California Department of Education

Executive Office

SBE-002 (REV. 11/2017)

memo-eb-cctd-oct21item01

# **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** October 14, 2021

**TO:** MEMBERS, State Board of Education

**FROM:** TONY THURMOND, State Superintendent of Public Instruction

**SUBJECT:** Overview of the California Community Schools Partnership Program

## Summary of Key Issues

This information memorandum provides the State Board of Education with a summary of the community school model, history and background, effectiveness, and information on past and current activities the California Department of Education (CDE) has participated in during the evolution of the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). In addition, input from community partners is described to provide feedback and guidance on the development of the application process and administrative plan. Per statute, *on or before November 15, 2021, the Superintendent, with the approval of the state board, shall update as necessary, the application process and administration plan for the selection of grant recipients under the program. After November 15, 2021, the Superintendent shall update the state board on an annual basis regarding the administration of this chapter and present to the state board any proposed changes to the application process and administration plan.*

In 2020, the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. With these funds, the California Legislature appropriated $45 million, as part of California Senate Bill 820, Chapter 110, and the Budget Act of 2020, for the CCSPP. In 2021, the California Legislature appropriated $2.8 billion, as part of the Budget Act of 2021, for the CCSPP.

## Background

### **Introduction - Community Schools Approach to School Transformation**

A community school is a “whole-child” school improvement strategy where the district and school work closely with teachers, students, and families to understand the unique needs, assets, and aspirations of the school community. Community schools then partner with community-based organizations (CBOs) and local government to align community resources to realize a shared vision for success and improve student

outcomes. These partnerships help support “an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Many operate year-round, morning to evening, and serve both children and adults. Community schools are designed to intentionally and collaboratively address the economic and social barriers that underly the opportunity and achievement gaps.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Recent events, such as the COVID-19 emergency, have forced districts and schools to rethink the direct connection between schools and families, and to examine the link between school and community services, including ways in which these links can be strengthened. Community school strategies can be an effective approach to mitigate the academic and social impacts of current events, improve school responsiveness to student and family needs, and to organize school and community resources to address barriers to learning.[[3]](#footnote-3)

The CCSPP is an important opportunity for California to build a cohesive statewide approach that mitigates the disparate impacts of COVID-19 on student learning, development, and emotional well-being while accelerating efforts across the state to reimagine schools in ways that are aligned with the equity goals of racial and social justice movements and that support the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of California’s families.

To meet the current moment, it is important not to view community schools as one initiative among many that are currently being funded in California districts, but rather as an equity-enhancing strategy that aligns with and can help coordinate and extend a wide range of school and district initiatives. This includes large state investments in youth-focused behavioral health and expanded learning, as well as ongoing efforts involving Multi-Tiered System of Supports, social-emotional learning, college and career readiness, and ultimately, the Statewide System of Support for school improvement.

### **Community Schools - History and Background**

Community schools have a long history in the national landscape that goes back to the turn of the 20th century to the progressive education movement which includes

John Dewey’s argument for schools as social centers—a comprehensive approach to schooling that encompassed adults as well as children, fostered holistic development, and brought resources from the community into strong partnership with schools.[[4]](#footnote-4) As more recent part of that history, California developed its own model in the Healthy Start Program. The Healthy Start Grant Program was funded between 1992 and 2006. Many of California’s existing community school initiatives were seeded by Healthy Start grants, including initiatives in Hayward, Lake County, Oakland, Ontario-Montclair, Redwood City, San Diego, and West Contra Costa among others.

The Healthy Start Program focused on establishing school-community collaboratives to build and provide comprehensive support services for students and their families at or connected to the school. As a critical part of the evolution of community schools, today’s community schools are taking to heart a critical lesson learned—a good student support system cannot compensate for a weak core instructional program[[5]](#footnote-5) that is not responsive to individual student development and learning needs (including social, emotional, and cognitive). To strengthen their core instructional programs and achieve school transformation, today’s community schools are guided by the emerging consensus on the ‘science of learning and development’ (SoLD) which synthesizes a wide range of educational research findings regarding well vetted strategies that support the kinds of relationships and learning opportunities needed to promote children’s well-being, healthy development, and transferable learning into a developmental systems framework.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The SoLD framework posits that the following are necessary for student learning and development:

1. Supportive environmental conditions that foster strong relationships and community. These include positive sustained relationships that foster attachment and emotional connections; physical, emotional, and identity safety; and a sense of belonging and purpose;
2. Productive instructional strategies that support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning. These curriculum, teaching, and assessment strategies feature well-scaffolded instruction and ongoing formative assessment that support conceptual understanding, take students’ prior knowledge and experiences into account, and provide the right amount of challenge and support on relevant and engaging learning tasks;
3. Social and emotional learning (SEL) that fosters skills, habits, and mindsets that enable academic progress, efficacy, and productive behavior. These include self-regulation, executive function, intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal skills, a growth mindset, and a sense of agency that supports resilience and productive action;
4. System of supports that enable healthy development, respond to student needs, and address learning barriers. These include a multi-tiered system of academic, health, and social supports that provide personalized resources within and beyond the classroom to address and prevent developmental detours, including conditions of trauma and adversity.

For a fuller description of the practices and structures that fill out these developmental systems, see Design Principles for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development into Action.[[7]](#footnote-7) Critical among these strategies are relationship-centered student, family, and community engagement, as foundational to community school development and all its other elements and strategies as well as a related commitment to building positive, nurturing school environments that build in restorative practices, opportunities for SEL and the professional development and coaching required to deliver these.

With a foundation in the SoLD principles, research[[8]](#footnote-8) shows that effective community schools have a common set of elements or four pillars[[9]](#footnote-9) that make up a comprehensive implementation strategy. Current statute regarding the CCSPP aligns well with the research. Specifically, community schools are defined in statute as public schools with “**strong and intentional community partnerships ensuring pupil learning and whole child and family development**,” including the following features:

* **Integrated student supports,** which can support student success by meeting their academic, physical, social-emotional, and mental health needs. Statute defines this as including the “coordination of trauma-informed health, mental health, and social services.”
* **Family and community engagement,** which involves actively tapping the expertise and knowledge of family and community members to serve as true partners in supporting and educating students. Statute defines this as including “home visits, home-school collaboration, [and] culturally responsive community partnerships.”
* **Collaborative leadership and practices for educators and administrators** that establish a culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility for outcomes in a manner that includes students, families, and community members. Statute defines this as including “professional development to transform school culture and climate that centers on pupil learning and supports mental and behavioral health, trauma-informed care, SEL, [and] restorative justice.”
* **Extended learning time and opportunities** that include academic support, enrichment, and real-world learning opportunities (e.g., internships, project-based learning). Statute refers to these opportunities as both “extended learning” and “expanded learning” and defines them as including “before and after school care and summer programs.”

These four pillars have served as the basis for California’s community schools investments in 2020 and 2021.

While community school grants are typically made for ‘eligible’ school sites, school districts, and COEs, each has a role to play, along with county health and human services agencies.

* School districts help to vet and formalize partnerships with CBOs and local government agencies on behalf of their schools; and are responsible for aligning initiatives and scaling the community school initiative district-wide and building systems and financing strategies to ensure sustainability.
* COEs can play an important role in convening local government service agencies to support community school initiatives on behalf of all the districts in the county. This can support more efficient programs, systems, and resource allocation changes as it avoids the complication of each school district negotiating its own partnership with county agencies.

**Lessons from the field emphasize the importance of technical assistance for supporting community school implementation. To address the complexity of the work,** technical assistance to support high-quality implementation of community school initiatives includes a wide range of capacity building support from professional development and coaching, and support for strategic planning, to partnership development that brings resources to schools (e.g., direct staffing, service provision, and funding) at the school site, district and county level. Technical assistance for Healthy Start was offered by 11 regional providers with coordination through the Healthy Start Field Office, housed in the education department at the University of California, Davis. Grantee cohorts met regularly within regions and statewide. Focus groups of 12 districts with the most enduring Healthy Start initiatives named technical assistance as key to their success, as well as the importance of building capacity to do family engagement.

## California Community Schools Partnership Program

### **2020 California Community Schools Partnership Program**

In 2020, the California Legislature appropriated $45 million in federal emergency relief funds for the CCSPP. On October 30, 2020, the CCSPP Request for Applications (RFA) was released (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/profile.asp?id=5577>).

The 2020 CCSPP was established to expand and sustain existing single, or a network of, community schools, aligned to the four pillars described above, to:

* Coordinate and provide health, mental health, and pupil support services to pupils and families at community schools, and
* Provide training and support to local educational agency (LEA) personnel to help develop best practices for integrating pupil supports.

The CDE reached out to content experts during the RFA development process to ensure alignment with community school best practices. These partners continue to support community schools in California, and the CDE through their work with the team at WestEd (see details below).

The CDE received 102 applications requesting a total of $167.5 million. After a competitive scoring process the CDE awarded grants to 20 LEAs serving over 150 community school sites. These grants were awarded to existing community school programs across the state, with preference given to schools serving 80 percent or more low-income students (students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals).

The 2020 CCSPP legislation permitted the CDE to withhold 1 percent of funding ($450,000) to contract with a technical assistance provider and help the CDE with the legislative report, due on December 31, 2025. The CDE is contracting with WestEd to provide four technical assistance webinars, the first was on September 9, 2021, and develop the foundation of a Community School Toolkit, which the CDE plans to expand in the future.

### **2021 California Community Schools Partnership Program**

This year, the California Legislature allocated $2,836,660,000 for the CCSPP to establish new, and expand existing, community schools. The legislation establishes three different grant opportunities and regional technical assistance centers starting in the 2021–22 program year through the 2027–28 program year, as follows:

* Planning Grants (at least 10 percent of total funding = $269,482,700) for the 2021–22 and 2022–23 program years. Grants are up to $200,000 per qualifying entity for local education agencies (LEAs) with no community schools. Planning grants have a matching requirement of one-third, with grant periods of up to two years.
* Implementation Grants (up to 70 percent of total funding = $1,886,378,900), annual grants up to $500,000 per qualifying entity for new, expanded or continuing community schools, with a matching requirement of one-third. New community schools must receive funds for five years.
* Coordination Grants (at least 20 percent of total funding = $538,965,400) for the 2024–25 through 2027–28 program years, grants are up to $100,000 annually per community school with a one-to-one matching funds requirement.
* Up to $141,833,000 is allocated to contract with LEAs to create at a minimum of five regional technical assistance centers.

The most recent CCSPP legislation significantly increases the timeframe and funding for the program. While the 2020 program was relatively small (20 grants were made), the new initiative is intended, over the next seven years, to reach all of the schools in the state with more than 80 percent of students living in poverty (more than 3,000 schools) through networks of schools supported and/or coordinated by districts or county offices of education (COEs) to meet students’ and families’ holistic needs.

The 2021 CCSPP legislation also significantly broadens the framework and the scope of work grantees will be expected to plan for and implement, including:

* A focus on the four pillars of community schools that go beyond adding wraparound services (e.g., health, mental health, social services) to the expanded and enriched learning time, community and family engagement, and collaboration as a framework for all of the school’s operations.
* An operationalization that introduces the LEA (district or county) as a key supporter and organizer of resources, rather than each school trying to coordinate all of those elements on its own.

To support the increased complexity of what is expected for implementation, the expanded 2021 CCSPP provides for building a new technical assistance framework and infrastructure.

Enhancements to the CCSPP Program also include a greater emphasis on student, family, and community engagement. A focus on engagement with a broad cross section of community and education partners has already defined CDE’s CCSPP implementation process. The CDE has met with many interested parties such as LEAs, COEs, CBOs, advocacy groups, labor groups and educational researchers to ensure the CCSPP will meet the needs of community school efforts across the state.

CDE also hosted a virtual input session on September 17, 2021. Participants included LEAs, COEs, CBOs, advocacy groups, labor groups and educational researchers. Initial input from the broader community regarding concerns and aspirations for the new CCSPP initiative include:

* Ensuring that California’s community schools approach is a school transformation strategy.
* Ensuring a school transformation strategy by conducting a framework building process that has broad partner and community input.
* Making sure the program is carefully crafted and the timeline is not rushed.
* Ensuring there is robust partner and community input and feedback across the life of program development.
* Emphasizing the critical importance of the technical assistance and the need to carefully craft the content and infrastructure of that system.
* Interest in establishing a statewide steering committee.
* Consideration of rural/small districts and their ability to compete against the larger, higher profile districts for grants.

CDE is developing a comprehensive engagement process and feedback initiative that engages interested partners in all phases of the CCSPP development and implementation process from visioning through program evaluation.

Given the level of investment and the hope for transformational change, the state’s role is critical to setting up a coherent and effective statewide community schools initiative. Areas for the state to lead in could include:

* Building a robust community input and feedback process and infrastructure.
* Utilizing the community input process to build a central framework (California’s Community School Framework). This framework will guide grantee visioning, planning, and implementation processes (via RFA development) and provide a foundation for the technical assistance content and infrastructure.
* Building an effective technical assistance infrastructure. Given the complexities of community schools planning, implementation, and sustainability, and the intention to build an initiative that delivers on school transformation, it will be important to consider the capacity of technical assistance providers to support schools across this broad developmental arc and will likely need to involve LEAs partnering with CBOs, institutions of higher education, and other technical assistance providers.
* Monitoring regional technical assistance centers and ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness in the technical assistance infrastructure.
* Engaging in statewide initiatives to increase or improve services for youth, to support improvement efforts and ensure alignment with the community schools initiative.

These and other topics will be presented to the Board for discussion in November.

**Conclusion**

Community schools is an evidence-based holistic strategy to school transformation, particularly for high-need students. With Healthy Start and the 2020 CCSPP program; our robust and diverse partner presence; and the history-making investment this year, California is poised to lead the nation in meeting students’ and families’ diverse needs through a statewide community schools strategy. A proposed application process and administration plan for the 2021 CCSPP will be presented for board approval at the November 2021 SBE meeting.

1. Coalition for Community Schools. <http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Learning Policy Institute, Community Schools: An Evidence-Based Strategy for Equitable School Improvement. June 2017. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-equitable-improvement-brief>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Policy Analysis for California Education: Community Schools, A COVID-19 Recovery Strategy. <https://edpolicyinca.org/publications/community-schools>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. New York University: Twenty Years, Ten Lessons: Community Schools as an Equitable School Improvement Strategy. 2021. <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/vue/twenty-years-ten-lessons>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. New York University: Twenty Years, Ten Lessons: Community Schools as an Equitable School Improvement Strategy. 2021. <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/vue/twenty-years-ten-lessons>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Linda Darling-Hammond, Lisa Flook, Channa Cook-Harvey, Brigid Barron & David Osher (2020) Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development, Applied Developmental Science, 24:2, 97-140. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1537791>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Learning Policy Institute and Turnaround for Children: Design Principals for Schools: Putting the Science of Learning and Development into Action. June 2021. <https://eb0b6ac7-8d5b-43ca-82bf-fa89e49b5cb.usrfiles.com/ugd/eb0b6a_042c6c82a88144249223ca80bc9c2919.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Learning Policy Institute: Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy. December 2017. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_REPORT.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Learning Policy Institute: What the Four Pillars of Community Schools Look Like in Action. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Community_Schools_Effective_INFOGRAPHIC.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)