

Bridging the Gap:

How Nonprofit Collaborations Strengthen Los Angeles Unified

Executive Summary

Nonprofit service providers — organizations that have formal agreements with a school district to serve students and families and offer a wide range of services from academic enrichment to health and wellness — have proven to be critical partners to Los Angeles Unified. With over 260 nonprofit providers offering services to Los Angeles Unified, these partnerships not only increase the district’s capacity to meet student needs but also play a key role in bridging opportunity gaps, particularly for underserved communities. Well-established research illustrates the impact of these partnerships on student achievement, attendance, social-emotional development, and overall well-being.¹

Nonprofit service providers are particularly valuable now as Los Angeles Unified continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and works toward its vision of creating a learning system where every student is ready for the world. Despite above-average pandemic recovery under the leadership of Superintendent Alberto Carvalho, Los Angeles Unified students continue to face significant challenges. The district lags behind the national average in math and reading, and academic recovery remains uneven across age and race, with younger students, Black and Latino students, and English learners struggling the most.² The social-emotional well-being of students has also been affected, revealing an urgent need for more comprehensive support.³

¹ See, for example: Velma McBride Murry, Reuben Jacobson, and Betheny Gross, “Leveraging Community Partnerships for Integrated Student Support,” Annenberg Institute for School Reform, February 2021, 3–5, https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_14.pdf; Susan Sapanik and Kevin Thaddeus Brown Jr., “School-Community Partnerships,” MDRC, November 2021, 3–4, https://nocache.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/RWJF_Partnerships_Brief_0.pdf.

² “State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?” GPSN, August 2024, 2–4, <https://gpsnla.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/GPSN-Education-Recovery-Now-FINAL.pdf>; “Education Recovery Scorecard,” Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University and Stanford University’s Educational Opportunity Project, 2023, <https://educationrecoverycorecard.org/>.

³ “State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?” GPSN, 27.

This report examines the current landscape of nonprofit service providers in Los Angeles Unified; highlights the benefits they offer students, families, and communities; and offers considerations for sustaining and expanding these vital collaborations. We recognize the great efforts and progress Los Angeles Unified is making, but pre-pandemic inequities and post-pandemic setbacks are too big for any single entity to tackle alone. We offer this report to uplift how nonprofit service providers can help meet the demands of this moment, especially to help improve outcomes and opportunities for students of color and those living in poverty.

Nonprofit Service Providers by the Numbers

400,000+

students served in Los Angeles Unified for SY 2024-25⁴

260+

nonprofit service providers

40¢ / \$1

a nonprofit service provider spends comes from philanthropy

Nonprofit service providers — organizations that have formal agreements with a school district to serve students and families and offer a wide range of services from academic enrichment to health and wellness — have proven to be critical partners to Los Angeles Unified.

⁴ Projected enrollment for TK-12 LAUSD schools for the 2024-25 school year is 409,518. "Fingertip Facts 2024-25," Los Angeles Unified School District, 2024, 1, <https://www.lausd.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=73040&dataid=178843&FileName=2024%20FingertipFacts.pdf>.

The challenge of high student need amid diminishing resources

Los Angeles Unified serves a diverse population of over 400,000 students, who collectively speak more than 150 languages.⁵ Spanning 710 square miles and covering parts of 25 cities and unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County,⁶ the district faces the complex task of providing equitable support across its vast geographic and demographic range. With more than 75% of students living at or below the poverty level, ensuring every student, regardless of background, has access to the necessary resources for academic success and overall well-being remains an ongoing challenge for the district.⁷

The COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically disrupted Los Angeles Unified and schools nationwide, further exacerbated this challenge and laid bare long-standing inequities.⁸

Since beginning his term in February 2022, Superintendent Carvalho has introduced several measures to address achievement gaps and support schools with the greatest needs, including extending instructional time, expanding academic programs, investing in initiatives like the Black Student Achievement Plan, designating 100 new priority schools, and revamping early literacy and numeracy

programs.⁹ Because of these efforts, Los Angeles Unified experienced less learning loss compared to other major school districts in California and across the country, and it continues to show above-average recovery.¹⁰

Despite a stronger recovery, Los Angeles Unified is still a year behind the national average in reading and more than a year behind in math, and academic recovery is uneven across age, race, and ethnicity.¹¹ Younger students who experienced remote learning in their earliest school years have still not caught up to where they should be in math and literacy, and some learning gaps among these students have deepened.¹² In particular, Black students who were in kindergarten in the 2019-20 school year have fallen further behind their peers.¹³ Among older students, Black and Latino students continue to lag behind Asian and white students, and English learners are struggling most significantly to catch up.¹⁴

Chronic absenteeism almost tripled immediately after the return to in-person learning, and while attendance rates have somewhat improved in recent school years, it continues to be a significant challenge for Los Angeles Unified.¹⁵ Though chronic absenteeism is usually seen among high school students, absenteeism rates have been

⁵ "Fingertip Facts 2024-25," Los Angeles Unified School District, 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Report on Improving Student Outcomes and Ensuring Rights," Los Angeles Unified School District, May 2024, 12, <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/381/ECM%202022-2023%20Report%20on%20Improving%20Student%20Outcomes%20FINAL%20ENGLISH.pdf>.

⁸ See, for example: Howard Blume, "Test Scores Show L.A. Students Still Struggling to Recover From Pandemic Setbacks," Los Angeles Times, October 17, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-10-17/test-scores-show-l-a-students-struggling-to-recover-from-pandemic>; Sarah Mervosh and Ashley Wu, "Pandemic Learning Loss and the Long Road to Recovery," The New York Times, January 31, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/01/31/us/pandemic-learning-loss-recovery.html>.

⁹ "State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?" GPSN, 5.

¹⁰ "State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?" GPSN, 5; "Education Recovery Scorecard," Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University and Stanford University's Educational Opportunity Project.)

¹¹ "Education Recovery Scorecard," Center for Education Policy Research at Harvard University and Stanford University's Educational Opportunity Project.

¹² "State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?" GPSN, 14, 16.

¹³ "State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?" GPSN, 16.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?" GPSN, 22. under heade

especially high for K-5 students since in-person learning resumed.¹⁶ Black and Latino students have experienced the highest rates of chronic absenteeism at 57% and 48% respectively, which is about double pre-pandemic levels.¹⁷

The pandemic not only led to substantial learning loss but also affected the mental health and social-emotional well-being of students. Recent research shows that adolescents, who experienced the pandemic during formative developmental years, show increased levels of anxiety and depression.¹⁸ Within Los Angeles Unified, survey data show a decline across all grade levels in students feeling happy to be at school since the return to in-person learning, along with a decrease in the percentage who believe their teachers care about their attendance.¹⁹

Los Angeles Unified, like other districts nationwide, faces the reality of needing to do more for the students it serves but is limited by funding and capacity constraints.

The federal money to help students recover from the pandemic, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund ends during the 2024-25 school year.²⁰ Los Angeles Unified has allocated a total of \$2.6 billion in ESSER III funds, with \$882

million budgeted for the 2023-24 school year on pandemic-related items like mental health staffing and academic interventionists, and significant carryover funds are budgeted for the 2024-25 school year.²¹

Declining enrollment, a trend in many large districts across the country and in California, also means fewer dollars to do more work.²² Because California school districts are funded based on average daily attendance rates, a decline in enrollment results in a loss of funding.²³ California

“I work in the education nonprofit sector to help close the opportunity gap for underserved populations, be a voice for the voiceless, and make a tangible difference in the lives of students.” – Nonprofit leader with 20 years of service

¹⁶ Ibid. (see seco22)

¹⁷ “State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?” GPSN, 23.

¹⁸ “COVID-19 Pandemic Associated with Worse Mental Health and Accelerated Brain Development in Adolescents,” National Institute of Mental Health, January 26, 2023, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-news/2023/covid-19-pandemic-associated-with-worse-mental-health-and-accelerated-brain-development-in-adolescents>.

¹⁹ “State of Recovery in Los Angeles Unified: Four Years Later, How are Students Doing?” GPSN, 27.

²⁰ Joanna LeFebvre and Sonali Master, “Expiration of Federal K-12 Emergency Funds Could Pose Challenges for States,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 28, 2024, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/expiration-of-federal-k-12-emergency-funds-could-pose-challenges-for>.

²¹ “Superintendent’s Report on ESSER III,” presentation, Los Angeles Unified School District, June 6, 2023, 1, <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1057/3-%20Supt%20Report%20ESSER%203%20BOE%2023%2006%2006.pdf>.

²² Carrie Hahnel and Max Marchitello, “Centering Equity in the School-Closure Process in California,” PACE, September 2023, 16, <https://edpolicyinca.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/r-hahnel-sept2023.pdf>; Krista Kaput, Carrie Hahnel, and Biko McMillan, “How Student Enrollment Declines Are Affecting Education Budgets, Explained in 10 Figures,” Bellwether, September 2024, <https://bellwether.org/publications/How-Student-Enrollment-Declines-are-Affecting-Education-Budgets/?activeTab=1>.

²³ Hahnel and Marchitello, “Centering Equity in the School-Closure Process in California,” 2; Paul Beach, Carrie Hahnel, and Tanvi Kodali, “Navigating Change: Strategies to Strengthen California High Schools Amid Declining Enrollment,” Bellwether, September 2024, 3, https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/NavigatingChange_Bellwether_September2024.pdf.

has faced enrollment declines for many years due to a number of factors, including falling birth rates, slowed immigration, movement to independent charter schools, and transitions out of the state.²⁴ Although pandemic-related enrollment declines, such as a shift to home-schooling,²⁵ had a temporary impact on enrollment, other trends have intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic.^{26,27} In the 2023-24 school year, Los Angeles Unified expanded Universal Transitional Kindergarten, a high-quality early learning option for children who turn 5 years old between Sept. 2 and Sept. 1, to all of its elementary school campuses, boosting enrollment for the district's youngest learners.^{28,29} The district's new attendance initiatives have also reduced absenteeism.³⁰

Though the 2024-25 Los Angeles Unified budget maintains staffing levels and services to students, economic challenges are likely to persist in the coming years.³¹ The district's approved 2024-25 budget is \$600 million less than last year's budget,³² but it still manages to avoid layoffs³³ and retain

important services, such as the Black Student Achievement Plan³⁴ and arts programs.³⁵ This year's budget allocations represent prudent planning amid a difficult economic landscape.

Los Angeles Unified recognizes that these challenges are serious and likely to persist, saying in a 2024 press release that these challenges are "serious and formidable [due to] the sunset of federal pandemic relief funding, declining enrollment, challenging and growing economic conditions worsened by a significant state deficit and declining investments in public education."³⁶

In large and complex districts like Los Angeles Unified, no single actor in a system can or should do it alone, and nonprofit service providers can be one solution to add necessary capacity to districts, help close achievement and opportunity gaps, and support the needs of the district's most vulnerable students.

²⁴ California's public school enrollment decreased by 6.3% between 2007 and 2021, with losses concentrated in coastal areas like Los Angeles, and enrollment is expected to continue to decline an additional 9% by 2032. Hahnel and Marchitello, "Centering Equity in the School-Closure Process in California," 7.

²⁵ Thomas Peele, "Enrollment Decline: LAUSD's Carvalho Says Families Leaving the State or Choosing to Home-School," EdSource, July 24, 2022, <https://edsource.org/2022/enrollment-decline-lausds-carvalho-says-families-leaving-the-state-or-choosing-to-home-school/675830>.

²⁶ California's public school enrollment decreased by 6.3% between 2007 and 2021, with losses concentrated in coastal areas like Los Angeles, and enrollment is expected to continue to decline an additional 9% by 2032. Hahnel and Marchitello, "Centering Equity in the School-Closure Process in California," 7.

²⁷ LAUSD's enrollment data shows a 2.2% decline in overall enrollment for the 2023-24 school year compared to the previous year. LAUSD open data portal, 2024, <https://my.lausd.net/opendata/dashboard?language=en>.

²⁸ "UTK 2023 Fact Sheet," Los Angeles Unified School District, 2023, <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1080/UTK%2023%20FACT%20SHEET.pdf>.

²⁹ Susan Carpenter, "LAUSD to Launch Universal Transitional Kindergarten for 4-Year-Olds This Fall," Spectrum News 1, May 26, 2023, <https://spectrumnews1.com/ca/southern-california/education/2023/05/26/lausd-will-launch-universal-transitional-kindergarten-for-4-year-olds-this-fall>.

³⁰ See e.g., Interoffice letter from Pedro Salcido, deputy superintendent, business services and operations, Los Angeles Unified School District, September 20, 2023, <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/185/IOC%20-%20Student%20Attendance%20Initiative.pdf>; "iAttend," Los Angeles Unified School District, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.lausd.org/iattendlausd>.

³¹ "Los Angeles Unified Approves Budget That Addresses Current Realities and Ensures Future Sustainability," release, Los Angeles Unified School District, June 25, 2024, <https://www.lausd.org/site/default.aspx?PageType=3&DomainID=4&ModuleInstanceID=4466&ViewID=6446EE88-D30C-497E-9316-3F8874B3E108&RenderLoc=0&FlexDataID=175727&PageID=1>.

³² Howard Blume, "LAUSD Approved \$18.4-Billion Budget Amid Concerns Over Police, the Arts and the Future," LA Times, updated June 28, 2024, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-06-26/lausd-approves-a-budget-with-concerns-but-no-layoffs>.

³³ Though all full-time district employees will keep their jobs and benefits, the district may adjust some titles and job duties. Blume, "LAUSD Approved \$18.4-Billion Budget Amid Concerns Over Police, the Arts, and the Future."

³⁴ "Los Angeles Unified Approves Budget That Addresses Current Realities and Ensures Future Sustainability," Los Angeles Unified School District. (see bullet points)

³⁵ Art programs also received \$30 million more than last year's budget. Blume, "LAUSD Approved \$18.4-Billion Budget Amid Concerns Over Police, the Arts, and the Future."

³⁶ "Los Angeles Unified Approves Budget That Addresses Current Realities and Ensures Future Sustainability," Los Angeles Unified School District (see third paragraph down).

For decades, districts across the country have partnered with nonprofit service providers to supplement in-school and out-of-school offerings.³⁷ Partnerships between school districts and community organizations enable schools to leverage “rooted community assets” to address critical issues their students face, such as basic family needs, technology access, child care, and academic enrichment.³⁸

The pandemic underscored that schools are not just places of learning, but also hubs for students and families to access essential services, such as meals.³⁹ Similar to how community partners have provided valuable services in natural disasters,⁴⁰ partnerships between districts and nonprofits have been crucial in mitigating COVID-19’s impact by providing services like academic support, mental health care, family assistance, technology, and health care.⁴¹ These partnerships have shown time and time again that they are indispensable in helping schools create holistic support systems that meet the evolving needs of their students, families, and communities.

There are many ways partnerships can manifest between nonprofits and districts. For instance, community schools, which Los Angeles Unified defines as schools that address structural poverty and racism by providing integrated, wraparound services

to support student achievement and community well-being,⁴² are one version of school and nonprofit provider partnerships that benefit students and families. Another important Los Angeles Unified partnership is the Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, a nonprofit that manages 20 Los Angeles Unified Schools, serving 13,500 students across Boyle Heights, South Los Angeles, and Watts.⁴³ This partnership has facilitated supports and resources in scalable ways to historically underserved Los Angeles communities.⁴⁴ Another version of partnership involves individual schools partnering with a single organization or a set of organizations to supplement their in-school and out-of-school offerings, including health, enrichment, or social services.⁴⁵ Regardless of the partnership model, collaboration between schools and nonprofits can address the unique needs of students and families, fostering stronger, more resilient communities.

This report, based on a combination of a review of academic research, a survey of Los Angeles-based nonprofit service providers,⁴⁶ and interviews with Los Angeles-based nonprofit service providers, students, families, and philanthropic leaders, describes the value of these partnerships and identifies ways to build a more robust ecosystem to support students through these types of partnerships.

³⁷ See, for example: Jane Quinn and Martin J. Blank, “Twenty Years, Ten Lessons: What We’ve Learned About Community Schools as an Equitable School Improvement Strategy,” NYU Metro Center, 2020, <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/vue/twenty-years-ten-lessons>.

³⁸ McBride Murry, Jacobson, and Gross, “Leveraging Community Partnerships for Integrated Student Support,” 1.

³⁹ Carlos De Loera, “Free Food Is Available for Students During the Strike That Will Close LAUSD Schools,” Los Angeles Times, March 20, 2023, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-03-20/free-food-for-students-available-during-laUSD-strike>.

⁴⁰ See, for example: The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina, “Chapter Five: Lessons Learned: Non-Governmental Aid,” Office of President George W. Bush, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/reports/katrina-lessons-learned/chapter5.html>.

⁴¹ Joel Knudson and Hayin Kimner, “A Case for Coherence: Fulfilling California’s Community Schools Promise,” brief, California Collaborative on District Reform, June 2022, https://cslx.org/assets/g-files/CA_Collaborative_Community_Schools.pdf; McBride Murry, Jacobson, and Gross, “Leveraging Community Partnerships for Integrated Student Support.”

⁴² “L.A. Unified Definition for Community Schools,” Los Angeles Unified School District, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.lausd.org/Page/17396#:~:text=L.A.%20Unified%20Definition%20for%20Community,children%20can%20learn%20and%20thrive>.

⁴³ “Our Schools,” Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://partnershipla.org/our-schools/>.

⁴⁴ “Our Approach: Our Model,” Partnership for Los Angeles Schools, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://playbook.partnershipla.org/our-approach/#our-model>.

⁴⁵ Sepanik and Brown, “School-Community Partnerships,” 2.

⁴⁶ Sixty-eight Los Angeles-based nonprofit service providers completed the survey in late August 2024. Not all respondents answered each item, such that the sample size may vary across items.

The landscape of Los Angeles Unified nonprofit service providers

Los Angeles Unified has a robust ecosystem of nonprofit service providers that offers valuable services to Los Angeles Unified students and families. The partnership process varies, but generally falls into three categories:

- 1 Nonprofits that contract with the district as a vendor
- 2 Nonprofits that provide services free of cost and have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the district
- 3 Nonprofits that do not have a contract or MOU with the district but serve students (e.g., student organizing or youth advocates that recruit students to become leaders)

Our research is focused on the first two types of categories — instances when there is a formal agreement between nonprofit service providers and Los Angeles Unified. Though Los Angeles Unified was unable to provide a comprehensive list of approved and current nonprofit service provider partners,⁴⁷ our research surfaced over 260 in-school and out-of-school services to students and families that add unique value to the district.⁴⁸ Given the number of nonprofit service providers and the broad range of services, we believe that all students in Los Angeles Unified benefit from the district's partnerships with nonprofit service providers, as they will likely receive services from a nonprofit at least once, and often multiple times, during their education, whether during the school day or in after-school programs.

Types of services include enrichment, academic and college readiness, dropout prevention and reengagement, health and wellness, social services, gang prevention and juvenile justice, and family support and engagement.

⁴⁷ On July 29, 2024 and pursuant to the California Public Records Act (California Government Code § 6253(c)), a request was submitted that Los Angeles Unified provide information on 1) a list of all current and approved service providers that the district contracts with to provide direct services to students during the school day, after school or during school breaks, 2) district policies and guidelines for schools in partnering with these service providers, and 3) district policies and guidelines for service providers interested in partnering with schools. Los Angeles Unified acknowledged the request August 8, 2024. On August 9, 2024, Los Angeles Unified responded that they were unable to locate a list of nonprofit service providers, but they were able to share policies and guidelines related to district and nonprofit partnerships.

⁴⁸ We sourced this list through Los Angeles Unified's procurement website ("Master Agreements for Goods (Commodities), General and Professional Services," <https://www.lausd.org/Page/19815>), its 2024–25 Beyond the Bell partners list ("Beyond the Bell," <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1COzr-jb0JUUIRcG6pCQK1XJPcB3hQO8/view?pli=1>), its 2021–22 Los Angeles Wellness programs partner directory ("Partner Directory," https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/711/pdfs/Wellness%20Programs_Partner%20Directory082721.pdf), a 2021–22 Partners for Student Success approved vendors list, and past research from GPSN. In our resulting list, we included only approved service providers that are nonprofits and serve Los Angeles Unified. We then categorized service providers into seven service types: enrichment, academic and college readiness, dropout prevention and reengagement, health and wellness, social services, gang prevention and juvenile justice reentry, and family support and engagement. These categories are intended to be descriptive and, though we believe them to be comprehensive, they may not capture every nonprofit provider service within Los Angeles Unified. Additionally, there may be some overlap between categories.

Enrichment

Description of Services

- » Enrichment services support whole-child development, enhance student academic learning beyond core subjects, and provide new opportunities for young people to learn about themselves and develop new interests and skills. Enrichment refers to a wide range of possible youth development services, including sports, arts and other creative offerings, and leadership development and youth advocacy.

Target Population(s)

- » These programs can address student needs across the spectrum, from high-achieving students to students who need more support.

⁴⁹ See, for example: Laura M. Crispin, “Extracurricular Participation, ‘At-Risk’ Status, and the High School Dropout Decision,” *Education Finance and Policy* 12, no. 2 (2017): 166–196, https://doi.org/10.1162/EDFP_a_00212; Stephen Lipscomb, “Secondary School Extracurricular Involvement and Academic Achievement: A Fixed Effects Approach,” *Economics of Education Review* 26, no. 4 (2007): 463–472, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2006.02.006>.

⁵⁰ Kelia Washington, “Listening to Students to Get Beyond ‘Check-the-Box’ Approaches to Career Exploration,” *Education Strategy Group*, May 13, 2024, see under 2, <https://edstrategy.org/listening-to-students-to-get-beyond-check-the-box-approaches-to-career-exploration/>.

Evidence of Impact

- » Enrichment activities, like extracurriculars, have long been linked to improved student outcomes.⁴⁹ Some extracurricular activities can even support students to explore their interests and make connections to future careers.⁵⁰ In a focus group for this report, Los Angeles Unified students described enrichment services as additive to what they might receive in school, helping them increase their social skills, gain unique experiences, and develop self-confidence. They noted that these programs were especially valuable after the pandemic, with one student saying that students needed to “relearn how to be social and communicate” when they returned to in-person learning, and nonprofit service providers supported the transition. A focus group for Los Angeles Unified families also revealed that parents want even more hands-on or creative extracurricular opportunities, believing there is a benefit to exposing their student to different experiences. They are interested in more hours of programming, more recreational activities, more sports, and more hands-on activities.

Academic and College Readiness

Description of Services

- » Academic and college readiness services supplement student learning in core subjects and increase academic achievement; specific services include literacy and STEM programs, tutoring, and academic mentorship.

Target Population(s)

- » These services are often tailored for underperforming student groups, low-income students, or English learners.

Evidence of Impact

- » Research on after-school and summer learning programs consistently shows that these services help boost student achievement, especially in math and reading, leading to better grades and increased academic motivation.⁵¹ Los Angeles Unified students described how nonprofit service providers have helped them better manage their time when completing their school assignments, and these programs have also been a resource for exploring college options and preparing for the transition to college. Los Angeles Unified families described the value of having a trained adult helping their student with homework, as not all felt able to support their student academically. Many also reported that their student became more motivated in school after participating in the services.

Dropout Prevention and Reengagement

Description of Services

- » Dropout prevention and reengagement services support young people at risk of not graduating or who have left the classroom. There are a range of services dropout prevention may encompass, but they are intended to address a variety of root causes that lead young people to drop out, including low self-esteem, academic struggles, or family issues.

Target Population(s)

- » These programs usually target at-risk youth, which Los Angeles Unified defines as a student who does not meet academic expectations as determined by the district's early warning system.⁵²

Evidence of Impact

- » Studies on dropout prevention programs show that they may help decrease absenteeism, especially among boys.⁵³ Another study found that mentorship, which can support dropout prevention and reengagement efforts, can lead to a reduction of risky behaviors among low-income, at-risk Latino students in Los Angeles.⁵⁴

⁵¹ "The Evidence Base for Afterschool and Summer," brief, Afterschool Alliance, April 2021, 3, <https://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/The-Evidence-Base-For-Afterschool-And-Summer-2021.pdf>.

⁵² "At-Risk Early Warning," At-Risk Reports, Los Angeles Unified School District, 2015, <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/domain/443/tutorialfiles/AtRisk-EarlyWarning.pdf>.

⁵³ See, for example: Emily E. Tanner-Smith and Sandra Jo Wilson, "A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Dropout Prevention Programs on School Absenteeism," *Prevention Science* 14 (2013): 468–478, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-012-0330-1>.

⁵⁴ Ryan J. Collier and Alice A. Kuo, "Youth Development Through Mentorship: A Los Angeles School-Based Mentorship Program Among Latino Children," *Journal of Community Health* 39 (2014): 316–321, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-013-9762-1>.

Health and Wellness

Description of Services

- » Health and wellness services, including medical, dental, mental health, nutrition, and substance abuse services, support the overall wellness of students, their families, and communities.

Target Population(s)

- » These services tend to target low-income and medically underserved communities that lack access to providers.⁵⁵

Evidence of Impact

- » In addition to these services improving health outcomes for students, families, and communities, research also shows that students often have better school attendance after visiting community health clinics, especially if their treatment was related to mental health.⁵⁶ In Los Angeles, wellness centers have been associated with improved attendance rates; improvements were more pronounced for students with a mental health diagnosis.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See, for example: Mariana Dale, "Why LAUSD Is Betting School Wellness Centers Can Keep Students Healthy — and in the Classroom," LAist, August 21, 2024, <https://laist.com/news/education/los-angeles-school-wellness-centers-student-health-care-chronic-absenteeism-attendance>.

⁵⁶ Mariana Dale, "Why LAUSD Is Betting School Wellness Centers Can Keep Students Healthy — and in the Classroom," LAist, August 21, 2024, <https://laist.com/news/education/los-angeles-school-wellness-centers-student-health-care-chronic-absenteeism-attendance>.

⁵⁷ Caryssa Lim, Paul J. Chung, Christopher Biely, Nicholas J. Jackson, Maryjane Puffer, Alex Zepeda, Patricia Anton, Kathryn M. Leifheit, and Rebecca Dudovitz, "School Attendance Following Receipt of Care From a School-Based Health Center," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 73 (2023): 1125–1131, [https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X\(23\)00377-4/pdf](https://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(23)00377-4/pdf).

⁵⁸ See, for example: Eric Dearing, Mary E. Walsh, Erin Sibley, Terry Lee-St. John, Claire Foley, and Anastacia E. Raczek, "Can Community and School-Based Supports Improve the Achievement of First-Generation Immigrant Children Attending High-Poverty Schools?," *Child Development* 87, no. 3 (March 29, 2016): 1073–1090, <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12507>.

⁵⁹ Charles E. Basch, "Breakfast and the Achievement Gap Among Urban Minority Youth," *Journal of School Health* 81, no. 10 (October 2011): 635–640, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21923876/>.

⁶⁰ Deven Carlson, Hannah Miller, Robert Haveman, Sohyun Kang, Alex Schmidt, and Barbara Wolfe, "The Effect of Housing Assistance on Student Achievement: Evidence from Wisconsin," *Journal of Housing Economics* 44 (2019): 61–73, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhe.2019.01.002>.

Social Services

Description of Services

- » Social services support communities, and the young people within them, to thrive by addressing a range of community issues, including homelessness, transportation, employment, food access, and other basic needs.

Target Population(s)

- » These services target communities that have the greatest economic and social disparities as compared to other communities in Los Angeles.

Evidence of Impact

- » Identifying barriers to learning, then connecting students to community supports that address their needs, has a positive impact on learning.⁵⁸ For instance, studies show the positive impact of access to free breakfast on student cognitive function and attendance,⁵⁹ and housing assistance has been linked to improved math achievement.⁶⁰ One Los Angeles Unified student described how a local nonprofit service provider brought his family supplies and food during the pandemic, and it was reassuring to know that this organization was helping to keep him safe. Los Angeles family members also expressed gratitude for monetary assistance that was used to help pay for necessities such as rent, backpacks, raincoats, and baby supplies.

Gang Prevention and Juvenile Justice

Description of Services

» Gang prevention and juvenile justice services support young people in completing their education and finding alternatives to gang-related or other negative lifestyles. Specific services include gang prevention, anti-recidivism, and youth support, and mentorship and case management are often important tactics of many of these services.

Target Population(s)

» These services typically support youth involved in the Juvenile Justice System, which Los Angeles Unified defines as students who have “come in contact with Los Angeles County’s Juvenile Justice System and have an open delinquency case.”⁶¹ These services may also serve communities within Los Angeles’ identified Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) zones.⁶²

Evidence of Impact

» Several studies link integrated student supports in community-based and juvenile justice settings to “decreased problematic behaviors” and a higher likelihood of being placed in less-restrictive residential settings for criminally involved youth not residing at home.⁶³ In Los Angeles, the city’s Gang Reduction and Youth Development program, which partners with many nonprofits to provide services across the city, has been shown to have reduced violent crime by about 18% in areas where services were provided.⁶⁴

Family Support and Engagement

Description of Services

» Family support and engagement services can range from providing home support and volunteering in schools to actively participating in decision-making and policy changes at school and district levels, with nonprofit service providers helping to provide direct services to families or serving as a trusted liaison between community members and schools.⁶⁵ Specific services include parent classes, advocacy opportunities, caregiving, and support in navigating the school system.

Target Population(s)

» These services are primarily aimed at parents from underserved communities, often for those who do not speak English or have very young children.

Evidence of Impact

» Research finds an association between these services and improved academic performance, especially in math and English language development, better attendance, and a higher uptake of services like enrichment programs.⁶⁶ Los Angeles Unified parents we spoke with even found small programs to be valuable, such as a stress management workshop where parents were taught various tips and strategies.

⁶¹ “Specialized Student Services,” Los Angeles Unified School District, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.lausd.org/Page/16356>.

⁶² “Mission and Comprehensive Strategy,” Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development, accessed September 12, 2024, <https://www.lagryd.org/mission-comprehensive-strategy.html>.

⁶³ Anna Maier, Julia Daniel, Jeannie Oakes, and Livia Lam, “Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence,” Learning Policy Institute, December 2017, 24, https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_REPORT.pdf.

Nonprofit partnerships increase district capacity and improve student, family, and community outcomes

Nonprofit partnerships offer unique benefits to students and their families, especially for communities where certain resources and services are scarce. These offerings can play a vital role in closing opportunity gaps or the inequitable “distribution of resources and experiences” among children by “race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English proficiency, disability, immigration status, family situation, geography, or other factors.”⁶⁷

Nationwide, supplemental opportunities, like after-school programs, are lacking most severely among traditionally underserved communities.⁶⁸ For instance, according to a 2020 America After 3PM national survey, more than half of Black and Latino children did not participate in an after-school program “but

would be enrolled in a program if one were available.”⁶⁹ Additionally, only 60% of parents in the lowest income bracket reported that their children were involved in after-school programs, as compared to 89% of parents in the highest income bracket.⁷⁰ A 2022 parent poll revealed parent interest in supplemental learning activities for their children but also highlighted that parents face barriers to participation including lack of information, cost, and access to transportation.⁷¹

These disparities in access reveal a stark opportunity gap for enrichment and academic support, especially in a district like Los Angeles Unified, where 80% of students are Black or Latino⁷² and 75% live at or below the poverty line.⁷³

“I want to correct inequities that drive poverty and injustice. Our work can help close opportunity gaps by providing students with vital services they may otherwise go without.” – Nonprofit leader with three years of service

⁶⁴ P. Jeffrey Brantingham, George Tita, and Denise Herz, “The Impact of the City of Los Angeles Mayor’s Office of Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GRYD) Comprehensive Strategy on Crime in the City of Los Angeles,” *Justice Evaluation Journal* 4, no. 2 (2021): 217–236, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24751979.2021.1887709>.

⁶⁵ Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam, “Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence,” 107.

⁶⁶ Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam, “Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence,” 62; Asher Lehrer-Small, “HISD Opened 7 Centers to Provide Food, Clothes and More. Will They Reach Families in Need?,” *Houston Landing*, December 21, 2023, <https://houstonlanding.org/hisd-sunrise-centers-food-clothes-mike-miles-milby/>.

⁶⁷ Rebekah Hutton and LaRue Allen, eds. *Closing the Opportunity Gap for Young Children* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2023), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK596378/>.

⁶⁸ Michelle Croft, Alex Spurrier, and Juliet Squire, “Education Beyond the Classroom: Parent Demand and Policy Support for Supplemental Learning Options,” *Bellwether*, October 2022, 2, https://bellwether.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/EducationBeyondtheClassroom_Bellwether_October2022.pdf; Brian Knop, “Even Short-Term Spells of Poverty Lower School-Aged Children’s Involvement in Extracurricular Activities,” U.S. Census Bureau, September 23, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/09/children-in-poverty-less-likely-to-participate-in-sports-gifted-programs.html>; “America After 3PM: Demand Grows, Opportunity Shrinks,” *The Wallace Foundation*, August 2023, 7, <https://wallacefoundation.org/>

Local nonprofit service providers — which offer free or low-cost opportunities to young people in communities where the need is greatest — can help close these opportunity gaps.

Nonprofit service provider partnerships allow for expanded learning opportunities for students.

Many nonprofit providers supplement classroom learning, helping to address achievement gaps and supporting continued pandemic recovery. For instance, after-school programs and summer learning programs have long shown significant academic benefits for participating students, including increased academic engagement, better reading and math test scores and report card grades, improved attendance, and decreased risky behaviors.⁷⁴ Recently, high-dosage tutoring partnerships have enabled some districts to effectively address learning loss after COVID-19, especially for the highest-need students.⁷⁵

Nonprofit service providers can help address a range of student needs, from basic needs of students like food, clothing, or shelter to mental health issues, like isolation, that became more pervasive during the pandemic. For instance, health and wellness partnerships can support student medical, dental, and mental health needs, improving equity of health access to community members. Not only have school-based health clinics been shown to improve health outcomes like vaccination rates, but their presence is also

“Over the years, I’ve witnessed firsthand the profound impact of high-quality programs and strong community partnerships on helping youth succeed in school and navigate life with confidence and purpose. I believe every young person deserves the chance to thrive. This work is more than just a profession — it’s a calling.”
– Nonprofit leader with 23 years of service

associated with better educational outcomes, like higher GPA and school completion rates.⁷⁶

Wraparound services, which can include an array of social services such as health and human services, early childhood development programs, job training and placement, transportation, housing assistance, and food assistance, are linked to reduced problematic

[sites/default/files/2023-08/AA3PM-National-Report.pdf](https://www.wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/AA3PM-National-Report.pdf).

⁶⁹ “America After 3PM: Demand Grows, Opportunity Shrinks,” The Wallace Foundation, 7, <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/AA3PM-National-Report.pdf>.

⁷⁰ “America After 3PM: Demand Grows, Opportunity Shrinks,” The Wallace Foundation, 9.

⁷¹ Croft, Spurrier, and Squire, “Education Beyond the Classroom: Parent Demand and Policy Support for Supplemental Learning Options,” 4.

⁷² “Fingertip Facts 2024–25,” Los Angeles Unified School District, 1. Latino percentages

⁷³ “Report on Improving Student Outcomes and Ensuring Rights,” Los Angeles Unified School District, 12.

behaviors, enhanced social-emotional functioning in young people, and better school outcomes.⁷⁷ For example, wraparound services have been shown to improve attendance rates for students experiencing homelessness by addressing multiple barriers students face in consistently attending school, family challenges, enrollment issues and other administrative barriers within the school system, and “problems navigating transportation and school pick-up and drop-off.”⁷⁸

Nonprofit service providers are flexible and responsive to community needs.

Nonprofits can also address niche interests of young people through bespoke programs for students. For instance, offerings such as woodworking, the chemistry of cooking, robotics, or mariachi allow students to explore new areas. This level of customization is difficult to do at scale, particularly if it addresses hyper-specific interests of young people within the local community. Nonprofit service providers can often be more responsive in meeting these needs and more flexible in their approach than schools.

Nonprofit service providers are also often deeply rooted in communities with their ear to the ground, allowing them to be uniquely responsive to the changing needs of young people and families within Los Angeles’ diverse communities. One nonprofit service provider shared that a benefit of being embedded in communities means being able to support community members beyond the years they are in school, from birth into early adulthood. Los Angeles Unified students also reported being able to turn to nonprofit service providers for any questions that may emerge for them, whether they are education-related or not.

Nonprofit service providers’ close connection to community needs and their nimbleness allow them to effectively supplement district services. These partnerships are particularly valuable during times of heightened need, such as the pandemic, when many nonprofits acted as first responders, serving communities across Los Angeles.⁷⁹ Nonprofit service providers enhance, rather than replace, the district’s efforts.

“I grew up without these kinds of opportunities and am a first-generation college student, so this work is personal to me. I believe that mission-driven nonprofit organizations can be nimble, responsive, and innovative to meet dynamic and complex community needs. Local, mission-driven organizations bring community capital, experience, and trust.” – Nonprofit leader with 25 years of service

⁷⁴ “The Evidence Base for Afterschool and Summer,” Afterschool Alliance, 2.

⁷⁵ Anna Merod, “Tutoring Partnerships Take Shape to Address Learning Loss,” K-12 Dive, Feb. 1, 2022, <https://www.k12dive.com/news/tutoring-partnerships-take-shape-to-address-learning-loss/618099/>.

⁷⁶ John A. Knopf, Ramona K.C. Finnie, Yinan Peng, Robert A. Hahn, Benedict I. Truman, Mary Vernon-Smiley, Veda C. Johnson, Robert L. Johnson, Jonathan E. Fielding, Carles Muntaner, Pete C. Hunt, Camara Phyllis Jones, Mindy T. Fullilove, and the Community Preventive Services Task Force,

Partnerships bring additional caring adults into schools for student support.

Partnerships also infuse additional adults into school systems with whom students can form meaningful relationships.⁸⁰ Nonprofit service providers are often led by people with the same identities, lived experiences, and backgrounds as the students they serve. Partnerships with service providers who

are embedded in communities and reflect students may be especially beneficial for students of color, who historically have fewer opportunities to interact with adults in school “who look like them.”⁸¹ Los Angeles students described nonprofit service provider staff as reliable, accessible, and responsive supporters in their lives who help students academically and beyond.

“The nonprofit sector has been critical my entire life. As a student attending Los Angeles Unified schools, nonprofit organizations invested in my academic and leadership skills. The adults in those organizations treated me with respect and dignity. As an adult, nonprofits have provided me with gainful employment and career growth while giving back to the same community that I grew up in.

The nonprofit sector is the safety of tens of thousands of students in Los Angeles Unified. Our organizations are responsible for helping students stay connected to schools, find their voices, and grow their academic prowess. Our organizations help students graduate on time with opportunities to attend college or enter professions of their choice.” – *Nonprofit leader with 25 years of service*

“School-Based Health Centers to Advance Health Equity: A Community Guide Systematic Review,” American Journal of Preventive Medicine 51, no. 1 (July 2016): 114–126, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2016.01.009>.

Partnerships offer vital support to families.

In addition to helping to meet student needs, partnerships can also provide critical support to families. Services for families can range from providing home support and volunteering in schools to actively participating in decision-making and policy changes at school and district levels.⁸² Research shows that these engagement efforts can foster stronger parent-school relationships and empower families to actively participate in their students' schooling.⁸³ Parents we spoke to described how nonprofit service providers are critical partners in helping them navigate a complex education system and become strong advocates for their children, and they also noted that these partnerships contribute to their sense of belonging.

Service providers can continue to deepen their impact in partnership with the district.

Nonprofit service providers are an integral part of the Los Angeles ecosystem, and

they can continue to expand and deepen their impact in partnership with the district. Nonprofit service providers might consider continuing to:

- **Tell the story of their impact on students, families, and communities.** Nonprofit service providers can showcase their contributions to Los Angeles, demonstrate their unique value, and reinforce their alignment with Los Angeles Unified's goals. Storytelling includes collecting, analyzing, and sharing data about the impact of services.
- **Amplify community needs.** Because nonprofit service providers are embedded in communities, they understand where there may be gaps in programs and services. Nonprofit service providers are well positioned to work together to identify both shared and unique needs across Los Angeles Unified and help generate policy and advocacy priorities in the city.

⁷⁷ Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam, "Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence," 19–24.

⁷⁸ Dan Treglia, Michael Cassidy, and Jay Bainbridge, "Improving School Attendance Among Homeless Children: Evaluating the Attendance Matters

Supporting a vibrant nonprofit system in Los Angeles Unified

Los Angeles Unified benefits from its existing partnerships with nonprofit service providers, and there is an opportunity to expand these services even further to better serve students. In fact, nearly 90% of nonprofit providers we surveyed for this report are interested in expanding services in partnership with Los Angeles Unified. Though budget constraints require difficult strategic decisions, nonprofit service providers can serve as investments to bring additional resources to the district in service of students. To responsibly and successfully support this expansion, a balanced system of services and partnerships is needed.

As Los Angeles Unified continues to recover from the pandemic, the district is working toward a vision of creating a world-class teaching and learning system where every student is “ready for the world — to thrive in college, career, and life.”⁸⁴ To deliver on this goal, Los Angeles Unified has been focusing on creating alignment across the district about the best ways to service students and communities across the city.⁸⁵ As part of these efforts, the district has been closely examining how partnerships can best support its targeted objectives, including revising some of its partnership protocols and processes to help better support alignment and vet nonprofit service providers to ensure student safety.

Though district alignment work is an important strategic step, it has also led to challenges in establishing and sustaining nonprofit service provider partnerships with Los Angeles Unified.

Relationship imbalances.

With any partnership, there will be changes and challenges in relationships as there will be different approaches and perspectives. In the case of district partnerships, some nonprofit service providers perceive their current relationship with Los Angeles Unified as transactional rather than collaborative. This shift feels especially dramatic after COVID-19, when partners were heavily relied on to help meet student and community needs through social and academic services.

A complex partnership process.

The district needs to vet providers to ensure that the providers meet certain safety requirements and are providing services aligned with the district’s priorities. However, as the process for partnering with Los Angeles Unified has become more centralized, some nonprofit providers are finding the process more onerous and difficult to navigate.

Currently, the district approves all school-level partnerships, which is a towering task for a district as large as LAUSD and with hundreds of nonprofit service providers. When asked about barriers experienced in providing services, nearly 40% of nonprofit service providers surveyed for this report indicated challenges with this centralized contract approval process, and a quarter of providers reported lacking information about the contract process. In interviews, some nonprofit service providers shared that it can be challenging to have the time and expertise to complete the process, with some even hiring additional staff, like a grant writer, to complete

Program,” Children and Youth Services Review, 149 (2023): 106880, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2023.106880>.

⁷⁹ See, for example: Allie Anthony, Abbey Martichenko, and Phoebe Zheng, “LAUSD Meal Plan Supports Los Angeles Community During COVID-19,” USC Annenberg Media, October 12, 2020, <https://www.uscannenbergmedia.com/2020/10/12/lausd-meal-plan-supports-los-angeles-community-during-covid-19/>.

⁸⁰ Sepanik and Brown, “School-Community Partnerships,” 5.

the required paperwork. Smaller nonprofits with the least capacity may struggle the most to complete the intensive process in order to be approved by the district. Nonprofits should be experts in the services they provide rather than experts in complex contracting processes; the more these organizations devote resources to staffing for contracting, the less they are able to provide direct resources to the students and families they serve.

More than 30% of surveyed nonprofit service providers identified accessing students and families as a barrier to providing services. In interviews, nonprofit service providers shared that once they are approved by the district, many providers may sit on a “bench,” waiting for the green light to move forward with services at specific school sites. The more time providers spend on hold, the fewer students and families they can serve.

Service providers also reflected that local school sites had more autonomy about partnership decisions in the past, but service providers now observe that principals do not always know about the service providers that are available to them, nor do they feel empowered to seek out or select partnerships.

Financial feasibility and sustainability of partnerships.

Some nonprofit service providers report that the cost of delivering services in partnership with Los Angeles Unified is high. Though the district pays many nonprofit service providers, some partners report that the reimbursement rate often does not cover the full operational and programming costs of their services. In fact, a quarter of the nonprofits surveyed for this report indicated the reimbursement rate for services is a barrier to partnership. More than 80% report needing to offset district

funding through state and federal grants or philanthropy, with some nonprofits relying on philanthropy to cover the vast majority of the cost of their services.

Operational costs are one financial aspect of partnering with the district. For instance, nonprofit service providers that partner with the district are required, at a minimum, to maintain commercial general liability, business auto liability, and workers’ compensation and employers’ liability insurance, with limits reaching \$1 million per occurrence.⁸⁶ Though these insurance policies are intended to help mitigate the risk related to these partnerships, they also increase the costs of partnerships.

Nonprofit service providers also have their own costs for running their programs, which can vary greatly depending on a program’s offerings and its quality. Higher-quality programs often require more resources, like staffing and materials, which might not be adequately covered by the district’s fixed reimbursement rate.

Another financial barrier is the speed of reimbursements for services, as reported by 27% of surveyed nonprofit providers. Receiving reimbursements from Los Angeles Unified can take several months, which affects smaller nonprofits in particular that might not have the funds to cover funding delays.

These challenges have implications on how nonprofit service providers work with the district, and ultimately how they serve students and families.

In some cases, providers are not able to start services until a few months into the school year, delaying student opportunities

⁸¹ Sapanik and Brown, “School-Community Partnerships,” 6.

to benefit from the services. In other cases, providers may be reassigned to new school sites, disrupting long-standing school partnerships and potentially affecting the continuity of services for certain students and families. Some providers might hesitate to share their unique insights or critical feedback with the district due to concerns about how their input will be received, which can lead to missed opportunities for improving alignment between district and provider services and the needs of students and communities. In extreme cases, some nonprofit service providers are even choosing to find partnerships elsewhere. One Los Angeles nonprofit service provider shared, “It’s easier to serve the kids through other partnerships, including charter schools, other districts, or community partnerships.”

Los Angeles Unified can continue to strengthen its partnerships in service of its students.

Nonprofit service providers will continue to be important collaborators as the district moves toward scaling its efforts.

Some considerations for ensuring a strong relationship include:

- **Clear communication of requirements:** Nonprofit service providers benefit from clear guidance about partnership requirements, which can help streamline their navigation of the procurement process.
- **Transparency in the vetting and approval process:** Providers value transparency about the subsequent steps after submitting their partnership materials, including how they will be matched to school sites and how they begin delivering services. This also includes clarity around the role of school site stakeholders, especially principals, in selecting and contracting with specific service providers.
- **Equitable reimbursement policies:** The rate and timeliness of reimbursements for services are crucial for many nonprofits. The district’s reimbursement processes can influence decisions about whether a nonprofit service provider seeks a partnership with Los Angeles Unified, especially for smaller organizations with tighter cash flows.
- **In-kind support:** Although Los Angeles Unified often funds a portion of services provided by nonprofits, partnerships do not always need to come at a financial cost. Instead, Los Angeles Unified can provide in-kind support by making its facilities accessible for free or low cost to nonprofits, and the district can disseminate information about nonprofit service providers to students and families.
- **Ongoing relationship building:** Strong relationships with nonprofit service providers can offer Los Angeles Unified valuable insights into community needs, which is particularly important in a large city like Los Angeles. Fostering opportunities for collaboration, information sharing, and trust can help transition partnerships from transactional to more collaborative.
- **Raising awareness of offerings:** Los Angeles Unified can continue its efforts to make sure students and families are aware of the free and low-cost services available to them. In a focus group, students emphasized that greater awareness of these options would be impactful.

Strengthening and sustaining partnerships through philanthropy

Local philanthropy plays an important role in strengthening nonprofit service provider and district partnerships. Los Angeles benefits from a vibrant philanthropic community with funders that have a long history of funding education initiatives and supporting nonprofit service provider partnerships with the district.

Funders provide important operational support for nonprofits pursuing partnerships. Surveyed nonprofit providers indicate that philanthropy accounts for approximately 40% of their funding,⁸⁷ helping bridge the gap between what Los Angeles Unified pays and the actual costs of programs. This support is particularly valuable for smaller and early-stage nonprofits, which often need assistance to cover payroll while awaiting reimbursements. Philanthropy also plays a crucial role in investing in research and development, as well as early pilots of innovative programs and services.

Funders also have the opportunity to further facilitate these partnerships.

Funders might consider:

- **Amplifying and advocating for community needs:** Funders can support nonprofit service providers in identifying, publicly documenting, and amplifying the concerns of community members to local policymakers, city leaders, and other nonprofit service providers. They
- **Bridging relationships to accelerate collective impact:** Funders can convene local stakeholders and help strengthen relationships between the district and nonprofit service providers. Facilitating these connections can support alignment, reduce duplication of efforts, foster collaboration, and reinforce the idea that systems can mutually benefit each other and students.
- **Educating nonprofits:** Philanthropic investment plays a crucial role in helping nonprofit organizations operate more effectively. Funders can provide additional support by guiding nonprofits through the Los Angeles Unified application process and helping them strategically plan and diversify funding, including the integration of public funding sources.
- **Funding advocacy efforts:** Philanthropy can help fund advocacy efforts that bring more state or federal resources to support nonprofit service provider partnerships. For example, funders might fund advocacy efforts for legislation that would require districts to use certain money to support nonprofit service provider partnerships.

⁸² Maier, Daniel, Oakes, and Lam, "Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence," 107.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "Ready for the World: Strategic Plan 2022-26," Los Angeles Unified School District, 2022, 6, <https://www.lausd.org/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/1371/Strategic-Plan22-26.pdf>.

Conclusion

Nonprofit service providers play an indispensable role in supporting the diverse needs of Los Angeles Unified students, families, and communities. As Los Angeles Unified continues to recover from the pandemic, the demand for these services continues to grow, making it crucial to support and prioritize these partnerships and foster stronger, more sustainable collaborations.

To support strong partnerships, it is essential to recognize and amplify the unique value of these partnerships for students, families, and schools. It is also important to ensure that

partnership processes balance the need for alignment with district priorities along with the needs of nonprofit providers. There is an opportunity for philanthropy to facilitate continued collaboration among stakeholders and enhance their collective impact. Moving forward, Los Angeles Unified and its nonprofit partners can continue to work together to ensure that all students, particularly those from underserved communities, receive the support they need to thrive in all aspects of their lives. Strengthening these partnerships will immediately benefit students and contribute to the long-term success of the entire district and the Los Angeles region as a whole.

“Education is truly justice work, ensuring that every human being has the chance to advance and do whatever they want to do in life. Education is one of the equalizers and the greatest tools for people to access. If provided with access to information and opportunity, we can break the cycle of poverty, as well as other systemic inequities. Education positions people to be able to make their own choices; without it, choices are limited.” –*Nonprofit leader with 35 years of service*