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December 14, 2021

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond
President, State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Superintendent Thurmond and State Board of Education President Darling-Hammond,

On behalf of the over 300,000 members of the California Teachers Association (CTA), we are writing to you to provide our recommendations on the Community Schools Framework that is currently under development and the subsequent RFAs for the Planning Grants, Implementation Grants, and Lead TA Center Grant that will be developed shortly thereafter.

CTA strongly supports the historic investment of nearly \$3 billion for Community Schools and the work being done by the California Department of Education and the State Board of Education to develop the detailed plans that will help with the awarding of the funds throughout the state. This investment in Community Schools instantly made it the largest of its kind in the country and provides a real opportunity to transform public education for our students and communities.

CTA has been working with the National Education Association (NEA)'s Community Schools Strategic Campaign Institute – an exciting national initiative that was launched in February 2021, in which local educators and community partners in almost 50 cities and towns across the country are building strategic campaigns to win Community Schools. We see Community Schools as a unique vehicle to improve public education in historically marginalized communities, address racial injustice, increase parent/youth/community involvement in schools, expand democratically shared leadership, build community/labor coalitions, and initiate innovative community development efforts.

With California's historic investment in Community Schools, we have an incredible opportunity to transform our public schools for more racially just and democratic institutions for our students to learn, our members to teach, and our communities to thrive. California's historic investment in Community Schools dwarfs that of other states and even the federal allocation. It also raises the stakes of what we do in California. It is imperative that we lead the way with a successful, comprehensive, democratic, student and community-focused, racial justice-infused, school improvement-centered model.

Community Schools Framework

Given this historic level of investment, CTA encourages rigorous guidance and a comprehensive Community Schools Framework regarding educator and community engagement to ensure California's investment of \$2.8 billion promotes a deep, sustainable, and community-based model of Community Schools. In our research, practice, and organizing in the NEA Community Schools Strategic Campaign Institute, we have seen successful Community School models across the country, and unfortunately many weak or cookie-cutter models. We urge you to develop the framework in a manner that concretely supports a model built on six pillars of practice:

- 1) Strong, relevant curriculum
- 2) High-quality teaching
- 3) Collaborative and inclusive leadership
- 4) Restorative practices
- 5) Family and community partnerships
- 6) Community support services

As laid out by some of our partner organizations, student voice and engagement must be woven throughout the framework. Additionally, we believe the state and framework should model the democratic approach to decision making that has been the hallmark of transformative Community Schools. While the state has conducted statewide Community Schools Forums, we believe that this is just the beginning of the work, and we urge the state to continue to work with a broad sector of stakeholders at both the state and local levels to create a framework that requires districts receiving Community School monies to have the following:

- 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 that school's unique program
- Training and systematic coaching for Community School coordinators and others to support the development and implementation 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 model
- Expanded decision-making purview for parents, youth, community, and educators at each Community School
- A district-wide Community Schools Steering Committee within each district receiving funding

We have seen that committees like this guide the process with all the above elements, play an essential role in assessing and evaluating the work while also spreading best practices. At a local level, these steering committees lead on community engagement, ensure broad and diverse stakeholder leadership at the highest levels of the initiative, and help create sustainable funding.

We also believe that having the Statewide Advisory Council up and running as soon as possible will be key to ensuring fidelity of implementation of the pending framework. The Statewide Advisory Council would ensure democratic community stakeholder involvement, ongoing state level guidance, community and educator engagement, pathways to sustainable funding, and ongoing evaluation and assessment. This ongoing support for the work will be essential at the state level to ensure local district plans are successful.

Lastly, we believe that site visits to Community Schools across the state will be a vital piece of the development process and that they should happen as soon as possible.

RFA Development Recommendations

In addition to building in guardrails that concretely support a model built on the Community Schools Model advanced by the National Education Association, the students, educators, families and communities that we work with need the following related language as a part of the framework and specifically outlined in the RFAs for the Planning Grants, Implementation Grants and the Technical Assistance Center Grants.

Planning Grant RFA Recommendations

The following recommendations should be used as “guardrails” for the Planning Grant RFA to ensure Transformational Community Schools and must be inserted as commitments from the LEAs receiving funding.

- General Planning Grant Requirements to Receive Funding
 - **Base funding of \$200,000 for each school site**
 - This amount would be used to cover the Community Schools Coordinator
 - **Require a District Community School Steering Committee co-chaired by the district and a member of the local education association**
 - There are currently a variety of models being used in Los Angeles and San Diego that have been effective.
 - **Application signoff by collective bargaining unit/s**
 - This will ensure that collective planning is done up front and that the groundwork for transformational change can be done in partnership.
- Planning Grant Commitments to be considered for additional Implementation Grant Funding
 - Commitment to adopt a school board policy related to Community Schools that includes the Community School Steering Committee (CSSC)
 - Commitment to adopt a needs/assets assessment process that engages at least 75 to 100% of students, school staff, and families that uses the following strategies: 1-on-1 conversations, surveys, small and large meetings.
 - Commitment to democratically selecting the participating schools, such as implementing an application process.
 - Commitment to adopt the following recommendations for the Community School Steering Committee
 - Select co-chairs: The district and the education association should each select co-chairs and 5 members to join the co-chairs.
 - Each co-chair should select 5 members. For example, the district chooses a co-chair and 5 members, and the education association chooses a co-chair and 5 members.
 - Populate the CSSC with Community School experts, students, parents/caregivers, educators, administrators/principals, key district staff, community members/organizations.
 - Commitment to adopt the following Community School Steering Committee areas of focus:
 - Funding: The CSSC works to ensure there is adequate funding to maintain the current Community Schools core infrastructure and to support the growth of Community Schools.
 - Community School Selection: The CSSC develops and implements the application process and determines whether to grow the Community School strategy in any given year.

- Support Implementation: Receives regular reports from Community School coaches and other Community School implementers to learn what types of supports are needed for Community School Coordinators and other school and community stakeholders that are outside of the grasp of coaches and managers to provide. The CSSC works to provide those supports.
 - Evaluation: The CSSC receives regular reports from those leading the Community School Implementation on the quality of implementation. CSSC develops a framework for evaluation (e.g., Logic Model). The CSSC also is tasked with the recruitment of an external evaluator.
 - Awareness: The CSSC develops and implements a plan to share the successes and key learnings of the Community School strategy with key groups, such as the school board, city council, the Community School Collective Impact Committee, media, school and community stakeholders, etc.
 - Commitment to provide answers to the following questions before hiring the first Community School Coordinator (CSC):
 - What will be the composition of the Community School Steering Committee?
 - Who develops the agendas for CSSC meetings?
 - How often should the CSSC meet?
 - How should the CSSC make decisions?
 - Supporting Community School Coordinator
 - Who guides and supports the work of the CSC??
 - What curriculum will the CSCs in your district follow to accomplish their job?
 - What modification, if any, will you want to make to the curriculum to personalize it for your district?
 - Will your Community School staff and stakeholders join a national professional learning community (PLC) that supports best practices?
 - Which national PLC will Community School staff and stakeholders join?
 - How will the CSCs and other school stakeholders be consistently coached and supported while they are on their journey to implement Community School best practices?
 - What are the top skills you need to look for in your Community School Coordinator?
 - What will the job description for the CSC include?
 - How will schools be selected to become Community Schools?
 - What district level department will house the Community School manager?
 - Where does the Community School strategy fit in the district's strategic plan?
 - School Principals:
 - How will the district support community school principals to lead community schools effectively?
 - How will the district integrate Community School expectations for principals, so they don't see the community school strategy as an added job responsibility, but one that is aligned with their role as school leader?

Implementation Grant RFA Round One Recommendations

CTA believes that the CDE must ensure that access to Implementation Grant funds in Round One is limited to those eligible LEAs that meet certain threshold criteria of Community Schools Implementation. The threshold criteria should mirror all points outlined above for the Planning Grant RFA recommendations.

Funding under the Implementation Grant RFA should be consistent and easily digestible. Using a “band” system that is differentiated by the size of student population could be an effective way to manage these comprehensive RFAs.

One approach could be:

- Schools with 0-250 students are eligible for \$200,000 per year
- Schools with 251-500 students are eligible for \$250,000 per year
- Schools with 501-1,000 students are eligible for \$300,000 per year
- Schools with 1,001-1,500 students are eligible for \$350,000 per year
- Schools with 1,501-2,000 students are eligible for \$400,000 per year
- Schools with 2,001-2,500 students are eligible for \$450,000 per year
- Schools with over 2,500 students are eligible for \$500,000 per year

Additionally, qualifying entities that apply for Implementation Grants must make comprehensive commitments to meeting the intent of the Community Schools Framework. These commitments would be monitored by the District’s Community Schools Steering Committee as well as by the regional TA centers via the annual reports and other TA mechanisms.

CTA also believes that funding for the Implementation Grants should be annually for six years (2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25, 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28). Those LEAs and schools that have been ahead of the curve should not be punished with less funding and fewer years of support.

Technical Assistance Center RFA Recommendations

CTA recommends that the CDE and SBE adopt an approach to the Technical Assistance Centers that mirrors the 21st Century California School Leadership Academy (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ai/ca21csla.asp>) and deploys a similar approach to partnership and regional coverage. **The initial RFA for the Technical Assistance Center should be focused on awarding a “Statewide Lead TA Center” that can serve as the backbone of the TA structure** and help to ensure high quality content and technical assistance is developed and then ultimately deployed in a comprehensive manner and with fidelity.

A key first step would be to have the CDE immediately ask interested parties to submit “Letters of Interest”. This will help to better identify those qualified LEAs in partnership with IHEs, nonprofits and other qualified community organizations that are interested in providing these robust supports.

Once the “Statewide Lead TA Center” is identified and awarded, the next phase of RFAs for the “Regional TA Centers” can begin. This round of RFA should also require “Letters of Interest” to help immediately identify those qualified LEAs in different regions of the state who are prepared to partner with the Statewide Lead TA Center and serve as a regional hub.

The regional hubs should be limited to five regions of the state so to not dilute the funding and each regional hub should be responsible for delivering high quality technical assistance that is aligned with the statewide effort but to also work with the Lead TA Center to identify needs from the field.

Filling the Support Gap

CTA highlighted in our letter to the State Board of Education at their November meeting that there will be a potential gap of support for this program between the time the RFAs are released; LEAs are applying for funds; the time that the Lead TA Center is identified, funded and up and running; and then LEAs beginning to implement the Planning and Implementation Grants. CTA stands ready to support the CDE with the CCSPP Advisory Council and to lend our expertise with Community Schools to fill this gap and ensure that this program is successful.

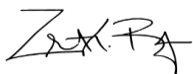
Conclusion

While this letter serves as a comprehensive response to the development of the Community Schools Framework and the subsequent RFAs, CTA would like to highlight some of the key pieces that we believe will help this historic investment in Community Schools truly transformative for students, educators, families, and communities.

- **The State Advisory Council should be identified and engaged immediately**
- **The District Community Schools Steering Committee should be co-chaired by the District and the Education Association**
- **Recommend the base funding amount of \$200,000 for Planning Grants as well as the floor amount awarded for Implementation Grants**
- **Require teacher association sign off for the grant applications**
- **Fund the Implementation Grants for the entirety of the CCSPP**

CTA believes that this historic investment in Community Schools is the right approach to help provide services and support that fit each neighborhood's needs and ensure that they are created and run by the people who know our students best: families, educators, community organizations, and the students themselves. CTA stands ready to support this work and to ensure that it is implemented with these end goals in mind.

Sincerely,



E. Toby Boyd, President
California Teachers Association

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