSPP Planning Grant FAQs. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/r17/ccspppg22faq.asp>

⁵⁸ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁵⁹ California Department of Education. California Community Schools Partnership Program.

⁶⁰ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁶¹ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁶² California Community Schools Partnership Act, 2021. https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/codes_displayText.xhtml?lawCode=EDC&division=1.&title=1.&part=6.&chapter=6.&article=

Services student funds, philanthropic foundation assistance, collaborations with partner organizations, and innovative uses of categorical funds in the education budget. One recommendation was to leverage the Partner Matching Fund. Funds allocated to schools via the Student Equity Needs Index can also be put towards some community school programming. Other state funding programs, such as for CTE linked-learning, can also be leveraged in support of community school programming. Current leaders in LAUSD community schools highlight the importance of community schools planning for sustainability in their funding model from the start. Partner and community relationships, and intentional planning, can open doors to private funding for program support. Rather than the full-system funding that the original grant supplies, ongoing funding will likely be more patchwork, combining support from various government and private sources to cover the established programs and developing needs.⁶³

One coordinator noted that many partner community organizations can provide services for free, and emphasized the value of strong relationship building in helping schools to identify such opportunities.⁶⁴ Planning for funding sustainability should start from the

beginning of the transformation, to ensure schools have the understanding of needs, data and documentation, and connections to continue sufficient support beyond state and district funding commitments.⁶⁵ Since long-term funding will typically be a mix of government grants, use of existing public funding, and private investments, it must be carefully planned. Documentation of trends, needs and successful programs from the start is key to making schools competitive for grant funding in particular. One expert states that this may sound more overwhelming to schools than it needs to; many of the key metrics to track will already be included in schools' Local Control and Accountability Plan and are not new goals to develop.⁶⁶

Funding Model

The Community School Initiative recommended schools consider the Partner Matching Fund, Student Equity Needs Index funding, School Innovation funds and general school funds.⁶⁷ In 2021, the program goal was expanded from 40 schools to 70 by 2025, to help LAUSD schools take advantage of the high level of state funding currently available.⁶⁸ The board has committed to funding schools in current and future cohorts at \$250,000 per school annually through 2025.⁶⁹

⁶³ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interviews.

⁶⁴ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Staff Interview.

⁶⁵ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interviews.

⁶⁶ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.

⁶⁷ L.A. Compact Stewardship Group. (2019, March 15). Embracing Community Schools in LA Unified. [Powerpoint Presentation]. <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1297/Embracing%20Community%20Schools%20March%202019%20Presentation.pdf>

⁶⁸ UNITE LA. (2021, June 16). Press Release: Community Schools Initiative. <https://www.unitela.com/community-schools-initiative-061621>

⁶⁹ Internal GPSN Data Collection: Community School Expert Interview.; United Teachers Los Angeles. (2019). Tentative Agreement 2022-2025.

Appendix: Community School Initiative Key Contacts

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Community Schools Steering Committee Members, 2023-24

[Full list of CSSC members](#), including representatives from: LACOE, LAUSD Office of Student, Family & Community Engagement, Office of Student Health & Human Services,

Black Student Achievement Program, Los Angeles Department of Recreation & Parks, Communities in Schools Los Angeles, LAUSD Board, Promesa Boyle Heights Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission, NEA, UTLA, Reclaim our Schools LA, 74th Street Elementary, Aldama Elementary School, UCLA Community School, and UCLA Center for Community Schooling

- Co-Chair: Selena Barajas, Director I, Community Schools at Los Angeles County Office of Education
- Co-Chair: Rosa Jimenez, Multilingual/Multicultural Academic Language Coach at UCLA Community School

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About GPSN

GPSN is a nonprofit intermediary organization exclusively focused on improving Los Angeles public education. GPSN envisions a public school system in Los Angeles that prepares all students to succeed in school and to live thriving adult lives. Guided by this vision, our

mission is to bring together the Los Angeles community to catalyze the transformation of the public education system so that students of color and students living in poverty gain the knowledge, skills, and experiences to lead thriving adult lives.