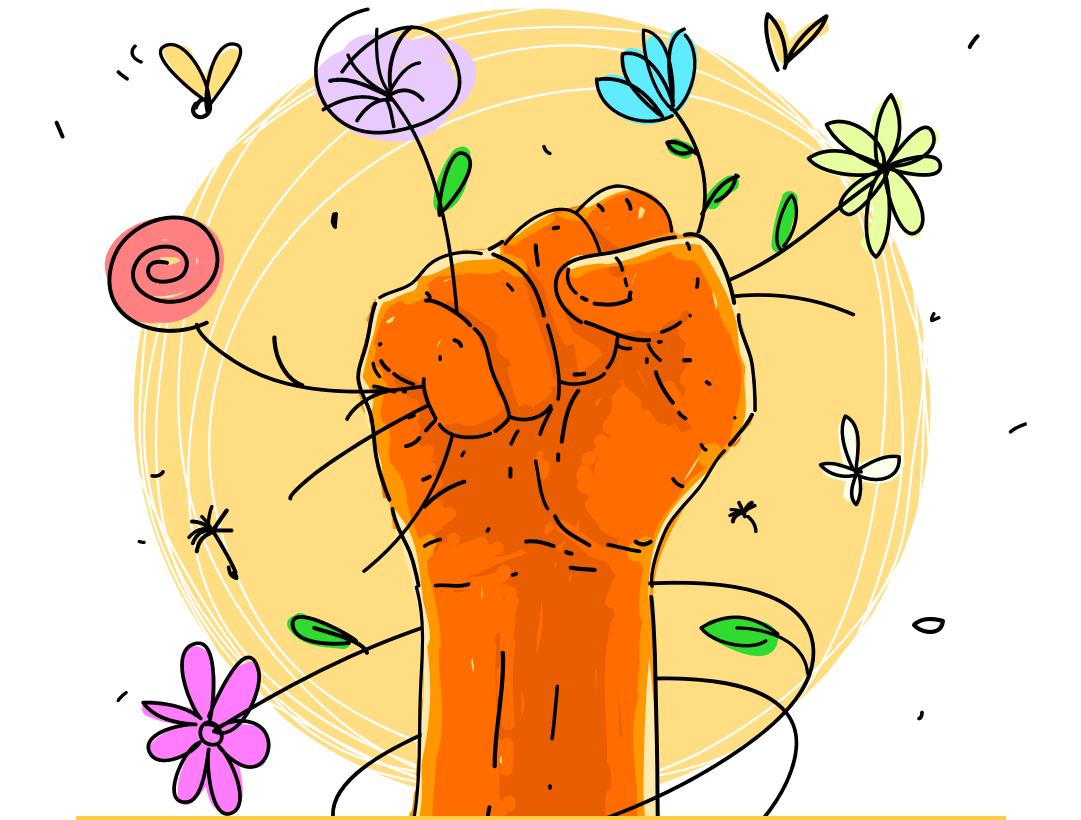
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Reimagining PUBLIC EDUCATION



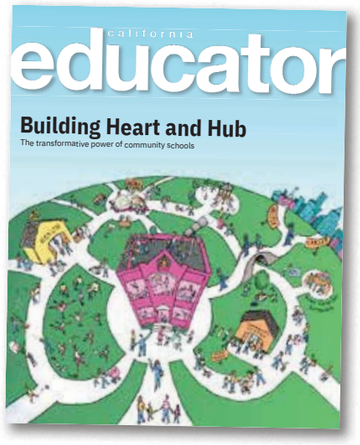
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

- What are Community Schools?
- The Union Role: Building a Movement
- Shared Governance & Five Steps to Success
- What Makes a Community School Thrive
- Family, Student, Educator Empowerment

CTA Stories from the magazine of the California Teachers Association

Community schools

Stories from the
California Educator magazine



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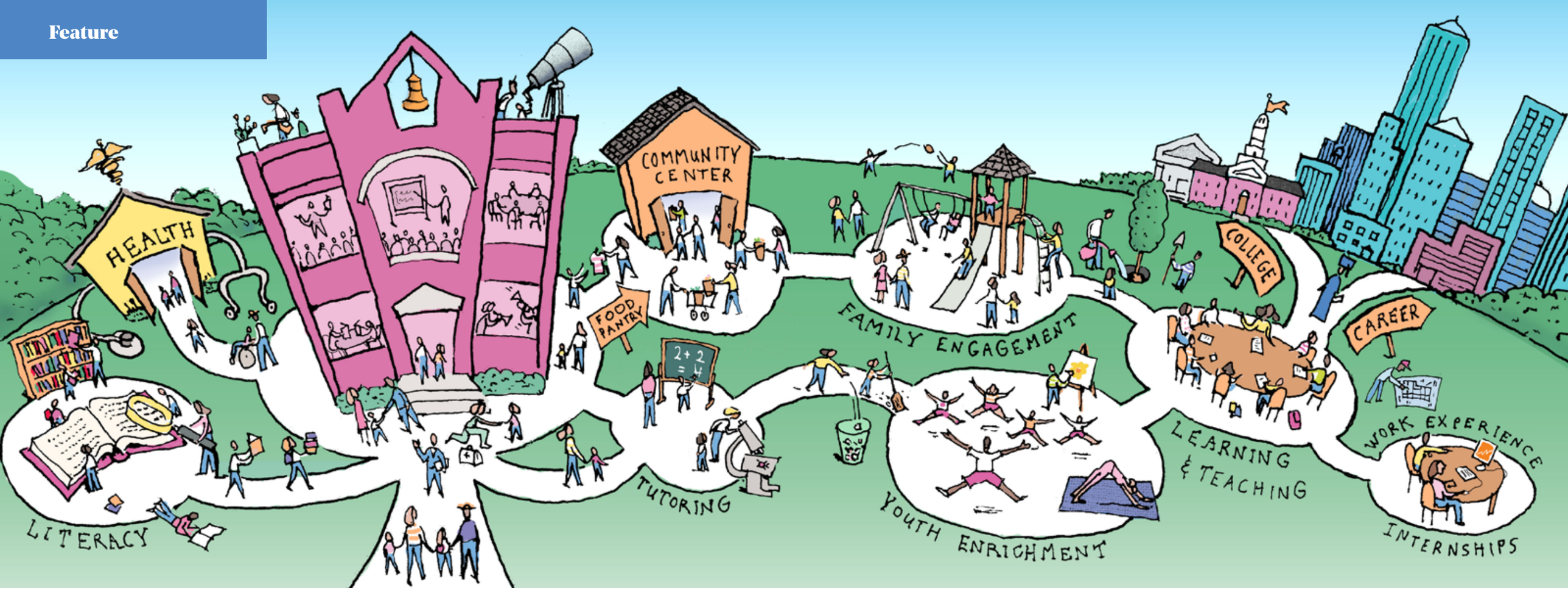
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Building the Heart and Hub

Historic resources for the transformative power of community schools

Story by **Julian Peeples** Illustration by **Daniel Baxter**

"WE'RE REIMAGINING SCHOOLS," says educator Ingrid Villeda. "It's so much more than what happens in class."



Ingrid Villeda

As the community school coordinator at 93rd Street Academy in South Central Los Angeles, Villeda works with students and families to support and connect them with the resources they need to learn and thrive. During the pandemic, her work has included delivering groceries to 250 school families every two weeks, the creation of a "giving room" with clothing, shoes and other items for students and families in need, and an after-school virtual enrichment program focusing on dance, art and sports.

"The community schools program is meant to support everything the students do," says Villeda, a member of United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA). "They can't focus on academics if they're hungry or sad or tired."

With massive investments by the state and federal government, community schools are getting historic resources at a time when students and families need the support most. The community schools model is aimed at disrupting poverty and addressing long-standing inequities, highlighting areas of need, and leveraging community resources so students are healthy, prepared for college and ready to succeed. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership, and community engagement, leading to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities.

Since each community school is centered around local needs and priorities, no two look exactly alike. But they all share a commitment to partnership and rethinking how best to provide the resources students and families need.

"Your school has needs. As a community school, you identify and elevate those needs," says Nick Chandler, community school coordinator and United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) member. "It is our role to elevate and push until that need is met."

CTA Vice President David Goldberg says supporting the community school movement is a priority for CTA, with significant implications for justice and democracy as schools and families examine whom schools serve and how decisions are made. The possibilities are exciting, he says.

"This is why I got into this movement and became a teacher — to make a true difference in a powerful way," Goldberg says. "Community schools are a chance to do this."

The heart of the community

Danielle Rasshan had taught at Ganesha High School in Pomona for more than 20 years when the school was chosen to be part of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) community schools pilot program in 2019. She was always "tied in" to which students needed more support and often intervened as the last stop to help some students before they faced serious discipline. Rasshan says she noticed the community school difference immediately, especially when it came to connecting students with resources and services.

"Now everything is located at my school. I know who to reach out to when I have a student who needs anything. I used to have trouble getting in touch with families, but now



Ingrid Villeda, forefront, with colleagues helping distribute food at 93rd Street Academy in Los Angeles.

I can reach them through regular community workshops," says Rasshan, a member of Associated Pomona Teachers. "Community schools empower parents because their health and success create the best environment for their students to succeed."

Rasshan says having these relationships meant that when the pandemic struck, a network already existed to reach out to school community members to provide support. She says several food distributions were held at Ganesha High and its feeder schools ("We consider them part of our family, too"), while the school quickly distributed necessary technology and addressed connectivity issues. Ganesha also used COVID relief funds to hire more tutors when the pandemic forced in-person tutoring opportunities to go virtual.

"This work means so much to me, because you have to build love, passion and commitment for your town and the people we serve. Community schools are a way to cultivate that," Rasshan says. "I think we're going to see some real effective change."



"This work means so much to me, because you have to build love, passion and commitment for your town and the people we serve. Community schools are a way to cultivate that."

—**Danielle Rasshan**, Associated Pomona Teachers

A community school should be the heart of a community, uniting diverse and engaged stakeholders to strengthen the school community and support the whole child — meaning students are not only supported in academics but also learning in environments that make them feel safe, valued, engaged, challenged and healthy.

At Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8 Community School (BVHM) in San Francisco, families expressed a need for help with a safe and stable place to sleep at night. What followed was a deliberate and coordinated effort to elevate the issue, leading to the creation of the Stay Over Program, a cross-sector collaboration that provides an overnight sleeping program for up to 20 BVHM families in the school's gymnasium — the only program of its kind nationwide.

"We started with the need, we started with the data, and then we moved forward with shared leadership," says Chandler. "We have successfully hosted hundreds of families."

In Los Angeles, 74th Street Academy community school coordinator Nicole Douglass says the school became a community hub during the pandemic, with families turning to it for everything from groceries and school supplies to mental health services. Formerly a special education teacher there, Douglass continues to serve the school community, forging connections and helping families do more than just hold on.

One Friday at 5 p.m., a phone call came from a mother who needed food for the weekend, saying that being able to make her family a traditional Nigerian meal would mean everything during difficult times. Since items from food banks don't typically include the necessary ingredients for such a meal, Douglass and her colleague pooled their money, delivering $50 to the mother so she could cook the food that would bring smiles to her family's faces during difficult times.

"There are a lot of stories like that for us, and it's brought us closer to our families when we needed to be. If the pandemic didn't happen, I don't think we would've been able to dig this deep," says Douglass, a UTLA member. "We've been able to connect with our families and students on a deeper level, and it will be lifelong."

▼ Nick Chandler at Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8 Community School in San Francisco. He helped the school open its gym to BVHM families who are unhoused in 2018, a program that continues today.



"Your school has needs. As a community school, you identify and elevate those needs. It is our role to elevate and push until that need is met."

—**Nick Chandler**, United Educators of San Francisco



"We are committed to improving the educational experience of our young people. Community schools provide the framework for how we do that."

—**Leslie Hu**, United Educators of San Francisco

A movement born out of struggle

While community schools as a concept have been around since the turn of the century (thanks to famed social worker Jane Addams and educator John Dewey), the movement to create these centers of transformative change got a huge boost in 2019 when UTLA members included community schools in their demands during their historic strike. They won funding for 30 community schools and additional UTLA positions as part of Los Angeles Unified's Community Schools Initiative. With California now investing more money into the community schools movement than all other states combined, Goldberg says, it's important to remember the sacrifice educators made to win this funding for students and families.

"Part of the reason we can do this is because of the courageous efforts of our locals. It allows us to bring CTA support and infrastructure to these struggles that have been so powerful and meaningful," Goldberg says. "What UTLA has done is the gold standard for community schools."

UTLA's victory has blossomed into a $3 billion windfall for community schools — one-time Proposition 98

THE SIX PILLARS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS model advanced by CTA and NEA includes six pillars of practice. Unlike most public education models, these pillars are adaptable to the needs of a school's students, staff, families and community, and pay particular attention to creating, supporting, and sustaining a culturally relevant and responsive climate.

Strong, Relevant Curriculum

Community schools provide a rich and varied academic program, allowing students to acquire both foundational and advanced knowledge and skills in many content areas. Learning and enrichment activities are provided before and after the regular school day, including sports, the arts, and homework assistance. Parents and families are supported through adult education.

Positive Behavior Practices

Community schools emphasize positive relationships and interactions. Restorative discipline practices such as peer mediation, community service, and post-conflict resolution help students learn from their mistakes and foster positive, healthy school climates where respect and compassion are core principles. Zero-tolerance practices leading to suspension and expulsion are avoided.

High-Quality Teaching

Teachers at community schools are fully licensed, knowledgeable about their content, and skillful in their practice. Instructional time focuses on learning rather than testing. Individual student needs are identified, and learning opportunities are designed to address them.

Family and Community Partnerships

Families, caregivers and community members are partners in community schools. Their engagement is not related to a specific project or program, but is ongoing and extends beyond volunteerism to roles in decision-making, governance and advocacy.

Inclusive Leadership

The leadership teams of community schools include educators, other school staff, parents, students and community members. The leadership team ensures that the community school strategy remains central in the decision-making process. The team plans development and implementation, including thinking about sustainability.

Community Support Services

Community schools recognize that students often come to school with challenges that impact their ability to learn, explore and develop in the classroom. Community schools provide meals, health care, mental health counseling, and other services before, during and after school. Connections to the community are critically important so support services and referrals are available for families and other community members.

For more information, examples and resources, visit **cta.org/communityschools**.

▼ NEA President Becky Pringle, left, listens to a student at Alhambra High School's Dream Center, a supportive space for undocumented, immigrant and other marginalized groups.





"This is why I got into this movement and became a teacher — to make a true difference in a powerful way. Community schools are a chance to do this."

—CTA Vice President **David B. Goldberg**

funding through 2028 to expand community schools across the state through the California Community Schools Partnership Program. School districts with more than 50 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch will be eligible for grants, with priority given to districts with greater need, those disproportionately impacted by COVID, and districts with a plan to sustain community school funding after the grant expires. Sustaining funding is a key piece to achieving the goal of turning every school where 80 percent or more of students live in poverty into a community school over the next five years.

On the federal side, President Biden's budget includes $443 million for schools to become community schools, nearly 15 times the previous amount.

CTA has long been advocating for more funding for community schools. President E. Toby Boyd made a request to prioritize community schools as a member of Gov. Newsom's state Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery to provide more medical and mental health services to students amid the pandemic and as an integral part of an equitable restart to in-person learning.

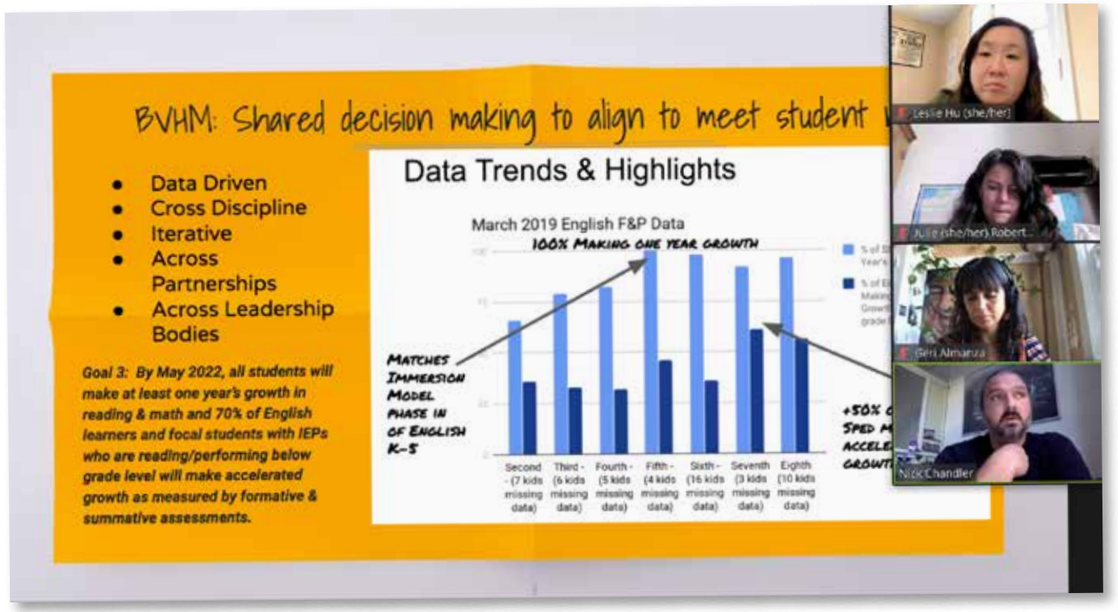
"This investment in community schools is hugely important. When we talk about reimagining public education, community schools are a big part of that vision," Boyd says. "It's how we connect what's best for students and educators to parents and our communities."

One prominent supporter of community schools first proposed funding the model when he was a school board member more than a decade ago. Now state superintendent of public instruction, Tony Thurmond says he is excited for the opportunity and grateful for the funding.

"It's like a dream come true for the types of supports our students need. Given what we've seen throughout the pandemic, the timing couldn't be better to make investments in community schools," Thurmond says. "As a former social worker, I see community schools as the ultimate way to support whole child learning."

Thurmond says the funding could result in one-third of all California public schools becoming community

United Educators of San Francisco is holding webinars to educate members about community schools and organize for funding.



SHARED LEADERSHIP: KEY TO SUCCESS

A CRUCIAL PIECE of the community schools model (and one of the most difficult) is shared leadership. School leadership teams include educators, students, parents and community members. These teams share the responsibility of school operations with the principal, and they ensure the school is serving the needs of the school community.

"Shared leadership is a difficult thing because people traditionally in power have to give some of that up," says Leslie Hu, community school coordinator and secretary of United Educators of San Francisco. "When you center schools around student and community voices, it makes it hard for a traditional approach."

As one of the major pillars of community schools, inclusive leadership is a commitment to the school community that students, families and educators will be part of the decision-making, implementation and accountability process. This ensures that solutions are built with shared interest and responsibility.

"That's really a game changer for our roles as educators," says Kyle Weinberg, vice president of San Diego Education Association. "Governance of schools is not set up to be equitable. If you're intentional about investing in collaborative leadership, it will pay dividends."

For community school coordinator and United Teachers Los Angeles member Nicole Douglass, it's just not possible to accomplish the goals of supporting students and uplifting communities without sharing goals, responsibilities and leadership.

"If this is a community school, there is no one leader," she says. "Shared leadership is everything."

A true test of family partnership at community schools, Hu says, is who the school considers to be experts on students and their needs.

"Do you think of the parents as experts, or do you center yourself as the expert? That's a significant shift," she says. "If we believe young people are the experts on their own lives, that families are experts on their own children, schools will look totally different."

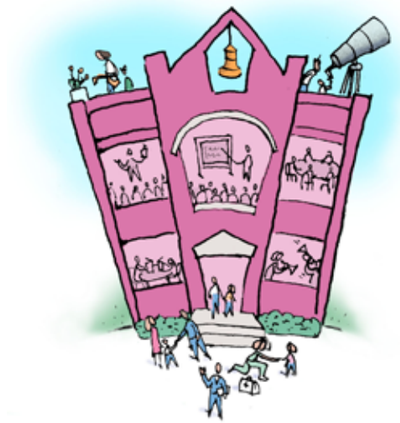


"We view it as an opportunity to empower all the stakeholders in our school communities. What's transformative about community schools is the empowerment."

—**Kyle Weinberg,** San Diego Education Association

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, shown visiting Ganesha High School in Pomona, says community school funding is "a dream come true."





schools, and he's eager to lay groundwork for supporting them past the one-time funds, including potentially leveraging federal funding for more mental health and medical services. He adds that the California Department of Education is planning to hold a series of listening sessions on the grant process before opening the application period, noting that CTA will be involved "in a significant way."

Thurmond says he is eager to replicate the success of Los Angeles-area community schools in supporting the whole child and prioritizing equity.

"LACOE and LA Unified provide us with really rich examples of places we can learn from," Thurmond says, adding that he's excited to partner with educators in this important movement. "UTLA put it forward. I want to thank everyone in the CTA family for having the vision to call for community schools."

Support from CTA and NEA

In addition to state and federal funding, NEA and CTA are providing resources to support local associations to join the community schools movement. NEA is directing $3 million annually to help school districts make the transition to community schools, starting with the 100 largest school districts in the country.



Kim Bui



Mayra Alvarado

CTA is creating a network to support local associations in community school initiatives. There are 20 CTA locals taking part in the NEA Strategic Campaign on Community Schools, with most receiving NEA Community Advocacy and Partnership Engagement (CAPE) grants to support their organizing efforts. Westminster Teachers Association (WTA) is using some of its $75,000 grant to build a partnership with the district's parent-teacher association and start a conversation about community schools with families. WTA is also offering a stipend to a district parent to be a part of the community school leadership team and help promote and organize community schools in Westminster.

"I'm really happy that NEA is doing this," says WTA President Kim Bui, noting how important it is to build a culture of collaboration with families. "We have each other and we support each other. We can do so much together for our community and our kids."

Educators Request Parameters for Community School Funding



Children at book and backpack giveaway at 93rd Street Academy in LA.

THE STATE'S $3 billion investment is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and CTA leaders are focused on ensuring the historic funding is used to create the community schools that students and families need across the state.

In a letter to Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond and State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond, the presidents of the 20 CTA local associations participating in NEA's Community Schools Strategic Campaign Institute requested the creation of a statewide Community Schools Steering Committee. This body would ensure democratic community stakeholder involvement, overall state-level ongoing guidance, community education and engagement, pathways to sustainable funding, and ongoing evaluation, assessment and support — essential to the success of community schools.

The CTA locals and their community partners also proposed regulations for school districts that receive state community schools funds, requiring:

- A rigorous and bottom-up application process to become a community school.
- Full-time community school coordinators at each school.
- Additional funding at each school annually to build the program.
- Training and systematic coaching for coordinators and others to support the leading and implementation of assessment of needs and development of a strategic plan at each school.
- Professional development, training and systematic coaching on culturally responsive curriculum, community organizing, and other key pieces of the community schools model.

"We are here as a community, working together to serve the whole child and the whole community."

—Olivia Udovic,
Oakland Education Association

- Expanded decision-making purview for parents, youth, community and educators at each community school.
- A Community Schools Steering Committee in each district that receives funding to guide the process with the above elements; help assess and evaluate the work; lead on broad community education about community schools; spearhead creating sustainable funding for community schools; and ensure broad and diverse community involvement and stakeholder leadership.



CTA President E. Toby Boyd talks to a child at Prescott Elementary School in Oakland.

"When we talk about reimagining public education, community schools are a big part of that vision. It's how we connect what's best for students and educators to parents and our communities."

—CTA President
E. Toby Boyd

San Diego Education Association (SDEA) leaders parlayed an NEA training on building a community schools coalition four years ago into convincing the San Diego Unified school board to adopt a supportive resolution last year and develop a plan to open five community schools for the 2022-23 school year. SDEA, which is also a CAPE grant awardee, is working with school sites to prepare for the state grant application process, developing their community school pillars and strengthening partnerships, according to SDEA Vice President Kyle Weinberg.

"The funds from the grant are going into developing the leadership and coaching skills of our members who are doing this work," he says. "NEA has done some groundbreaking work with community schools. It inspired us at SDEA to attempt to implement community schools with fidelity. We've taken a lot of the guidance from NEA and CTA to heart about what a community school can look like."

Leslie Hu, community school coordinator at San Francisco Unified and UESF member, has been working with NEA and receiving coaching for the past few years to expand the community school movement nationwide. She says community schools are effective vehicles to uplift the voices of young people and families.

"It's all based on what they need, on what the communities hope for," says Hu. "We're really interested in centering our young people and families. How do we use the power and resources of the union, of CTA and of NEA, to push this work forward?"

Mayra Alvarado teaches at Manzanita SEED Elementary School — one of more than 40 community schools in Oakland. She says educators and parents got a lot closer as they weathered the pandemic together, utilizing their "parent-teacher union" to organize and fight for the needs of their school.

"It's about parents supporting teachers as workers, and teachers supporting parents in what they need for their children," says Alvarado, an Oakland Education Association member. "Our teachers are aware of where our families are coming from. I wish I went to a school like the one I'm teaching at!" ■

For more information about CTA and NEA's work on community schools, go to **cta.org/communityschools**.

Money for Community Schools

TONY THURMOND, state superintendent of public instruction, says the increase in funding could result in one-third of California's 10,600 public schools becoming community schools.

- **$3 billion from the state:** One-time Proposition 98 funding through 2028 to expand community schools across the state through the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). The goal is to transition every school where 80 percent or more of students live in poverty into a community school over the next five years. School districts with more than 50 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch will be eligible for grants, with priority given to districts with greater need, those disproportionately impacted by COVID, and districts with a plan to sustain community school funding after the grant expires. Thurmond will present the CCSPP plan to the State Board of Education for approval in November.
- **$443 million from the federal government:** Funding in President Biden's budget for U.S. schools to become community schools, nearly 15 times the previous amount.
- **$3 million from NEA:** Annual funding to help school districts make the transition to community schools, starting with the 100 largest school districts in the country. Twenty CTA locals are taking part in the NEA Strategic Campaign on Community Schools, with most receiving NEA Community Advocacy and Partnership Engagement (CAPE) grants to support their organizing efforts. Details about CAPE at **nea.org/cape**.

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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:

A Transformative Journey

Educators, families and partners are key to the collaborative process

By **Julian Peeples**

EDUCATORS ACROSS THE STATE are embarking on the journey to build community schools in their local districts, identifying needs and developing partnerships to create transformative experiences for their students.

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership and community engagement, leading to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. With a historic $3 billion in funding from the state (and another $1.5 billion proposed in the governor's May budget revision), many local associations are applying for planning and implementation grants from the California Community Schools Partnership Program to help support their work.

These investments will strengthen and expand community schools across the state, with a focus on schools and communities with demonstrated need and an eye toward converting every high-poverty school (more than 80 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals) in the state to a community school within the next five years.

While locals like United Teachers Los Angeles and United Educators of San Francisco have been working to build community schools programs for some time, many others are at different points of the journey. We checked in with three local associations to learn about their progress.

1

ANAHEIM SECONDARY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION:

Building Trust Along the Way

Anaheim Union High School District

Enrollment: 29,183
Unduplicated pupil count of free/reduced-price meals, English Learners & foster youth: 80.1%
English Learners: 19.4%

Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) has been active in the community school movement for more than six years, with concerted efforts to build community schools. Last year, ASTA received a $75,000 Safe and Just Schools grant from NEA to develop structures to create community school policies, forming a steering committee and two school site committees. ASTA President Grant Schuster says they are looking to further expand with grants they applied for this year.



Grant Schuster

"The only way this works is if we trust each other."

The Anaheim Union High School Board adopted a resolution in March supporting community schools, acknowledging the work done by the steering committee and affirming the need for shared leadership as they move forward. The district will continue to develop two of its 18 schools to be community schools next year — Anaheim High and Sycamore Junior High — with a new $23.275 million state grant funding these and 11 more schools, according to Schuster.

"It's been a good process to start building trust as we build community schools," Schuster says. "The only way this works is if we trust each other."

Schuster says the community school movement is a generational opportunity to lift voices that have not traditionally been heard, so that schools become more reflective of the communities they serve.

"We're looking at a measurable transformation of how public schools are operated and how they interact with their communities," he says. "It's really exciting."

ASTA's work has attracted the attention of fellow educators looking to build community schools in their districts. Schuster says a group from Chula Vista Educators (CVE) visited an Anaheim steering committee meeting to get ideas for how to collaborate in their community. CVE President Rosi Martinez says their local's vice president is now on full release time to work on the community school effort, funded through a Community Schools Grant from NEA.

Next up in Anaheim: the completion of need and asset assessments, followed by recommendations by site committees to the school district with the steering committee presenting directly to the school board. Schuster says they will continue to build their coalition.

"Everyone is invested in success," he says.

The Six Pillars of Community Schools

The Community Schools Model advanced by CTA and NEA includes six pillars of practice. Unlike most public education models, these pillars are adaptable to the needs of a school's students, staff, families and community, and pay particular attention to creating, supporting, and sustaining a culturally relevant and responsive climate.

Strong, Relevant Curriculum
Community schools provide a rich and varied academic program, allowing students to acquire both foundational and advanced knowledge and skills in many content areas.

High-Quality Teaching – Teachers at community schools are fully licensed, knowledgeable about their content and skillful in their practice.

Inclusive Leadership – The leadership teams of community schools include educators, other school staff, parents, students and community members.

Positive Behavior Practices
Community schools emphasize positive relationships and interactions. Restorative discipline practices such as peer mediation, community service and post-conflict resolution help students learn from their mistakes and foster positive, healthy school climates where respect and compassion are core principles.

Family & Community Partnerships
Families, caregivers and community members are partners in community schools. Their engagement is ongoing and extends beyond volunteerism to roles in decision-making, governance and advocacy.

Community Support Services
Community schools provide meals, healthcare, mental health counseling and other services before, during and after school. Connections to the community are critically important so support services and referrals are available for families and other community members.

2

OCEANSIDE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION:

Involving All Stakeholders

Oceanside Unified School District

Enrollment: 18,984
Unduplicated pupil count of free/reduced-price meals, English Learners & foster youth: 58.6%
English Learners: 11.9%



Tiffany Cooper-Ortega

"We can teach our hearts out, but our students need more."

Educators in Oceanside are excitedly preparing for the debut of four community schools (three elementary, one middle) this fall, after pushing for and placing in the district's Local Control Accountability Plan a process for this to happen. Oceanside Teachers Association (OTA) President Tiffany Cooper-Ortega says community schools are about so much more than the wrap-around services often associated with the model.

"It's also the mindset of the stakeholders working together," says Cooper-Ortega. "I don't want to say this is the future of education — it's what education should have always been."

Cooper-Ortega says OTA and school district officials established shared leadership from the start of their collaborative work on community schools, lauding their "strong partnership." With an active political action committee, OTA worked to get progressive leaders elected to their school board, which now has three current or former CTA members. She says the district's "ask a teacher first" mentality has laid the groundwork for the important community schools effort.

"We worked hard to cultivate this partnership and this shared decision-making in this district," Cooper-Ortega says.

OTA is currently surveying key groups in school communities, informing members about community schools, and even looking at potential bargaining implications, such as winning contractually guaranteed shared leadership in community schools. With student needs exacerbated by the pandemic, Cooper-Ortega says the services and support provided in community schools are more important than ever.

"We can teach our hearts out, but our students need more," she says. "I'm excited to see families and students validated, letting them know that this is their part in education. It's not just something that happens to them but something they have a hand in."



THIS STORY IS part of our ongoing coverage of community schools. See **cta.org/communityschools** for background and information, and **cta.org/communityschools-building-heart-hub** for a broad look at educators' work around the state.

Benefits of Community Schools

Community schools help foster:

- Lower rates of absenteeism
- Better work habits, grades, test scores and behaviors
- Higher enrollment in college preparatory classes
- Higher graduation rates

Watch CTA's video for details on community schools' benefits at **tinyurl.com/communityschools-benefits**.

State Awards Community Schools Grants

The California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) supports schools' efforts to partner with community agencies and local government to align community resources to improve student outcomes. These partnerships provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement.

The State Board of Education in May approved more than $38 million in community schools planning grants to 193 local educational agencies (LEAs), with most receiving $200,000. Central Unified School District and Chula Vista Elementary School District are among many districts with CTA-affiliated local associations that won planning grants.

Nearly $600 million in community schools implementation grants were also awarded to 71 LEAs. Among many school districts with CTA locals, Oceanside Unified School District will receive $8.3 million and San Francisco Unified will get $33.7 million, while Oakland Unified will receive the largest grant in this funding cycle at $66.7 million.

Alameda County Office of Education was also selected as the contractor for the CCSPP Lead Technical Assistance Center.

For a full list of grantees, visit: **tinyurl.com/CommSchoolsplanning** (planning grants) and **tinyurl.com/CommSchoolsimplementation** (implementation grants).

—Julian Peeples

3



Judee Martinez

CENTRAL UNIFIED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION:

Empowering Families

Central Unified School District

Enrollment: 15,742
Unduplicated pupil count of free/reduced-price meals, English Learners & foster youth: 71.2%
English Learners: 13.9%

The recent funding for community schools has accelerated plans in Fresno's Central Unified School District, according to Judee Martinez, Central Unified Teachers Association (CUTA) president.

"It's not going to take two to three years," says Martinez. "We need to get on it now."

CUTA set out to inform its members about community schools and their transformative power. When the district said it wanted to move forward, Martinez says they decided to do it together. They selected a school, Teague Elementary, to designate as a community school, meeting with the staff and school community to build the team necessary for success. CUTA received a $75,000 Safe and Just Schools grant from NEA.

Martinez says that when educators met with the Teague community for the first time, they learned of needs that included a food pantry and a bus to transport school families without vehicles to important appointments and tutoring services.

"This is about empowering our families and letting them know we want the same thing for their children," Martinez says. "The teachers were very emotional because they're so excited."

Martinez says the district is submitting a grant proposal for further community schools work. She says they already have eyes on a second and third school in the district, perhaps a middle school that Teague feeds into and then a high school. Martinez says she is grateful for community schools training from NEA as well as constant support from CTA along their journey.

"It makes me proud to be a part of CTA and NEA," she says. "We have always said we will do what's best for kids. They are our future, and community schools are the future of education."

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:

Second Round of Grant Funding Opens

By **Lisa Gardiner**



At the core of developing community schools is organizing and building the shared decision-making structures that transform public schools.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS are collaboratively imagined and democratically run public schools designed to meet the unique needs of local students. Through authentic governance structures and a bottom-up approach, educators, students, parents and community organizations utilize a model of shared decision making to provide academic, emotional and community support for student success.

Over the past two state budget cycles, California has invested $4.1 billion — more than any other state — to support and expand community schools through the California Community Schools Partnership Program. Funding to support these ground-breaking schools, designed to disrupt poverty and address racial, economic and other inequities, is through grants from the California Department of Education.

Now, a second-round of grant funding for community schools is underway, creating opportunities for organizing and for expanding these transformative opportunities for students.

- Beginning Jan. 17, 2023, the application period for a second round of implementation grants — grants for those districts and Local Education Agencies with an existing community schools program — will open.
- Application deadline is March 17, 2023. Implementation grants are funding for up to five years for up to $500,000, depending on a school's enrollment. (A second round of planning grant applications closed on Dec. 20.)

At the core of developing community schools is organizing and building the shared decision-making structures that transform public schools. Districts must work with local chapters when applying for these grants. Be sure to talk to your superintendent if you have not heard from them, and CTA and local staff are available to help.

Around the state, local chapters whose districts received planning or implementation grants during the first round are working with districts to pass school board resolutions, create steering committees, hire community school coordinators, negotiate for community schools as part of collective bargaining agreements, or take steps toward democratically identifying school sites. None of this would be happening without the commitment and hard work of educators invested in the work and promise of community schools.

CTA's recently adopted organizing plan has resources to support local chapters and grant opportunities that can be used to build organizing capacity around community schools. For information, go to **cta.org/OrgPlan**.

More resources on community schools is at **cta.org/communityschools**. For details on CDE grants for community schools, go to **cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/ccspp.asp**.



BUILDING A MOVEMENT IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

By **Julian Peeples** Illustrations by **Audrey Chan**

"IT'S EXCITING and invigorating to do this work," says Elizabeth Kocharian, a Bell Gardens High School teacher on partial-release time working as a community schools coordinator for Montebello Teachers Association. "We all know the challenges our families are facing but now we have the opportunity to help them."

The movement to build transformative community schools continues to grow in districts throughout California, thanks to resources from the state's landmark $4.1 billion investment and the efforts of educators and their local associations. With the first round of planning and implementation grants awarded in May 2022, school districts are developing and enacting plans to build community schools that support the identified needs of their students and community.

During this first round of grants, local associations are generally encountering three distinct reactions from school districts: interested and willing to plan collaboratively with educators and stakeholders; interested but unwilling to work collaboratively; or uninformed and/or reluctant to apply. While each of these require a different response from locals in working toward the inclusive and collaborative planning needed to build community schools, the end goal is the negotiation of an agreement with the district outlining the shared governance structure for each community school.

A strong partnership between educators, parents, community and the school district are all vital pieces to a successful community school, but the lack of a collaborative relationship with district management doesn't mean the community school effort grinds to a halt. Local associations are organizing in their communities, building relationships with parents, neighborhood groups and other organizations, and continuing necessary work to build community schools.

CTA and NEA have been at the forefront of efforts to build community schools, providing resources and guidance to educators and local associations as they embark on this important work. And now, CTA leaders and staff have developed a five-step path to help locals build member and community support.

Here are the steps to building successful community schools, as illustrated through the journeys of five local associations.

FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESS

1

STEP 1:

BUILD CHAPTER LEADER SUPPORT

Fairfield Suisun Unified Teachers Association (FSUTA)
Members: 1,048
Nancy Dunn, president
Audrey Jacques, organizing chair



When FSUTA President Nancy Dunn first heard about community schools, it sounded a lot like the work Fairfield-Suisun educators were doing to build relationships in their community and capacity in their local. FSUTA applied and was selected for NEA's community schools cohort in 2021, also receiving a $75,000 NEA grant. Dunn says that the district's superintendent is not interested in collaborative leadership, so FSUTA is focusing on building internal capacity, identifying new leaders, and developing



Nancy Dunn



Audrey Jacques

"We're building relationships with community partners, but we needed to build relationships among our members as well."

—**Audrey Jacques**, *Fairfield Suisun Unified Teachers Association*

partnerships to be ready when that changes.

Dunn says that community schools are a part of FSUTA's organizing plan, which she and Organizing Chair Audrey Jacques presented to both their executive board and representative council to build support among FSUTA leaders.

"Part of it is the commitment to writing it down and being able to go back to our policy-making bodies to say 'we committed to doing this,'" says Dunn.

FSUTA used the grant funds to release Jacques from the classroom to work full-time starting last February on organizing and community schools — engaging new members, building relationships and taking note of potential leaders.

"We've been able to identify a lot of members who were looking for something that spoke to them," says Jacques, explaining that FSUTA established four new caucuses to provide spaces for members to meet and share. "We're building relationships with community partners, but we needed to build relationships among our members as well."

Dunn says FSUTA made changes to their structure to enhance member voice in the local and share leadership responsibilities among more members. Jacques is building action teams at school sites, creating new links between educators and their union, and developing collaborative leadership in FSUTA as a model for when they have district leadership willing to work together to support students and their families.

"We're hitting all of the notes, so when the ability to collaborate becomes available, we're ready to go," says Dunn. "We have all the pieces in place other than the district."



2

STEP 2:

BUILD EDUCATOR AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Natomas Teachers Association (NTA)
Members: 695
Mara Harvey, president

NTA's advocacy for community schools in the early stages of Natomas Unified's planning grant application led to strong foundations for building a collaborative process. President Mara Harvey says the local continues to share resources with district administrators to ensure effective implementation, including development of shared leadership structures. NTA is focusing on working with members at the district's selected community school site and districtwide to help foster understanding about the potential impact of community schools.



Mara Harvey

"We're working to ensure educators and parents have voices in schools. That's an exciting idea for educators," says Harvey. "There's this huge well of opportunities for our students. A lot of people are excited to get the resources to our families."

"We want to have a collaborative relationship. It's about setting up a structure, so everyone has a voice."

—**Mara Harvey**, *Natomas Teachers Association*
(if run in this story, no attribution because only one person in story)

Harvey says they are currently analyzing community needs at their future community school site to determine what supports are necessary when it opens next school year. That information will be used to help identify potential needs in other schools.

"The more resources we can get to our students, the better," Harvey says. "It's exciting to me because education is about bringing your community together."

Harvey says talks are ongoing between NTA and Natomas Unified to reach a memorandum of understanding about shared governance.

"How do we guarantee a role in leadership in this effort? We see it as fundamental to the success of community schools. That is really the key piece," she says. "We want to have a collaborative relationship. It's about setting up a structure, so everyone has a voice."

Harvey says it has been helpful to have a neighboring local — Twin Rivers United Educators — that is a couple years ahead on the community schools timeline and willing to provide advice and support as needed. For local associations just starting, she recommends reaching out to fellow CTA leaders building community schools in their districts.

"What are other districts doing and how can that work for us," Harvey asks, adding that CTA support has been invaluable. "CTA has been really strong behind us and there's so much excitement about it."



3

STEP 3:

BUILD PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA)
Members: 3,036
Nikki Milevsky, vice president

Sac City TA made a community schools proposal that the school district refused to even discuss during bargaining leading up to their strike last March, but that hasn't stopped educators from moving forward with plans to build community schools in Sacramento. This includes successful action at the ballot box in the November 2022 election.

"Community schools fit very tightly with priorities we set in 2016 and build an avenue for things we want to accomplish for our students," SCTA Vice President Nikki Milevsky says.

During their strike, three parents led more than 50 parents, students and community members in

"It's amazing how similar educators' thoughts are to parents' and the community's thoughts. The goal is the success of our students."

—**Nikki Milevsky**, *Sacramento City Teachers Association*

▼ Nikki Milevsky and SCTA ran a school board campaign last year to elect leaders who would direct district management to collaborate with educators and the community on, among other issues, community schools. Three SCTA-supported candidates won, flipping the board and changing the direction of the district.



occupying the school district office and demanding to speak to the superintendent, signifying the community's solidarity with educators and helping lead to Sac City TA's settlement victory that ended the eight-day strike. SCTA hired one of those parents to work as a community schools organizer and help build relationships.

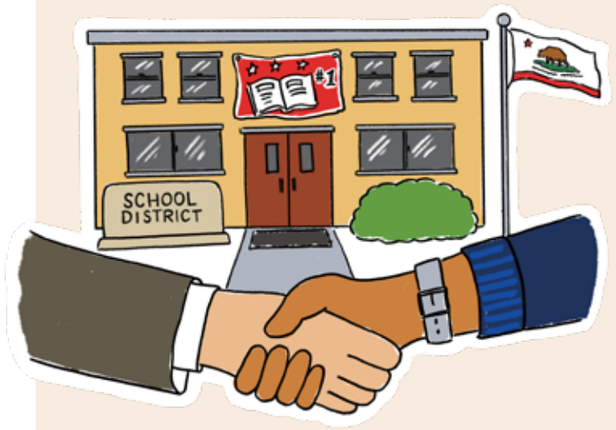
"She's been doing a great job organizing parents and school site councils for community schools," Milevsky says. "It's just amazing how similar educators' thoughts are to parents' and the community's thoughts. The goal is the success of our students."

Knowing that they would make no progress on community schools as long as their superintendent lacked the desire to work with them, SCTA set out on an ambitious school board campaign last year to elect leaders who would direct district management to collaborate with educators and the community. SCTA mounted an extensive community-based campaign, supporting a CTA educator and two community members who emerged during the strike as community leaders. In a massive victory, all three won election, flipping the school board and changing the direction of the district.

"That's been a critical step in moving forward for community schools," Milevsky says. "The teachers and community are going to fight to get true community schools for our students."

Milevsky recommends working with community and parent groups to learn about their needs and wishes for their students. She says it was inspiring to hear from other locals and working community school coordinators at last year's Summer Institute and learn from their experiences.

"We've found CTA and NEA support to be invaluable in this effort," Milevsky says. "It's so powerful to know you're not alone."



4

STEP 4: PLAN COLLABORATIVELY WITH THE DISTRICT

Montebello Teachers Association (MTA)
Members: 1,333
David Navar, president

Montebello educators are planning for community schools on the ground and at the bargaining table, with MTA making a community schools contract proposal late last year that outlines structures for shared leadership. MTA reached a tentative agreement in January on a new community schools article in their contract, which establishes a joint steering committee that will make recommendations regarding the implementation of the community schools program, including applying for an implementation grant from the state. While the grant would provide necessary resources, President David Navar says MTA educators are ready to build community schools in Montebello, regardless of the outcome.


David Navar

"We want community schools in our district whether we get the grant or not," Navar says.

▼ MTA leaders attended last year's Montebello Eggstravaganza to engage the community about the benefits of community schools and build support.



"The school board knows that MTA is leading the charge for community schools. Our students are who this was made for."
—**David Navar**, *Montebello Teachers Association*

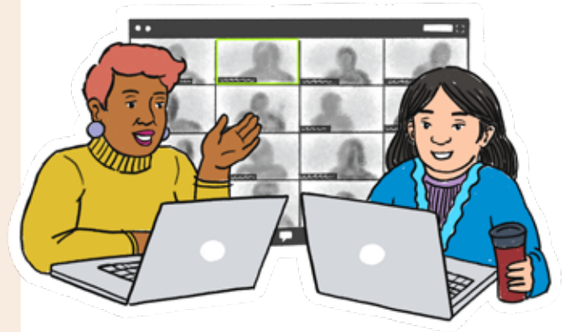
In 2021, MTA received a $75,000 grant from NEA for community schools planning, which they used to organize internally and release a teacher full-time to work on community schools (see sidebar). MTA held a community schools public forum and a series of trainings on leadership development, inviting educators, parents and community organizations to participate. Navar says these sessions were wildly popular and important in building their movement.

"We need to be ready from an organizational perspective to demand and win community schools," he says. "The school board knows that MTA is leading the charge for community schools. It is in the minds of people that this is the focus of our association."

MTA adopted an educational justice resolution in 2021, which Navar says aligns with the goals of community schools. MTA is currently building capacity for the community schools effort, which includes educating members and the community about the power of these spaces. He's also hoping that district management will better embrace community schools — their responses have been tepid at times and collaboration lacking, according to Navar.

The groundwork continues to build community schools in Montebello, where Navar notes the amount of work they've done organizing and planning without yet having one (Note: There is a community school in Montebello, but it is funded by Los Angeles County Office of Education). He can't wait until these efforts come to fruition.

"Our students are who this was made for," Navar says.



5

STEP 5: BUILD STRUCTURES FOR SHARED DECISION-MAKING

Vista Teachers Association (VTA)
Members: 1,255
Keri Avila, president

Things are moving fast in Vista Unified, where the district is in the process of implementing five community schools. VTA President Keri Avila says schools at the district had already been providing wraparound services to students and families, so the community school model was a natural fit.


Keri Avila

"It's an aggressive plan, so we're implementing while we're figuring it out," Avila says.

The district's community schools steering committee includes VTA educators, but not education support professionals, parents or community — so Avila says VTA worked to ensure those voices are on site-level

"Our community school model is an aggressive plan, so we're implementing while we're figuring it out."
—**Keri Avila**, *Vista Teachers Association*

committees. Each of the district's community schools will have a community school coordinator, family liaison, school counselor and an additional full-time position, which Avila says could potentially be used to focus on personalized instruction.

With things moving quickly, Avila met with educators at the soon-to-be community schools to discuss the model and answer questions. VTA accepted an invitation from Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association to visit a community school there, bringing along educators, the district's community schools coordinator and a parent — who has become a staunch advocate for the same transformative experiences in Vista. Now, VTA and the district are building shared leadership structures.

"It really brought it home to see how Anaheim was doing shared leadership," Avila says. "It made us think about how we can build community schools like this in Vista and how can we get people to support them?"

Avila is working with the school board to craft a community schools resolution. She says it's an ongoing effort to get management to share power, noting that "being a part of the conversation is a good place to start." When VTA hit roadblocks with district-level management, Avila says they transitioned to working with school site administrators to share information and collaborate on community schools, building their local movement together.

"We could do a demand-to-bargain for all these things, but if we are working together on shared leadership, then that's not necessary," she says. "We're making sure the boxes aren't just being checked, and the collaboration is authentic and real."

MONTEBELLO: EDUCATOR ON FULL RELEASE FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



Elizabeth Kocharian

"This is our opportunity to create schools where every student gets what they need to succeed every day."

Elizabeth Kocharian became fully immersed in the community schools movement last October, transitioning from teaching governance structures to Bell Gardens High School students to organizing and building them as a community schools coordinator for Montebello Teachers Association.

The 20-year history and government educator was on full and is currently on partial release time from the classroom, building relationships between educators and parents, community groups and the school district. Kocharian works closely with fellow teachers to create workshops and sessions to develop the foundational knowledge necessary to create transformative experiences for Montebello students. She's excited to work to build community schools in her hometown.

"We know our students and our families. We know what we need. And this is our opportunity to create schools where every student gets what they need to succeed every day," Kocharian says. "Being on release is really important — this isn't something you can do well if you're working in the classroom."

Kocharian is getting help and support from fellow educators. She attended the community schools strand at last year's Summer Institute, meeting members doing similar work from locals including Chula Vista Educators and United Educators of San Francisco, and joining a Slack channel set up by them to share information about community schools and their efforts.

Kocharian says MTA's adoption of an educational justice resolution in 2021 was the impetus to go further and learn more about community schools.

"It really expanded my view of what a community school can be, and the possibilities are limitless. We don't have to model our school like anyone else," Kocharian says. "How do we create educational justice and what does that even look like for our students?"

Looking ahead, Kocharian is hoping that one to three Montebello schools apply to be community schools by June, as they continue to develop the structures for shared leadership.

"MTA is building a model for how to meet every student's needs and engage the entire family in collaborative leadership," she says. "I want this to be sustainable, and that's the only way we can guarantee it will continue."

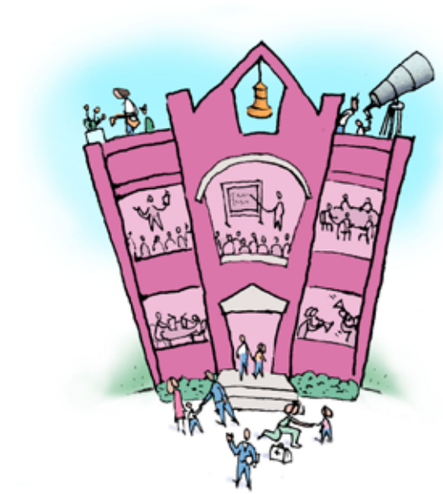


WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership and community engagement, leading to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools are collaborative efforts, where school district administrators share decision-making power with educators, parents and community groups to provide the support students and families need every day. Visit **cta.org/communityschools** for more information and previous coverage.

For all CTA videos on community schools, including roundtable discussions with educators, interviews with CTA and state leaders, and more, go to our playlist at **bit.ly/3HMkmcc**.

Check out our story on Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) and the work its leaders and members are doing around community schools in Anaheim Union High School District, next page. And view a new video about the effort, with input from ASTA educators, students, school and district administrators and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, at **bit.ly/3R7Hmpe**.



SECOND ROUND OF GRANT FUNDING UNDERWAY

California has invested $4.1 billion to support and expand community schools through the California Community Schools Partnership Program. Funding is through grants from the California Department of Education.

A second round of grant funding is now underway: The application period for implementation grants — grants for those districts and Local Education Agencies with an existing community schools program — will close March 17, 2023. Implementation grants are funding for up to five years for up to $500,000, depending on school enrollment. For details on CDE grants for community schools, go to **cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/ccspp.asp**.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS EVENT AT CAAASA, MARCH 17

CTA Vice President David Goldberg



A special panel discussion will take place at the California Association of African-American Superintendents & Administrators' annual summit on Fri., March 17: "Community Schools: The Roadmap to Academic Success for African American and Other Students of Color." CTA Vice President David Goldberg is one of the featured speakers.

The theme of the summit, at Hyatt Regency Orange County, is "Building a Powerful Equity-Centered Education." Attendees can register for virtual or in-person attendance.

For details, visit **caaasa.org/2023summit**.



▼ In September, Anaheim Union High School District opened the first of 13 Community Resource Centers that offer a variety of support services for families and the community.



LEARNING FROM SUCCESS

Anaheim union, district a model of community school collaboration

By **Ed Sibby**

IN EARLY DECEMBER, CTA Vice President David Goldberg and several board members met with Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) leaders and Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD) officials representing community schools in Anaheim.

For several years, ASTA and the district have been a model of collaboration on community schools, serving some 22,000 students. They have worked with students, parents and the community while making strides to grow their community schools and meet the needs of all students. In May, AUHSD received a $23 million California Department of Education grant distributed over five years, part of a $4.1 billion statewide commitment to community schools.

The ASTA/AUHSD model is a study in partnership. Local union leaders were foundational to the institution of the community schools process, with active communication and consensus among all parties as the work progressed. The process has gone so well that it led to the district committing to a program that would include 13 school sites.

> "Through the practices of shared leadership, engaging the community, providing integrated student supports and enriching student learning, we are focused to ensure the whole child and their family thrive."
>
> —**Grant Shuster**, president, Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association

At the meeting, ASTA President Grant Schuster explained the all-in approach their local took to ensure the program's adoption throughout the district:

"Through the practices of shared leadership, engaging the community, providing integrated student supports and enriching student learning inside and outside of the classroom, we are focused to ensure the whole child and their family are supported to thrive. This process has more potential to transform public education than anything I have seen in my 30 years of teaching."

Successful community schools — in Anaheim and throughout the state — are in constant contact with their students and parents to deeply understand the needs and assets of their school community.

"Through those interactions, community-based partners bring resources that help meet these needs in a way that honors the hopes, dreams and assets of our community," Shuster said. "[For example,] Sycamore Junior High's school community works with North Orange Continuing Education to provide adult English as a Second Language classes Monday through Thursday

▼ ASTA President Grant Shuster talks about Anaheim's community school work.



▼ Part of the day's meeting included discussion with Sycamore Junior High community school staff.



▼ Community organizations sponsor a farmers market at Sycamore Junior High.



evenings; with Healthy Smiles for Kids of Orange County to provide preventative dental care to students and dental health education to parents; with Second Harvest Food Bank to host a monthly, free farmers market, and with Orange County Human Relations to embed restorative justice practices into all aspects of our school operations, from the classroom to the cafeteria, administration and beyond."

The community schools model adheres to overarching principles that invest in systems, not silos. Interventions are tailored to personal student needs, whether those challenges are social-emotional, food insecurity, language acquisition, special needs, or need for other specialized family services. It is both microtargeting and delivery based on specific needs that makes the program transformational, say its proponents.

> "This process has more potential to transform public education than anything I have seen in my 30 years of teaching."
>
> —**Grant Shuster**

Presenters at the meeting also pointed out that key to the success in Anaheim is dedicated human resources that help coordinate the program's many moving parts at each site. Community school coordinators work side-by-side daily with site educators and support personnel, administrators, community partners, students and others. They are embedded in the community and most are former students of the local school they serve.

"We're looking to serve our children and our families holistically because we know they can't leave who they are at the door," said Araceli Huerta, Sycamore's community school coordinator. "We want to make sure that we're creating the conditions they need to thrive."

Among their responsibilities, coordinators manage the events calendar, direct parents and students to community services, operate on-site food pantries and secure local donations. They co-lead school advisory committee meetings and keep all sides informed on progress and ongoing needs.

Another side of this critical partnership is the community school teacher lead on each site. This relationship ensures that each site has trained, trauma-informed educators who are committed to developing trusting and collaborative relationships with students, families and community members. They encourage career pathway development with industry experts in and outside the classroom.

Jemma Rodriguez, teacher lead at Sycamore, believes that staff buy-in has been high because the model is making a difference.

"Through the community school strategy, we are taking care of the whole child. For instance, a single student has received on-site services such as mental health counseling, holiday and winter clothing sponsorship through the school's 'Angel Tree' and conflict mediation through restorative justice practices within the classroom. The same student's family has also been referred to the resource center where they have received guidance and resource connections for legal matters and other basic needs, such as food and school uniforms."

Another axiom in Anaheim is that community school programs should supplement, not supplant, existing city services. Understanding and linking parents and students to local programs strengthens ties and builds community at both ends while avoiding duplication of effort. At Sycamore, parents have access to a small food bank, but provisions for addressing long-term food insecurity, as well as health care, immigration services and other needs, are directed out by staff to local and regional government providers.

Ensuring that every program is a value-added measure makes for more abundant services and is not a means for justifying cuts and reductions. In this way, every site can maximize resources according to their needs.

For AUHSD and the members of ASTA, the commitment to community schools is long-term. District officials see positive signs of progress as parents and students become reconnected to their local schools in the post-pandemic era. And confidence is strong among union members that this shared power model has the potential for transformational change throughout the public school system. ■

▼ Left to right: NEA-Jurupa Bargaining Chair and President-elect David O'Rafferty, JUSD Assistant Superintendent Daniel Brooks, CTA District K Board Member-elect and NEA-J past-president Wendy Eccles, and JUSD Superintendent Dr. Trent Hansen.



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In Jurupa, relationships are key to community schools success

By **Ed Sibby**

AS JURUPA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (JUSD) continues its community schools journey, Inland Valley school districts can learn much about the importance of effective relationship-building. With significant input from the NEA-Jurupa (NEA-J) chapter, JUSD has begun implementation of their community schools program in a 20,000-student district in north Riverside County: Six schools have adopted the model and an additional six are in the application process.

How this has come about is testament to the collaborative relationship between NEA-J and JUSD.

"Our success is a shared one," said Wendy Eccles, CTA District K Board Member-elect and immediate past-president of NEA-J. "By taking a solutions-oriented approach to problem-solving, we are building a community schools model that will meet the learning and social-emotional needs of the community through our local public schools."

> "By bringing all our education stakeholders together to determine how to meet the community's needs, we are discovering our true transformational power to change our public schools."
>
> —**DAVID O'RAFFERTY**, NEA-Jurupa President-elect

BEGINNINGS

NEA-J's partnership with the district has been built and solidified over the years.

In the 2016-2017 school year NEA-J's member engagement/organizing team began an active campaign to support shared decision-making, and built a local campaign called #AskAnEducator. It was a challenge to the former model that largely ignored the voices of those closest to and most knowledgeable about issues related to students — parents, educators and support personnel.

NEA-J next began educating teachers, district officials and parents about community schools and how their structure differs from simply offering wraparound student services. True community schools are based on a shared decision-making model that determines each school's needs separately. NEA-J called for a district equity audit and a shift to the community schools model, where services are delivered only after educators, parents, community advocates and administrators have collaboratively determined those specific local needs. In this way every school community can build a model unique to their needs, whether the emphasis is educational, social-emotional, economic or some other locally determined one.

While COVID closures slowed some elements of that educational evolution, NEA-J and JUSD used the time to work through the challenges school closures created for administrators and educators. Those partnerships and the collaborative problem-solving they required became foundational to the work they would do after the pandemic.

"Having been a member of NEA-Jurupa during my teaching career, I have seen firsthand how important it is to have a strong partnership between the district and NEA-Jurupa," said Daniel Brooks, now JUSD assistant superintendent. "We have developed an effective and collaborative culture that allowed us to weather many storms during the pandemic shutdown and all that followed. The relationships we have built with NEA-Jurupa's leaders sustain and drive so much of our work."

▼ Mural on the campus of Hoover High School, one of five community schools in San Diego; 10 new community schools have been added for the 2023-24 school year.



COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AGREEMENT IN SAN DIEGO

Educators, district put their commitment in contract article

IN A VICTORY for San Diego students and communities, San Diego Education Association educators reached agreement with the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) in April on a contract article that stipulates an ongoing and expansive commitment to community schools.

The "SDUSD Community Schools Initiative" acknowledges and supports the proven community schools model to advance racial justice and quality education in high-need school communities. In addition to articulating school site and district processes such as conducting needs and assets assessments, hiring full-time community schools coordinators and establishing shared decision-making and governance teams that involve all stakeholders, the article specifies several other items to ensure success:

- State and federal grant funds can be used for ongoing investment in, among other things, parent/community/youth organizing, outreach and training; and curriculum training time for educators, specifically around culturally responsive and community-based curriculum;
- Community school initiatives will be sustained "to the fullest extent possible" if grant funding expires;
- Establishment of community schools site coach project resource teacher positions, initially part-time but individual sites can expand to full-time if needed; site coaches are educators who work with school staff, site governance teams and community schools coordinators to support expanded and enriched learning and collaborative leadership;
- Establishment of community schools district coach positions, who build the capacity of site coaches and site governance teams.

"This new community schools article in our contract is the product of five years of continuous advocacy by SDEA union educator leaders in partnership with the San Diego Community Schools Coalition," said Dr. Kyle Weinberg, SDEA president and middle school special education, English Language Development and social science teacher. "Our SDUSD transformative community schools model is now enshrined in what will soon be a legally binding agreement that provides accountability and resources to sustain the initiative."

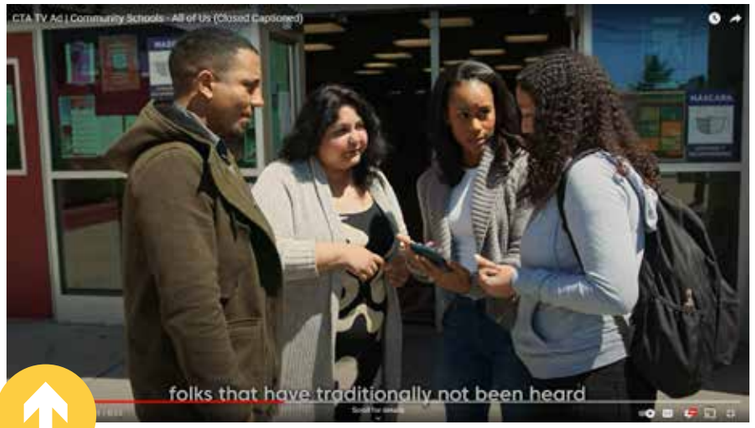
> "Our SDUSD transformative community schools model is now enshrined in what will soon be a legally binding agreement that provides accountability and resources to sustain the initiative."
>
> —**DR. KYLE WEINBERG,** president, *San Diego Education Association*

He anticipates that the contract article will be ratified by SDEA members and SDUSD soon after a yearlong SDEA contract campaign that includes pickets at over 140 schools, school board actions and a community rally to support a demand for expanded after-school opportunities.

The contract article ensures that educators, parents, students and community have a say in school site-level decisions for community schools. It also ensures that the community schools initiative is integrated and aligned with other racial justice, education justice and equity initiatives at the district and school site levels.

For more on CTA's work with community schools, see **cta.org/communityschools**. ■

▼ The community schools model allows for shared decision-making among educators, parents, students, community stakeholders and school and district administrators. Watch the ads at **youtube.com/@CaliforniaTeachers**.







MEDIA SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

CTA's new ad campaign focuses on shared leadership and decision-making

ON CALIFORNIA DAY OF THE TEACHER, May 10, CTA launched a series of TV, radio and digital ads spotlighting community schools – a campaign that will continue throughout the year. "Planting Seeds: Inspiring students and future educators" is the theme, which parallels California's growing and thriving community schools movement.

The ads focus on the importance of the shared leadership and decision-making governance model that allows community schools to create new and successful opportunities for students and local communities.

"Community schools lift the voices of folks who traditionally have not been heard, whether they are parents, students, community groups," said Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association President Grant Shuster in one of the ads.

"It's shared decision-making with parents," said United Teachers of Richmond President John Zabala in the same spot. "They're saying that these are the priorities that they want to see for their kids."

Both Anaheim and Richmond school districts, as well as other districts across the state, are well along the path to growing their community schools in partnership with CTA chapters, parents and community. With the support of the State Legislature and Governor Gavin Newsom, California is now leading the nation with a $4 billion investment in the development and expansion of community schools.

Community schools have proven to foster lower rates of absenteeism, better work habits, grades, test scores, and behaviors, high graduation rates and higher enrollment in college-prep courses.

"Educators, parents and students are reimagining public education in their local communities through community schools," said incoming CTA President David Goldberg. Watch the ads at **youtube.com/@CaliforniaTeachers**. Learn more about CTA's work with community schools and ways to reimagine public education at **cta.org/communityschools**. ■

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

▼ Educator Tina Luu, center, teaches nutrition and culinary arts with fresh produce from Hoover High School's food market.



The Right Stuff

The essential elements that make a **San Diego community school** thrive

by **Katharine Fong**

EACH COMMUNITY SCHOOL is different — they have to be. The community school model draws on the unique strengths of a neighborhood to address its students' unique needs. This is particularly clear at bustling Hoover High School in San Diego, one of five designated community schools in the San Diego Unified School District last year (another 10 have been designated to begin their transformation this year, 2023-24).

Hoover, with 2,136 students, is situated in the most ethnically diverse neighborhood of the county, City Heights. Many students and families are newcomers to the United States; 100% are eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch. "We have over 40 languages represented among our families," says Candace Gyure, the school nurse. The demographic breakdown, according to Hoover's website, is 75% Latino/Hispanic, 12% Asian, 9% African American, 1% White, 22.3% English Learners and 7.5% Homeless Youth.



Kyle Weinberg

"Hoover High serves one of the highest need communities in San Diego," says Kyle Weinberg, president of the San Diego Education Association (SDEA), which with CTA has long advocated for community schools. "Community schools are a great way to identify the unique needs of a community like City Heights, and also to transform how we do education within the classroom, have more culturally sustaining curriculum — more community-based curriculum, real-world projects, collaboration with community organizations on the issues that are facing our communities."

Like many schools, Hoover offered various services — including a wellness center, mental health center, etc., before officially becoming a community school. But the community school structure brought shared decision-making among students, families, educators, district and community as well as a data-oriented approach to assess needs and assets. This has resulted in more accessible, coordinated services, and resources directed to or developed for specific needs. The structure has also allowed for enhanced partnerships with community organizations and stronger connections among the school, students and families.

"It's a long-term approach," Weinberg says. "Addressing [social, mental, physical] needs now will impact such things as academic performance, social emotional learning, and attendance in the coming years."

Here are the elements that Hoover has put in place and continues to refine:

▼ Hoover High is situated in the most ethnically diverse neighborhood of San Diego County.



▼ In class with Chase Fite, Hoover's community schools site coach and AP Government teacher.



Community Schools Site Governance Team

Composed of 10-12 elected positions who have an equal voice and represent all stakeholders: students, parents, community, union educators, district leaders. The team oversees the working group subcommittee, composed of about 22 people who work on strategy and communication, assessing needs and assets, developing protocols and processes, etc. SDEA has a precedent for shared governance won in a contract fight in the 1990s - see page 38 for details on how key this is to the community schools model, and what it requires..

Involvement of all stakeholders

- **Parents:** "Convincing parents that this is not district-driven but truly collaborative [is hard]," says Richard Gijon, Hoover High's community schools coordinator. "But I can see them get excited when I ask, 'What are the top priorities for your students,' and we actually listen to them and ask them to work with us and be part of that process."
- **Students:** It's the same with students, Gijon says. "To see their excitement has been amazing — 'not only are you asking me for my voice, but you're actually telling me what you're hearing.'"
- **Educators and community:** A big part is played by the community schools coordinator and site coach, says Chase Fite, Hoover's site coach, "You need someone who's trusted, [who can convince others that] this is something that is going to improve our site and improve the life of the students as well as all people surrounding our community."



"We've had top-down approaches to school transformation. But they didn't take into account the unique needs of each school. The community schools model is different."

—RICHARD GIJON, Hoover High Community Schools Coordinator

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



"Hoover reached out and invited us parents to get involved; they did a focus group to find out what we needed for ourselves and for our students. That was wonderful because, as a single mom, I could get comprehensive help for my child. And now I'm a member of the Site Governance Team — we get to make good choices, good decisions for the students....The school has a lot of activities to get involved with, a lot of clubs for young people, trainings and events for parents, family engagement."

—LISA PEOPLES, parent and Hoover Site Governance Team member

People power

It takes a village, of course, but specific people in specific roles are crucial to success.

RICHARD GIJON, Community Schools Coordinator. Gijon works full time to coordinate all student and family support services and creates an environment that helps support student achievement and wellness. "The students and families in our community dictate what I do. Some days a family comes in in crisis [over] issues of food security, housing, and I connect them to the resources we have. Sometimes it's mental health....We had all these resources [before, but] it was a little disjointed. Part of my role [is] trying to get all these programs to develop a plan to engage all our students."

CHASE FITE, Community Schools Site Coach. The AP government teacher spends one class period on community schools work, including needs assessment and data collection and analysis; implementing expanded and enriched learning; and developing and implementing collaborative leadership and decision-making protocols and structures. "A site coach helps build up the relationships and the onboarding of the staff as well as the community partners on site. I'm also developing collaborative leadership protocols and structures and helping implement them."

SITE GOVERNANCE TEAM, see previous page. The site team approach, with its shared governance, was actually established in the SDEA contract in the 1990s to ensure members' ability to democratize the workplace, determining such things as school schedule and dress code. (Note: The team is different than the School Site Council.) Community schools' work builds on these existing decision-making bodies.

SDEA AND MEMBER EDUCATORS, a critical force in supporting community schools as drivers of equity, democracy and engagement among students, families and community — and educators.

▼ At top: Slide from a San Diego community schools presentation. Bottom: At Hoover's Health Center, students can visit licensed therapists from Rady Children's Hospital.





"Because of community schools, we were able to expand Hoover Market; it gave us the infrastructure to give everyone more access. What made it meaningful is that it's infused throughout campus, it's part of our curriculum. Our lessons this month are on the connection between mental health and food, and how eating nutritious food can change your mood and decrease depression. Students are part of the transformational knowledge about how food impacts people, their health and their communities."

—ELIZABETH LONNACKER, English teacher who started Hoover Market



Assessment of needs and assets

Hoover sought answers from all stakeholders: What does success for students and the school look like? What are the barriers to achieving it? What strengths — including from parents and community — can we draw on to address the challenges? Through surveys and focus groups, the top three needs, by group:

- **Students:** Working bathrooms (last year there were only 2-3 working bathrooms per gender for 2,136 students; some were closed due to maintenance, vandalism, drug usage); health, including improved food; and attendance (not just chronic absenteeism, but security and being consistent with school rules).
- **Parents:** Academic enrichment and tutoring, mental health, opportunities for students to connect socially.
- **Educators**: Attendance (including tardiness), mental health supports, student engagement. Mental health services and supports were also among the top needs for students and parents.

Data collection:

- **Students:** "We reached 83% of the student body through surveys and focus groups," Fite says. "We audited the information to ID those students we have no data on — such as the chronically absent. Then we created a system to engage in home visits with those students and parents to ID a unique stakeholder group who have particular needs, assets and wants."
- **Educators:** 92% of certificated staff completed surveys. Overall, an aggregated 74.5% of classified and certificated staff participated in focus groups.
- **Parents:** "By June 2023 we will have reached 75% of parents," says Gijon. "We started multiple focus groups in January 2023, in Spanish and English, electronic and paper surveys in six different languages. Every day at drop-off we were asking 'Have you done your survey? We want your feedback.' We were also hitting all our big events, and asking community partners who have parent meetings to pass along the survey."



"If we improve the community at large, we're improving it for everybody, including ourselves. All the things that allow for us to be community schools is a product of union fights, union wins and continued union work."

—CHASE FITE, Hoover High Community Schools Site Coach

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



"The numbers of kids who are referred or self-refer to mental health services just exploded. Families don't always have access to services. So one of the things we're hoping is [that] our students bring awareness around mental health to parents, to be a bridge to help destigmatize getting services. There is still a lot of shame in families about what it means if their child is struggling with a mental health issue. Through community schools, we connect more with them and help them access services for their students."

—ELLEN HOHENSTEIN, Health Academy director

Exploration of potential solutions

Use the data to determine the needs and assets; the working group with input from others are coming up with ways to use the assets to address the needs, as well as create other assets or bring in services for specific needs. This is an ongoing effort. Some early outcomes:

- **Class projects:** In a first-semester U.S. History class with juniors, Chase Fite's students worked on a public health advocacy project using the community schools framework. "For me, this was a rough draft/dry run for implementing the framework before doing so with other stakeholder groups," Fite says. Focusing on the bathroom issue (see previous page), students developed a needs and assets assessment survey and pushed it out to the school for completion, and created a website where they analyzed survey data, presented historical context of the issue, explained the science behind why the issue is harmful to the community, and put forward philosophical and ethical theories that they used to argue whether or not to act on the issue.

Students then presented their findings to other classes, teachers and administrative leaders, and engaged in collaborative dialogue about solutions the community would want to see implemented.

In a second semester AP Government class, Fite had students refine the working group protocols for determining and implementing solutions. This class found that the root cause of the bathroom issue was vandalism due to lack of student ownership, and that a student art installation, for example, could allow them to regard the space as their own and discourage vandalism. Another class found the root cause to be bathroom drug use and vaping, which cause other students to avoid bathrooms. Students suggested those who are caught using drugs take part in a Social Justice Academy-run student mentoring program with a focus on restorative justice.

- **Next wave of planning:** The district is paying for a two-week 2023 PBL summer institute where the working group and other stakeholders are delving deeper into the needs and assets data to come up with solutions. For example: creating a mental health campaign through Hoover's Health Academy, as data shows more than half of students don't know how to access the school's mental health services; and dedicating community schools funds to more supports offered by community partners, such as those involving mental health.

These new efforts around mental health build on current/earlier initiatives by educators such as Ellen Hohenstein, whose students work on campus-wide projects to bolster mental health awareness and interventions, and Elizabeth Lonnacker, whose students created mental health public service announcements for the school.

- **More opportunities for engagement:** "Parents want the school to become that hub where they can have meaningful relationships with each other and with other positive adults," says Gijon. To that end, he and Hoover have further developed resources and events for students focused on social connections, and for parents/families focused on health and wellness, government and community programs, etc.

"Having health services at Hoover benefits students because they have access in a timely manner, they can have their needs met and remain in school. It benefits parents who take less time off from work. They don't have to worry about transportation or hours. Everything's right here. ... [I will soon have] a spot screener to test vision and screen students who would otherwise not be screened. It will take about 5 seconds to get a complete reading, and then provide information to a vision specialist for follow-up."

—CANDACE GYURE, school nurse



▼ Below, students stock classrooms with items requested by teachers for their students — a variety of healthy snacks and other foods.



Featured Services, Programs

Based on its unique needs, Hoover High School has integrated a number of successful student and family supports, among them:

- **Hoover Market**, in partnership with Feeding San Diego; a variety of foodstuffs are free to students and available in classrooms as well as at the market. Special needs students and Hoover's Health Academy students stock and distribute foods; educator and chef Tina Luu teaches nutrition and culinary arts with fresh produce and other ingredients from the market, and the food distribution center is open to the community twice a month. The market was started by teacher Elizabeth Lonnacker in 2022, after she noticed students were taking snacks she had in a classroom cupboard as "food for the weekend." She used project-based learning with students to help bring the market to fruition. The initiative addresses some of the student absentee problems as well, as many students hold part-time jobs to help their families pay for food, rent, etc., but whose jobs interfere with school. (See a recent video about the market at **tinyurl.com/2jc5s8sm**).
- **Organic school garden project**
- **After-school programming** with strong parental input, focusing on arts and music, science, etc.
- **At-risk student support** through Youth Empowerment
- **Health center**, offering health assessments, general assistance with chronic illnesses, immunizations, vision and hearing screening, family planning services, dental services; some services through La Maestra Community Health Center (on campus)
- **Mental health supports**, through Mending Matters, offering drop-in and crisis services and Rady Children's Hospital, offering licensed therapists (both on campus)
- **Recovery services**, through Union of Pan Asian Communities (on campus)
- **Laundry facilities**, washing machines for student/family use (on campus)
- **College and career services**, through Avenues for Success (on campus)

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



"Our counseling team facilitates attendance, academics, mental health, education, referrals. We saw that there is a high need for parenting workshops, how to parent your teen, so we recently started them, with childcare available. We have lots of resources for families — Hoover Market, our upcoming Cardinal Closet with clothing, lawyers to help with the undocumented, wrongfully eviction, students who have lost their only guardian or parent."

—ANDREA MUNOZ, head counselor

"The biggest part about shared decision-making and why it is a strength [is that] no one has to be the most important voice in the room. We draw upon all the knowledge and experiences. So when we add all the voices, including student voices, we hear multiple perspectives and have to really think through what the impact for the student is."

—TRACEY MAKINGS, Principal



Strong partners

In addition to community partners at individual school sites, a steering committee at the district level includes representatives from San Diego State University, community organizations, educators, high school students and others who meet monthly, oversee work groups and provide recommendations.

SDEA is a member of the San Diego Community Schools Coalition, which advocates with parents, community organizations, school board members and at the bargaining table to elevate parent and educator voice in the decision-making process.

Hoover High School maintains an extensive network of community, district and city resources for students and families in multiple arenas, including legal services, food and shelter, health and wellness, tutoring and more.

▼ At left, students working in Hoover's garden. At right, inside the campus Health Center. Next page, across: Mural on the Hoover High campus.









"Being part of the subcommittee has given us (students) a voice that we know will be heard and valued for many years"

—DANIELA SILVA, Hoover student

Daniela Silva graduated from Hoover in June and was a member of its community schools working group subcommittee. She spoke in a Hoover video presentation about how she and other students have been able to witness the many impactful changes at the school in recent years, including the community garden and Hoover Market. Watch the video at **tinyurl.com/3fyrkue4**.

The Union Role

San Diego Education Association is unique in that it won a contract fight with the school district in the 1990s that codified shared decision-making. This has proved crucial to San Diego community schools' success — and is a sticking point for other locals who do not have such contract language. Without it, educators, as well as parents, students and community members, often struggle to be heard and participate as equals. Many locals are now organizing to ensure shared governance is codified, for community schools and for the public education structure that best serves students.

"SDEA has advocated for community schools because we view them as a way to elevate the voice of our highest-need school communities and get more resources and better processes to the students that we serve," says SDEA President Kyle Weinberg.

CTA's role is important on a statewide level. "CTA has been essential to establishing strong community schools in California — lobbying with the State Board of Education, with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, to make sure that the pillars and mechanisms of transformative community schools are embedded into state policy," Weinberg says.

▼ CTA President David Goldberg records a community schools spot.



CTA and Community Schools

CTA is deeply committed to helping grow and support California's community schools, a partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and communities. Community schools' democratic model of shared decision-making ensures all students' needs are addressed so they can thrive and helps build power with community that leads to a more equitable society. Read more of our coverage of CTA and members' work, and find information and resources, at **cta.org/communityschools**.

Media Spotlight

CTA's series of TV, radio and digital ads spotlighting community schools are in full swing during this back-to-school season. They focus on the importance of the shared leadership and decision-making governance model that gives voice to educators, students, parents and community members. Watch them at **youtube.com/@CaliforniaTeachers**.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

From left, Grant Schuster, Emma Alvarez, Cecily Myart-Cruz, Catherine Gilmore (Florida), Becky Pringle, Kelly McMahon (Iowa), Mary Parr Sanchez (New Mexico); not pictured: Nikki Woodward (Maryland).



TALKING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

CTA and California were well-represented at an eight-person panel on community schools, held at NEA's Representative Assembly in July and moderated by NEA President Becky Pringle. In addition to UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz and Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) President and CTA/NEA Coordinator Grant Schuster, a recent graduate from Anaheim's Sycamore Junior High (a community school) also spoke.

The significant Golden State presence reflects California's nation-leading $4.1 billion investment in community schools as well as CTA chapters' success in organizing, bargaining for and now implementing community schools in multiple school districts.

"The community schools model — an actual democratic model that includes every stakeholder — is for every school across this nation — urban, rural, suburban and every school in between," said Myart-Cruz. "It is the absolute antidote to privatization."

In 2019, following a six-day strike, UTLA reached a deal with LA Unified School District that included funding to convert 30 campuses to community schools. LAUSD now has 55 community schools, with plans to add more.

Student Emma Alvarez, who was on Sycamore Junior High's community schools site team, spoke of being heard as an equal. "I get a say in what I want in my classroom, what I want to learn. I have the same amount of voice as my principal, my administrator, my parent, my friend and the people in my community."

Schuster talked about his and ASTA's experience in working with the school district, parents and students and community allies to open/transition 15 community schools.

"What we've learned is that listening is critical in building trust. We engaged with and educated our members and built relationships with community partners. Then we went together to the district and said, 'we want to implement this model.' We built a steering committee including teachers, ESPs, parents, students, community groups and our district.

"We set out a five-month path for teacher leads and community school organizers to talk to every teacher, ESP and facility worker at every site, and then followed up with parent and student conversations, and community circles and one-on-one interviews. Before we started, parent participation averaged 15 percent. We made it a goal [to reach] 75 percent — and we got that at every one of the community schools.

"We were able to bring [what we learned] into the classroom. At Sycamore Junior High, for example, immigration [came] out in all the surveys. Parents did not understand what their rights were or what resources were available. Students were anxious about their families' future, and teachers saw that reflected in the classroom.

"The site team got together to talk about solutions. We now provide services around immigration, so parents can understand what they can do. The 7th grade English teachers got together to create a unit on immigration, so students can study U.S. policy on immigration and deportation to not only relieve their anxiety and express how they feel but to learn about opportunities for civic engagement and to advocate for themselves and their families.

"We are only two years into this process, but we are learning that we must go intentionally slow to build the structures so that in the future we can go much faster. Because we know that progress only travels at the speed of trust."

> "We are learning that we must go intentionally slow to build the structures so that in the future we can go much faster."
>
> —ASTA President **Grant Schuster**



▼ Students relax at Buena Vista Horace Mann. Photo: Chris Robledo

FAMILY POWER

San Francisco Community School puts family needs front and center

By **Katharine Fong**

TYPICALLY, says Nick Chandler, community schools coordinator at Buena Vista Horace Mann K–8 school in San Francisco, the family power structure in schools tends to fall within families with privilege. "Families with income, families with access, families with time," he explains.

At BVHM, such families are few. A dual-language Spanish Immersion Community School in the city's Mission District, BVHM enrolls about 600 students; in 2021–22, 86% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 64% were socioeconomically disadvantaged and 63% were English Learners.

"To ensure that we had authentic partnership with our families of students who needed the most support, we've had to be really strategic about how we engage families and set up shared decision making to hear the voices that often go unheard," Chandler says.

> "We've had to be really strategic about how we engage families and set up shared decision making to hear the voices that often go unheard."
>
> —BVHM Community Schools Coordinator **Nick Chandler**

The strategy involved continuous outreach, listening to and encouraging leadership from families — especially monolingual Spanish-speaking families — and responding to their needs. This included creating the Stay Over Program about five years ago, which allows unhoused San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) families to sleep at the BVHM gym and receive case management services to support their eventual housing.

Housing remains one of the major challenges BVHM families face. Other immediate challenges identified by BVHM families are immigration and mental and physical health needs. "Basic needs supports have evolved over time. They've been a direct result of that family voice, of that student voice," says Chandler.

It's almost 6:30 p.m. on a late spring evening, and several families are already standing patiently outside the BVHM gym, backpacks and bags in hand, waiting for the doors to open at 7. Inside, workers are setting up partitions that give each family a modicum of privacy where they can unroll bed mats and settle in for the night.



▼ The Navas-Torrez family prepares their beds at the Buena Vista Horace Mann school gym.



▼ Not pictured is the eldest son, who will join the family later in the evening.

> "[The Stay Over Program] is important because our kids aren't in the streets. They have a place to be after school, a place to study. For them it feels like a second home."
>
> —Parent **Mayel Navas**

Bathrooms, with showers, are at one end of the gym; at the other end is the room where families enter, sign in and eat dinner. Students can use the dining tables for homework.

Some 70 people will sleep at BVHM tonight. They'll eat breakfast before leaving the gym by 7 a.m.

"When we arrived in San Francisco, we didn't have a place to live, so we were living in the streets," says Mayel Navas, who with her husband Saul Torrez has been staying at the gym with their four sons — one of whom is still in a stroller. "We met a friend who told us about this program. We feel super grateful.

"This place is important because our kids aren't in the streets. They have a place to be after school, a place to study. For them it feels like a second home."

"We came to the United States because our country [Nicaragua] was going through a time of social-political unrest and there was a lot of government persecution," Torrez says. "We don't have the words to say how much we appreciate [the Stay Over Program]."

A joint use agreement allows this S.F. Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing program to be operated on school district property by the nonprofit Dolores Street Community Services.



BVHM Community Schools Coordinator **Nick Chandler**

While each community school is unique, their common denominator is shared governance among educators, students, families, administrators and community partners. By achieving a truly equitable model of shared decision making and listening to all stakeholders, BVHM's Stay Over Program and other initiatives are meeting vital needs that have led to healthier families, more engaged and productive students, educators who are able to teach and nurture children to their fullest potential, and stronger connections to the community.

CTA and local chapters are working in partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and community to help grow and support California's community schools, bolstered by the state's nation-leading $4.1 billion investment. A primary focus among locals is to ensure shared decision making is contractually codified — necessary for all stakeholders to be heard and participate as equals.

"UESF has been working on three different levels" with SFUSD, says Cassondra Curiel, president of United Educators of San Francisco (UESF). "The first is in bargaining a contract that would codify community school language and the shared decision-making protocol."

The second is UESF's agreement with SFUSD to help select and hire a district director for community school

▼ Bilingual teacher Marcos Espino with 7th grade students.



▼ BVHM Principal Claudia DeLarios Moran.



"What does every child need to be self-regulated enough to learn today's lesson? The community school approach allows us to wrap ourselves around a child and their family's need so we can get them there."

—BVHM Principal **Claudia DeLarios Moran**

implementation, "working closely with them to make sure we are in close alignment with state guidance"; the person hired has a background in community nonprofits. Third, the local is involved at the ground level with UESF Secretary Leslie Hu, who is on full-time release as UESF's Community Schools Initiative Coach.

"It's a position we felt was important to have to bring up member 'Community Schools IQ' and to help directly at sites as they navigate the community schools process," Curiel says. Hu works with educators, school staff and administrators.

Curiel adds that for "our 6,500 UESF members, learning about community schools is an ongoing process. We've been working to educate and elevate this — not just the application to become a community school, but what it means to be part of a community school.

"At school sites operating with a shared decision-making model where families are actively invited to help make decisions and embraced and empowered, we're seeing a big impact.... At one elementary school, the administration and educators were trying to seek an intervention to raise reading and math scores. [Stakeholders] devised a plan collectively to shift schedules and carve out the school budget for extended hours so educators could work with the after-school program [toward] those math and reading goals. It spread into what families engaged their students on at home as well."

Curiel points to multiple other examples of community schools' collective decision-making that have successfully addressed challenges at individual sites, and made students and families feel like they are represented and have a voice.

Boisterous students congregate in the BVHM yard at midday, some eating lunch and talking with friends, others engaged in games. The administrative offices also bustle with students and educators. In contrast, students in Marcos Espino's 7th grade class upstairs quietly work on assignments. Espino, who grew up in the Mission District, moves from table to table, speaking in Spanish.

BVHM Principal Claudia DeLarios Moran is a native San Franciscan whose children attended the school before she stepped into her current role. She notes that BVHM has been a community school since its inception in 2012; she expects the new funding and protocols will amplify the school's resources and programming. While DeLarios Moran was BVHM vice principal, she worked to pilot the Stay Over Program.

"The shelter started out of desperation during a particularly rainy winter," she recalls. "A number of families asked us directly if they could stay overnight. We quickly realized that that is exactly what we should do.

"Our true north is 'What does every child need to be self-regulated enough to learn today's lesson?' The community school approach allows us to wrap ourselves around a child and their family's need so we can get them there."

▼ Stay Over Program participants line up for dinner.



▼ A family set up to sleep in the BVHM gym.



This results in students who flourish academically and on a social-emotional level — and parents who are empowered to speak up, get involved and become leaders themselves. "We now have parents who serve on important boards within SFUSD, for example, on the community advisory council for special education. We have parents that are extremely adamant about demanding the kind of facilities our students deserve — having conversations not even at the district level, but at the state [level]."



"UESF is very intent on making sure that community schools is not a trend. This is not a moment. This is a cultural shift."

—United Educators of San Francisco President **Cassondra Curiel**

Chandler says the development of the Stay Over Program taught BVHM administrators and educators a lot on how to engage families — how to build authentic partnerships and shared decision-making structures. "We surfaced flaws in how we were governing our school and how families participated. By having those hard conversations and building programming that was responsive to the highest needs as defined by our families, we were able to disrupt that pattern. It shifted our programming and our focus and intention. It shifted our goals and our mission.

"It forced us to really articulate 'Why are we here? Who are we here to support? How are we going to be inclusive in that work?'"

Current needs, according to surveys and data, center on mental health. As Chandler puts it, "How do we deliver trained, qualified bilingual mental health professionals to our students and families that need it?"

BVHM educators, he says, are fully aligned with the community school's objectives, particularly around family involvement. "We have intentionally brought in teachers that have the vision and philosophy of teaching that includes the family. Teachers are always strong advocates for families at our site."

Educators city-wide are working hard to make community schools work long-term, says Curiel. "UESF is very intent on making sure that community schools is not a trend. This is not a moment, but instead this is a cultural shift, a movement from traditional schooling to a community schools model that includes so much community input, so much student, family, educator [input] that the school itself is fundamentally changed to be a place where families and students feel they are part of the entire day." ■



To view videos on BVHM Community School and its Stay Over Program, visit **youtube.com/californiateachers**. *Learn more about CTA and community schools and read previous coverage at* **cta.org/communityschools**.

▼ The inaugural National Community Schools Learning Lab brought together five local teams from across the state and program facilitators.



A TEAM EFFORT

Community Schools Learning Lab gives locals — and partners — the tools to succeed

By **Katharine Fong**

FOR CELIA MEDINA-OWENS, seeing a fully operational Community School up close and hearing from educators, union leaders and district officials directly involved in it was invaluable.

"We were able to get a common understanding of what community schools could be and how to implement them with all stakeholders," said Medina-Owens, president of Pittsburg Education Association (PEA), of her and her local's participation in the inaugural program of the National Community Schools Learning Lab. "We read about and discuss community schools, but to experience it solidified the theory."

The Learning Lab, hosted by Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) and the Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD), took place in mid-September. Teams from four other CTA locals — Association of Rowland Educators, Mountain View Teachers Association, San Mateo Elementary Teachers Association and United Teachers of Pasadena — also participated in the two-day Learning Lab.

Medina-Owens attended with key members of her local as well as Pittsburg Unified School District administrators. Similarly, other teams were comprised of local leaders, educators, district superintendents and administrators and in some cases, parents and community partners.

These teams, in fact, represent the collaborative nature of successful community schools, which work through a shared decision-making model. Specifically, community school steering committees at both the district and site levels are composed of multiple stakeholders — all the above, along with students — who have equal voice and input.

The objectives of the Learning Lab, funded with a $750,000, three-year grant to ASTA from NEA's Great Public Schools initiative, are to give participating teams the fundamental tools to

- build and sustain strong, shared leadership and governance;
- connect and forge alliances with families and community partners;
- recruit and train essential staff;
- develop curriculum that is academically robust and responsive to students' needs inside and outside the classroom.

The ultimate goal is racially and socially just community schools that support student success and well-being, where students, families, educators and community partners are engaged and invested in their schools and in their communities.

▼ Participants learned about the nuts and bolts of shared governance, among other critical components of community schools, and worked on their own teams' steering committee structure and plans.





A rundown of the Learning Lab inaugural program:

DAY 1

Participants gathered at AUHSD offices for introductions before Leading & Learning visits — informational tours at either South Junior High or Katella High schools (the Learning Lab will soon offer elementary school tours as well). These campus walks and classroom visits focused on programming related to community schools, as did presentations by staff, administrators, students, parents and community partners.

Every community school is unique in that each school's students and community have unique needs. South's community school coordinator Denise Osorio, for example, explained that outreach to parents is not necessarily school-based. "Many of our students and families live on the other side of the city where parking is difficult," she said. "Parents don't want to give up their parking spaces. We decided to hold a barbecue in a park in that area, which was very successful [in engaging parents]."

Similarly, the school maintains a dry goods pantry with food and supplies for families but works with community partners to offer fresh produce at various spots that are within walking distance of families' homes.

In another project, students in art and woodworking classes designed, built and painted benches a calming shade of green, placed around campus where students and others can rest and connect. The benches also bring awareness to mental health, featuring a QR code that takes users to mental health resources.

Afternoon activities included a "station rotation" where participants chose from various topic areas for more intensive discussion, including collaborative leadership practices, community partnerships, sustainable funding/budgeting, harnessing student voice for community problem-solving and civic engagement, community school assets/needs assessment, and centering community-based learning.

DAY 2

Participants met at ASTA offices for an opening panel discussion with AUHSD Community Schools Steering Committee members on committee structure, the process of building consensus and sharing leadership, school board resolutions, and more.

CTA Board Member, CTA/NEA Coordinator and former ASTA President Grant Schuster facilitated the discussion, emphasizing that building trust and "going slow so we can go fast" were essential for the committee.

"At first it was hard to nail down what this was all about," said ASTA President Geoff Morganstern. "But we knew from the very beginning that we wanted all our educational partners at the table."

AUHSD Community Schools Director Carlos Hernandez talked about steering committee consensus-building: "Boy, that's hard," he said. "But it is so worth it and it's the right approach. We go farther together."

Separately, MVTA President Leticia Urias, whose team of 16 included the superintendent, three assistant superintendents and eight teacher leads, echoed the challenges. "It has taken a long time to build a relationship with the district and it takes continuous effort on both sides to keep it going. We have labored hard to make sure all partners are at the table and all voices are heard."

Participants reviewed CTA's Community Schools 5-Step toolkit along with NEA's "Five Steps to Kickstarting Community Schools." Morganstern underscored the importance of codifying community schools in the contract. "Maybe your MOU is imperfect," he said. "But that's okay — we did a second MOU to address additional issues."

Community schools teacher lead Nikki Resch and site coordinator Isabel Tabares-Torres next explained their

➔







▼ The Leading & Learning visit to South Junior High included a tour of an entrepreneurial "market" and club run by exceptional students (bottom left) and presentations by educators, staff, students, parents and community members (below).

leadership roles at Gilbert High School, an AUHSD continuation school. While teacher leads are given partial release time (which lets them remain in the classroom and connect directly with students), both they and full-time community school coordinators work with school staff, administrators, students, families and community partners on curriculum, services and much more.

Resch said that community school initiatives such as "deep listening" and civic engagement have had a real impact on students. An example: One educator listened to a student — who is a parent of a baby — explain how the city bus schedule did not mesh with the end of the school day, leaving her to wait for an hour or seek other ways to get her and her baby home. When it became apparent that many students were affected by the bus schedule, Gilbert students worked to gather information, present it to city officials and get the schedule changed.

"Listening to and giving our students the ability to take larger actions has given them a lot of confidence," Resch said. "There is a lot more dreaming by our kids about what is possible, what they are capable of doing."

Learning Lab Lead Christie Bettendorf was particularly proud to include an alternative education school in the program mix. "I don't want that to be overlooked in the discussion — how community schools can be successful in giving alternative education students what they need, which is a second chance."

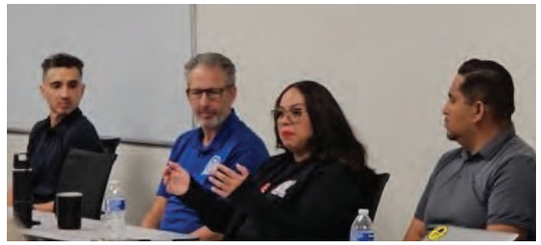
At Gilbert and other community schools, she added, "every kid gets a chance to be part of a community, that structure is in place. Kids who went to Gilbert, even for a semester or less, come back to help with orientation, work in the *mercadito* (market), make documentaries about the school. Community schools have roots, and kids are rooted in their schools."

Teams spent the final hours collaborating on their own plans for creating and sustaining a Community Schools Steering Committee and community schools.

Learning Lab participants were overwhelmingly positive in their evaluations of the program, and Bettendorf is excited at what's next. "A Portland [OR] team of 20 is coming for the November session," she said, joining California teams from Alhambra, Fairfield-Suisun, Pomona and Whittier. A Seattle team of five is lined up. The lab is taking the show on the road, traveling to Washington, DC, in February 2025 and fielding interest from teams in Albany, NY; Baltimore; Jackson, MS; and North Carolina.

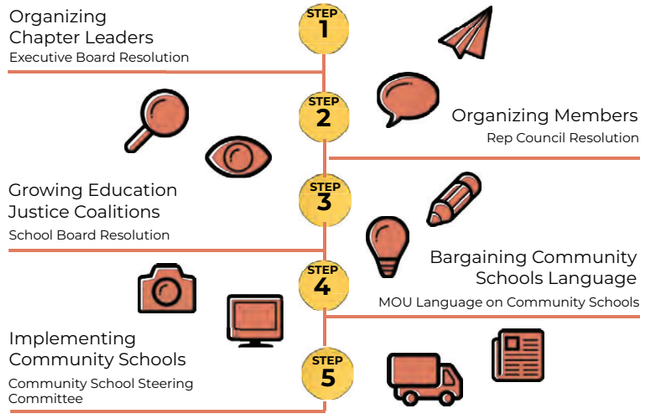
Teams who complete the Learning Lab program can participate in the NEA Benchmark Academy, which supports attendees through regular professional learning community meetings, customized trainings, and coaching for local district and site teams. They can also enter NEA's Community School Implementation Institute, which helps community schools that are completing their needs and assets assessment engage in problem-solving around their priority areas. ■

▼ Anaheim district community school steering committee members spoke on Day 2: From left: John Gutierrez, community partner from Ocapica; ASTA President Geoff Morganstern; Katella High Teacher Lead Diana Gomez; AUHSD Community Schools Manager Kenny Perez; Gilbert High Principal Jose Lara; AUHSD Community Schools Director Carlos Hernandez; parent Jesse Alvarez.





CTA 5 Steps to Community Schools



▼ A small-group discussion about centering community-based learning.



CTA and Community Schools

CALIFORNIA HAS MADE a historic $4.1 billion investment in community schools and CTA — in partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and communities — is working to help create new community schools and transition traditional schools.

Community schools' democratic model of shared decision making ensures all students' needs are addressed so they can thrive and helps build power with community that leads to a more equitable society. Community schools have been shown to improve student outcomes, including in attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.

Read more of our coverage of CTA and members' work, and find information and resources, at **cta.org/communityschools**.



▲ Gilbert High's community schools teacher lead Nikki Resch and site coordinator Isabel Tabares-Torres talk about their roles.

What Teams Learned, What They're Doing

Participating teams' progress with community school implementation varies widely. The Association of Rowland Educators and district partners, for example, are preparing their first application for state funding. Nine of Pasadena Unified's 23 schools are community schools — three elementary, three middle and three high schools. Earlier this year, all eight of the Mountain View School District's schools were awarded state implementation grants. Here are thoughts from local presidents who attended the Learning Lab:

"Experiencing the Learning lab with our district partners was truly powerful. The conversations within our group, the questions answered, the connections made, the new possibilities imagined, and the support offered from the folks in Anaheim and NEA gave us some much-needed calm in the storm. We came out of those two days with a stronger sense of 'we can do this, and we can take what we are doing well and make it better.'"

—DEREK HOLLINGSWORTH, *Association of Rowland Educators*

"At the Learning Lab, I saw that Anaheim's community schools are not test-driven, the curriculum is not based on some tech. Instead, learning is integrated into kids' lives through authentic projects.... The rest of the team (including administrators and a community partner) saw how the union can be helpful in our district. Not only with integrated supports but also with leveraging all resources — [especially] community school teacher leads. It is hard asking for member release time, but they saw how powerful it is with teacher leads freed up."

—JONATHAN GARDNER, *United Teachers of Pasadena*

"Our attendance group was small — just one of our site steering committee members and me — but our greatest takeaway was that we *need* to have representation of some of our district people to come and hear the same information. The only way that this is going to work is if we are all on the same page."

—KATHY PRATT, *San Mateo Elementary Teachers Assn.*

"Being able to bring 16 members, including our superintendent, saved MVTA and MVSD months of creative work. We feel better prepared to continue the work because we all had the same experience together. We just received the $11.6 million implementation grant; the assets and needs assessment is next.... MVTA has done school site visits and staff luncheons [to build community schools awareness]. This is why seven out of eight community schools site leads applied for the positions when they were posted — they heard our message and were excited to be part of such an important journey!"

—LETICIA URIAS, *Mountain View Teachers Assn.*

"It took us from August 2023 to April 2024 to get an MOU. The district didn't want to negotiate.... Now, we have a relationship; the district is holding community schools meetings at sites — it's a paradigm shift. All 13 of our schools are classified as community schools, but only 11 got grant funding. The district funded the other two. We used CTA site visit and member engagement grants for release days for PEA community schools committee members to talk to our parents, attend events. We're still doing one-on-ones with our 615 members."

—CELIA MEDINA-OWENS, *Pittsburg Education Assn.*

The Role of Community Schools Teacher Leads

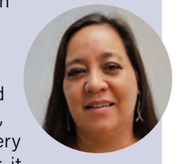
COMMUNITY SCHOOL TEACHER leads' roles vary depending on site needs. One important focus: helping develop curriculum that incorporates community-based learning. Teacher leads are given partial release time, maintaining a presence in the classroom. The Learning Lab showcased three teacher leads and their work:



Diana Gomez, Katella High School, special Ed and English teacher. "My main focus is on instruction, on community-based learning — how we connect learning to real life. We empower students to have agency and voice while still adhering to rigorous state standards. Right now I'm having students read a novel where a virus kills all the adults and the kids survive. It reminds them of the coronavirus; they share stories of resilience. I challenge them to have conversations with their families: 'What if there's another emergency? How can we be better prepared to lessen the effects of trauma and increase our safety?'"



Jason Collar, South Junior High School, history and CTE teacher. "Whole child education is a collaborative effort. We are very intentional about what we do. This allows opportunities for us to elevate voices and engage students and families. An example: I had students research their communities' assets — 'What brings you joy in your neighborhood and school, what are the resources for your family. And what are the resources that we should have and why?' Students really thought about this. I was able bring their input to our site team, and we considered making changes based on their work."



Nikki Resch, Gilbert High School, English teacher. "Gilbert is a continuation school and has been doing a lot of relationship-building, deep listening and civic engagement for a very long time. [With comunity schools,] however, it has become more of a site-wide approach — connecting with our students and finding out 'What are you really interested in learning?,' so instruction and content is more relevant in all classrooms and not just sprinkled into a few. All our students learn to advocate for themselves — they can collaborate with their peers and know that their teachers have their back."

▼ The Learning Lab team includes Geoff Morganstern, ASTA president; David Greenberg and Angelia Ebner, NEA senior policy analysts and community schools specialists; Lisa Eck, ASTA executive director/CTA UniServ; Learning Lab Lead Christie Bettendorf; Adriane Dorrington, NEA program manager for community schools; Grant Schuster, CTA board member and CTA/NEA Coordinator.



ANAHEIM:

The Local and the District

The National Community Schools Learning Lab draws from ASTA and AUHSD's expertise and experience with community schools. To date, 15 of 21 middle and high schools in AUHSD have transitioned to community schools and have received more than $23 million in state funding. The ASTA/AUHSD Leading & Learning Lab — informational tours and presentations at those schools — has drawn hundreds of educators nationwide.

"AUHSD has been super helpful with the Learning Lab, they want this to be successful," said Learning Lab Lead Christie Bettendorf, who made sure the district steering committee and district cabinet gave input on and approved the Learning Lab components. "They've been with us every step of the way to fulfill the goals of the NEA grant."

The relationship between ASTA and the district can sometimes be strained — the recent move to lay off Anaheim teachers, for example, was a difficult time. "Despite what happens, the kids are going to come first — our shared vision is still the priority," Bettendorf said. "That's what community schools are about."

Interested in the Learning Lab?
Contact **astacslab@gmail.com** for information. Ideally, teams are composed of all stakeholders, but teams who have not yet formed collaborative relationships are welcome. The cost of the Leading & Learning Lab (tour), materials and some meals are covered. Attendees pay for travel and lodging.

Pringle addressing participants at the National Community Schools Learning Lab in Anaheim in April.



"Fight for the Right to Learn"

NEA President Becky Pringle visits California community schools

NEA PRESIDENT Becky Pringle was a special guest at the National Community Schools Learning Lab's multi-day session in Anaheim in April.

Pringle was there to participate in the Learning Lab's community schools visits and hear about best practices in implementing community schools' shared decision-making model involving educators, district administrators, community members, students and families.

The Learning Lab, funded by NEA's Great Public Schools initiative and coordinated by Anaheim Secondary Teachers Assn. and the Anaheim Union High School District, brings together teams of local stakeholders from across California and beyond. It recently took its program to several cities on the East Coast.

Pringle spoke to the attendees about community schools' significance in giving our children the education they deserve — and that in this current political climate, especially, how we must step up to protect the right to learn.

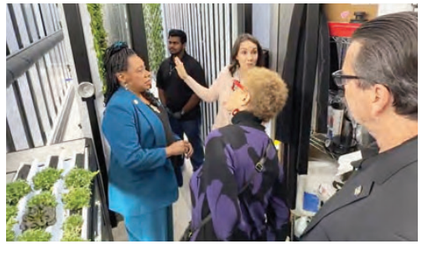
"Of all the civil rights for which this world has fought and died for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental," she said, quoting American sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. DuBois. "The freedom to learn has been bought by bitter sacrifice. So whatever you might think of the curtailment of other civil rights, you must fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn."

For more about your union's work with community schools, visit **cta.org/communityschools**.

Pringle with teacher and ASTA member Veronica Lopez at Loara High School.



Pringle and others at Magnolia High School's Agriscience Community Center (MACC) where MACC Farm Coordinator and ASTA Member Sabina Giakoumis explains that the walls are used to nurture and grow plants.



Year in Review

▼ Teams of CTA local leaders, district administrators, parents and community partners discuss foundational components of community schools, such as shared decision-making and ensuring all stakeholders have an equal voice.



COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS LEARNING LAB

Teams come together in Anaheim to learn best practices and chart their own path

IN SEPTEMBER 2024, the community schools movement took a huge step forward with the launch of the National Community Schools Learning Lab, coordinated by Anaheim Secondary Teachers Assn. (ASTA) and the Anaheim Union High School District.

Four CTA locals participated in the inaugural two-day program, along with their district administrators, parents and community partners. Since then, many more teams — including from the Pacific Northwest and East Coast — have benefited from the Learning Lab, which shows community schools in action; discusses shared governance and ensuring all stakeholders have an equal voice; and unpacks individual teams' unique needs, assets and path forward.

In April, NEA President Becky Pringle participated in a Learning Lab program, at one point speaking to all attendees. "Whatever you might think of the curtailment of other civil rights, you must fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn," she said, quoting activist W.E.B. DuBois. ➔

Our union is committed to community schools' democratic model of shared decision making, which helps build power within communities and leads to a more equitable society. Community schools have been shown to improve student outcomes, including in attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.

The Learning Lab is funded by NEA's Great Public Schools initiative. The state has also made a historic investment of $4.1 billion to help create new community schools and transition traditional schools in California. Read more about our work with community schools at **cta.org/communityschools.** ■

▼ NEA President Becky Pringle steps off the bus with CTA Board Member Grant Schuster on her visit to Anaheim community schools.



Learning Lab 2025–26 Dates

The National Community Schools Learning Lab's 2025–26 two-day programs are scheduled as follows:

- Sept. 23–24
- Oct. 21–22
- Feb. 24–25
- March 17–18
- Apr. 21–22

For more information email Sean Fleshman, Learning Lab Lead, at **ncslearninglab@gmail.com**.



▼ Joy with students at her floral workshop at the Magnolia Agriscience Community Center (at Magnolia High). The bouquets are sold, used for community farm-to-table dinners or given to community members as gifts.

From PATROL to Possibility

How the Community Schools model transformed my purpose

By **Katrina Joy**

MY FIRST RADIO CALL as a police officer alerted me to a crime scene where a 16-year-old had been shot and killed by a rival gang member. In the moments that followed, I did not have the luxury of time to process the grief and tragedy of the situation. It was the first of many indescribably difficult situations I would face during my six years working in law enforcement. Too often, those situations involved children whose lives should have been full of possibility. Each time, I had to bypass my emotions so that I could do my job.

Later in life, those neglected emotions would resurface in a completely different context — a classroom full of students.

Working as a police officer taught me a lot about my identity and values. I worked alongside men and women who cared deeply about the communities they served and many of those partners are still dear friends who I consider family. At the same time, while I still believe police work to be an incredibly honorable service, there was often a tangible feeling of grief I felt in my work because any rehabilitation or proactive measures felt impossible; many of the radio calls I responded to required me to be reactive. I made space for this frustration while being exposed to hard truths about our society and seeing more than someone could be expected to process on a daily basis.

Through the realities I absorbed, I quickly found my heart expanding for all those whose life paths didn't afford them opportunities to thrive. In particular, I felt drawn to youth who needed to be exposed to the open window of education and have someone walk next to them to show how they could let in the light that knowledge offers — the strength emerging in themselves grounded by their values.

The theme that surfaced was the desire to transform my personal mission from one centered on *help* into one of *hope*.

After a series of building events involving youth that caused my heart to beat for a different kind of purpose, I decided to resign from police work and become a teacher. But the impact of my years in police work gave me a unique lens when it came to teaching. I had seen decisions made that had challenging, sometimes fatal consequences, and I came into teaching caring less about test scores and more about how students could see themselves in the curriculum, their overall wellbeing and who they could become when engaged in a meaningful educational experience.

But an incident that occurred in the midst of my teaching career recalled many of the pained emotions I had experienced as a police officer.

Around the middle of my career, a student in my class who had recently graduated was killed by a gang member. He died protecting his brother. He was one of the kindest, most humble students I'd known. He was always the first to pick up my papers when they fell on the floor, and would hold the door open for others with no expectation of a thank you. He was the only student in my class who laughed at my horrible puns. In fondness, I gave him a nickname that stuck in our classroom and even on his football team.

His untimely death impacted me heavily, not only because of how unfair it was, but because much like what I experienced in police work, it was too late.

An internal question plagued me: *Could I have somehow prevented this?*

The tragedy of my student's death fueled me once again to view urgency in my interactions with students. Yet, I was also forced to accept that my power and influence were limited. At the time, although I still felt I could serve and help people, I was missing an important perspective that would blossom later in my career.

If we don't seek to understand our students as individuals, and if our students don't feel known and valued first, educational content becomes a brick we are throwing at a glass wall. I began to place content in the back seat in favor of "supporting the Whole Child" — a mantra that I did not know at the time was foundational to **the community schools model**.

The concept of the community schools model was transformative for me because the lens through which we view others (not just students) is asset-based. Instruction is focused on student voice and choice, civic engagement, culturally responsive teaching, social emotional learning and collaborative leadership. We believe that students, parents and teachers should all have a representative seat saved for them at the decision-making table. All of this results in students gaining confidence and establishing ownership over their educational experience. If we know our students first, we can give them an accurate depiction of their best selves; they then feel empowered to discover who they would like to become and how they can impact others.



Katrina Joy

> "Becoming part of the community school family transformed the way I see others — and how I see myself. The community school mindset helped me turn my personal mission from providing *help* into one of spreading *hope*."

Becoming a part of the community school family transformed the way I see others, and in turn, how I see myself. Importantly, the community school mindset helped me accomplish what I'd wanted to do since I first experienced a desire to work with youth: turn my personal mission from providing *help* into one of spreading *hope.* Rather than protecting or helping students, our job is to provide tools and create opportunities for them to feel empowered, independent and proud, so *they* can define success.

I have proudly held the position of Community School Teacher Lead for the past three years. When I compare myself today to who I was when I left police work, I am overwhelmed by the evolution that has taken place. I see students and youth differently. I see our community differently. I even see myself differently. Where fear previously crept in and wanted to swallow me whole during my attempts to protect students, I now choose to see courage, strength and glimmers of hope in who they are now, and who they can become.

Students need to have the space and confidence to explore who they are and feel valued. Only then will they have the freedom to make decisions that will empower themselves and inspire others. Instead of responding to the sense of urgency to help, we can take bold steps of hope. We can walk alongside them while they lead the way, and if we are fortunate enough to witness it, we can watch them open new windows of hope to let that same light in for others. ■

Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association member and 20-year educator Katrina Joy was a Community Schools Teacher Lead and senior English/Google Project Management teacher at Magnolia High School. This year, she will be an Outreach Teacher at Katella High, another community school in the Anaheim district. Joy is a 2025 winner of NEA Foundation's Travelers Award for Teaching Excellence.



CTA & Community Schools

Our union is committed to helping grow and support California's community schools, a partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and communities. Community schools' democratic model of shared decision-making ensures all students' needs are addressed so they can thrive, and helps build power with community that leads to a more equitable society. Find information and resources at **cta.org/communityschools**.

▼ CTA President David Goldberg speaks at the press conference announcing results of the community schools report by the Learning Policy Institute. Parents, educators, San Diego Education Assn. President Kyle Weinberg (in red T-shirt) and CTA Board Member Kisha Borden (to Goldberg's right) also participated in the event, which was held at Encanto Elementary School in San Diego.



Our Union's Fight for Community Schools

Landmark study shows improved student learning and well-being in just one year

OUR UNION'S ongoing fight to support and grow the community schools movement is making a big difference: A new report from the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) finds that community schools in California in the past year have positively impacted students and families in multiple ways. In addition to marked improvement in chronic absenteeism and suspension rates, students have made major gains in academic achievement — particularly among historically underserved students.

"Community Schools Impact on Student Outcomes: Evidence From California" shared encouraging results from LPI's research of the first cohort of California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) grantees with a full year of student outcome data. The evidence shows the state's investment in community schools is already creating transformative change, even in a short time.

"This report underscores what we already see happening at community schools across California: This is a model for public education that works," said CTA President David Goldberg at the press conference in September announcing the findings. "Our union has been proud to advocate for historic investment in this model that brings educators, parents, students, community organizations and administrators to the same table to make decisions about their school together.

"At a time when public education is under attack at the federal level, in California we are investing in models that work and organizing together for the schools our students deserve."

Our union has been deeply committed to helping grow and support California's community schools, a partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and communities, even before the CCSPP investment of $4.1 billion in 2021. CCSPP is the nation's largest community schools initiative, now serving more than 2,500 schools. Community schools' shared governance component is crucial to their success, and our union has been diligent across the state in fighting to get school district administrators to embrace this critical collaboration.

As Community Schools Coordinator Clarisa Elmore said at the press conference, held at Encanto Elementary (one of 35 community schools in the San Diego Unified School District), "Being a community school means inviting parents to the table — not just as participants, but as thought partners and leaders."

Next page:
Pittsburg's Community Schools honored

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

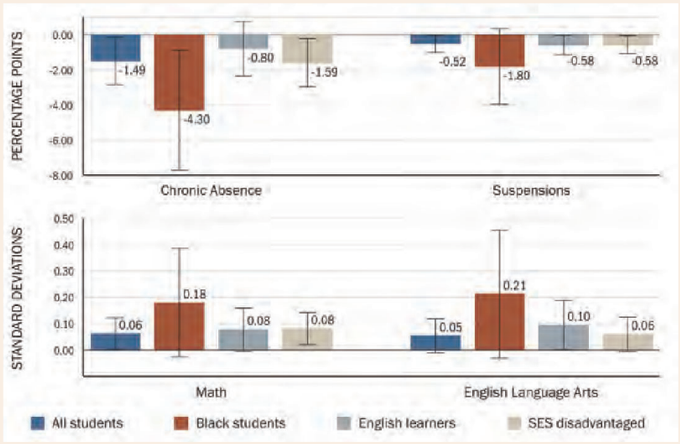
CTA & Community Schools

Our union is committed to helping grow and support California's community schools, in partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and communities. Read more of our coverage of CTA and members' work, and find information and resources, at **cta.org/communityschools**.

"At a time when public education is under attack at the federal level, in California we are investing in models that work and organizing together for the schools our students deserve."

—CTA President **David Goldberg**

▼ **Community Schools' Effects**
This chart shows the gains made by historically underserved students at community schools in CCSPP's first cohort in the first year. Outcomes are shown by student group (all students, Black students, English learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged).



Credit: Learning Policy Institute

Major Findings of the LPI Report

The LPI report shows how California's investment in community schools has significantly impacted student attendance, reduced suspension rates in schools and increased academic achievement scores, especially for students who have been historically underserved including Black students, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds. Major findings:

- Compared to matched comparison schools, community schools' chronic absence rates dropped by 30%, suspension rates fell by 15% and academic achievement rose.
- Black students and English learners saw gains equivalent to about 43 extra days of learning in math and 36 in English language arts.
- The strongest academic improvements occurred in schools with the greatest progress in attendance.
- Results suggest that community schools' holistic approach can reduce educational inequities and improve multiple student outcomes.

"The early results from the first cohort of schools served by the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) are promising," said Walker Swain, a principal researcher at LPI and lead author of the new report. "In just the first full year of implementation, CCSPP schools noticeably outperformed similar schools that did not receive grant funding, making significant reductions in chronic absence and suspension rates, along with improvements in student achievement; especially for historically underserved students.

"Our results echo findings from a similar RAND study of New York City community schools, where larger gains unfolded over a longer period of time. Together, these studies suggest community schools are a scalable tool for addressing educational inequalities and promoting deeper learning."

For the full report, visit **learningpolicyinstitute.org**.

▼ "Lunch on the Lawn" at Martin Luther King Jr. Junior High with families and community partners; photo: Jose Rodriguez, Community School coordinator.



PITTSBURG: Community Schools for the Win

PITTSBURG SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS have seen impressive gains in literacy, math and science assessment scores following adoption of the community schools model. State Superintendent of Schools Tony Thurmond, school district officials and Pittsburg Education Association (PEA) leadership held a special press event in October to celebrate.

PEA President Celia Medina-Owens spoke at the event, crediting community schools' shared decision-making model for student success. "We know that when educators and support staff are empowered to collaborate with school and district leadership, we can focus on the students and their individual needs and everyone thrives."

Statewide assessment results show that the number of Pittsburg Unified School District students who met or exceeded standard in English Language Arts increased by 4.6% since last year, while the rate of students who met or exceeded standard rose by 1.5% in math and 2.9% in science. In addition, students' average scale score increased in every grade level and nearly every student demographic group for ELA and math.

All 13 schools in Pittsburg district are community schools. Nine schools have grant money from the California Community Schools Partnership Program, which has seen a total investment of $4.1 billion statewide since its launch in 2021. Four schools are funded through their LCAPs.

California's community schools address the whole child, where academics are intertwined with student well-being and social-emotional learning. The schools build partnerships with community organizations to provide resources, such as mental health services and family outreach including home visits, that engage both families and students. Visit **cta.org/communityschools** for more. ■

▼ Students vote for their representatives for the Community Schools Site-Based Steering Committee at Marina Vista Elementary; photo: Kelly Johnson, Community School coordinator.



"When educators and support staff are empowered to collaborate with school and district leadership, we can focus on the students and everyone thrives."

—Pittsburg Education Assn. President **Celia Medina-Owens**



◀ Far right: Central Unified Teachers Assn. members Alex Mejia, community schools site committee member, and to her right Judee Martinez, Teague community schools site coordinator and CUTA bargaining advisory team for community schools member. Others pictured: Betty Barajas, Teague classified community schools member (far left), school/district administrators and a community partner.

Put It in Writing!

Community Schools language in your contract ensures a continuing process that benefits students, families and educators

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS CONTINUE to make a big impact on students, educators and communities up and down the state. In addition to results showing marked improvement in student learning and well-being in just one year — as documented in a recent report by the Learning Policy Institute (see Resources box) — community schools and their shared decision-making model are effectively bringing together multiple interest-holders to chart the path to student success.

Through regular and meaningful discussion and assessment, interest-holders have equal voice and include students, families, community partners, district administrators — and educators. While each community school is unique, reflecting the needs of its students and families, CTA locals whose members teach and work in thriving community schools are seeing the value of shared governance and are bargaining community schools' memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and language into contracts to ensure systems and structures stay in place.

"For Pittsburg Education Association, this was an important priority, as PEA sought a formal commitment from the management team to work collaboratively with educators as partners in the transformation of our schools," says President Celia Medina-Owens. PEA had to fight for their MOU; the process took eight months and involved member actions and help from student families and community.

"Management was hesitant to sign a binding document because of the shared leadership component. PEA had to take actions — we rallied; we spoke to the school board and brought in families, community and educators to speak."

—PEA President **Celia Medina-Owens**

Community schools are supported by the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), which has invested $4.1 billion statewide since its launch in 2021. As funding could expire in the next few years, the issue of sustainability of community schools looms large and makes it all the more important to codify in chapter contracts.

The path to the bargaining table looks different from local to local. Below are the unique stories of five CTA locals' community schools journeys that lead to the bargaining table, by five areas of focus:

1. **Get informed and take the lead to chart your path.**
2. **Strategize and implement what works best for your local and each site.**
3. **Build member and other interest-holder support.**
4. **Negotiations: Take necessary actions, hold district accountable.**
5. **Sustaining community schools.**

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▼ WETA Organizing Chair Allyson Banales-Pfeifer, President Julie McCarty and Human Rights and Equity Chair Alie Mercado.



1

Get informed and take the lead to chart your path through trainings, other locals' experience

Whittier Elementary Teachers Association, *with 310 members, has a Community Schools MOU in place. Its K–8 district has 11–12 total sites (the virtual learning academy is separate). "We jumped in with eight community schools at once, two are middle schools," recalls WETA President Julie McCarty. "We got a state Implementation grant in April 2022, but the first year we spent planning instead of implementing because this was all brand new to us."*

According to McCarty, WETA leadership with community schools stems from its ongoing participation in various CTA and NEA programs. "In summer of 2022, four of us went to CTA Summer Institute's Community Schools strand not knowing anything. It completely changed our direction. We learned how to take the lead and make shared decision-making a sustainable model. We went back to the district with so much knowledge.

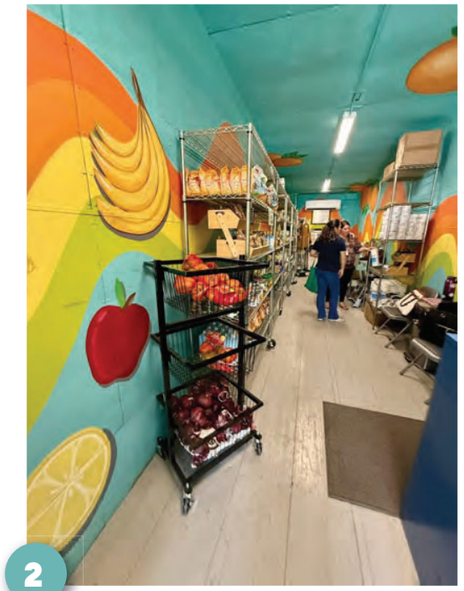
"The following CTA Summer Institutes we sent a large group of educators, including our program specialist and many of our site coordinators. We've held strategy sessions with CTA staff. We've learned from other locals. We hope to send another team this year to Summer Institute. We truly feel that this is one of the most valuable trainings offered for community schools."

In addition, WETA has participated in

- The Community Schools strand at CTA Issues Conference (now CTA Organizing Academy).
- NEA's Social & Racial Justice Conference.
- NEA's Community Schools Benchmark Academy.
- A CTA social and racial justice workshop in Whittier, which included district administrators.

WETA has also sent different teams — including classified staff, who are community schools' community liaisons — and district administrators to multiple sessions of NEA's National Community Schools Learning Lab in Anaheim.

▼ The Teague Elementary temperature-controlled food pantry.



2

Strategize and implement what works best for your local and each site's unique needs; use other locals' MOUs or articles as models

The almost-900 members of ***Central Unified Teachers Association*** *(CUTA) work in a school district just outside of Fresno. The district started with one community school, then added five more. "The first school is further along, with a food pantry in a temperature-controlled building, and a clothing closet," says CUTA President Laura Bolton. "Some of our community schools are really rural, there are no community resources nearby, so they look different than those closer to city areas.*

"We achieved a signed Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) agreement on community schools with our district on Sept. 30, 2025. It is four pages and focuses on shared decision-making and governance.

"We attempted to bargain for three years to get an MOU approved. We had a ton of turnover in the district office, with two superintendents and two interim superintendents, so there were a lot of stops and starts. We used a CTA template

▼ Roosevelt Elementary in Fresno celebrated Diwali Art Night as a community schools collaborative event.



from one of the community schools trainings early on — essentially a demand to bargain.

"One superintendent was open to community schools and applied for state funds. CUTA had applied for an NEA community schools grant and was approved, and we used that for trainings. We started with one site, which already had a strong relationship with the community center and the church across the street. Now we have six sites — all with the SOP agreement in place.



Laura Bolton

"An assistant superintendent came up with the SOP idea, and we wrote it collaboratively for the community schools site leadership teams. We [also] started an SOP handbook — a how-to, with procedures in place.

"We put the SOP in the handbook and inserted a section that states it cannot be changed without the permission of CUTA or the community schools steering team. We signed the document so it's binding and enforceable. And CUTA did not have to give up bargaining rights to put the agreement into the contract later.

"The SOP is accessible to the community, parents, students, etc. and in that way holds the district accountable." CUTA's leadership and work with the SOP also serves as an example that other locals can follow.

3 Build relationships with your members and other interest-holders (parents, community partners and district)

a. Chris Anderson, Stockton Teachers Assn.

Stockton Teachers Association *(STA) has 1,942 members and has been working on community schools since the CCSPP grants started in 2022. The Stockton school district received implementation grants for 20+ schools (out of 55 sites) in the first round. Additional schools were added in the next round for a total of 41 community schools — "and other schools are lined up," says STA President Dr. Chris Anderson.*

Sites that implemented community schools first have hired coordinators and are in the process of ensuring functioning steering committees. At the district level, the steering committee is meeting regularly and includes all labor interest-holders. The district is still working on getting parent and community groups engaged.



Chris Anderson

"Our school board passed a resolution supporting community schools, and STA is currently working on community schools contract language that matches what's in the resolution.

"When I went to the first community schools steering committee for our district, I looked around the table and said, 'Where is the rest of labor?' We have nine different units in our district. Everybody needs to be a part of this; every unit and stakeholder needs to be represented.

"We had to educate everyone about community schools, so that they know the grant money is to pay for coordinators — who are not just extra office workers — and to build teams and work with parents. It's about the site using the existing funds and community resources that they might not be taking advantage of. That is the needs and assets assessment: What are the needs at each school — a gym? Tutoring sessions? Classes for parents so they can support students in their learning? Food support?

Continued on Page 33

A Sample: UTR's Community Schools Contract Language

Article 53 of United Teachers of Richmond's current contract contains community schools language. "Support Collaborative" is the local and West Contra Costa Unifled School District's term for the community schools steering committee. An excerpt:

Section 2. District Community Schools Support Collaborative

WCCUSD will model a community schools engagement ethos at all levels of this work. At the district level, the WCCUSD Community School Support Collaborative shall be formed. The Support Collaborative shall make decisions and provide all participating schools with a robust set of universal supports focusing on community engagement, positive school climate, and they key goals of the district's Instructional Focus Plan. The Support Collaborative will decide how funds are allocated and make policy decisions based on district date.

The Support Collaborative shall consist of 20 members composed of partners that share a commitment to support the purpose and creation of a Community School model in WCCUSD.

1. The WCCUSD Support Collaborative (Support Collaborative) shall
    a. support Community Schools operations with planning, technical assistance and additional resources to support site level community school operations,
    b. support messaging around WCCUSD's community school implementation and strategy, and
    c. design and support implementation of a Needs and Asset Assessment and Community Schools implementation rubric by April 2023.
2. There shall be four co-chairs: WCCUSD, UTR, a parent who is not an employee or contractor with the District, and another member from the following groups: other bargaining units, funders, or community. The fourth co-chair shall be selected by majority vote of members of the District MDAC, DLCAP, CAC, and AASAT committees. Each co-chair shall appoint 5 members to the Support Collaborative. The Support Collaborative shall consist of membership from labor, relevant community organizations and advocacy groups, funders, parents and students. The co-chairs shall (1) set the schedule of the meetings and determine the agenda, (2) help to lead critical projects of the Support Collaborative and (3) allocate matching resources towards the initiative.
    a. Support Collaborative members will agree to serve on the committee for one year coinciding with the District's fiscal year. Members may serve more than one year if a party reappoint them.

Resources

- For more about **NEA's National Community Schools Learning Lab** in Anaheim, email Sean Fleshman, NCSLL Lead, at **ncslearninglab@gmail.com**.
- Learning Policy Institute report "**Community Schools Impact on Student Outcomes: Evidence From California**," Sept. 2025, **learningpolicyinstitute.org**.

"We had to educate everyone about community schools, so that they know grant money is to pay for coordinators — who are not just extra office workers — and to build teams and work with parents."

—STA President
Dr. Chris Anderson

Continued from Page 31

Medical support? There is no one answer for all sites.

"With a shared leadership model, these are the cookies on the plate, so how do we use them? The funding will be gone in five-to-seven years. We front-load what we want and need and then taper it down, so at the end, it's part of your school plan."

b. ***United Teachers of Richmond*** *(UTR), with approximately 1,500 members, was among the first locals in the state to bargain community schools language into its contract. Even before that, UTR worked with interest-holders to ensure multiple voices were captured: The local, its district and several community partners worked on the CCSPP application together and after funding was received, all three parties worked on language that was codified in a contract article in the 2022–23 school year. The article expires in 2031.*

"Some district officials didn't understand why this had to be in the contract, since we were in agreement," says Cathy Baker, UTR's Elementary Director currently on special assignment as an NEA/CTA Community Schools support specialist. "An assistant superintendent who felt this way at the time recently told me, 'Now I get it.'"

UTR's contract article has served as a model for other locals. "It stipulates that each community schools site must have a community schools director — a full-time, paid position that is open to all, including educators, district staff and community partners."

Baker notes that many UTR members serve as community schools teacher leads, positions that offer educators stipends and time while they continue to teach.

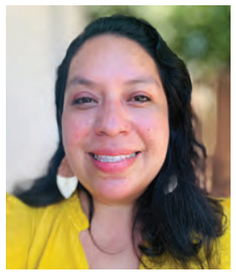
Almost 30 of 54 sites in West Contra Costa are community schools, a mix of elementary, middle and high schools. UTR is currently starting to address the sustainability of community schools, engaging the district and community partners in discussion.

▼ Food distribution at a Pittsburg community school.



4 Negotiations: Take necessary actions, hold district accountable

a. ***Pittsburg Education Association*** *(PEA) boasts 98% union membership, with 604 members. All 13 schools in its district are community schools. Nine schools have CCSPP grant money; four are funded through their Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) process.*



Celia Medina-Owens

Pittsburg schools and students have seen impressive gains in literacy, math and science assessment scores following adoption of the community schools model, and were honored for their accomplishments in October at a press event by State Superintendent of Schools Tony Thurmond.

"We bargained CS language in an MOU and got it signed on April 11, 2024," says PEA President Medina-Owens. "Now we're focused on implementation and enforcement."

"It took eight months to get the MOU signed. Our district had passed a resolution making a commitment to community schools, but management was hesitant to sign a binding document because of the shared leadership component. PEA had to take actions — we rallied; we spoke to the school

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▼ Community Schools teams in Whittier packing up boxes of food to get ready for food distributions.



board and brought in families, community and educators to speak.

"We also continued to work with the management team to educate them on community schools — what they are, how we and they envisioned them and our goals to change the systems.

"We held meetings with them and CTA and NEA. We were moving at the speed of trust. We borrowed language from Natomas Teachers Association for our MOU and reached out to Natomas again for their revised MOU.

"We had a lot of challenges, and we continue to have challenges and work through them. We now have a working relationship with the district."

At the October press event, Medina-Owens attributed community schools' shared governance for their success. "We know that when educators and support staff are empowered to collaborate with school and district leadership, we can focus on the students and their individual needs and everyone thrives."

b. Whittier Elementary Teachers Association (WETA) bargained its first Community Schools MOU in 2023.

"When we first went to the district about community schools, we were shut down," says WETA President Julie McCarty. "We kept pushing them, inundating them with info about the state grants and community schools. [Admin finally applied for a grant,] then our superintendent and SpEd director told us that we'd received $10.4 million over five years.

▼ In mid-January, PEA and neighboring Antioch Education Association sponsored a Crepes & Community Schools event; attendees played community schools-themed bingo based on CCSPP grant language.



It was an exciting moment.

"But the district had problems with shared governance, shared decision-making and how to spend the money. It was hard to get our superintendent to go to anything — he went to the Anaheim Learning Lab but didn't stay the whole time, same at steering committee meetings. School board members attended, including one who was opposed to community schools; the Lab opened her eyes. WETA had to keep updating the board on the value of community schools.

"During MOU negotiations, we really had to fight. It was not a pleasant environment. The turning point was having CTA staff with WETA meeting with the district's team. We were able to turn things around in our favor, with strong language that Montebello and Alhambra locals had used, for our MOU. For example, our language specified that community school site coordinators could not be used for other jobs."

▼ Students vote for their representatives for the Community Schools Site-Based Steering Committee at Marina Vista Elementary in Richmond; photo: Kelly Johnson, Community School coordinator.



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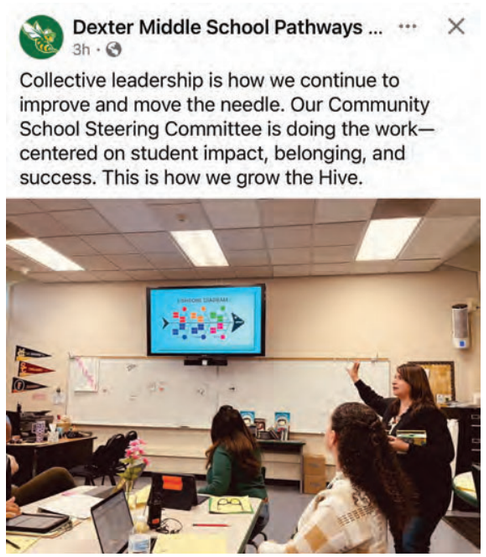
Sustaining community schools' practices and relationships

a. Pittsburg Education Association President Celia Medina-Owens says, "We're looking at the sustainability of community schools practices that we are implementing, meaning will we continue these practices when the funding runs out? Our vision is to change systems within our schools, even without state funding, so the services we provide are sustainable.

"At our one comprehensive high school — with 167 PEA educators and 3000+ students — a sustainable practice is the community closet where families can get food and clothing; it's a hub for families to support literacy and treat anxiety. This is not funded by grants — we use LCAP funds. Other community schools use grant money to provide glasses to students, so we have to think how to continue this service."

b. *Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association* *(ASTA) has been at the forefront of the community schools movement in California for years — so much so that the NEA-funded National Community Schools Learning Lab is run through ASTA in collaboration with the Anaheim Union High School District. (NCSLL hosts CTA locals and community schools teams from around the country in multi-day trainings.) Currently, three-fourths of district schools are community schools; plans to transition the rest to community schools in the next year, funded by the district, are underway.*

▼ A Dexter Middle School (Whittier) post about its community schools steering committee.



ASTA, with 1,125 members, secured its community schools MOU in January 2023. "The MOU will last the length of the [five-year] CCSPP grant," says ASTA President Geoff Morganstern. "We also are working to extend to year six of the grant with our existing funds so the sustainability discussion will be for the 2027–28 school year. We'll then recommend that we update the MOU once all interest-holders collaboratively decide what sustainability will look like."

For the MOU, ASTA and the district formed a subcommittee of the community schools steering committee to make language recommendations for both parties to consider at the bargaining table.

"Contract bargaining is historically between the union and the district. We pitched the subcommittee idea to the district in the spirit of community schools and collaborative leadership — to use the community schools process to create collective bargaining. This also helps build parent and community relationships, as we are not excluding them from something so central.

ASTA's relationship with the district as a result of community schools work helps both parties get through tough challenges, as with the 2023–24 layoff fight. The work also strengthens family and community support for ASTA's goals.

"We use our contacts and relationships to build support. We were very successful in fighting layoffs by engaging our community, and now through the We Can't Wait (WCW) campaign. After talks with ASTA and the district, the school board passed a resolution supporting WCW. [Relationships] help us get further down the road because the board and community are familiar with and generally supportive of the goals."

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CTA & Community Schools

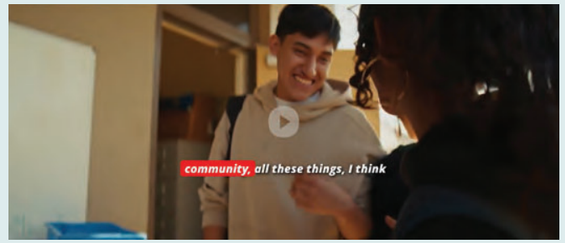
Our union is committed to helping grow and support California community schools, in partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and communities. Read more of our coverage of our union's work and find resources at **cta.org/communityschools**.

View our new community schools videos! Visit **youtube.com/Californiateachers** to watch our new short videos that convey information and thoughts about community schools from a community schools coordinator, students and a parent.

▼ Screenshot from a new CTA video showing the four pillars of community schools.



▼ A scene from an Anaheim community school video, one of several new videos produced by CTA.



▼ At the UnRig California rally and press conference in March, CTA President David Goldberg joined labor unions, community organizations and others in demanding that our legislators close corporate tax loopholes.



Fully Fund Our Schools

Our union's 2026–27 legislative platform demands funding, fairness for educators, students and public schools — now

WE LIVE IN the fourth largest economy in the world, and yet our schools lack the resources to support students and educators. Unstable funding, federal cuts and unfair and disruptive policies have created massive inequities in classrooms and on campuses across California. In our survey of 2,000 CTA members earlier this year, 88% of respondents said that insufficient school funding is a serious issue, citing lack of resources, inadequate staffing and overcrowded classrooms as results.

In addition, educators are increasingly worried about affordability for themselves and the families of their students, including the cost of housing, everyday goods and services, health care and basic household expenses.

Educators reported a willingness to strike for improved teaching and learning conditions, wages and benefits — and have done so at multiple locals up and down the state.

Fully funded schools are the key. We know what works — from the shared governance model of community schools to a district budgeting system focused on today's students to making our profession a viable and respected option for future educators. We know that billionaires and corporations must pay their fair share to make these initiatives happen. Our union will fight for all this and more in the State Legislature this coming year. Visit **cta.org/legislative-advocacy** for details.

Our 2026–27 Legislative Platform:

- Protect school funding promised by Prop. 98
- Increased revenue for schools and communities
- Commitment to Community Schools: A model for public schools
- Establish paid pregnancy leave for educators
- Relief for school communities with emergency state loans
- Eliminate 3-year budget manipulation
- Strengthen the teacher pipeline

▼ Students and their teacher at Buena Vista Horace Mann K–8 in San Francisco, a community school.





3

COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: A MODEL FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Our union is committed to helping grow and support California Community Schools, in partnership with students, families, communities, school districts and the state.

The community schools model of meaningful shared governance and shared decision-making has proven to be a resounding success: In a year's time, according to a Learning Policy Institute (LPI) study, students at community schools have made major gains in academic achievement and social-emotional well-being. Community schools have transformed into neighborhood hubs that integrate high-caliber education with mental and physical health and other community services to support students and their families.

The state has provided $4 billion to fund the California Community Schools Partnership Program, and nearly 2,500 schools, or about 25% of the state's campuses, have received grant funding since 2021. In his 2026–27 State Budget, Gov. Newsom is proposing an ongoing annual appropriation of $1 billion to CCSPP to maintain and expand community schools. Under his proposal, an additional 3,700 schools would be eligible for funding each year.

"Our union fully supports ensuring the sustainability of community schools by building this funding into the state budget formula," said Goldberg. With more funding on the horizon for Community Schools, our union is advocating for shared governance models in every layer of the community schools infrastructure, strengthened eligibility, oversight and accountability measures, and improved systems of support for implementation guidance.

"By pairing sustained funding with clear eligibility standards, strong accountability and aligned support systems, community schools can continue to be transformative spaces that uplift students, families and entire communities," Goldberg added.

In addition to significant academic gains, the LPI study showed students at community schools increased attendance and engagement at schools: Chronic absenteeism declined, on average, 30% more than at comparison schools and suspension rates decreased by an average of 15% while comparison schools saw slight increases. Gains were greater at elementary schools and among underserved students.

Community schools' whole-child approach with programs and services tailored to individual school and student needs; and student, parent and community voice in decision-making and governance results in students, their families and community members who are more connected and engaged with school.

To learn more about CTA's work with community schools, visit **cta.org/communityschools**.

▼ Students at Magnolia High's Agriscience Community Center in Anaheim after preparing a community dinner; Magnolia is one of 13 community schools in Anaheim Union High School District.



▼ Pittsburg families and community partners at a lunch gathering at Martin Luther King Jr. Junior High; all 13 schools in the district are community schools and have been recognized for their students' academic gains.



Community Schools Work

The successful shared-governance model receives ongoing budget funding

OUR UNION'S WORK with community schools, in partnership with educators, families, communities, school districts and the state, has resulted in strong schools with engaged students that are the hubs of their neighborhoods.

Students at community schools across the state have made major strides academically and on social-emotional levels, according to a recent Learning Policy Institute study, including higher test scores and improved attendance. Both students and their families find supports at community schools that help them flourish, including mental and physical health services and resources, community assistance and educational offerings tailored to their needs.

The 2026–27 State Budget reflects community schools' essential place in education, with $1 billion in ongoing funding to the California Community Schools Partnership Program. This funding will help maintain and expand the community schools model, rooted in shared decision-making among all stakeholders. Since the program's inception in 2021, about 2,500 schools, or about 25% of the state's campuses, have received grant funding. The new funding means an additional 3,700 schools would be eligible for funding each year.

The new funding comes with strengthened, ongoing eligibility criteria; new accountability and oversight measures; enhanced systems of support, including technical assistance; and more money for planning and implementing of the community schools model, including professional development.

"At a time when public education is under attack at the federal level, in California we are investing in models that work and organizing together for the schools our students deserve."

—CTA President **David Goldberg**

"Thanks to continued organizing and advocacy from educators across California, the State Budget now includes $1 billion for community schools along with stronger accountability measures to ensure districts implement a true bottom-up, democratic school model," said CTA President David Goldberg.

"Our union has been proud to advocate for historic investment in this model that brings educators, parents, students, community organizations and administrators to the same table to make decisions about their school together. At a time when public education is under attack at the federal level, in California we are investing in models that work and organizing together for the schools our students deserve." ■