

Northern California Bay Area Full-Service Community Schools Framework

“We face huge challenges in California, yet we also have incredible opportunities — to make the investments that restore our state to its rightful place as a leader in public education; to give every child the chance to learn in a safe and healthy school environment; to bring teachers, parents, and advocates together in a thoughtful and productive dialogue that makes learning a priority.”

-Tom Torlakson, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Throughout the Bay Area, communities are working together to ensure that children and youth are prepared to thrive in the 21st century. The following document proposes an overarching framework for the community schools approach, a strategy that organizes the resources of the community around student success. We hope that schools and communities throughout the Bay Area will adapt and use this framework in their own contexts.

What is a Full-Service Community School?

Full-Service Community Schools, or community schools, are educational institutions that combine the rigorous academics of a quality school with a wide range of in-house services to more efficiently and comprehensively promote children’s learning and development.¹ A community school serves as a hub of a community where the school, families and private and public agencies, businesses and faith groups work collaboratively to integrate academics and supports, addressing the multiple factors that impact student success. This collaborative approach leads to an environment that is responsive to a community’s specific needs.

What a Full-Service Community School Involves

While community schools vary, they function best when school, family, and community leaders work together to create a shared vision for their community, have a set of clear, compelling goals, and develop an inclusive process for planning, implementing, governing and evaluating the progress of their work. In general, thriving community schools are guided by the following core components:²

- **High Quality Teaching and Learning:** First and foremost, a community school must include a core instructional program with qualified teachers, a challenging curriculum and high standards and expectations for all students. Students are both engaged in learning and benefit from a strong partnership between teachers and their families.
- **Equity and Access:** Communities schools actively work to address disparities and inequities among youth and families. A community school strives to remove barriers to learning by ensuring that all children, youth and families - regardless of race, ethnicity or class - have access to the services, supports and opportunities they need to be successful in school and in life.
- **Integrated Services:** Programs and services in a community school are not just located on the same campus, but are actually woven into the school’s structure. After-school programs, counseling, public assistance, parent leadership and education classes, and/or health services are delivered as part of a seamless system on campus and in connection with services off site. Critical to this integration is the leadership of a community school coordinator who partners with the school’s principal and administrative staff and families to provide both instructional leadership and needed services.
- **Shared Leadership:** Shared leadership in a community school means that leadership and collaboration happen at all levels and across organizations and institutions; that is, schools, families and the broader community share responsibility for the results that are achieved for all parties. Principals work in partnership with the community school coordinator and both work with families and community-

¹ The Children’s Aid Society. *Building A Community School* (third edition). New York, 2001.

² Embedded within are The Coalition for Community Schools’ five conditions for learning.

based organizations. A community school often works with a non-profit lead agency that is responsible for bringing community partners together to plan, implement, advocate for, evaluate and govern community school activities. School districts work closely with the school and collaboratively with city, county and community agencies to enable, support and sustain the school's development and progress.

- **Youth Engagement:** Community schools provide opportunities for children and youth to actively contribute to their school and community. During and after school, as well as over the summer, students from community schools take on safe and supportive experiential roles such as student council members, program evaluators, or leaders on governance teams. Such activities allow children and youth to build new competencies and skills and motivate and engage them in learning.
- **Family and Community Engagement:** In a community school, family and community members have ample opportunities to serve as leaders on governing boards and committees and to engage other families in the work of the community school. In addition, families and community members can participate in classes and activities that build their own skills, such as classes on computer training, English as a Second Language, employment skills, or other services that can reduce barriers to participation in their children's education and promote self-sufficiency in their own lives.

An Effective School Reform Approach

Schools and districts cannot close the achievement gap alone nor can they be exclusively responsible for improving outcomes for children and youth. By partnering with families and leaders in the community, as well as focusing on the broad community context in which education and learning happen, community schools promote students' academic and personal success and use all of the community resources at their disposal. In their research brief on community schools, the Coalition for Community Schools, a national leader in this area, describes a growing consensus on the positive outcomes that a community school can provide:³

- *Increased learning and achievement* as demonstrated by significant academic gains by students, improved school attendance, improved student behavior, and reduced drop-out rates;
- *Improved family well-being* as shown through improved family functioning, increased family involvement and communication with teachers, and a greater sense of responsibility towards children's learning; and
- *Heightened sense of community pride and strengthened relationships* between community residents and students.

Growing Support for Full-Service Community Schools

Policy makers, superintendents, and educators throughout the United States are seeing the value of community schools. The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) recognizes partnerships and supporting the whole child as key strategies to improving the quality of public education. DOE recently established a federal funding stream to support the development of community schools. As a growing body of research continues to shed light on promising findings of a community schools approach, we are hopeful that community schools will continue to improve student learning, build stronger families and healthier communities.

Developed collaboratively by: Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, New Day for Learning – San Francisco, School Health Centers Association, Center for Community School Partnerships – University of California Davis, Center for Strategic Community Innovation, Hatchuel Tabernik & Associates, Community Network for Youth Development, John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities – Stanford University, Partnership for Children and Youth, The San Francisco Foundation.

³ Coalition for Community Schools. (2009). *Community Schools Research Brief 09*. Retrieved December 13, 2010, from Coalition for Community Schools: <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/CCS%20Research%20Report2009.pdf>