

# Funding Community Schools in California

Dion Burns, Michael Griffith, and Anna Maier

## Summary

In the past 2 years, California has made significant investments to support the expansion of community schools statewide, including \$4.1 billion to establish the California Community Schools Partnership Grant Program. In addition to leveraging new state funds, sustainably financing a community schools strategy may also involve blending and braiding local, state, and federal funding sources. This brief provides an overview of some state and federal funding sources that may be used to support a community schools approach in California.

## Community Schools in California

The community schools strategy transforms a school into a place where educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development.<sup>1</sup> Research finds that well-implemented community schools can lead to improvements in student outcomes—including attendance, academic achievement, and graduation rates—and advance equity.<sup>2</sup> The community schools strategy holds particular promise as schools seek to support learning recovery and emerge from the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> As described in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) framework, successful implementation requires not just adding services, but also building a positive school climate and trusting relationships, along with providing rich learning opportunities that prepare all students for college, career, and life success.<sup>4</sup>

California has made significant investments in the past 2 years to support the expansion of community schools across the state, including \$4.1 billion in one-time Proposition 98 funds to establish the California Community Schools Partnership Grant Program. In addition to leveraging new state funds, sustainably financing a community schools strategy may also involve redeploying existing resources and drawing on one-time and ongoing federal, state, local, and private sources to enable school and community partnerships and to address student needs. Community schools can blend and braid local, state, and federal funding sources to sustain the approach,<sup>5</sup> which may be especially important once grant funds expire.

Finding funding for any new educational program or initiative can be overwhelming. District and school leaders may find it helpful to create an inventory of current and planned activities and of current federal, state, and local funding sources at their school sites or local education agencies (LEAs).

What follows is an overview of some state and federal funding sources that may be used to support a community schools approach in California. The list is not exhaustive; for example, it does not address the many local funding sources that may be available. Community schools and initiatives will differ based on the needs and assets of their communities, and thus each will differ in the funding sources to which they apply and the way in which funds are blended and braided to support students. Community school staff and district officials—together with members of their school communities—should work together to explore how new and existing funds can be blended and braided to support community schools.

## Funds Specific to Community Schools

The California Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education both have grants available specifically to start and support community school initiatives.

**California Community Schools Partnership Program:** These competitive grants are open to LEAs—school districts, county offices of education, or charter schools—serving at least 50% unduplicated students (those from low-income backgrounds, English learners, or students in foster care), with priority given to schools serving 80% or more unduplicated students. LEAs with high rates of dropout or suspension and expulsion, students experiencing homelessness, or justice-involved youth may also apply. Funds may be used to support staffing (including community school coordinators), professional development, and school partnerships with community agencies and local government to provide services and resources and improve student outcomes. Implementation grants are available over 5 years (through 2030–31) in the amounts indicated in Table 1 and have a one-third matching requirement, with the next funding cycle anticipated for 2023–24.<sup>6</sup> Starting in 2025–26, extension grants of up to \$100,000 annually over 2 years will be offered after an implementation grant ends, with a one-to-one matching requirement. Technical assistance is available to grantees through the [State Transformational Assistance Center](#), as well as a network of regional technical assistance centers led by county offices of education throughout the state.

**Table 1**  
**California Community Schools Partnership Program Round One**  
**Implementation Grant Funding Amounts, 2022–23**

Enrollment category	Annual grant amount (years 1–4)	Annual grant amount (year 5)	Total grant (over 5 years)
Very small: 25–150 students	\$150,000	\$112,500	\$712,500
Small: 151–400 students	\$250,000	\$187,500	\$1,187,500
Medium: 401–1,000 students	\$300,000	\$225,000	\$1,425,000
Medium/Large: 1,001–2,000 students	\$400,000	\$300,000	\$1,900,000
Large: 2,001 or more students	\$500,000	\$375,000	\$2,375,000

Source: Reproduced from California Department of Education. (2023). *2022–23 California Community Schools Partnership Program: Implementation grant—Cohort 2 request for applications*.

**Full-Service Community Schools Program (FSCS):** This federal grant is open to consortia consisting of one or more LEAs and one or more community-based or nonprofit organizations or other public or private entities to support the planning and implementation of community schools, particularly for students in high-poverty or rural schools. Grants are awarded over a 5-year period and have a matching funds requirement. Grantees must also have a full-time community school coordinator at each school site. In 2022, 42 new grants were awarded for a total of \$63 million in funding, with a median annual grant of \$500,000. Over the years, 14 California initiatives have received federal FSCS funding, some for multiple rounds. In fiscal year 2023, the federal government provided a significant increase in the budget for FSCS—now funded at \$150 million. Applications for the next round of FSCS funding are anticipated to open in summer 2023.

## Other State Funds to Support a Community Schools Strategy

There are additional state funding sources, including formula programs and competitive grants, that can provide support to expand the activities or services in community schools, such as offering expanded learning time, providing integrated student supports, building the capacity of educators, and developing college and career pathways. Community school coordinators and district leaders can increase the capacity of school sites to leverage and implement these various funding sources (some of which have already been disbursed and some of which would require a grant application) in a strategic way that benefits students and families.

One way that coordinators can help to leverage funding sources is to use a needs and assets assessment process at their school sites to identify available funding sources that can meet the specific needs and goals of their school communities.<sup>7</sup> Of course, coordinators are not solely responsible for figuring out how to coordinate funding sources at the site level. An effective blending and braiding strategy can also benefit from district-level participation and support. For example, a district leader could identify relevant funding sources and eligible positions that could be funded with those sources and share that information with school sites.

## Expanded Learning Time

**Expanded Learning Opportunities Program:** Over \$4 billion annually is allocated to school districts and charter schools with classroom-based instructional programs in transitional kindergarten (TK) through 6th grade. This ongoing program provides funding for after-school, summer, or intercession learning programs for TK–6 that focus on developing the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs and interests of pupils through hands-on, engaging learning experiences that complement, but do not replicate, learning activities in the regular school day and school year. Funding is based on average daily attendance and unduplicated pupil counts. Districts with 75% or higher unduplicated student count receive \$2,750 per unduplicated student; other districts receive \$2,052 per unduplicated student.<sup>8</sup> Districts have discretion in how funds are divided across schools and between summer and after-school learning and may also use funds to serve students in grades 7–12. In alignment with CCSP, this funding stream encourages and relies on collaboration with community partners. (See also [this guide from the Partnership for Children and Youth](#).)

**21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) and After School Safety and Enrichment for Teens (ASSETs) programs:** This competitive federal funding is administered by the California Department of Education to support LEAs, cities, counties, and community-based agencies that offer before- or after-school academic enrichment for elementary and middle school students, particularly for those in high-poverty or low-performing schools (21st CCLC) or after-school academic enrichment, college and career readiness, and family literacy for students in grades 9–12 (ASSETs). 21st CCLC and ASSETs grants are for 5 years and are awarded on a per-student, per-day rate.

**After School Education and Safety Program:** This competitive state grant program is open to LEAs to develop after-school programs that partner with schools and communities to provide educational support and enrichment. Funding is determined and prioritized by school eligibility for free and reduced-price meals, with specific amounts based on the number of students served. Maximum grants for 2023–24 were \$152,000 for elementary school sites and \$203,000 for middle/junior high school sites.

**Universal Prekindergarten:** As part of California’s expansion of prekindergarten to all 4-year-olds, the California Department of Education awarded a total of \$600 million in [Universal Prekindergarten Planning and Implementation grants](#) in 2022 and 2023. Grants

were awarded on a formula basis to all LEAs enrolling kindergarten students and may be used in many ways that complement community schools. For example, grants may be used to support family engagement, community partnerships, expanded learning, developmental screenings, professional development, and strategic planning. The CCSPP emphasizes the importance of early childhood services as an available support for students and families.

## Integrated Student Supports

**Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative:** \$4.4 billion investment over 5 years, including \$400 million in one-time competitive grants (forthcoming from the Department of Health Care Services) to strengthen school-linked behavioral and mental health services. The initiative also includes \$400 million in funding for the Student Behavioral Health Incentive Program to encourage managed care plans to partner with and pay for health services in schools. Additional areas of support include developing and training school-based wellness coaches, educator training on trauma-informed care from the Office of the Surgeon General, and educator training on social and emotional learning from the CalHOPE Student Services program. The Department of Health Care Services will leverage CalHOPE to distribute \$65 million in K–12 grant funding to promote wellness and mindfulness programs to support students and teachers.

**Medi-Cal:** Funds accessible via several sources, such as the Billing Option Program and Schools Medi-Cal Administrative Activities Program under the Department of Health Care Services. These programs reimburse LEAs for eligible direct and administrative services, including a range of health care, social, emotional, and mental health, and coordination and care services. LEAs may also access Medi-Cal funds by partnering with county health and other agencies. Technical assistance is available for districts interested in starting or expanding their Medi-Cal billing programs. (See also financing guides and resources from [California Children’s Trust](#) and [Breaking Barriers California](#).)

**Mental Health Student Services Act:** \$170 million state investment to provide grants for partnerships between county mental health agencies and LEAs to deliver school-based mental health services to students and families, with an additional \$100 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funding. This funding is intended to support all California counties to establish a Mental Health Student Services Act program.

**Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS):** An investment of \$82 million in continuing or expanding school and district access to MTSS, a comprehensive framework that aligns academic, behavioral, social and emotional learning, and mental health supports that are universal (Tier 1), supplemental (Tier 2), or intensive (Tier 3). MTSS can help partners coordinate, deploy, and target their resources efficiently at community school sites.

**California Universal Meals Program:** \$1.9 billion supporting universal access, increased reimbursement rates, and improved infrastructure for school meals. The program builds upon the federal National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.

## Educator Support and Collaborative Leadership

**Educator Effectiveness Block Grant:** \$1.5 billion to support educator professional learning across a variety of areas through 2025–26, including reengaging students and accelerating learning, improving access to mental health services and pupil well-being, creating a positive school climate, and implementing more inclusive practices.

**Community Engagement Initiative:** An increase of \$100 million (building on a \$13 million investment in 2018) to expand LEA capacity to create school–community partnerships for student success through a peer leading and learning network composed of cohorts of district teams, including parent leaders, community partners, teachers, family, and community engagement staff; district, school, and county office of education leaders; and—in some cases—students.

## College and Career Pathways and Adult Education

There are additional programs to support LEAs in partnership with institutions of higher education, employers, and community organizations to support transitions from high school to postsecondary education or the workforce—an important aspect of establishing the key conditions for learning outlined in the CCSPP framework. There are also funds to support adult education via school districts in partnership with county offices of education, community colleges, and regional consortia. Examples of these programs follow.

**California Golden State Pathways Program:** \$500 million to support LEAs to provide high school pathways in high-wage, high-skill, high-growth areas (e.g., technology, health care, and education) and encourage collaboration between LEAs, institutions of higher education, local and regional employers, and other relevant community interest holders.

**College and Careers Access Pathways Grant:** \$100 million to help “establish a College and Career Access Pathways dual enrollment partnership agreement” that enables high school students to take community college courses. Open to LEAs with a current or planned community college partnership. Funds up to \$100,000 per high school site. Funds may also be used to support the work of existing partnerships.

**K12 Strong Workforce Program (K12 SWP):** Grant program to create, support, and/or expand high-quality career and technical education course sequences, programs, and pathways at the K–12 level that are aligned to regional workforce efforts. Open to partnerships of LEAs with California community colleges. Funds may be spent on students in grades 7–12. Matching funds of 2:1 are required from LEAs. Funding levels are based on average daily attendance up to a maximum of \$2 million.

**Regional K–16 Education Collaboratives Grant Program:** Supports pathways from secondary to postsecondary education and the workforce. Open to collaboratives of K–12 school districts in partnership with a state university or community college.

**California Adult Education Program:** State funding for adult education through LEAs and [regional consortia](#), joint power authorities of LEAs and community colleges, or a combination of these. Allocation of funds is based on the share of statewide need for adult education.

## Additional State and Federal Funds

The programs listed above are just some of the state and federal resources available to start, expand, and strengthen community schools through a sustainable approach to blending and braiding available funding sources. For example, districts can leverage other state and federal education funds to develop community school infrastructure, coordination, and management, and to support services.<sup>9</sup> Examples include:

- **Local Control Funding Formula:** California school formula funding provided to LEAs. All LEAs receive a per-student base grant, with supplemental and concentration grants awarded depending on unduplicated pupil counts.
- **Title I:** Federal financial assistance to LEAs and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families.
- **Title II:** Federal funds received as subgrants from the state to LEAs to improve teacher and principal quality.

## Further Reading

The following resources contain more detailed information about available state and federal funding sources for community schools:

- [White House Tool Kit: Federal Resources to Support Community Schools](#): This publication outlines all of the federal funding sources that could be used to support community school initiatives.
- [Supporting California's Children Through a Whole Child Approach](#): This recent publication from a partnership of education administration, research, and nonprofit organizations in California provides an overview of initiatives and associated funding sources to support whole child education.
- [California Department of Education Funding Page](#): This website contains information about funding programs operated by the California Department of Education, including a searchable list of programs.
- [California K-16 State Investments Crosswalk](#): This digital tool outlines 17 state cradle-to-career investments and articulates cross-segmental opportunities for alignment.

## Endnotes

1. Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Framework: Essentials for community school transformation*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>
2. Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/community-schools-effective-school-improvement-report>
3. Darling-Hammond, L., Schachner, A., & Edgerton, A. K. (2020). *Restarting and reinventing school: Learning in the time of COVID and beyond*. Learning Policy Institute.
4. California Department of Education. (2022). *California Community Schools Framework*. <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/documents/ccsppframework.docx> (accessed 04/04/23).
5. Deich, S., with Neary, M. (2021). *Financing community schools: A framework for growth and sustainability*. Partnership for the Future of Learning.
6. Two rounds of planning grants in the amount of \$200,000 per LEA were awarded in 2021–22 and 2022–23; however, future planning grant rounds are not anticipated.
7. For an example of a needs and assets assessment, see <https://www.nccs.org/publications/>
8. Partnership for Children & Youth. (2023). *Summer 2022: How California schools are making the most of new increased state investments*. Partnership for Children & Youth.
9. Deich, S., with Neary, M. (2021). *Financing community schools: A framework for growth and sustainability*. Partnership for the Future of Learning.

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