Community schools implementation and administration: Policy opportunities

The Learning Policy Institute, the Center for Universal Education at Brookings, Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools, and the Coalition for Community Schools, and the below members of the [Community Schools Forward task force](#) provides the below policy memo to the U.S. Department of Education (ED) related to community schools and the federal Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) Grant Program, planned national and local evaluations, and supporting new entrants into the field.

This memo is based on existing research and extensive consultation within the field, including surveys, document analysis, and structured conversations. Our preliminary findings about what the community schools strategy is, who it is for, and what it is intended to achieve have clear and direct implications for the impending key decisions the ED will make in the coming months. In particular, it should help inform implementation guidance, administrative oversight, and outcomes and evaluation designs.

OVERVIEW

This memo begins by describing the recent turn to community schools as a response to the U.S.'s persistent failure to provide for the well-being of the most vulnerable children and families—a reality exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It then argues for community schools, not as a substitute for other much-needed policy changes in support of children and families, but as a way to employ a long-standing whole-child approach to schooling that coheres with a growing body of research about how all children learn. From there, we explain how the vision and theory that have emerged from this knowledge base, together with the accumulated wisdom from the field, should drive support for implementation and evaluation that take the complexity of community schools into account. The memo concludes with the following five recommendations that should help policymakers and education leaders translate the burgeoning interest in community schools into practices that live up to the promise of this transformative approach.

> **1. Frame policies, grant competitions, and undergo evaluations** to recognize that community schools require guidance, administrative oversight, and accountability that specify the core components of a community school program and leave the particulars of how those components come to life to local communities and schools. At the same time, community schools should be framed as a comprehensive school transformation strategy. The core components of the strategy are intended to dynamically interact with one another. Individually, they have limited impact, but when integrated are mutually reinforcing and powerful.
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> **2. Provide sufficient support and resources for technical assistance** that treats community school implementation as complex, developmental, and embedded in local

context. There is a need to build the capacity of practitioners at all levels to achieve meaningful outcomes.

3. Conduct evaluations of efforts to implement community schools that attend to the strategy's complexity. Any evaluation that does not include data from multiple sources—such as administrative, survey, qualitative, and observation, and from all stakeholders—will not result in a complete picture of the community school strategy with its integrated approach.

4. Identify community school outcomes that reflect the comprehensive and integrated nature of the strategy. Evaluations should consider outcomes across multiple categories, including: student performance and engagement, individual and collective well-being, quality teaching and learning, culture and climate, and inclusion and collaboration. Outcomes also must be assessed at the student, school, and community level.

5. Ground evaluations in the school's or system's stage of development, first conducting a process of implementation evaluation before designing and conducting more rigorous impact studies. Further, all evaluations should be grounded in community school principles and theory of action.

WHY NOW?

COVID-19 has forced schools and communities to confront the inextricable links between student and family well-being and effective teaching and learning.[1] While there are pockets of progress across the United States, adequate and equitable educational opportunity is far from a reality for many students of color, students from low-income families, and other historically underserved students. Now more than ever, schools are picking up the slack from a frayed social safety net—placing enormous strain on teachers who are expanding their roles in attending to students' well-being—even as they face serious constraints on teaching and learning. This has led to turnover, burnout, and staffing shortages—adding to already deep inequities. By leveraging resources from partnerships, community schools can remove some of these pressures and allow teachers to return their attention to the classroom.

The disparate impact of the disease on racial and ethnic minority groups further illustrates persistent structural and policy disparities among communities—e.g., access to high-quality health care, safe neighborhoods, clean environments, and equitable participation in democratic institutions. These entrenched disparities illuminate the need for a multi-level approach that utilizes tools and resources available at the local, state, and federal levels.

A turn toward community schools

The pandemic has underscored the fundamental interdependence of education, health, and community. Educators, children- and family-serving partners, and decisionmakers across the country are looking to long-standing community school strategies as a promising approach to mitigate the social and learning impacts of COVID-19. The increased awareness of community schools as an effective approach to address the complexities of learning loss and educational

disparities has yielded new and increased resources that federal, state, and local governments have marshaled to support recovery from the pandemic.

The work of community schools, however, is not borne out of this latest crisis.[2] For more than a century, community schools have operated under the premise that schools and communities are intertwined. They have served as a place for making support, resources, and opportunities for democratic participation in schools available to communities, families, and young people—often focusing efforts on those who have been denied sufficient access. Reliable estimates indicate that by 2020 there were approximately 8,000 U.S. schools that identified as community schools and over 100 districts that had adopted community schools as a preferred reform strategy.[3]

In 2021, a report issued by the Brookings *National Task Force on Next Generation Community Schools*[4] positioned community schools as a critical strategy to address education inequality.[5] It cites evidence about the efficacy of community schools approaches,[6] highlights the ways that community school strategies are meeting the needs of students during the pandemic, and recommends scaling these schools nationally with a progressive universalism approach. The report calls on mayors, states, and the federal government to prioritize and aid in building capacity for all public schools to operate as community schools—prioritizing initial efforts on the 4 percent of school districts that educate approximately 40 percent of the country's children, include urban and rural communities across the nation, and have the greatest concentration of unmet student needs.

The heightened awareness of the efficacy of community schools has led to unprecedented federal and state investments in community school funding programs, including proposed increases to the ED's federal grants program, and new and expanded federal and state legislation supporting community schools. Moreover, the reach of the movement extends to myriad cities across the country. Initiatives in large cities such as New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Austin have been joined by those in smaller cities in Indiana, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Arkansas—to name just a few.

New and expanded funding

States have access to over $[176 billion](#) in federal COVID-19 relief funding for K-12 through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security or CARES Act (March 2020), Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (December 2020), and the American Rescue Plan (March 2021). Further, [the $75 million investment in the FSCS Grant Program for FY22](#) would be the most explicit investment in community school strategies in the history of the grant program. California has similarly invested $3 billion specifically in the California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) with the goal of ensuring that all of the state's Title I schools operate as community schools. Other states, including Maryland and New Mexico, have increased the size and scope of their investments in community schools.

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New and expanded legislation

Several recent pieces of federal legislation aim to increase access to community schools—namely, the Full-Service Community School Expansion Act of 2021. Since these efforts began, the number of Senate co-sponsors for community school legislation has grown from one to 12 and a companion bill has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Full-Service Community School Expansion Act would direct the ED to award grants to eligible entities (including local education agencies and states) to plan, implement, expand, and support full-service community schools. In this act, a community school is defined according to four pillars: (1) integrated student supports that address out-of-school barriers to learning (e.g., medical care and assistance with housing, transportation, or nutrition); (2) expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities (e.g., before-, after-, and summer-school programs); (3) family and community engagement (e.g., home visits and adult education classes); and (4) collaborative leadership and practices, which must include a school-based leadership team, a community school coordinator, and a community-wide leadership team. Similarly, California, Maryland, New Mexico, and Vermont have all established state-level community school grant programs that refer to these four pillars as part of their definitions.

New entrants

The demands of the moment, together with increased resources and statutory support, has brought a host of new entrants into the community schools space. Professionals across existing systems—including education, child- and family-serving organizations, and municipal partners—have begun to work collaboratively to develop and scale community school strategies. Although many have worked previously in partnership as part of whole-child and collective impact initiatives, the success or failure of their efforts will depend on their understanding of how to design, implement, and sustain high-quality community schools.

THE STAKES ARE HIGH

With the spotlight on community schools, the stakes for demonstrating efficacy and impact (and the criteria for determining what constitutes efficacy and impact) are high. Success at scaling community schools will depend, in part, on whether and how the field coalesces around a shared understanding of what high-quality community schools are, how best to support them, and what they can achieve.

A pressing need for guidance on implementation

The Community Schools Forward task force—composed of federal, state, and local community school practitioners, advocates, and policy champions—has formed to address the challenges

of this high-stakes moment. A key portion of the task force's charge is to articulate a shared vision for community schools and to provide clear and consistent guidance for new entrants. A shared framework for community schools is currently in development,[7] but a framework alone will not yield success. Bringing community schools to scale requires targeted and intentional capacity-building and a commitment to systemic implementation.

One key piece of successful implementation is access to high-quality technical assistance.[8] Community schools depart from the traditional school structures, practices, and relationships that are outside the current repertoire of educator and community knowledge and skills. Learning how to "do" community schools well in a way that is faithful to the core underlying concepts requires an infrastructure of resourced technical assistance and adult learning opportunities—including teacher, principal, and community school coordinator preparation. As critical as direct start-up resources are to schools, resources will only be used well if adults in schools and communities have an opportunity to learn how to use them. Without a set of cohesive guideposts and experts to help develop community schools with fidelity, the strategy cannot be adequately evaluated.

A pressing need for high-quality evaluation

In addition to high-quality guidance during implementation, the field needs access to findings from rigorous, comprehensive, participatory evaluations that account for the complexity of whole school, whole systems reform.

There are several pending opportunities for evaluation to help advance the field's knowledge of effective community school strategies and their implementation, including evaluation conducted through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and independent evaluations of new and existing federal FSCS grantees. However, these evaluations will yield helpful results only if they examine the right features and outcomes—ones that align with the core elements and theory of action for community schools.[9] Evaluations whose designs do not adhere to this approach can produce inaccurate and unhelpful findings.[10]

KEY FACETS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOL DESIGN AND EVALUATION

The task force is working toward a consensus vision and theory of action for community schools, along with associated key outcomes and measures. Thus far, our evidence points both to considerable agreement about the vision and theory of action, as well as a common understanding of the core inputs, outputs, and outcomes that signify a successful, fully formed community school. Any large-scale evaluation of community schools implementation and impact should test against a consistent and comprehensive vision and theory of action.

Toward a consensus vision and theory of action for community schools

Community schools prioritize the full scope of children's development across multiple domains—including academic, physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and emotional learning—enabling students to develop the knowledge, mindsets, and skills to become civically engaged adults ready for college, careers, and community life. Academic success and well-being are interdependent, reinforcing,[11] and tightly integrated; community schools reject the notion that one domain must take priority over the others.

To achieve this approach to supporting students' development, community schools are locally grown through a democratic co-creation and co-design process that is grounded in trusting, collaborative relationships among students, educators, families, community leaders, and other community-based partners. Centered around the assets and needs of the entire community, these schools build out structures and practices that integrate resources and establish families and communities as key partners in student success. These partnerships allow community schools to support students to learn, develop, and thrive both in and out of school.

The community schools strategy is grounded in an ecosystem approach, meaning the goal is to improve the interrelated web of a child's life at each level: individual, family, school, community, and society (Figure 1). [12] This strategy is informed by evidence that children—regardless of their race, ethnicity, zip code, or circumstance—thrive in environments where their physical, cognitive, academic, socioemotional, and developmental needs are met.[13] Consistent with this evidence, community schools employ a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach of "whole child" and "whole school" transformation, rooted in relationships, collaboration, and trust—all of which are embedded in the community schools standards and practices.[14]

Figure 1.

Social, economic, and cultural contexts and policies

Community

District School Child Family
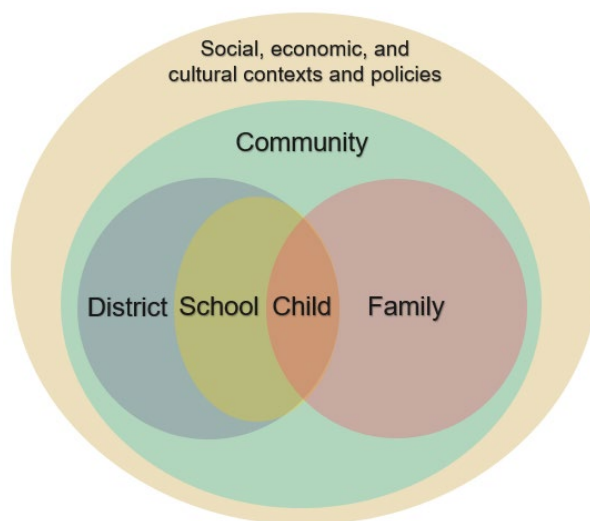
Further, community schools' structures and practices cohere with recent legislation and guidance from the field,[15] as well as more recently developed, evidence-based principles for equitable whole child practices grounded in the science of learning and development.[16] Specifically, key design principles include:

1. **Developing a culture that promotes strong relationships among students, teachers, and families that are rooted in trust and mutual respect.** For community schools, this includes an emphasis on building trust between schools, families, students, and the broader community. Relationships that are reciprocal, attuned, culturally responsive, and based on trust are essential ingredients in any learning setting. When relationships like these flourish, they can enable youth to grow their agency and confidence and enhance their ability to learn skills, perform tasks, and take on new challenges. An important element of trust-building is engaging in democratic practices such as inclusive governance structures that educate, engage, activate, and serve all members of the school community. Doing so can both build social capital and reduce barriers to learning and engagement for students through collaborative community problem-solving. A strong web of mutually supportive relationships between and among students, families, and staff helps all members of the community thrive and can even buffer the impact of stress on learning and growth. Community schools draw on community strengths and wisdom by seeking knowledge and experience from the group to build and enact their vision and mission. In many community schools, this means intentionally centering their efforts around students and families from diverse and marginalized backgrounds.

2. **Establishing learning environments that foster a sense of physical, emotional, and psychological safety and belonging for students**. Environments influence learning—context sends messages about the value placed on students and staff. What is important or unimportant, what is rewarded or sanctioned, who is powerful or powerless, and who is viewed as trustworthy or untrustworthy are all communicated by the environment. Young people are better equipped to learn and take risks when they feel physically safe with routines and order, and experience emotional and identity safety, because they and their culture are a valued part of the community. Community schools show promise in creating the conditions that foster this form of safety and belonging. For example, many community schools implement practices such as social and emotional learning, experiential learning, behavior modeling, mindfulness, restorative circles, and trauma sensitivity.

3. **Intentionally promoting and integrating academic learning with the development of skills, habits, and mindsets to support student growth.** For deep learning to occur, educators need to simultaneously develop students' cognitive, social, and emotional capacities, which can serve as the building blocks for academic learning. These skills, including executive function, growth mindset, social awareness, resilience and perseverance, metacognition, and self-direction, help young people become engaged and productive learners who can be resourceful in new situations while contributing positively to their communities. With their attention to youth development across a

variety of domains, community schools grounded in whole-child design are positioned to help youth build resilience and knowledge; develop their interests, identities, and passions; and grow the skills, habits, and mindsets they need to live lives of fulfillment.

4. **Implementing productive, student-centered learning strategies that elicit motivation and engagement and build on students' prior knowledge** (e.g., inquiry-based learning and performance assessments). Students learn best when they are engaged in authentic activities and are collaboratively working and learning with peers to deepen their understanding and transfer knowledge and skills to new contexts and problems. Students' motivation, performance, and beliefs in their abilities are shaped by the nature of learning tasks and contexts and can be nurtured by skillful teaching that builds on students' cultures, prior knowledge, and experience to accomplish meaningful tasks. In community schools, students are enabled to understand their own rights and responsibilities in school, their community, and in society and feel empowered to act as agents in their own and community well-being.[17] Community schools are also well positioned to engage with local partners on offering students meaningful community-based learning opportunities.[18]

5. **Building integrated support systems that enable healthy development, meet student needs, and address learning barriers.**[19] Community schools strive to center equity in their work–ensuring that all students have access to the resources, opportunities, and relationships they need to thrive. Each student has unique needs, interests, and assets to build upon, as well as areas of vulnerability to strengthen without stigma or shame. An integrated support system can help provide this access by creating a coordinated web of structures that readily meet students' holistic needs. In doing so, these structures buffer excessive stress by combining secure relationships with academicphysical and mental health, and social service supports. They also provide opportunities to extend learning, build on interests and passions, and create ongoing opportunities for exploration, enrichment, and discovery. Community schools also operate from an asset-oriented approach to support students and families. This includes drawing on community strengths, wisdom, and resources when developing integrated support systems–with students, families, and community members centered in identifying culturally and linguistically responsive supports, services, and opportunities.

The principles that undergird community schools are most powerful when they are fully integrated and can work in mutually reinforcing ways. Though all community schools adhere to the key components described in the theory of action above, no two schools will be alike. This is because community schools are locally-driven, democratic entities–each shaped by the unique experiences, needs, and assets of the community in which it is created. Community schools are committed to continuous improvement, self-reflection, data, and opinions from all stakeholders to assess present implementation and plan for the future.

Also central to this emerging vision and theory of action is the recognition that community schools are not a stand-alone program. Rather, they are a platform for an integrated solution that brings together a broad range of initiatives and community-based partners, including federal Title 1 programs, support for out-of-school-time programs, Medicaid support for health interventions, and state and local programs focused on academic improvement and child well-being. Community schools blend and braid these parallel initiatives into a whole-school strategy. In this way, partnerships with local community-based organizations that work in concert with—but outside of the school building—add extra layers of support and provide additional resources to students, families, and community members.

A fully implemented community school is greater than the sum of its parts and is transformative, personalized, empowering, and culturally affirming for each student. As such, effective evaluations must be designed to capture and interrogate the complex nature of the work.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATION

The task force addresses "evaluation" as a valuable tool that, in addition to reporting on outcomes, sheds light on effective and promising strategies and areas for improvement. The task force is also mindful of how traditional thinking and approaches to evaluation and accountability can drive or reframe community schools to fit existing school paradigms—many of which are antithetical to community schools' transformative intentions.

The following principles should inform evaluation, the selection of indicators, and data collection that derive directly from the emerging vision, theory of action, and implementation commitments described above.

1. **Data sources.** Community schools are about people, systems, structures, and practices. They cannot be properly assessed without the collection and consideration of multiple sources of data from different levels of stakeholders involved in community schools, including students, parents, teachers, leaders, coordinators, and partners. Data collected and assessed must reflect all of these voices.
2. **Whole child metrics of student success.** Though a primary goal of the community schools strategy is to improve student academic performance and increase lifelong opportunities, academic achievement (test scores, grades, and credits) and attainment (graduation, post-secondary enrollment, and employment rates) are not the only indicators of success. Improvements in attendance levels and reduction in chronic absenteeism, as well as students' proficiency in 21st century cognitive and metacognitive skills, mindsets, and habits also matter to students' readiness for competent adulthood.
3. **Multi-level well-being.** The well-being of individual families, teachers, school leaders, and community members is foundational to the community schools approach and to

students' outcomes, and therefore must be tracked and assessed.[20] It is also necessary to monitor the conditions that contribute both to well-being and student success– explicit attention to student behavior, trusting relationships, socioemotional learning, and a positive school climate and culture.[21]

4. **Implementation and outcomes.** The impact of a community school cannot be assessed without examining core features of the school and the extent to which the community school strategy is implemented with high quality and fidelity. A systematic documentation of this context is required to understand all relevant outcomes for students.[22] This would include tracking things such as teacher/principal retention and educator characteristics.[23]

5. **Quantitative and qualitative data.** Community schools are relationship-centered and data collection should reflect this. Administrative data and descriptive statistics can only be one piece of a multifaceted evaluation, as perceptions, attitudes, engagement, and collaboration best captured in surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations are key to understanding the impact of the community schools strategy.[24]

6. **Ongoing data collection.** Community schools are flexible and evolving, and evaluations must acknowledge the multiplicity of types and stages of development of community schools. Data collection is a continuous process and outcomes should be assessed in the short and long term to inform practice and measure success. Variation should be expected, and desired outcomes will vary with a school's stage of development.

7. **Continuous improvement.** Collecting and using data is not just a summative exercise. Rather, multiple data types and methodologies are used to identify interventions for students and families, to monitor progress, to gauge uptake and effect of inputs and practices, and to serve as leading indicators that inform continuous improvement. Evaluation must provide meaningful insight and feedback that can be used for real-time program improvement and development.[25]

POTENTIAL MEASURES FOR U.S. ED AND OTHER EVALUATION OPPORTUNITIES

Community schools strategies are whole school, integrated approaches to improve students' school experiences and a broad range of outcomes. It follows then, that evaluations of community school implementation must consider the strategy's complexity (Table 1).

Table 1. Community school outcomes, indicators, and data sources

OUTCOME CATEGORIES	OUTCOME FOCUS	INDICATORS/METRICS	DATA SOURCES
STUDENT PERFORMANCE _____ Academic achievement Proficiency in 21st Century skills, mindsets, and habits Attainment	**Student** **School** **District**	• Attendance & chronic absenteeism, participation, engagement • School connectedness • On-time progression • Achievement test scores (Including from performance measures) • Grades • Credit accumulation • Graduation status, postsecondary enrollment; employment status	• Administrative data student attendance & participation • Teacher & student survey surveys • Administrative assessment data • Results of locally developed measures • Administrative data on attainment
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING	**Student** **Family** **Community**	• Students and families have access to and use programs and services that meet their needs. • Students' and families' basic needs are being met: physical health, social-emotional wellness, mental health • Student attitudes • Connectedness and belonging, agency, satisfaction, security and stability, engagement. • Poverty status • Food insecurity; homelessness; civic engagement; transiency, crime rates; employment rate; increased use of preventive care and routine check-ups or reduction in emergency-room use rate for chronic illness; more inclusive and greater participation in city government; greater voter participation in municipal elections.	• Student, family, & community partner surveys • Student, family, & community partner interviews • Local, state, and nationally collected administrative data
QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING	**Classroom** **School**	• Equitable access to learning opportunities • Arts, technology, and other offerings during day and out-of-school-time; student-centered practices; inquiry-based learning opportunities; performance-based assessments; community-centered and led instruction; culturally and linguistically sustaining pedagogy • Opportunities for educators and schools' staff to gain high quality professional development and skill building that include trauma informed practices, restorative practices, social-emotional learning, opportunities for project-based learning, opportunities for learning ties to real-world applications	• Teacher & student surveys • Observations • Document analysis
CULTURE AND CLIMATE	**Students** **Family** **Teachers** **All School staffs** **Community** **Classroom**	• Trust, safety, belonging, caring relationships, family connectedness, welcoming atmosphere; sense of joy and creativity; venues for voice • Sense of fairness and shared accountability; disciplinary referrals, detention, and suspensions • Use of restorative and positive behavior systems • Educators and schools staff retention and job satisfaction; balance of educators early in their careers, vs mid-career vs advanced in their careers	• Teacher, student & family surveys • Observations • Document analysis • Administrative data
INCLUSION, COLLABORATION, AND ENGAGEMENT	**Students** **Family** **Teachers** **All School Staff** **Community**	• Distributed power and decision making collaborative and inclusive governance structures • Diverse stakeholders are involved in collaborative decision-making and leadership. • Existence of a site-based steering committee or advisory committee made up of stakeholders from within and outside of the school • Inclusion of student voice and expertise • Comprehensive asset/needs assessment done in collaboration with stakeholders on a regular basis • Active family engagement and capacity building (e.g. home visits, parent participation in adult learning opportunities, parent led learning opportunities) • Community partners are contributing a mix of resources to support community school priorities.	• Surveys and interviews of staff, families, students, community partners • Observation

While some outcomes will be important to examine across all schools, the degree to which each of these outcomes should be considered in a community school evaluation is contingent on the particular goals of each community school, outlined in a locally-developed community school strategic plan that is responsive to ongoing, comprehensive needs and assets assessments. Community schools are a complex, comprehensive, long-term strategy and investment that will take time to fully implement. As such, it is important to examine both leading indicators (e.g., attendance and engagement) that signal progress in the right direction, and lagging indicators (e.g., credit accumulation, post-secondary enrollment, and improved community health) that indicate whether key outcomes have been achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN AND SCALE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

We issue the following recommendations to help inform efforts to implement and evaluate community school initiatives. These recommendations provide evidence that can inform federal, state, and local policy.

1. **Frame** community school policies and grant competitions both "tightly" and "loosely." Community schools require policies and administrative oversight that are both "tight" and "loose."[26] The "tight" part includes specifying components that are core to a community school, such as enriched learning opportunities, integrated student supports, family and community engagement, and collaborative and democratic processes. The "loose" part is to leave the particulars of how those components are established to local communities and schools. The goal is to develop community schools and systems that are both faithful to key principles of the approach and tailored to the needs and assets of particular places. Though local communities will establish their priorities and goals, it is vital that they have access to high-quality technical assistance and ongoing, evidence-based professional development, particularly around practices for student, family, and community engagement.

    Additionally, it is important to frame community schools as a comprehensive school transformation strategy. The key elements, components of the "tight" portion of the strategy, are intended to dynamically interact with one another. Individually, they have limited impact, but when integrated are mutually reinforcing and powerful. As Anthony Bryk notes in his work on organizing schools for improvement, "School development is much like baking a cake. By analogy, you need an appropriate mix of flour, sugar, eggs, oil, baking powder, and flavoring to produce a light, delicious cake. Without sugar, it will be tasteless. Without eggs or baking powder, the cake will be flat and chewy. Marginal changes in a single ingredient—for example, a bit more flour, large versus extra-large eggs—may not have noticeable effects. But, if one

ingredient is absent, it is just not a cake."[27] Together these ingredients make community schools an effective approach to school improvement that is designed to fit local contexts. Community schools connect students to the elements found in high-quality schools around the world, where local institutions, family resources, and the combined capabilities of community members complement what the local schools can provide.

2. Provide sufficient support and resources for **technical assistance.** Implementation is complex, developmental, and embedded in local context.[28] There is a need to build the capacity of practitioners at all levels in order to achieve meaningful outcomes.[29] Such technical assistance should be available on an ongoing basis and serve schools' needs at each stage of development. Further, the deep knowledge held by technical assistance providers can lend expertise to evaluation design.

3. Design evaluations that draw on multiples sources of data, are inclusive, and are accessible to the community. When devising **evaluations** of community schools and community school initiatives, design strategies that do not attempt to measure every single indicator at each point of data collection. But recognize that any evaluation that does not include a cross-section of data triangulated from multiple qualitative and quantitative sources—such as administrative, survey, focus groups, and observation. and from all stakeholders—will result in an incomplete picture of the community school strategy or yield results that do not speak to the integrated approach. With this in mind, we make the following recommendations:
    a. Any study or evaluation must include the voices and experiences of students, families, and community partners in addition to teachers, leaders, and coordinators.
    b. The impact of the strategy on each student is a key component of any evaluation. This means measuring intra-individual (within person) change across various, stable measures.[30] To do so, an evaluation must rely on longitudinal data collection, not just point-in-time cross-sectional data for similar students across similar schools. Additionally, longitudinal intra-school measures that align with locally established goals must be a key part of an evaluation.
    c. Administrative data is not sufficient to successfully evaluate community schools. Surveys, focus groups, observations, curriculum audits, document analysis, and available longitudinal information about the health, stability, and development of the larger community are all vital sources of data that can be triangulated to understand implementation fidelity and impact. Further, sample size and response rates must be considered in any analysis.
    d. Data gathered for evaluations should be made easily accessible to the community schools to support their ongoing work and continuous improvement efforts. Policies like MOU's between evaluators, districts, lead

partner organizations, schools, and grant requirements around data sharing can help ensure data is provided to all stakeholders.

   e. It is unwise to design a study looking at a single structure or component with the intent of measuring successful implementation of the full strategy.

4. **Align evaluations with the developmental stage**[31] of the community school. Conducting an outcome evaluation before the community school is "mature or operating as intended" can yield flawed and incomplete results.[32] Begin evaluation design with a study of process implementation to determine if outcomes and impacts are ready to be evaluated. Additionally, though community schools will reach "fully baked" status (e.g., full implementation), the goals and outcomes each school holds themselves to is ever-evolving. The continuous improvement at the heart of this strategy means schools will be constantly revisiting needs, assets, and goals. In addition to any cross-sectional national, state, or districtwide evaluation, each community school should conduct frequent, local evaluations to inform their own continuous improvement process. Robust, continuous improvement based on quality data improves implementation, which can lead to improved outcomes.

It is our hope that this memo and the work of the task force continue to support and guide new entrants in the field and local, state, and federal policymakers looking to support this important work.

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[1] Science of Learning & Development Alliance. (2020, May). How the science of learning and development can transform education: Initial Findings

[2] Community schools are a century-old American idea stemming from Dewey's 1902 NEA address "School as Social Centre" that was inspired by Jane Addams. That address asserted that schools and communities are intertwined, and inspired by settlement houses, that schools can be neighborhood hubs and centers for developing democratic communities (Harkavy, 2017). Following the publication of Joy Dryfoos's ground-breaking book entitled "*Full-Service Schools*: *A Revolution in Health and Social Services for Children, Youth, and Families*" (Oxford University Press, 1994), community schools saw slow but steady growth across the country. This publication helped advance the development of several existing national models, including the Children's Aid lead-agency model, the Beacon Schools, and the University of Pennsylvania's university-assisted model, among others. Several of these groups formed the national Coalition for Community Schools in 1997 to lead field-building and advocacy activities. Around the same time, Children's Aid established the National Center for Community Schools; previous to that, the University of Pennsylvania created the Netter Center for Community Partnerships in 1992. Both organizations work to build the capacity of educators and their partners to adapt the community school strategy in cities, schools and districts across the country.

[3] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Next-generation-community-schools-task-force-report-FINAL.pdf

[4] *National Task Force on Next Generation Community Schools* membership included 24 organizations representing leaders in state and local government, nonprofits, academia, and community school policy and practice

[5] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Next-generation-community-schools-task-force-report-FINAL.pdf

[6] Much of the scholarly evidence base for the effectiveness of community schools is summarized in Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/ community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report.

[7] The data collection for this included collecting and analyzing data from a survey of 85 participants working on or with community schools at the national, state, and local level, across a variety of geographies. Additionally, a corpus of over seventy documents and websites were nominated by those in the field as representative of core or foundational frameworks, practices, principles, and structures of community schools. These data and consultations serve as the basis for a cohesive framework still in development and reflect the collective wisdom and experience of the field and the research base on community schools.

[8] Led by the National Center for Community Schools and the Coalition for Community Schools, multiple projects around technical assistance are underway. These include gauging technical assistance needs and best practices from the field, determining criteria for who can be considered a high-quality technical assistance provider, designing technical assistance infrastructure, and mapping existing technical assistance providers.

[9] Johnston, W. R., Gomez, C.J., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Xenakis, L., Anderson, B. (2017) *Developing Community Schools at Scale Implementation of the New York City Community Schools Initiative*. RAND Corporation https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2100.html: Johnston, W. R., Engberg, J., Opper, I. M., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Xenakis, L. (2020). *Illustrating the promise of community schools: An assessment of the impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3245.html

[10] Mahoney, J.L. & Zigler, E.F. (2006) Translating science to policy under the No Child Left Behind Act of

2001: Lessons from the national evaluation of the 21st-Century Community Learning Centers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 27: 282–294.

[11] Immordino-Yang, M.H., Darling-Hammond, L., Krone, C. (2018). The brain basis for integrated social, emotiona, and academic development: How emotions and social relationships drive learning. *The Aspen Institute National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development.*

[12] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

[13] Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., & Osher, D. (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; Maier, A., & Niebuhr, D. (2021). California Community Schools Partnership Program: A transformational opportunity for whole child education. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/806.436.

[14] Coalition for Community Schools. (2017). Community school standards; https://www.communityschools.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/03/Community-School-Standards-Updatesd2017.pdf;

[15] These structures and practices are frequently identified as pillars or standards in legislation and other initiatives. For example, the four pillars identified in LPI's research review are cited in the federal community schools legislation and are the basis for state initiatives, in California and New Mexico, for example. The six standards advanced by the National Education Association are the organizing principles for the initiative in the Los Angeles Unified School District, as are the six pillars of The Sustainable Community Schools (SCS) that are guiding community schools in Chicago. These structures and practices are also articulated in the Community School Standards prepared by partners in the Coalition for Community Schools. LPI and the Task Force are bringing these ideas together and building on them with field input from consultation.

[16] Learning Policy Institute & Turnaround for Children. (2021). Design principles for schools: Putting the science of learning and development into action; Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B. J., & Osher, D. (2019). 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; Maier, A., & Niebuhr, D. (2021). California Community Schools Partnership Program: A transformational opportunity for whole child education. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/806.436.

[17] Kimner, H. (2021). Practices of a healing-centered community school. Policy Analysis for California Education.

[18] https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/community-based-learning-time-covid-19

[19] Science of Learning & Development Alliance. (2020, May). How the science of learning and development can transform education: Initial; https://www.childtrends.org/publications/making-grade-progress-report-next-steps-integrated-student-supports

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