

Key Practices of Community Schools

FACT SHEET

What is a community school?

Community schools enable educators, families, students, and community partners to work together to support students' learning and development. In collaboration, they organize in- and out-of-school resources, such as health care, mental health services, meals, tutoring, after-school and summer programs, internships, and other learning and career opportunities that are tailored to the goals and needs of their students and families. They also cultivate a welcoming and safe school environment and provide instruction that invites students' multifaceted identities and backgrounds into the classroom to support rich and inclusive learning.

Community schools work with community partners and a full-time, school-based coordinator. Members of this extended school community set a shared vision and make collaborative decisions about how to strengthen and improve student and school outcomes.

Although community schools have been around for more than a century, modern community schools—designed around whole child structures and practices—have been gaining momentum in recent years, supported by increases in state and federal funding and their ability to pivot and respond to family needs more quickly during the pandemic. Nationally representative [survey data](#) suggest that 45%–60% of schools offer some form of wraparound services (e.g., mental or physical health care), a subset of which are directly implementing the community schools strategy. At this time, over 30 states have community schools work underway in some form (e.g., proposed legislation, local initiatives), while at least 8 states are directly [funding community schools](#).

What are the key practices of community schools?

Community schools design a strategy to meet the needs and assets of their school and surrounding community, leading to a unique combination of programs and services at each site. Implementation is frequently organized around common school-level practices. In a [2017 research review](#), LPI identified [four pillars](#) as the most prevalent practices in effective community schools: integrated student supports, expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities, active family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership and practices. In subsequent years, these four pillars were adopted in several states and by the federal government's Full-Service Community Schools grant program.

As more research has emerged, the four pillars have been expanded to include two more features that have proved central to effective community schools: a culture of belonging, safety, and care; and rigorous, community-connected instruction. These six interconnected practices of community schools were codified in the [Essentials for Community Schools Transformation](#) framework to help policymakers and practitioners align around a research- and practice-based conception of community schools. This work was led by a national collaboration called [Community Schools Forward](#)—including the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, the Children's Aid National Center for Community Schools, the Coalition for Community Schools at the Institute for Educational Leadership, and the Learning Policy Institute—that engaged with more than 700 practitioners, researchers, policymakers, and community partners to inform the *Essentials* development.

As the *Essentials* framework shows, these key practices are most effectively implemented when members of the school community have a shared vision and trusting relationships and are engaged in data-informed, inclusive decision-making. Systems-level support—including professional learning and sustainable resources—also contributes to effective implementation.

The Six Key Practices for Community Schools Transformation



Source: [Key Practices for Community Schools Transformation](#)

The Ballmer Group and the Stuart Foundation provided funding for this project.

Learn more

Visit [Community Schools](#) or [Community Schools Forward](#) on the LPI website for more information.