



Community Schools in Lynwood Unified

Building Capacity for
Districtwide Implementation

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Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, students' rising mental health needs, chronic absence, academic challenges, and struggles to reengage with school have spurred interest in whole child education and pushed practitioners and policymakers alike to reimagine what school can look like. Community schools are a strategy designed to address these issues, focused on simultaneously improving student well-being and expanding educational experiences and outcomes. Across the country, major investments in community schools are driving interest in how increased access to funding and the expansion of the strategy are affecting students and families. This is especially true in California, which has committed \$4.1 billion to support the strategy in nearly 2,500 schools across the state. Through this funding, the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) grants have helped spur the scaling of community schools in districts throughout California, necessitating the hiring and development of community school-specific personnel, namely community school coordinators.

Community schools are an evidence-based school transformation strategy that unites the efforts of students, families, educators, and community partners to improve student learning and well-being. Part of what makes community schools unique is the community school coordinator, a school-based staff member not traditionally found in schools, who is charged with organizing access to a range of public and private resources tailored to student and family needs and weaving them into the fabric and daily operations of the school. They also are the connector or bridge between the school, community-based partners, and families. The distinct roles and responsibilities of a coordinator require a specific set of skills and opportunities for capacity building and professional learning targeted to their needs. Thus far, we know very little about the hiring process for coordinators; the skills and dispositions needed to do the job well; and the supportive infrastructure provided to them at the district, county, and state levels.

Practitioners, policymakers, and community members alike seek guidance on how to use the increased resources to develop high-quality community schools that are responsive to community needs and assets. However, studies on the structures, processes, and practices that enable quality scaling and implementation of the community schools strategy are few. Even less common are studies of community school coordinators and the structures, policies, and supports that aid them as shepherds of implementation. This report elevates findings from a rapidly scaled community schools district that prioritized defining the role of the coordinator and developing their capacity to be collaborative leaders and the drivers of community school implementation.

Lynwood's Community Schools Initiative

Located in southern Los Angeles County, Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood) sits within a 4- by 4-mile area, filled with a tight-knit community of families who have lived there for generations and newcomers from other countries. Many district administrators, principals, teachers, and staff attended Lynwood schools themselves, while others have worked in the district for their whole careers. This deep-seated connectedness and sense of community helped usher the district's commitment to community schools as an equitable school improvement strategy.

Lynwood serves 10,900 students across 17 schools (3 high schools, 2 middle schools, and 12 elementary schools). Most students identify as Hispanic or Latino/a and come from low-income households. In 2024, the district received more than \$24 million in CCSPP grant funds to expand beyond its pilot community school, Lynwood High School, established in 2019. Lynwood leveraged this funding to turn all remaining 16 schools into community schools, helping the district to advance its vision of equity and whole child support at the urgent pace demanded by the needs of students and families.

The district built upon existing strengths around integrated student supports, namely its health collaborative of more than 45 physical and mental health partners, and a commitment to social and emotional learning. While the existing infrastructure and initiatives gave Lynwood a firm foundation from which to grow, scaling community schools districtwide required leaders to be laser-focused on staffing and designing a system to support rapid implementation. Lynwood was able to accomplish this by focusing its energy on building its community school coordinators' capacity to drive implementation and align efforts around the highest-need areas across the district and within its unique school communities.

The care and intentionality of Lynwood's approach to implementation and professional learning for coordinators has, even in 2 years, yielded impressive results for students and families. They have seen rates of chronic absence decline by one third, student achievement grow in English language arts and math in nearly every school since implementation began in 2023, suspensions decline by 15.5%, improvements in school climate and culture, and increasing family and community engagement.

Findings

We found that Lynwood enabled successful scaling and implementation of its community schools by doing the following:

- **Conducting a Holistic Districtwide Analysis.** Conducting an analysis of what was being provided and what was still needed drove use of funds and enabled community school coordinators to do the critical work of accessing and integrating tailored services and opportunities for students and families. Lynwood leadership used a combination of referral data tied to the district's health collaborative, climate surveys, and administrative data to pinpoint high areas of need among their students and gaps in existing resources, staffing, and partnerships. Lynwood expanded the partners in its health collaborative and increased point-of-access services on individual campuses to meet the growing health and mental health needs of students and families.
- **Communicating a Clear and Consistent, Data-Centered Vision.** This vision created coherence around community school implementation across each campus. From that vision, coordinators were able to strengthen and integrate an existing infrastructure of services ranging from health and social work to attendance supports, supports for social and emotional learning and restorative practices, and crisis intervention. Lynwood used CCSPP funds to hire personnel to bolster and facilitate these services. The wraparound services team consists of the grant-funded community school coordinator and a certified student support analyst, along with a social and emotional learning specialist, a licensed clinical social worker, and a community liaison. The Student Services team educated coordinators on existing systems, initiatives, and resources within the district and in the community and helped them identify gaps to be filled at the system and campus levels.

- **Developing Role Clarity for the Community School Coordinator.** Clearly defining the skills, responsibilities, disposition, and position classification for the community school coordinator helped ensure the right people were hired and enabled a smooth onboarding process. Lynwood sought coordinators who had commitment to community; familiarity with existing resources; and the ability to form strong, positive relationships. The job description and designation as classified management emphasized that coordinators were leaders on campus who were expected to collaborate with the principal, other members of the leadership team, families, and community partners.
- **Building the Capacity of Community School Coordinators.** To help coordinators grow into their roles, Lynwood offered a well-structured, weekly professional learning community (PLC), personalized coaching, and collective problem-solving. Lynwood also created a system-level position (district community school coordinator) focused on providing professional development, coaching, and facilitating implementation across the district. The PLCs helped establish consistent goals, routines, and practices for all coordinators to draw from when leading implementation at their campuses. Coordinators were also provided specific and targeted training on conducting assets and needs assessments to give them tools to effectively identify, access, and integrate needed resources, partnerships, and services into their schools.
- **Encouraging Coordinators to Engage in Outside Professional Development.** Community school coordinators had frequent opportunities to take advantage of professional development opportunities, especially those provided by the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Regional Technical Assistance Center, and the State Transformational Assistance Center for Community Schools. In Lynwood, coordinators attended and found useful the county and state technical assistance and professional development offerings, pointing to the value of California’s investment in building a spoke-and-wheel model of technical assistance.
- **Investing in Coordinators’ Long-Term Growth and Well-Being.** Lynwood was able to sustain the work of coordinators by developing a strong community of collaboration and offering ongoing capacity building in high-leverage skills. Coordinators forged a strong community among themselves, which served as both a safety net and support, and a space for creative collaboration and collective impact. Through their communal and collaborative orientation, one person’s strength became the whole group’s asset. Lynwood is investing in growing the leadership skills of coordinators over time, particularly focusing on how to be a collaborative leader who facilitates shared decision-making and leads through influence.

Lessons

Lynwood went all in on community schools and faced a difficult task of scaling quickly, across the district, without time or funds for planning. By focusing on developing the coordinators, who are the ambassadors of the strategy—in an intentional, coherent, and consistent way—the district has been able to make great strides in implementation over the course of 2 years with positive student, family, and community outcomes. Key lessons from Lynwood that can inform other districts’ efforts to implement community schools include the following:

- **Take Stock of Existing Infrastructure, Services, and Opportunities Paired With an Analysis of High Needs.** This allows for intentional and targeted scaling. Implementing community schools can happen more effectively when the strategy is presented as a means to augment and strengthen existing services and programming grounded in shared vision and goals.
- **Clearly Define the Skills, Responsibilities, and Position Classification.** Doing this for the community school coordinator aids in designing a hiring process to bring on the right people and enable a smoother onboarding process.
- **Design Ongoing Professional Development Opportunities.** Opportunities like a weekly PLC structure grounded in learning and shared experiences are an effective way to build the capacity of community school coordinators. In Lynwood, the PLC helped coordinators align around a common set of goals, routines, and practices while building skills to make tailored decisions on their own campuses. Within the PLC structure and through personalized coaching, coordinators were able to workshop and troubleshoot with one another, improving upon their work as each school year progressed.
- **Train Coordinators in Conducting Assets and Needs Assessments.** Community school coordinators help the broader school community organize around a shared vision and goals. To do this effectively, they need to learn and practice the varied skills needed for a comprehensive process, including piloting a listening campaign, learning about all of the available administrative data sources and how to pull data from them, practicing and facilitating data analysis, writing and administering surveys, presenting findings, and crafting priorities and action steps.
- **Provide Access to Professional Development Opportunities.** Opportunities beyond the PLC structure can help coordinators tailor learning unique to their strengths and areas for growth. Encouraging and assisting coordinators in accessing these opportunities allows them to take ownership of their development. These opportunities are easier to provide when county and state supportive infrastructure and technical assistance exist.
- **Cultivate a Supportive Community of Coordinators.** Doing this helps them forge on with the work and stick with the role. New community school coordinators are often stepping into a role that previously did not exist and is singular on a campus, which can be difficult and lonely. When coordinators form bonds and trusting relationships, they can lean on one another for both support and to deepen their work, and they are more likely to stay year after year.
- **Develop the Disposition and Skills Needed to Be an Effective and Collaborative Leader.** This is a long process that takes ongoing, targeted learning focused on building leadership capacity. Community school coordinators are leaders who harness the ideas and strengths of others to build a collective set of priorities, goals, and actions. To be a community-oriented, transformational leader, they can only move at the speed of their collaborators. Learning how to bring these partners along is an ongoing process that is central to quality implementation of community schools.

Introduction

Being in a brand-new position to a district, navigating the ins and outs, the climate and culture of each individual, is tough work. We have some amazing [community school] coordinators who have really grown into leaders who are centering the needs of their school, the community, [and] everybody who's involved—the students, staff, parents. And they [the coordinators] are really ... serving, and they make that a priority. And along with that, they are also becoming transformational leaders. Principals are so thankful to have this position at their school. We have been able to do so much more for our students and for our parents. It is just amazing to hear the feedback, the positive feedback that we're getting.

— District community school coordinator

Community schools are designed to simultaneously improve student well-being and expand educational experiences and outcomes.¹ They are grounded in the understanding that young people are part of a larger ecosystem that can enhance or mitigate their ability to thrive.² Accordingly, community schools take a whole child, collaborative approach that draws on local assets, needs, and goals to efficiently tailor the programs, services, and opportunities of a school and its surroundings. This work requires the coordination and leveraging of services and resources, like health, mental health, and extended learning; building relationships among students, families, partners, teachers, and administrators; and a commitment to authentic collaboration and continuous improvement.³

Part of what makes community schools unique is the community school coordinator position, a school-based staff member dedicated to doing the work described above and weaving the implementation of the community schools strategy into the fabric and daily operations of the school. Coordinators are cross-boundary leaders, managing interactions and relationships inside and outside the school, encouraging open dialogue and honoring different ideas and perspectives, and establishing organizational processes that shepherd actors from across the school community toward a collective set of goals around student success.⁴

Because this role is new to schools that have adopted the community schools strategy and is distinct from other roles in a typical school, coordinators must hold a specific set of skills and be provided with capacity-building and learning opportunities targeted to their professional needs.⁵ However, few studies of community schools specifically focus on the hiring of coordinators, the skills needed to do the job effectively, and the supports provided to them by a district invested in expanding the community schools strategy.

Given the multifaceted needs of students and families after the COVID-19 pandemic, interest in scaling community schools has grown across the country.⁶ Practitioners, policymakers, and community members alike are seeking guidance on how to implement and sustain high-quality community schools. However, they have yet to fully explore how to best leverage funds and resources to support community school implementation across a district or initiative. This report elevates findings from a rapidly scaled community schools district. By leveraging a strong foundation of supports and services and conducting a data scan of remaining areas of need, the district determined that investing in strategic hiring and developing the capacity of community school coordinators would best enable quality implementation of community schools districtwide in a single year.

What Are Community Schools?

Community schools are an evidence-based school transformation strategy that unites the efforts of students, families, educators, and community partners to improve student learning and well-being.⁷ Embodying a whole child educational approach, community schools organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities to enable student success. These resources and supports include mental health services, meals, health care, tutoring, after-school and enrichment programming, and other services and opportunities tailored to specific community needs. To do this, community schools often implement specific key practices, such as expanded and enriched learning opportunities; powerful student and family engagement; integrated systems of support; collaborative leadership; shared power and voice; a culture of belonging, safety, and care; and rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction. They also embrace a shared whole child vision; cultivate a relationship-centered school culture; and emphasize meaningful collaboration and leadership among educators, families, local community members, and students as a means of enabling the conditions to drive change.⁸

Community schools are constantly adapting and setting priorities grounded in local needs and goals. Refinement and adaptation occur as the community works together to track progress in an ongoing cycle of shared reflection, analysis, revision, and inclusive decision-making. This continuous improvement process both builds capacity and draws on the support of the entire school community to develop and maintain a responsive, high-quality community school where students thrive.

Systems-level supports that enable community schools development and sustainability play an important role, particularly when seeking to support community schools at scale. These include, but are not limited to, adequate resources, shared governance structures, data systems to support continuous improvement, professional learning opportunities, and strategic partnerships. These efforts are further strengthened by supportive local, state, and federal policies; ongoing, coordinated technical assistance; and private and public investments.

Researchers, policymakers, and community members increasingly recognize community schools as an evidence-based strategy for improving a range of student outcomes. Studies indicate that, when fully implemented, community schools enable increased academic achievement and graduation rates, particularly among those from marginalized communities and/or disadvantaged backgrounds.⁹ Research also shows that high-quality community schools improve student attendance and feelings of connectedness while reducing exclusionary discipline practices.¹⁰ The COVID-19 pandemic also brought the value of the community schools strategy to the fore, as these schools maintained structures, processes, and home-school connections that enabled them to respond to the holistic needs of students and families.¹¹

With growing evidence of its impact and promise, historic investments in the community schools approach have followed at the federal and state levels.¹² These investments have spurred the growth of community schools in geographically diverse communities across the country, including states in different U.S. regions (e.g., Kentucky, New Mexico, New York, Tennessee) and a range of urban, suburban, and rural communities. In these disparate locations, community schools strive to create environments in which students can thrive. However, practitioners implementing the approach are often doing so with different tools and resources available to them.

This Study

With increased resources for community schools, practitioners, policymakers, and community members alike seek guidance on how to use investments to develop high-quality community schools that are responsive to community needs and assets. However, there are few studies on the structures, processes, and practices that enable quality implementation of the community schools strategy.¹³ Even less common are studies of rapid, wide-scale implementation of community schools and the ways in which they support those responsible for shepherding that growth, namely, community school coordinators.¹⁴

This case study of Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood) helps fill this research gap. Seeking to better serve students struggling with mental health, social-emotional needs, and chronic absence postpandemic, Lynwood leveraged the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) grant funds to become a full community schools district—going from 1 to 17 community schools in a single year. Supporting the professional development of 16 brand-new community school coordinators who were tasked with overseeing the implementation of community schools pushed the district to be strategic and intentional in its hiring, onboarding, and approach to capacity building. (Note: Lynwood calls this position a “community school case manager”; however, in this report, we use the more common term in the field, “community school coordinator.”¹⁵)

This report details their work, highlighting how a highly organized professional learning community (PLC) with a structured scope and sequence, paired with one-on-one coaching and peer-to-peer support, translated into tangible outcomes for students and families. The work of community schools flows through the coordinators. This report deepens our understanding of how to build their capacity to transform schools and communities. Initial findings illustrate that successful scaling of community schools is enabled by the following:

- Conducting a holistic districtwide analysis of what was being provided and what was still needed to drive use of funds and support community school coordinators to do the critical work of accessing and integrating services and opportunities for students and families.
- Communicating a clear and consistent, data-centered vision for community schools to support implementation across each campus. From that vision, they were able to strengthen and integrate an existing infrastructure of services, ranging from health and social work to attendance supports, supports for social and emotional learning (SEL) and restorative practices, and crisis intervention.
- Clearly defining the skills, responsibilities, and position classification for the community school coordinator to ensure the right people were hired and to enable a smooth onboarding process.
- Building the capacity of community school coordinators through a well-structured weekly PLC, personalized coaching, and collective problem-solving.
- Encouraging coordinators to take advantage of professional development opportunities, especially those provided by the county office of education and the State Transformational Assistance Center for Community Schools.
- Sustaining the work of coordinators through a community of collaboration and ongoing capacity building in high-leverage skills.

This report begins with an introduction to Lynwood’s community schools initiative, noting the strong foundation upon which it was built as well as some early bright spots in outcomes. It then takes a deep dive into growth and development of the district’s community school coordinators, diving more deeply into the experiences of two coordinators and the positive results they have seen for their students and families. The report concludes with lessons and takeaways for districts and initiatives undergoing rapid expansion of community schools and for those seeking to strengthen community school coordinators’ capacities.

Lynwood’s Community Schools Initiative

Located in southern Los Angeles County, Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood) sits within a 4- by 4-mile area, filled with a tight-knit community of families who have lived there for generations and those who are newcomers. Many district administrators, principals, teachers, and staff attended Lynwood schools themselves, while others have worked in the district for their whole careers. This deep-seated connectedness and sense of community helped usher the district’s commitment to community schools as an equitable school improvement strategy.

Lynwood serves 10,900 students across 17 schools (3 high schools, 2 middle schools, and 12 elementary schools). The student body is majority Latino/a, at 94.4%, with 25.4% of students classified as English learners and 17.2% classified as students with disabilities (see [Table 1](#)). Black students make up 4.4% of the student population, while White, multiracial, Asian, and Native American/Indigenous students account for 1% combined. The percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals (93.5%) far exceeds the state average.

Table 1. Lynwood Unified School District Demographics, 2024–25

Student group	Lynwood	California
Enrollment	10,900	5,806,221
English learners	25.4%	17.4%
Students experiencing homelessness	5.7%	4.0%
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	93.5%	63.6%
Students living in foster care	0.8%	0.5%
Students with disabilities	17.2%	14.2%
African American/Black	4.5%	4.9%
Native American/Indigenous	0.1%	0.4%
Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander	0.2%	12.7%
Hispanic or Latino/a	94.4%	56.1%
Two or more races	0.1%	4.8%
White	0.6%	20.0%
Not reported	n/a	1.2%

Source: EdData. (2025). [District Summary](#) for Lynwood Unified School District and [State Summary](#) for California Public Schools.

History and Initiative Priorities

Lynwood began its community schools journey in 2019–20, when Lynwood High School joined the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) Community Schools Pilot Initiative. Implementation there served as an early example of how community schools could expand supports for students and families, a need that became much more acute in the wake of COVID-19. Lynwood emerged from the pandemic laser-focused on providing more supports and services for mental health and social-emotional well-being. As one district administrator shared:

The challenge was [that students] were coming to school no longer knowing how to share or how to disagree or how to compromise ... or how to be on a schedule. Everything was a battle. For me, long term, I want them to be fully equipped adults who do not just have great academic outcomes, but who have the skills to manage their emotions and work with a diverse group of people. Because to make systemic change, you have to work with all types of people, but you [have] got to be prepared for that.

Lynwood leaned into the community schools strategy as the best way to integrate the resources and opportunities students needed most upon returning to school postpandemic.

Building upon existing strengths around student supports, Lynwood secured a \$24.5 million 5-year California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) implementation grant (round 2) to expand the initiative to the district’s remaining 16 schools—effectively making Lynwood a community schools district (see [The California Community Schools Partnership Program](#)). The 2023–24 school year marked the formal launch of the districtwide initiative. (See [Table 2.](#)) Lynwood envisions community schools as a means to “transform the lives of [its] students, [its] community, and generations to come.” In practice, the district’s mission is to “ensure equity, access, and justice for all students, by providing a safe space that empowers each student to reach their full potential and actively contribute to a thriving and connected community.”¹⁶

Table 2. Lynwood Unified School District Enrollment, 2024–25

School	Grade span	Student enrollment
Helen Keller Elementary School	K–6	407
Janie P. Abbott Elementary School	K–6	417
Lincoln Elementary School	K–6	328
Lindbergh Elementary School	K–6	552
Lugo Elementary School	K–6	318
Mark Twain Elementary School	K–6	542
Roosevelt Elementary School	K–6	445

School	Grade span	Student enrollment
Rosa Parks Elementary School	K-6	343
Thurgood Marshall Elementary School	K-6	511
Washington Elementary School	K-6	492
Will Rogers Elementary School	K-6	684
Wilson Elementary School	K-6	499
Cesar Chavez Middle School	7-8	882
Hosler Middle School	7-8	754
Marco Antonio Firebaugh High School	9-12	1,633
Vista High School	10-12	186

Source: EdData. (2025). [Lynwood Unified](#).

The California Community Schools Partnership Program

In 2021–22, California allocated \$4.1 billion to the growth and spread of community schools across the state. This legislation established a competitive grant program, called the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), which allots funding to cohorts of community schools annually through the 2031–32 fiscal year. CCSPP offers planning grants, implementation grants, and extension grants, depending on the maturity of the community schools initiative, and allots approximately \$140 million for technical assistance, including statewide and regional centers that provide ongoing support to grantees within their jurisdiction.

The grant program prioritizes funding for community school initiatives in which at least 80% of students are either from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, are English learners, or are living in foster care, and it considers these demographic characteristics alongside other state priority areas when determining grant awardees. CCSPP grants can be used for staffing, service coordination and provision, family and community engagement, data systems and continuous improvement structures, and professional development.

To date, CCSPP grants are reaching 2,484 school sites—approximately 25% of California public schools—and more than one third of high-need schools in the state (37%) are or will soon be community schools supported by the grant program. Lynwood Unified School District’s 16 schools were among the 570 schools in Cohort 2 to secure state funding to implement community schools in their district.

Source: California Department of Education. (2025, May). [Agenda item #09](#) (accessed 09/26/2025).

A Community Schools District Built on a Strong Foundation

Lynwood built its community schools initiative on a strong foundation rooted in its long-standing health collaborative of more than 45 physical and mental health partners and the LACOE pilot community school, Lynwood High. Established in 2007 with just 2 mental health partners, the collaborative has steadily expanded and now includes more than 45 partner organizations that “provide resources and support services for students to succeed academically and personally,” according to a district administrator. These partners offer a wide range of services—from substance abuse and mental health care to dental services, housing assistance, and vision exams. Meeting quarterly under the guidance of a district coordinator, the collaborative has given Lynwood deep experience in identifying and vetting partners, establishing referral procedures, and maintaining systems of communication with external organizations.

At Lynwood High School, which became a community school in the 2019–20 school year, district administrators were able to witness how a focus on building relationships with students and families and devoted coordination of services enhanced the work they were doing with the health collaborative. As part of becoming a community school, Lynwood High established a health center on campus, which had an on-site counselor as well as personnel and supplies to provide other kinds of health care. The direct services available on campus yielded more successful referrals. As the only community school in the district during the pandemic, when mental health needs began to rise dramatically, Lynwood High was better positioned than other schools in Lynwood to connect families with services, even though the health collaborative and referral process were in place. Seeing that in action spurred Lynwood leadership to think about expanding community schools across the district. One district administrator noted: “When we saw how the community schools project at Lynwood High, how they brought in deeper resources, that’s when we started [to] think, ‘This is something that we can do districtwide.’” One newly added resource in particular, an on-site health center that provided accessible mental health care through a counselor and a space to attend to the physical health needs of students, illustrated the benefits of services located on campus.

District leaders saw the grant as both recognition of their existing strengths and an opportunity to expand their vision of holistic support for students and families. With a strong history of collaboration with external partnerships and the districtwide health collaborative in place, Lynwood already had much of the infrastructure in place to support community schools. At the same time, administrators acknowledged that the CCSPP grant would allow them to address critical gaps in services and supports. The district community school coordinator captured this sentiment, recalling her excitement when she learned Lynwood had been awarded the grant:

This [CCSPP grant] would help fill those gaps that exist. We were already doing great work, like the student services [department] had laid the foundation with our health collaborative, but knowing that it would be a community approach to whole child success, I was just like, “Wow, this is amazing!”

By leveraging CCSPP funding, Lynwood was able to strengthen its existing foundations while rapidly advancing its vision of equity and whole child support. The superintendent emphasized the urgency of expanding access quickly, noting that while LACOE envisioned adding one community school every year or two, every child in Lynwood needed these opportunities immediately—a goal that became possible through the CCSPP grant. District administrators described the initiative as a comprehensive strategy for student support, framing community schooling as both an equity approach and a cultural shift away from blaming families and toward embracing holistic support for children and communities.

By leveraging CCSPP funding, Lynwood was able to strengthen its existing foundations while rapidly advancing its vision of equity and whole child support.

District Infrastructure to Support Community Schools

An important feature of Lynwood’s community schools initiative is its placement in the district’s Student Services Department (SSD), which is responsible for coordinating all noninstructional services, including crisis intervention, services for students experiencing homelessness or in the foster system, mental health and social work services, attendance-related supports, and coordination of the district’s health collaborative. The SSD’s support systems, combined with the extensive partnerships housed within the district’s health collaborative, provided a strong foundation of integrated services that CCSPP funding could further strengthen. Rather than starting from scratch, district leaders analyzed their existing structure of supports for students and families and strategically used CCSPP funding to develop new positions designed to fill critical gaps.

As the SSD director shared:

Over 50% [of the community schools approach] was already in place. [We have] the integrated support services; we have extended learning already in place; we have the mental health piece in place; we already had the SEL [social and emotional learning] implementation. So when we talked about strengthening it, we talked about what is missing. At the end of the day, we’re an organization where we need to make sure kids graduate. We’re a school district, but we’ve been bringing in the resources to help kids graduate. Because if they’re hungry, they’re not going to learn. If they have mental health issues, they’re not going to learn. If they’re sick, they’re not going to learn. So we take this grant and fix these other areas to make sure that when they’re here, they can learn.

As the SSD was planning to use CCSPP funding to augment their existing services, a key source of data for the SSD’s planning was referrals made to the health collaborative by school staff. “The health collaborative referral process really helped us identify the gaps,” the SSD director explained. “You don’t have to go back and ask a school, ‘What are your challenges?’ When they ask us for help through this referral process, we see what they’re asking for.”

For example, as of 2022–23, every Lynwood school had access to an SEL specialist—shared at the elementary level and dedicated at each middle and high school. SEL specialists implement the district’s SEL curriculum, provide Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports (e.g., small-group counseling),¹⁷ connect students

to clinical social workers, and serve as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) leads at the secondary level. However, analysis of health collaborative referrals revealed a need for additional behavioral supports, particularly for general education students without individualized education programs (IEPs) who required intensive Tier 3 interventions. To address this gap, the district used CCSPP funds to hire four certified student support analysts, who augment SEL specialists by working individually with students and conducting home visits to ensure consistent support at school and at home.

Alongside student support analysts and SEL specialists, all schools now have access to licensed clinical social workers, nine in total, who balance caseloads across schools. Each high school and middle school has its own clinician, while four social workers rotate among elementary schools. Recognizing that many families lack insurance or face high copays, the district expanded its investment in social workers, making direct therapy available to students at no cost.

Lastly, each school now has a community school coordinator—16 of the 17 are funded through the CCSPP grant—who provides school-level leadership for community school implementation. These positions were intentionally created as classified, administrative roles so that coordinators could remain focused on their core responsibilities without being diverted to certificated duties. The job description for the coordinator emphasizes building relationships with staff, families, and partners; conducting school-level assets and needs assessments; and developing school governance committees.

Together, community school coordinators, SEL specialists, social workers, and community liaisons (a long-standing position focused on attendance and home visits) form an integrated wraparound team, one that is being more formalized in the third year of implementation as a Coordination of Services Team (COST) co-led by the coordinators and principals. For the district, the CCSPP grant filled critical gaps. The school-based resources for students and families have “been a dream,” according to an administrator in the SSD, “because these are things that we’ve been talking about for the last 8 years” but had only been able to offer supports in a piecemeal fashion. Now, however, a district administrator explains:

[Lynwood is] really doing wraparound services at the school for the families and students that need it. When I say wraparound services, in the Department of Children and Family Services, when a family gets referred to them, they have a therapist, a behavior analyst, a therapist for the family. They have this whole wraparound team that helps every family with whatever their needs might be. ... Our certified support analysts, our licensed clinical social workers, our coordinators, our school community liaison at every school—we have a wraparound trained team for every student.

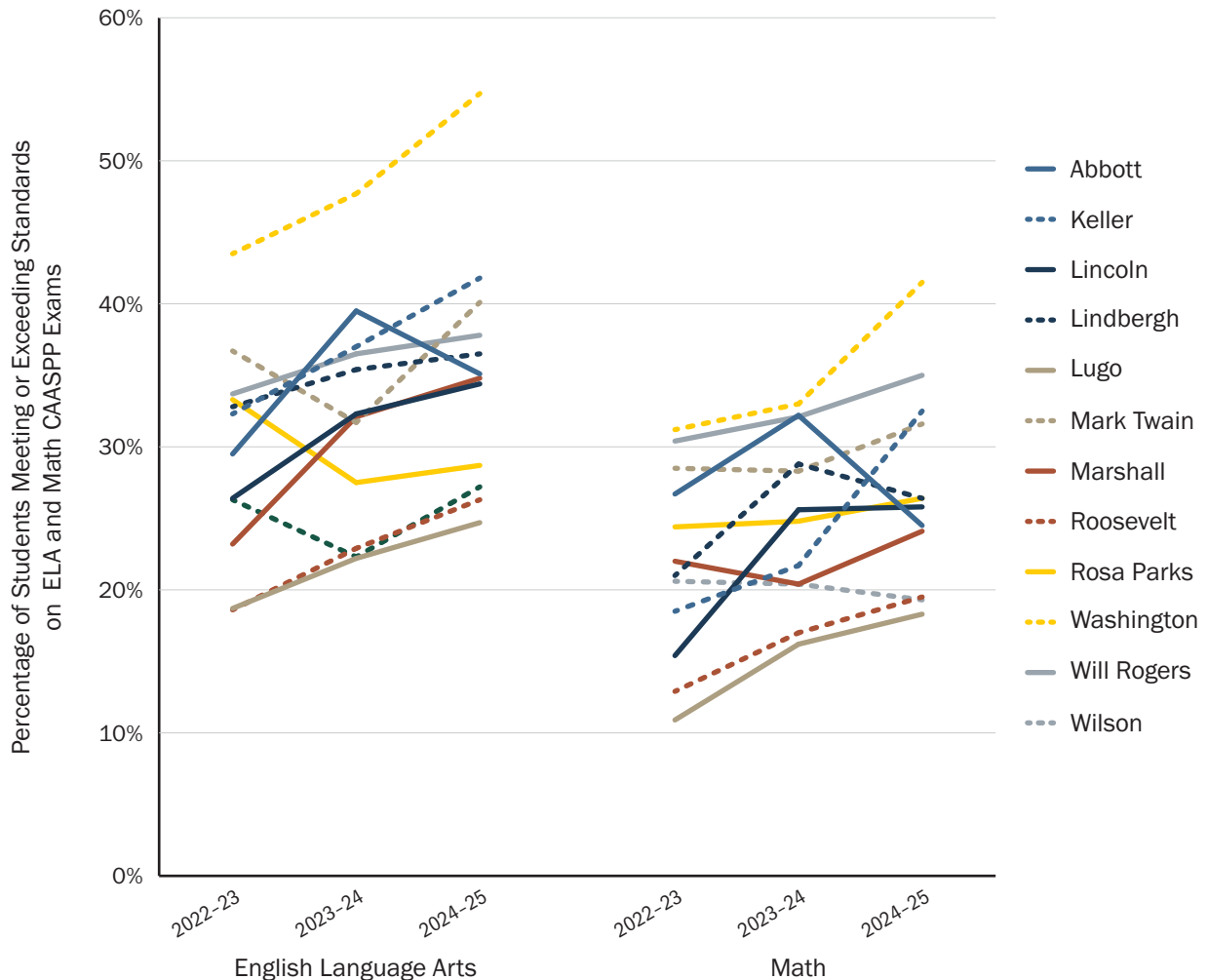
To provide coherence across schools, the district also brought on a district community school coordinator, who oversees the CCSPP grant and provides extensive coaching and professional development for the community school coordinators.

In designing this layered system, Lynwood illustrates how districts can strategically implement and scale community schools by supplementing what is already in place and addressing critical gaps to ensure that schools are equipped to meet the holistic needs of students and families. It underscores that most districts are not starting from zero as they work to redesign systems to more holistically serve students and families, and that effective initiatives can grow by leveraging what is already in place.

Serving the Needs of Students and Families

Lynwood is in the early stages of implementation, having wrapped up its second full year as a community schools district in summer 2025. Even so, the district is already seeing positive outcomes for students and families. Across the district, chronic absences have fallen by just over one third, from 37.1% in 2021–22 to 24.5% in 2024–25. Average daily attendance has increased over that same period, from 87.4% to 91.5%. With a focused effort on reducing suspensions, Lynwood saw a drop from 3.3% in 2023–24 to 2.8% in 2024–25. Academic scores are also on an upward trajectory. Compared to the year before they became community schools (2022–23), 11 of the 12 elementary schools have increased the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the English language arts proficiency standard, while 10 have done the same in math (see [Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#)).

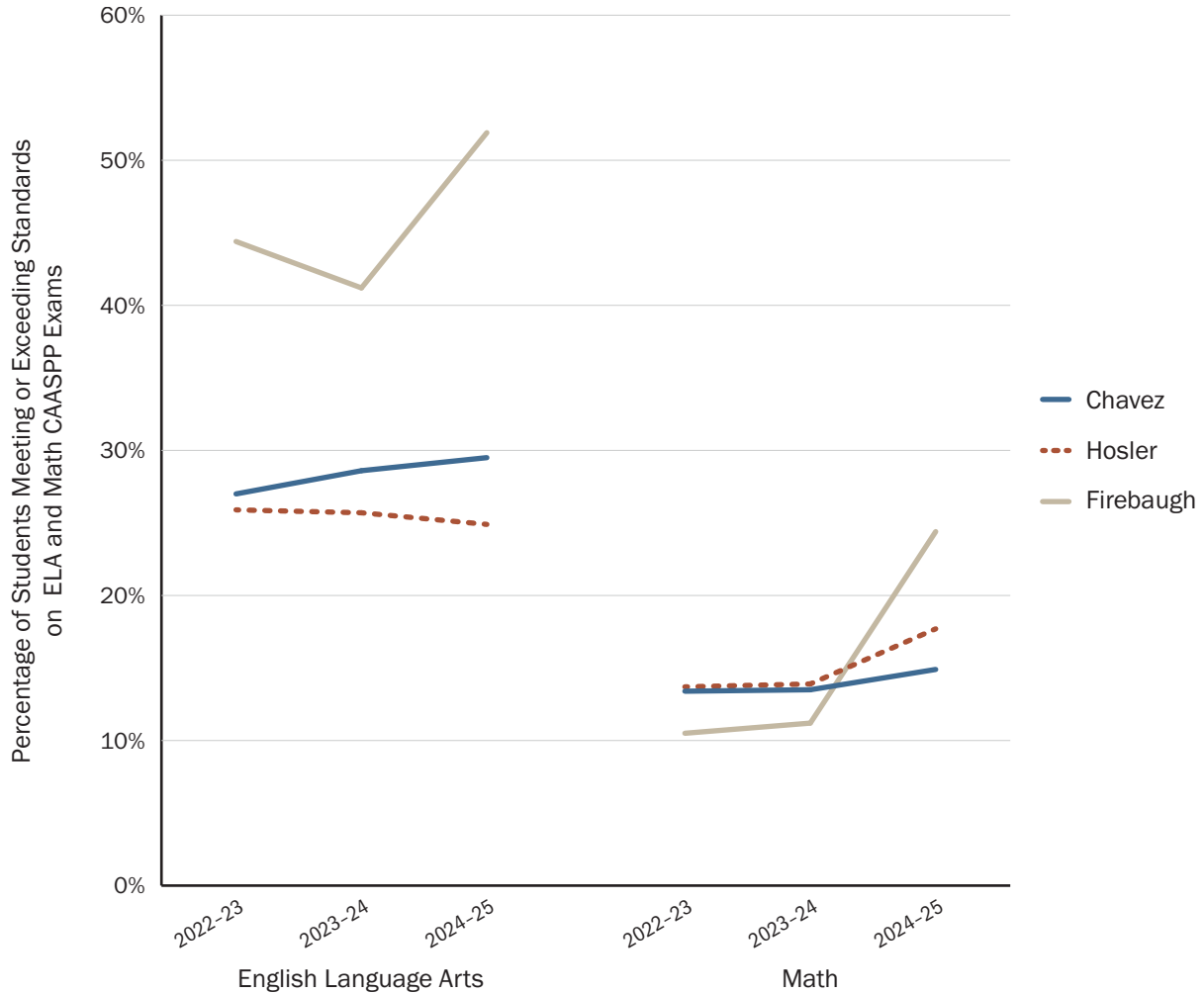
Figure 1. Lynwood Unified Elementary Performance in English Language Arts and Math



Note: CAASPP = California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress.

Source: California Department of Education [DataQuest](#) data for the schools in Lynwood Unified School District 2022–23 through 2024–25.

Figure 2. Lynwood Unified Middle and High School Performance in English Language Arts and Math



Notes: CAASPP = California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. Achievement data for Lynwood Unified’s continuation high school, Vista High School, is excluded from this figure due to the low numbers of students testing each year and the focus of the school.

Source: California Department of Education [DataQuest](#) data for the schools in Lynwood Unified School District 2022–23 through 2024–25.

The intentional interventions, programs, and opportunities Lynwood is offering as part of its community schools initiative have materialized as gains in key outcomes. Based on data collected by the district last school year, a wide array of mental health services and supports, identified as one of the biggest needs by district administrators, were offered to students and families. The district reported that 509 students were referred to the health collaborative; 2,022 students received direct therapeutic support; and nearly 1,400 hours were spent on crisis calls, assessment, stabilization, and prevention of escalation. Parents and teachers were provided with 238 presentations on mental health topics such as suicide awareness, trauma-informed care, how to support students in crisis, and building positive relationships, among

others. Lynwood also hosted 250 events aimed at educating students and removing stigmas around mental health. Substance abuse specialists reached nearly every student in the district through a mix of classroom visits and tabling events.

SEL specialists made more than 1,300 classroom presentations and held 3,690 student check-ins, 1,626 teacher and staff consultations, and 1,112 parent consultations. Staff across the schools received 52 SEL trainings. Students' emotional well-being was tended to through 368 restorative and community circles, 283 Wellness Wednesday activities, and 240 crisis interventions.

Community school coordinators at each school also provided targeted opportunities and services for families and students. Several schools partnered with local churches and food pantries to provide consistent access to food. Southern California Crossroads came to campuses to offer workshops for parents around key topics of interest, including how to talk to teenagers, how to set boundaries and be warm and demanding, how to navigate teen social media use, and how to communicate and build relationships with your child, while also offering on-site mentoring for students. In response to high rates of heart disease, lung cancer, and high blood pressure in the community, St. Francis, a hospital located just behind the school district offices, held workshops to encourage healthy habits. Lynwood Parks and Recreation created an Explorer app for students that allowed them to walk around the park and learn about the community.

Coordinators also organized a visit from an immigration specialist to educate families about their rights, provide advice on how to stay safe, and answer any and all questions in response to increased Immigration and Customs Enforcement presence and immigration raids around the Los Angeles area. According to the community school coordinators, this program was very well attended, and families were highly engaged. Beyond that, coordinators are crafting a culture and climate that is welcoming to families and engaging for students. Surveys at several of the schools, according to the district coordinator, showed that students are “happy coming to school. They feel safe and excited to come to school on a day-to-day basis. And that means a lot.”

By building upon existing strengths and strategically developing supportive infrastructure, Lynwood helped its community schools achieve an array of positive outcomes for students and families in a short time. Essential and central to Lynwood's implementation of the strategy are the community school coordinators. The following sections describe how the district organized the onboarding and development of community school coordinators, built a strong and collaborative peer-to-peer support network, and found balance between outlining shared processes and expectations and encouraging coordinators to serve the unique goals and needs of their school community. The report concludes with mini profiles of coordinators in action and key takeaways.

Setting up Community School Coordinators for Success

One of the most effective practices contributing to the success of our community schools initiative has been our commitment to intentional professional growth, collaboration, and leadership development within our team. We prioritize creating a strong internal community where our community school coordinators feel supported, valued, and [are] continuously growing in their roles. We meet weekly as a team to review site-level progress, share insights, reflect on challenges, and celebrate successes. These meetings serve as a hub for collaboration and collective problem-solving, ensuring alignment across school sites and encouraging innovation through shared experiences.

— District community school coordinator

Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood) received California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) implementation funds without a previous planning grant. Scaling the whole district at once required deliberate planning around hiring, capacity building, and supporting implementation. The strong, supportive infrastructure constructed around the community school coordinators illustrates the intentionality and strategic care with which Lynwood embarked on becoming a community schools district.

District Leadership With a Strong Vision for Community Schools Staffing

After receiving the CCSPP funds, Lynwood administrators developed a distinct vision for the skills and disposition of the community school coordinators, which shaped both the hiring process and the classification of the position. First and foremost, they prioritized hiring individuals with a background in social services and community relations or organizing. As a district administrator explained:

We were looking for people who already had a strong commitment to community, who already knew resources that existed in our communities, and who had that personality and that vested interest, [and who] would be great at building those positive relationships, because relationships matter in the work that we're doing.

Drawing on their vision of a full wraparound services team, district administrators wanted to ensure that the community school coordinators were insulated from being pulled into roles and responsibilities that fell outside their scope of work. They did not want coordinators to “be another body on the campus to answer phones, to make copies, to do the daily operations of the school,” noted one district administrator. They also wanted to emphasize that coordinators were leaders on campus who would collaborate with the principal and other members of the leadership team. As a result, and on the recommendation of the Los Angeles County Office of Education, which is also the Regional Technical Assistance Center (R-TAC), the position was listed as classified management, a noncertificated role. This classification was intended to help coordinators have the space and time to fulfill their responsibilities. It also allowed schools to shift certain functions related to student and family well-being off principals' plates, allowing them more space to be instructional leaders and focus on the overall operation of the school.

Relatedly, from the start, Lynwood made efforts to clearly define the role of the coordinators and brought them together with other site-based staff, like the community liaison, to determine points of collaboration and distinct work responsibilities. Further, a district employee explained that “after we got everybody hired, we did an onboarding process and we met with the community school coordinators. We met with every entity to set expectations and be really clear about what their role is on a campus.”

The district community school coordinator also worked to forge relationships with the Lynwood Teachers Association president and other unions, like the California School Employees Association, meeting with them regularly to build a shared leadership model and make sure everyone was “on the same page.” The coordinators have come to embrace and understand the unique positions they hold within the schools. One coordinator shared:

We support parents in addition to students, and we bring in community partners. ... We are looked at to lead in sort of shifting the mindset or perspective of our school sites and the district to where it's not just about the students anymore and about their academics, but now we're looking at: What are their needs outside of school? Do they have basic needs [fulfilled]? Do they have the resources that they need, mental health, social-emotional health? And we're looked at as the leaders in that work. So, I think, in that way ... I've been able to still share my expertise and knowledge of community resources. ... It's a different type of leadership.

Ultimately, the district was able to design clear and coherent expectations for coordinators, develop hiring processes to find the right people to fill those positions, and then socialize the role among the coordinators and other key staff. As the assistant superintendent emphasized:

I don't want compliance. I want commitment to this work. At the end of the day, that's what's really going to make it work: that everybody understands their role, their responsibility, and their dedication and commitment to the framework being delivered in a way that supports our students and families. That's the change, because you can have the prettiest, most elaborate plans in the world, but if people are only compliant, you're going to get the bare minimum. And I want excellence. I want your best, so I need your commitment.

The hiring and onboarding process was a deliberate attempt to garner commitment and common understanding of how the coordinator would operate and facilitate implementation of the community schools strategy.

While this process strengthened coordinators' capacity to do their work, principal support was uneven. Despite a districtwide introduction to the community schools strategy and several community schools presentations at principal meetings, school leaders' buy-in varied across campuses, as did their capacity for collaborative, distributed leadership—an essential disposition for effective implementation. As a result, coordinators reported mixed experiences at their individual campuses. Some worked with very supportive administrators, while others felt isolated and siloed in their work. Coordinators often discussed how to improve collaboration with their principals at professional learning community (PLC) meetings and in individual conversations with the district community school coordinator, who has prioritized garnering stronger principal buy-in for the 2025–26 school year.

Building Capacity Through a Structured Weekly Professional Learning Committee

Lynwood's journey toward becoming a community schools district required designing intensive professional development opportunities to support the growth of coordinators. Throughout the school year, the district community school coordinator held weekly in-person PLC meetings with all coordinators, as well as a 3-day summer institute. During the first year of community school implementation, the primary focus of the PLCs was relationship building and community engagement, data collection and analysis, and growing into a leadership role. In the second year, the emphasis expanded toward strengthening communication and facilitation skills, building strategic partnerships, and strengthening leadership skills.

Getting to Know the District, Community, and Families

At the start of implementation, weekly meetings introduced coordinators to district priorities and initiatives. Partners presented on the health collaborative and ongoing family engagement strategies. Coordinators learned how community schools are building upon investments in licensed clinical social workers and social and emotional learning (SEL) specialists to align with the district's focus on community and social and emotional well-being in its strategic plan.

As the district community school coordinator explained, "My training consisted of making them [school coordinators] aware of the systems that were already in place, the services that were already in place, for them to get a firm understanding of what existed," preparing for the work that would come later as they embarked on their assets and needs assessments. Eventually, District Community School Coordinator Dawn Green shared, they would "do the work with their [community school advisory] council to see, 'OK, this is what we have. But what's still needed?'"

Part of that initial education was grounded in learning more about the Lynwood community and the resources available to students and families. The district coordinator set aside time to familiarize coordinators with key parts of the community and to help them become a visible, recognizable presence beyond their school sites. PLC meetings, for example, were held at different restaurants in the area. For one session, the coordinators were brought on a guided tour of the city public library, during which they learned about the vast number of resources available through the library, including tutoring, technology help, workshops for parents, and field trips.

Meetings also featured presentations from a range of local partners and district staff. Lynwood's family engagement specialists shared the work they are doing, as did the Expanded Learning Opportunity Program coordinator. Lynwood Partners Educational Foundation, whose mission is to secure extra funding for enrichment, discussed its ongoing initiatives. The Department of Public Health presented opportunities for parents and caregivers, such as workshops and leadership development. To help coordinators organize professional development for their school staff on mandated reporting versus when to provide assistance and resources, CalKIDS and the Department of Children and Family Services paid a visit.

While they familiarized themselves with the landscape and resources in the city of Lynwood, coordinators were also developing their capacity to nurture trusting relationships with school staff, families, and the broader community. This was communicated by all the administrators in the Student Services Department

as both foundational to the work and a top priority. According to the district community school coordinator, for the first several months of training, the emphasis should be on “building positive relationships, being out, being present, getting to know your families, getting to know your students, getting to know the staff, so that you can better understand the climate, the culture, of your own school.”

Coordinators were encouraged to be visible, available, and friendly. In practice, this meant being at the front gate during drop-off and pickup to greet students and caregivers, spending recess and lunch with students, and dropping off little snacks for teachers, for example. To build a personal and collaborative relationship with their administrators and to learn about being a building leader, coordinators shadowed principals, walking into classrooms with them, observing the tools they used to provide feedback and their daily interactions with school staff. Coordinators prepared formal introductions to the staff while also offering to be an impartial listener and resource.

Coordinators were encouraged to be visible, available, and friendly.

Aligning Around a Common Set of Goals, Routines, and Practices

Each PLC meeting starts in the same way, providing consistency and a reminder of how the community schools’ work connects to the larger goals of the district. The format also offers an approach to mirror when the coordinators host their community school advisory council (CSAC) meetings on their own campuses. Each meeting starts with an icebreaker, an overview of the agenda, a review of the California Community Schools Framework, and a recitation of the mission and vision of Lynwood schools. By the second year, each meeting also held time to reflect on at least one of the five capacity-building strategies developed by the State Transformational Assistance Center for Community Schools, a state-funded technical assistance provider. Those strategies are: (1) shared commitment, understanding, and priorities; (2) centering community-based learning; (3) collaborative leadership; (4) sustaining staff and resources; and (5) strategic community partnerships.¹⁸

The goal is to be comfortable and fluent in these areas, because “this is the rubric that we’re using to see how we are growing within the framework,” the district community school coordinator shared. These capacity-building strategies, “structured by three sequential phases of growth and development and phase-specific strategies and activities that aim to assist LEAs [local education agencies] and schools in gauging their growth and progress,”¹⁹ drive the continuous improvement cycle at the systems and school levels. The District Community Schools Advisory Council, just like the PLC and the site-level CSAC meetings, uses the capacity-building strategy as the means to assess their progress, plan, and implement. Green explained:

One of the things that we do each month at our District Community Schools Advisory Council is look at our capacity-building strategies. ... It is how we engage with the continuous improvement cycle. We’re looking at where we are: Are we visioning, are we engaging, are we transforming? And then we’re looking to see, “OK, what systems need to be changed? What more can we do so that we can show more growth in this area?”

This vertical alignment around implementation creates a shared language and a common set of benchmarks to strive for as implementation deepens. For example, in the PLC, there was an initial focus on the capacity-building strategy of “shared commitment, understanding, and priorities.” One of the activities in visioning, the first stage of development, is for LEAs to “collaborate with schools to raise awareness of the community school strategy across the broader community, creating shared understanding.”²⁰ As a team, the coordinators and district coordinator asked questions like, “Where are we? How many people know about community schools? Are we getting the word out? If we were to walk up to parents, do they know that we’re even a community school?”

The community school coordinators’ reflections on and answers to these questions prompted the creation of Community Schools Nights, a way to build a shared understanding of community schools; gather the wider community for activities, food, and workshops; and have a resource fair to show families what is available to them (see [Community Schools Nights: Collaboration in Action](#)). By facilitating the same type of reflection and discussion in their CSAC meeting, the councils can identify which phase they are in and what they’ve done to get there, including what has worked and what has not, allowing them to plan and prioritize what to do next.

With the year mapped out, including benchmarks and tasks to fulfill in order to be ready for the year-end report and next year’s implementation plan, PLC time can be used effectively and efficiently. The required forms and documents are easier to manage within this structure, as coordinators are able to work on the same items at the same time, allowing them to learn from each other. Similarly, because the council meetings also have established topics to cover each month (usually focused on a capacity-building strategy), while also leaving room in the agenda for the issues that are most important to the council members, coordinators are able to productively discuss what is working and why, share best practices, and problem-solve collaboratively.

Assets and Needs Assessments to Drive Implementation

Coordinators moved from getting to know their school communities to developing the skills and tools needed to conduct an assets and needs assessment, the primary focus of the first year of implementation. Early on, coordinators learned how to conduct a listening campaign. In workshops, they created interview questions together, received feedback on data analysis, and practiced presenting findings. These activities prepared them to share results with their school communities and school site councils.

Between December 2023 and June 2024, coordinators were guided step-by-step through engaging students, families, and school staff in an assets and needs assessment process and transforming results into an implementation plan. Data dive sessions familiarized the community school coordinators with a broad array of data sources (e.g., California School Dashboard, student information systems, California Healthy Kids survey results, and the School Plan for Student Achievement) to better understand school strengths and areas for growth. Coordinators then synthesized and analyzed the administrative data, along with data collected from their surveys and conversations with members of the school community, to set priorities, plan programs and interventions, create goals for the year, and write their implementation plans.

The data collected in the assets and needs process is distilled by each coordinator and then shared with their CSACs. In these collaborative sessions, the data drives the priorities and action steps recommended by the council. After reading 200 survey responses, the coordinator at one elementary school said she “brings all this information to the committee, and we identify our three goals for next year, based on the data.” Hosler Middle School, for example, took concrete steps to improve school climate and student mental health by creating a wellness center (see [Hosler Middle School’s Student Wellness Center](#)). The center was created to provide a safe, calming space where students are provided with coping skills, mental health resources and services, and stress-relief strategies. The vision for this center emerged from the assets and needs process conducted over the previous year, in which improving school climate and attending to the mental health needs of students were elevated as primary areas for growth. The coordinator considered:

What can we do so they feel supported, and they’re not just rushed and pushed into class, even though they’re not having the best day or they need a mental break? We need to fill in that gap because we want them to be focused, we want them to be the best versions of themselves, but if they’re not mentally there, what can we do as a school site to make sure that we’re supporting their needs?

She brought the idea for a student wellness center to her CSAC, and through their recommendation, they were able to secure funds to put the plan into action.

Hosler Middle School’s Student Wellness Center

As Kimberly Perez walks around the outdoor campus of Hosler Middle School, she greets students by name and waves to staff. It is clear she is proud of the school she used to attend and is filled with positive energy and an eagerness to show off her community school, where she is the community school coordinator. On this day, she is leading a tour of campus on the way to the newly opened Lion’s Den: Strength in Wellness, a dedicated student wellness center. A huge blue banner announcing the “Student Wellness Center” with the school colors, mascot, and values (Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Safe) hangs on the wall. The door has a poster titled “101 Stress Relievers,” offering numerous ways to “take a quick or not-so-quick stress break.” Some of the suggestions include: forgive someone, daydream, ask for help, make a list, stand up, and stretch.

When students arrive, they scan a QR code to check in and to allow data tracking for impact and use. As they enter the room there is a table with affirmative messaging: “Seize the moment,” “Stay positive,” “Believe.” Along the front wall is a ceiling-to-floor image of a path through the woods, flanked by lines of faux vines on either side. Multicolored bean bag chairs line the floor. Different stations are set up for students to find an activity that may soothe or calm them. There is a large coloring and doodling area, a set of whiteboard desks to write messages on, and a building and engineering station. The message “It’s Okay To ...” is displayed on the back wall, with a number of different feelings and actions posted below. Existing resources, opportunities, and information pamphlets for students are displayed on shelves. Stress balls, fidgets, and water shakers are organized below another wall with posters that display how the nervous system works.

In an ongoing effort to promote the wellness center, Kimberly worked with the social-emotional specialist and social worker on a schoolwide campaign destigmatizing mental health needs and encouraging students to recognize and name their emotions. Students are urged to seek out the wellness center when they need to calm down, de-stress, or have a more targeted intervention with the staff inside. Teachers are also encouraged to send students to the center, minimizing behavior referrals for students struggling emotionally, mentally, or physically.

The wellness center seems to be serving its purpose. In its first several months, 158 students have visited the center for a variety of reasons. Of the students who checked in, 27.4% did so to talk to someone; 21.9% to take a break, relax, or de-stress; 12.3% were not feeling well emotionally or physically; and 11% were referred by staff.

As the tour moved on to other parts of the campus, two students just arriving at the wellness center were subdued but smiling, ready to take a moment to decompress.

Source: Learning Policy Institute observation notes, documents, and data shared by the community school coordinator at Hosler Middle School.

Identifying Useful Data Tracking Systems

Not all practices were standardized or consistent from the outset. Data collection has been an area of growth for both the district coordinator and site-level coordinators. After several months, they recognized the need for a shared document that “tracks all of the resources.” They also needed to standardize how coordinators tracked their work at school sites and to formalize how impact was reported. This type of data tracking differs from what is typically collected in schools. For example, Green explained that coordinators should document activities such as “scheduling a parent workshop, having a conversation with a potential partner, or using vetting forms, especially for our health collaborative.” One coordinator recounted that early on:

We were all talking about, well, how do we document what we do? I mean, we do so much, but it goes unnoticed. It’s a “if it’s not captured, it never happened” type of deal. So, during these meetings, we all expressed that we weren’t really tracking anything. How do we justify our time? How do we justify our outings? So, I think during one of those Thursday meetings, we all agreed, sure, let’s get it done in one uniform way.

These efforts evolved over time. By the end of the 2024–25 school year, the IT department had developed an online tool for coordinators to log their work. The tool was in beta testing last year and is likely to be refined to make it as useful and user-friendly as possible.

Deepening Implementation and Continuous Improvement

By the end of Year 2, coordinators benefited from a clear structure of responsibilities. Unlike the first year, which felt rushed due to the lack of a planning year, the second year offered a monthly framework of tasks to help coordinators manage their time and responsibilities strategically. As coordinators matured into their role, the PLCs added smaller focus groups that met twice per month. The subcommittees tapped coordinators’ interests and expertise to help strengthen their work across four key areas: parent and

family engagement; public affairs and community relations; community and partner engagement; and community-connected, socially just teaching and learning. One community school coordinator on the public affairs and community relations committee shared what some of that work looks like:

Three of us are part of that team, and it's going out to city council meetings, board meetings, really talking about the work that we're doing. Making sure the whole community knows about the work happening at each school site. And so that's one of the things we're working on. Branching out, even to senate members, legislators. Really stepping out of our community too to make sure that we're spreading the word about the good work that's happening here at Lynwood.

The other committees are seeking to uplift practices that are effective, develop initiatives, and seek out the resources needed to more effectively fulfill their goals.

Lastly, the coordinators have expectations around several processes connected to analysis, reflection, and continuous improvement. Each year, at the end of the school year, the coordinator writes a letter to the school community. In it, they note what they are proud of, which goals they have met, and where they hope to grow the next year. They often also include the major impacts, resources, and programs undertaken that year (see [Helen Keller End-of-Year Letter](#) for an example). They also answer two reflection questions: (1) What's one key takeaway from this year that you believe will inform our work next year? and (2) What are you most excited about for the next year of CCSPP implementation?

Community school coordinators appreciated the district's work to create common processes, procedures, policies, and expectations. They reported feeling well supported through the PLC structure and through the accessibility of the district community school coordinator and her ad hoc coaching. One coordinator reflected on the impact of that support:

She's very hands-on, very encouraging, very supportive. She is open to our ideas as well. And so we are very team-oriented and collaborative, and we meet weekly. ... For this month, we're doing the needs and assets assessment. For next month, we're going to do the asset mapping, so kind of those big items, we want to make sure that all the schools are implementing at the same time. So there's this clear vision of what community schools [are]. Those weekly meetings really help us make sure we're aligned to the same initiative, to the same goals for the month.

Collaboration, coherence, and room for flexibility ground the work of the community school coordinators. By sharing their practices, ideas, and reflections on a weekly basis, community school coordinators are able to implement programs that fit the needs of their schools' populations, while also adopting some universal practices that work for all coordinators.

Helen Keller End-of-Year Letter

At the end of each year, community school coordinators write a letter to their community reflecting on the progress they've made toward shared goals, celebrating partnerships and programs, and thinking forward to the next school year. Below is an example from the coordinator at Helen Keller Elementary School.

Dear Helen Keller Elementary School Families, Students, Teachers, Staff, and Community Partners,

As the 2024-2025 school year comes to a close, I reflect on my time here with mixed emotions. It is with a heavy heart that I announce my retirement, but I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to serve this community. Over the past 2 years, I've witnessed growth, collaboration, and remarkable support from everyone involved in the Helen Keller Elementary family.

During my time here, I've had the privilege of building strong relationships with our students, teachers, staff, local businesses, and community organizations. Together, we've created an environment where our children can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Some of the key highlights from our work together include:

- Community Partnerships. I am deeply grateful to the many partners who supported our school, including CF Fitness Inc, Hands of Love Nonprofit, Veterans Stand Together, Divine Hustles, Winstar Donut Shop, Presidential Barber Shop, Compator Counseling Center, The Comic Den, Missing Children Foundation (MCF), and more. Their trust and dedication helped us bring vital resources and services to our students and families.*
- Enrichment Activities & Events. From our Back-to-School Resource Fair to Hispanic Heritage Month performances, health and wellness workshops, and our first Spring Fair, we created opportunities for students to engage, learn, and have fun. We even celebrated our first snow day and held a pumpkin patch event, ensuring our students had memorable, joyful experiences.*
- Student Engagement. One program I'm especially proud of is our collaboration with CF Fitness. By introducing a coach during recess and lunch, we ensured that students felt invited to play and be physically active. The program helped reduce social isolation, increased student participation, and created a more inclusive, team-oriented environment.*
- Parent & Community Involvement. I worked to foster stronger connections between the school and families by hosting workshops, organizing a community garden, and coordinating food distributions. Parent engagement was a cornerstone of our work, and together we helped build a foundation of support for every child.*

As we look to the 2025–2026 school year, I encourage our Community Schools team, teachers, staff, parents, and community to unite in support of our shared vision, focusing on the following goals:

- 1. Strengthening Student Attendance. It's essential that we keep encouraging consistent attendance to ensure our students' academic success.*
- 2. Enhancing Parent Engagement. Continuing to involve parents in school activities and leadership will remain a priority.*
- 3. Expanding Enrichment Programs. Our work in offering after-school enrichment opportunities should continue, providing our students with diverse learning experiences.*

Though I am retiring from my role as Community Schools Coordinator, my commitment to helping children and families remains strong. I know that the community we've built at Helen Keller will continue to flourish, and I trust that our students will continue to receive the support they need to succeed.

I also want to remind our families that Lynwood Unified School District offers a wide range of resources, including parent workshops, social-emotional learning support, and enrichment programs.

Please continue to take advantage of the incredible services available to you and your child.

Thank you for your trust, support, and collaboration. It has been an honor to serve this community. I wish you all a wonderful summer and look forward to the continued success of Helen Keller Elementary.

With heartfelt gratitude and best wishes,

Grace Funes

Source: Document provided by Lynwood Unified School District. (2024).

Outside Professional Development Opportunities

The weekly PLCs serve as the centerpiece of the coordinators' professional learning and development. Those sessions are complemented by monthly communities of transformational practice hosted by the R-TAC, which is located within the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE). Those sessions are built around the California Community Schools Framework and Capacity-Building Strategies.²¹ Coordinators noted that both LACOE and the R-TAC have been instrumental, in particular, in helping them learn the intricacies of the Community Schools Framework. As one coordinator shared, "When it comes to the framework, I want to give credit to LACOE."

In the 2024–25 school year, the community of practice zeroed in on developing a strong understanding of the Cornerstone Commitments: (1) a commitment to assets-driven and strengths-based practice; (2) a commitment to racially just and restorative school climates; (3) a commitment to powerful, culturally proficient and relevant instruction; and (4) a commitment to shared decision-making and participatory practices. This upcoming year, sessions will include explicit teachings on capacity-building strategies and connecting implementation flow to continuous improvement.

The coordinators were also encouraged to seek out other opportunities to build their capacity. Many reported looking to LACOE to find specific trainings. The coordinators were given time to attend one professional development session every 2 months, and “depending on your goals or depending what you’re focusing on,” one coordinator said, “you kind of pick and choose which ones you want.” Most often, the coordinators sought the free trainings offered by LACOE and even coordinated with each other by taking turns attending and reporting back. During the highlights portion of the PLC meeting, one coordinator shared about the “great work that’s happening somewhere [we visited]. Or if you attended the summit, then you’ll be able to share all of that information with the team, so you don’t gatekeep it.”

They also cited the Empowerment Summits hosted by the State Transformational Assistance Center, as well as other conferences, as valuable opportunities to observe how other districts were implementing community schools. These experiences allowed coordinators to see promising practice in action and helped build confidence that those approaches could be adapted for schools in Lynwood. School site visits were another way to see the work in practice. The coordinators had opportunities, often coordinated by LACOE, to observe other schools within the county. In those visits, coordinators typically received information about the initiative for half the day, then toured the school to see the work in action. As one coordinator emphasized, they were “physically there with them [other coordinators], while students are there, during a school day. I thought that was very helpful too.”

Other times, Green brought in experts to meet an identified need. For example, public speaking and presentation are essential communication tools for a coordinator. Several coordinators identified public speaking and presenting as essential skills to have, and many noted that they felt they needed improvement. As a result, Green organized a full-day professional development with an outside firm specializing in “effective presentations.” When asked about effective professional development opportunities, one coordinator reflected on this session, sharing:

It was honestly amazing to be able to actually hear from a professional. They recorded us. We were able to see that transformation from the beginning to the end to see how this PD [professional development] is working. And it just wasn’t like any other professional development that we’ve gotten.

In addition, coordinators are frequently afforded opportunities to practice presenting in front of one another in a low-stakes setting, receiving feedback from trusted colleagues. When asked about the ways in which she has witnessed coordinators grow in their skills, Green noted:

When I think about growth, I also want to mention that our coordinators have become such excellent professional speakers. So that was one of the things that we really had to work on with them, because they’re forever speaking, even if it’s informal conversations they’re having with parents and teachers, giving workshops, or speaking to report out or give formal presentations. And so they have grown so much in that area, myself included. Now they engage and have that passion when they’re speaking and can make it relevant.

The intentional scope and sequence designed to develop the coordinators has helped them mature into their roles. Year 1 centered on understanding the role and its components, connecting community schools with the district’s goals and initiatives, building effective and positive relationships, bringing added value to their school’s climate and culture, and conducting an effective assets and needs assessment.

Year 2 built upon skills developed in the previous year while also focusing on growing into the role and developing leadership and communication skills, tracking the work effectively and efficiently, and building systems to support the work. The impact is being noticed outside of the SSD. One district administrator said she has “had several principals say, ‘I wish we had this for other roles,’ like this type of training and this type of development.” According to this administrator, this is “a good thing, because other people are seeing the outcomes and the effects of us having these moments to reflect and to really grow.” This investment in internal capacity building has created a ripple effect, positively impacting how coordinators engage with and lead community school implementation, contributing to the long-term sustainability of the community schools model in Lynwood.

Sustaining the Work

There are a lot of needs, and every school is different, but just having that team to fall back onto and experiencing the same things and just holding each other tight ... helps us de-stress. We pretty much tell each other we can do it!

— Community school coordinator

Cultivating a Community That Capitalizes on Everyone's Strengths

Bonding as a team has made the “heavy work” of being a community school coordinator doable. The coordinators consistently expressed that they are each other’s support network. They text and call each other constantly. Often, they coordinate an ad hoc or spur-of-the-moment resource or event across schools. The professional learning communities (PLCs) are deeply effective in building coordinators’ capacity, but the weekly touchpoint also allowed the group to form trusting and deep relationships—ones they have come to rely on when the job gets tough. This sentiment surfaced in a focus group. One coordinator said:

We’re all in this together. So we’re like, “How do you do this? Because for me, it was, I don’t know, frustrating or challenging at first.” So just having someone to vent to. ... When I talk to any of [the other coordinators], they relate to what I’m saying.

Another coordinator summed up the benefits of growing and learning together and having that protected weekly time to meet when she stated, “I really value the times that we spend as a team because it’s a time for us to reflect, just get ideas from each other, and support each other.”

This team of 16 coordinators frequently has informal meetings and conversations “whether it’s through [a] phone call or through text. We share best practices, we give each other support emotionally as well. ... I think just overall.” Sometimes a coordinator comes across an opportunity that is not right for their school. But instead of just passing it up, they will call another coordinator to see if they can take advantage of it.

This attitude exemplifies Lynwood’s larger sense of community. All the students and families in the district are part of the community, not just those at each individual site. One coordinator recounted how a colleague wanted to do a parent passport program to increase family engagement (parents get stamps for attending different events, workshops, volunteering, etc.), but the principal did not feel it would work well at the school. So, she brought the idea to another coordinator whose principal was fully on board. He noted, “[The principal] told me to go ahead and do it and supported me. We saw that program really help us increase our goal for parent engagement.”

Similar to how coordinators were open and generous in sharing ideas and resources, they also emphasized how they could rely on each other’s different strengths and areas of technical expertise. Some, for example, were better at putting together spreadsheets or designing Google Forms, while others were more comfortable doing public outreach. When it came to helping the community school advisory council (CSAC) complete a self-assessment around the capacity-building strategies, one coordinator developed a form to help drive the work and help them identify which phase they were in. Another

created a form that can be used to identify the big three goals for next year. Through their communal and collaborative orientation, one person's strength became the whole group's asset. These collaborative relationships helped the coordinators form a sense of solidarity with each other.

Community Schools Nights: Collaboration in Action

It's not even 10:00 a.m., and community school coordinators are dropping off materials for the Community Schools Night set to take place on Hosler Middle School's campus that evening. Community Schools Nights were developed by Lynwood Unified School District's community school coordinators as a way to bring everyone together from the area feeder schools to learn more about community schools, attend a partner fair, celebrate with food and performances, and participate in parent workshops (while kids are entertained by a community partner). While the coordinator at the host school takes the lead on logistics, each event is a deeply collaborative effort, from planning through cleanup, and every coordinator participates.

By 1:00 p.m., all the community school coordinators and the district coordinator have left their campuses and traveled to Hosler. Each arrives with supplies: snacks, signs, decorations, flyers, and a can-do attitude. They huddle in the family resource room, catching up quickly and drinking a coffee for a pick-me-up before they break into different groups to begin setting up. After a quick pep talk from District Community School Coordinator Dawn Green, the coordinators spring into action. They move tables, set up chairs, tape down tablecloths, hang signs, prepare snack bags for children, open classrooms, welcome community partners, and set up a large blow-up screen and projector. Cheerleaders practice their routine in the background, preparing for their show in the gym.

As the start time approaches, coordinators take their posts. Those from the feeder elementary schools set up tables near the balloon-lined entrance. Each table is adorned with its school name, a handout specific to the community schools work on their campus, and a sign-in sheet to track attendance. Others are staged at key areas, from monitoring the bathroom to welcoming guests and helping with parking. In the gym, 14 community partners welcome families; talk with them; hand out swag; and share resources on mental health, STEM enrichment, free transportation programs, and more.

An hour into the event, everyone is ushered to the gym, where Green leads a presentation about Lynwood Community Schools. She provides an overview of the initiative, the mission, the vision, and the goals they hope to achieve. Several principals and nearly all the leadership from the Student Services Department line the walls. Student cheerleaders perform, as does a middle school student who identifies as Pacific Islander. Brave and confident, she performs an Indigenous dance in front of a large crowd, who give an uproarious cheer when she finishes.

The evening ends with a theater program for young kids, giving parents and caregivers the opportunity to choose from several workshops: Navigating Parent Burnout; Vape Waves: Guarding Children in a Digital Age; Parenting With Firmness, Kindness, and Warmth; Road to My Child's Success: Establishing Structures and Routines; and Community Schools 101. Partway through the event, a food pantry drops off bags of food. The coordinators help distribute them and carry bags out to cars. They set aside what's left to take home to their own families. After families leave, exhausted but upbeat coordinators work to break everything down and pack it away.

Reflecting on the event in their professional learning community the next day, one of the biggest and most consistent “glows” is the teamwork and collaboration that allows these events to be successful. True to their process and commitment to continuous improvement, the coordinators also start identifying how to do this even better next year. They reference observation data about flow and sequencing, along with attendance numbers and workshop participation, to guide their brainstorming. Even as they discuss what they wished had gone better, the group punctuates the conversation with praise, remarking on how proud they are of each other for all they were able to accomplish.

Source: Learning Policy Institute observation notes. (2025).

Strengthening Collaboration and Embracing Leadership

During the 2024–25 school year, the second year of community school implementation, professional development focused on enhancing coordinators’ leadership capacity. Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood) coordinators hold a classified management designation, placing them in a unique position within the school’s leadership hierarchy. They do not have the traditional control over school decision-making, but are still on par in many ways with the leadership in the building. As a result, they are learning how to exert influence through collaboration and use their unique position to elevate the voices of families, partners, students, and teachers to create positive changes in their schools.

To deepen this growth, Green launched a new segment titled “Leading and Learning.” This dedicated time in the weekly professional learning community (PLC) focused on building the leadership capacity of the coordinators by offering targeted learning aligned with identified areas of need. Topics included servant leadership, transformational leadership, communication skills, navigating difficult conversations, and leading through influence rather than authority. The goal is to empower the coordinators to not only support students and families but also to emerge as leaders on their campuses who model collaboration, empathy, and strategic thinking (see [Building a Community of Leaders](#)). After observing her team of coordinators over the course of the year, Green shared:

The goal is to empower the coordinators to not only support students and families but also to emerge as leaders on their campuses who model collaboration, empathy, and strategic thinking.

[The] “Leading and Learning” segment has strengthened our team’s ability to approach their work with greater confidence, vision, and purpose. As a result, we’ve observed increased leadership presence among our coordinators at school sites, more active participation in school decision-making processes, and stronger relationships with staff and community members.

The coordinators echoed her assessment. In focus groups, they reflected on their own development. Several shared that their confidence has grown, with one coordinator saying they have begun to really identify “as a leader in [their] school site.” The coordinators acknowledged the expertise they bring to their schools, both in terms of bringing in and connecting people to resources and also using their position to

elevate more voices. As one coordinator noted, they “highlight the importance of capturing student voices. I think a lot of times, as adults, we’re making the decisions for them. ... In community schools, we tap [students] to share what they want to see in their schools.”

Similarly, as leaders of the CSACs, their role is not to dictate what the council discusses and the decisions that emerge, but rather to facilitate and teach members of the schools how to be leaders, share ideas, and advocate for what they need and want. The purpose, according to one coordinator, is to “have shared decision-making.” For coherence and consistency, certain items appear on the agenda each month across the councils. However, when describing her approach to council leadership, one coordinator illustrates the balance of addressing required topics and creating a space for sharing ideas:

The way I see it, I give them [council members] a voice. So, I tell them, speak on your perspective, but also think about other parents. Same for the students. You are the student, but think about what other students will think too, because this is the voice that I am hearing, but I want to make sure that you’re representing your population. So, if you don’t know, make sure you go and you ask. And then we can continue to have those conversations on how we can support you guys. So, we form the agenda. At first, I created it for them because it was kind of very uniform, like every school site needed to do the same thing. And then from there, they were able to begin building their own agendas.

Through this approach, she noticed a marked increase in engagement. She said, “I had maybe four, maybe five people in my Community Schools Advisory Council [last year]. This year I have up to 20, 25.”

The councils are composed of administrators, parents, teachers, classified staff, and student representatives. Community school coordinators are being trained to facilitate collaborative dialogues, grounded in data analysis, that help refine strategic priorities. The coordinator at Helen Keller Elementary noted that through this process her CSAC was able to see positive gains in the areas of expanded learning opportunities, authentic family and community engagement, and targeted attendance interventions. Through a variety of data, including “qualitative and quantitative feedback through student and parent surveys, workshop evaluations, and ongoing check-ins with staff and families,” they made some key adjustments. For example, the school sought to offer more culturally responsive workshop content, create better-aligned scheduling, and improve the school-home communication systems.

Despite the strides made in coordinators’ abilities to be effective leaders and good collaborators, there remains work to do in building collaboration between the coordinators and their school leadership team. All the coordinators in the focus groups agreed that principal buy-in, support, and collaboration are vital to effective implementation. However, they reported uneven commitment across their school sites. The stark difference in experience is exemplified by these two very different accounts. The first was very positive:

I have a supportive admin team. They see me as management, and so admin here includes me in weekly meetings. At all-staff meetings, I have time to present to keep them updated on community schools. And so, the support here at the school site is definitely what is helping this initiative thrive. I feel like my leadership team is really supporting me and they’re guiding me throughout the way. I don’t feel like I have to do it on my own. And even when I do, I feel confident enough to be able to do these things now because I’m in the loop. I know what’s going on.

Another coordinator shared the ongoing struggle in working with her administrators:

For me, it's a little bit different. I feel like I'm a little bit unique in the sense that there's not a lot of support from the principal. And so that has affected my ability to implement the initiative of community schools. And so unlike [the others], I have limited communication. I don't know if it's maybe the lack of the buy-in from her, the lack of understanding. But it does affect me because, like they were saying, it starts from the top. And if the top doesn't support it, then the rest will not. And so that has been very challenging for me at the school site because that support is not there in the same way.

District administrators also acknowledge this is an area of growth and are seeking opportunities for individual and joint principal–coordinator trainings through the Los Angeles County Office of Education, more in-house professional development for principals around the community schools strategy, and better coordination with principal supervisors about the expectations for community school leadership.

Building a Community of Leaders

The Lynwood Unified School District school board chamber is a large room. The district's mission and objectives hang above the dais, displayed in both English and Spanish. Rows of chairs for community members fill the space. On the day of the summer training, two large projector screens display the self-reflection: "Who we are and why." Coordinators were asked to identify their top three strengths and discuss them with a partner.

At tables around the room, coordinators were studiously reviewing the list of 34 leadership traits, assessing which resonated with how they viewed themselves. One pair connected over a shared commitment to responsibility—valuing honesty, taking psychological ownership of what you say you will do. Another pair led with empathy—sensing the emotions of another by imagining themselves in their lives. During the group share-out, many individuals selected the learner trait, noting their desire to learn and continuously improve.

District Community School Coordinator Dawn Green smiled as she listened to the reflections. "Yes, we are good as one, but we are better as a team." As the group was pondering this takeaway, one coordinator raised her hand. "Ms. Green, can I offer a reflection? There were a few times where the strengths that I chose for others was what they shared themselves, but also some that people didn't choose. I would love to hear what other people view as our strengths." There were nods around the room for redoing the exercise, this time hearing what their peers thought were people's leadership strengths.

"That's something we can engage in. I would like that. Others see strengths in you that you don't see in yourself," Green remarked. She noted that many times people feel imposter syndrome, which blocks us from seeing ourselves honestly. This sentiment brought vigorous nods of agreement among many in the room. Several pairs pointed at each other with knowing laughter; they had just been discussing the same feeling.

Green went further, opening up about one of her professional anxieties: "I don't feel like a great public speaker." Many disagreed immediately. With a nod of appreciation for the affirmations, she clarified, "But wait, let me explain. I just say what needs to be said, without great

stories. ... Sometimes we diminish our own shine. We can be so self-critical.” Another round of nods passed across the room before the conversation turned into a group reflection on how leaders can avoid downplaying their own strengths.

Source: Learning Policy Institute observation notes. (2024).

Coordinators Reflect on Their Roles and Growth

The scope and sequence driving the coordinators’ professional growth, confidence, and efficacy have yielded results. In a focus group conversation between two coordinators, they reflected on how their grasp of their position has changed from the early days through the end of their second year:

Coordinator 1: “We went from messy to clarity.”

Coordinator 2: “Next year’s going to be transformative.”

The focus groups also reflected on the skills they have and the skills they need to do their work well. When asked to reflect on growth or improvement in their roles, coordinators mentioned public speaking and presenting, survey administration, leadership skills, problem-solving and strategizing, creativity and thinking outside the box, and increasing confidence over the year.

Several noted what they were proud of:

- “I’ve grown a lot in terms of being able to create partnerships and being creative in the partnerships that I create with my school site and the outside partners. It’s not just, OK, food, resources, clothing, basic needs, but it’s also, ‘What can I bring to students in terms of enrichment programs or expanded learning opportunities that they may not have had if I wasn’t here as a community school’s coordinator?’
- “I feel like our middle school was definitely bashed a lot because we were the bad school. But the first year, compared to this year, we have really invested in our staff. For example, we did Teacher Appreciation Week. Every single day, we did something for them this year. And they really said, ‘Oh my God, we felt so much love. This has never happened.’ And then even our students were doing a structured lunch for my school site. And so, during lunch, they have a fun activity, they got to vote what they wanted during that lunchtime. So, they had cooking, pottery, 3D printing, and soccer. And so really listening to our school community and trying to support them as much as we can—I feel like that positive school climate has really transformed in our school.”
- “I have a mobile bulletin. In my community, most of our children are being raised by grandparents. So yes, we do a lot of media posts and all that stuff, but the grandparents don’t get those messages. ClassDojo, well, only the parent is signed up to that. So, I went old-fashioned. I have my bulletin board on wheels, and every morning I take that bulletin board and all my flyers, and everything is there, out front. So that’s how I have been able to increase parent engagement because, obviously, my parents are working, but grandparents are attending.”

- “When I started, the parents wouldn’t acknowledge me. They would just look at me and walk away. Even some of the staff wouldn’t acknowledge me. I stayed the course, greeting the parents, being visible out there, and now the parents, they love me. We have a great connection. They always come to me for anything. With the teachers, my relationship is great too. They come to me and ask, ‘How can we bring this group to our school? How can we connect our community to the school?’ So they’ve been doing that, and I’ve been working very closely with some of the teachers.”

The coordinators featured in this report are dedicated to their jobs and have put a tremendous amount of effort into bringing community schools to Lynwood. Their success is due in large part to how their development has been structured within the district, as well as the infrastructure that exists at the county and state levels.

Coordinators Improve Their School Communities

The investments in developing highly capable community school coordinators have translated into tangible outcomes for students and families. The district is seeing evidence of growth on achievement tests in nearly all its campuses, school climate has improved, and suspensions and chronic absence have declined. Aside from these bigger-picture outcomes, each coordinator has integrated programs, services, and partners into their campuses.

The investments in developing highly capable community school coordinators have translated into tangible outcomes for students and families.

At Helen Keller Elementary School, a partnership with CF Fitness provided a daily coach who brought joy and energy to organized play sessions during recess and lunch. Not only did this build students’ skills and confidence, but it also reduced disciplinary incidents across every grade level. Hosler Middle School, in addition to opening a student wellness center, secured a partner to provide mentoring to students. Those mentors are on campus 3 days per week. Washington Elementary School used some of its California Community Schools Partnership Program allotted funds to buy materials for a weekly family book club.

At Wilson Elementary, the coordinator elevated how partnerships brought several enrichment opportunities to campus, including participation in the LA Rams Readers Assembly and the LA Kings Ball Hockey Clinic; art activities through the LACMA Mobile Museum; and a yearlong, structured sports program during lunch through One-on-One Sports. The coordinator at Firebaugh High School highlighted that its Parent Involvement Day had “the highest turnout to date.” They also welcomed The Book Truck, which offered high-interest books to all students, and provided weekly food giveaways through a partnership with a local church. At Roosevelt Elementary School, the coordinator helped launch three student clubs (cooking, theater, and STEM) and hosted several well-attended workshops for parents on topics like Communicating Effectively and Nutrition for the Family, as well as activities like Zumba.

These efforts only scratch the surface of the services, programs, and partnerships the coordinators have initiated in their short time in this role. As they continue to grow their capacity, forge long-standing relationships with key community partners, and work with their school community to identify ongoing needs and desired opportunities, the integration of services and programs will blossom.

Lessons Learned on Building Coherence and Developing Strong Coordinators

Alignment and coherence in education are important for effective transformation. They can help ensure equitable outcomes for students by supporting whole person learning and development. When systems are aligned and coherent, educators at all levels can work together to achieve their goals. This can lead to students experiencing a sense of purpose, healthy relationships, and success in schools and districtwide.

— Presenter during district professional development

Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood) went all in on community schools and faced a difficult task of scaling quickly, across the district, without time or funds for planning. As investments in community schools as a promising school improvement strategy continue to expand across the country, understanding how districts take up and support implementation in an intentional and coherent way is key. This report highlighted one district's approach. Lessons learned from Lynwood can provide a helpful blueprint for initiatives planning to scale rapidly or begin a new community schools initiative.

Findings suggest that Lynwood's efforts proved successful because the district built upon existing strengths and infrastructure. Lynwood is using the California Community Schools Partnership Program funds to amplify initiatives within the district and build upon already instantiated pieces of community schooling. To identify and fill critical gaps, Lynwood conducted a holistic assessment of existing services and initiatives. By gaining clarity around critical student needs and services, the district was able to coalesce around an aligned vision for community schools.

To drive coherence around that vision, Lynwood concentrated its efforts on building the capacity of community school coordinators. By focusing on developing the coordinators, the ambassadors of the strategy—in an intentional, consistent way—the district has been able to make great strides in implementation over the course of 2 years and positively impact students, families, and the Lynwood community.

Clearly defining the skills, responsibilities, and position classification of the community school coordinator led to a more effective hiring process and a smoother onboarding experience. Lynwood was very specific and intentional in crafting the community school coordinator position, prioritizing commitment to community; familiarity with existing resources; and the ability to form strong, positive relationships. Lynwood also made a key decision on where the coordinators sit in the organizational chart. As classified management, they are required to have degrees and take on a leadership role, but are ineligible to backfill needs in the school that require certificated staff, such as subbing for absent teachers.

Building the capacity of community school coordinators requires designing ongoing professional development opportunities, grounded in learning and shared experiences. In Lynwood, this took the form of weekly professional learning communities (PLCs), in-person structured meetings that were sequenced to prepare coordinators for each next step of implementation. The PLC structure helped coordinators align around a common set of goals, routines, and practices while building skills around relationship building, data collection and analysis, facilitation, collaborative leadership, and strategic thinking to make

tailored decisions on their own campuses. The district coordinator, who oversees districtwide community school implementation and is charged with community school coordinators' professional growth, crafted a scope and sequence for the coordinators that layered essential skills and practices central to effective community school implementation. Within the PLC structure and through personalized coaching, coordinators were able to workshop and troubleshoot with one another, improving upon their work as each school year progressed.

Community school coordinators help the broader school community organize around a shared vision and goals. They cannot do that job effectively without specific and targeted training on conducting assets and needs assessments and driving the data analysis process. In Lynwood, the final product of the first year's work was an implementation plan driven by the assets and needs assessment. Coordinators spent months practicing and building the varied skills needed for a comprehensive process, including piloting a listening campaign, learning about all the available administrative data sources and how to pull data from them, practicing and facilitating data analysis, writing and administering surveys, presenting findings, and crafting priorities and action steps.

Encouraging and assisting coordinators in accessing professional development opportunities beyond the PLC structure can help them tailor learning to their individual strengths and areas for growth. For Lynwood coordinators, the Los Angeles County Office of Education served as a key source of training and guidance. Coordinators sought out individual professional development opportunities both individually and as a group, including sessions organized by the district coordinator. Importantly, coordinators took advantage of, and found value in, the county and state supportive infrastructure, particularly the technical assistance offerings, pointing to the value of California's investment in building that spoke-and-wheel model.

New community school coordinators are often stepping into a role that previously did not exist and is singular on a campus. In the beginning, that can be both difficult and lonely. Finding ways to cultivate a supportive community of coordinators can help them forge on with the work and stick with the role. When coordinators form bonds and trusting relationships, like in Lynwood, they can lean on one another for support and to deepen their work. Weekly in-person PLC meetings helped the coordinators forge bonds that are personal and professional, something they credit with sustaining the work. They also took on an identity rooted in the belief that they are stronger and more powerful together, embodying the central tenet of community schools: collaboration.

Community school coordinators are meant to model shared leadership. Cultivating the disposition and skills needed to be effective, collaborative leaders is a years-long process that takes ongoing, targeted learning focused on building leadership capacity. Each year of implementation, Lynwood has added to the expectations for coordinators and the leadership training they receive. The results of this approach are reflected in coordinators' growing confidence and increased agency, as evidenced in their reflections on how they have changed and grown over the course of 2 years. In addition, these types of trainings help coordinators understand what to ask for from collaborators within their school and from partners and families.

Appendix: Methodology

This single-case study was conducted as a part of a multisite investigation of how local educational agencies (LEAs) that received a California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) grant leveraged resources to enable community school transformation in their settings. The purpose of the research was to examine how state investments enabled LEAs to implement systems and approaches that allowed for the development and sustainability of high-quality community schools. To this end, this overarching study sought to examine: (1) the structures and processes implemented and/or redesigned by LEAs that received CCSPP grants to support community school implementation; (2) how LEA-level changes enabled the development of high-quality community schools; and (3) the emerging impacts of community school transformation on students, families, and communities.

Situated within this broader study, the Lynwood Unified School District (Lynwood) case study focused on how the district developed systems and supports to build school and staff capacity for community school transformation. This exploration was guided by the following research questions:

- What infrastructure, organizational structures, and processes has Lynwood implemented or redesigned to recruit and build the capacity of community school staff?
- How are Lynwood’s efforts to strengthen and support community school staff enabling schools in implementing essential community school key practices (e.g., culture of belonging, safety, and care; powerful family and community engagement; rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction; integrated systems of support)?
- What lessons can be garnered from Lynwood’s capacity-building processes? How can the lessons learned be leveraged by other LEAs aiming to expand and strengthen community school approaches?

This study used purposive sampling to identify “information-rich cases” of LEAs that received CCSPP implementation grants in 2021–22 and 2022–23, the first 2 years of the program, to examine how districts were using funds to develop and sustain community schools. Researchers selected sites based on several bounding criteria: geography, to capture diverse regional contexts; alignment with the Essentials for Community Schools Transformation framework,²² to ensure attention to whole child practices rather than service provision alone; and LEAs’ demographic composition and student outcomes, to assess how equity strategies supported students and families from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds.

In considering these criteria, Lynwood’s community schools initiative (CSI) emerged as an information-rich case and was thus selected as one of three LEAs for this investigation. Lynwood launched its first community school in 2019–20 with funding from the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) CSI. The district later received a 5-year, round 2 CCSPP implementation grant totaling \$24.5 million to expand the initiative to its remaining 16 schools. With support from both LACOE and CCSPP, Lynwood has transformed into a full community schools district, with all 17 schools receiving dedicated funding for community school implementation. Because Lynwood’s community schools initiative is both

recent—launched in 2023–24—and districtwide, this case also offered a unique opportunity to examine the early stages of how a district leveraged CCSPP funding to support the development of community school staff and to scale implementation.

Focused attention on specific coordinators and the schools where they worked was selected through a combination of nomination and data analysis. We requested that coordinators be nominated based on effective implementation, demonstrated impact, and strong collaborative relationships with their school leadership teams. We paired these nominations with a look at publicly available data, as well as internal impact data around the use of resources, take-up of initiatives, and family engagement, among other factors. Our observations of and deeper dives with these coordinators purposely coincided with key meetings and events happening at the district so that we could see the collaboration and community schools work in action.

Research Design

To answer the study’s research questions, investigators conducted a nested case study, allowing them to generate a holistic and comparative understanding of consortium practices and their interplay with the local context.²³ This case study methodology also enabled researchers to analyze a variety of data sources, which allowed them to examine the LEA as it operated, rather than exerting control over the research sites.²⁴ Given that a case study allows researchers to remain sensitive to context and enables investigators to capture multiple processes and data sources, it is an appropriate research design to surface the complex ways that community school transformation efforts transpire in local settings.

This study’s research design also supports holistic and nested case analyses, which can surface insights about the phenomenon and its distinct manifestations in varied contexts. Nested case analyses enable researchers to examine a broader phenomenon and its embedded subunits, which supports systematic comparisons of patterns within and across the study’s sample to corroborate evidence and illuminate embedded case dynamics.²⁵ In this study, researchers consider the LEA the overarching case of a transformation effort, while community schools operating within its jurisdiction can be understood as its nested subunits.

With this design, this report illustrates how community school transformation has uniquely unfolded within Lynwood and draws its conclusions from the commonalities and differences that emerged across the nested cases to identify lessons and takeaways for researchers, practitioners, and educational decision-makers.

Data Collection

Data for the Lynwood case study were collected from February 2024 to August 2025. Primary data sources for this study include interviews, observations, and documents.

Interviews

The research team conducted 18 interviews with 23 district and school-based staff members affiliated with Lynwood, including initiative leaders, district officials, principals, community school coordinators, and an intervention specialist. (See [Table A1](#) for a breakdown of the study’s participants by role.) Interviews were

conducted in multiple rounds. Initially, investigators used purposive sampling to identify prospective study participants based on their affiliation with Lynwood and its CSI. First-round interviewees included district leaders who played key roles in the CSI’s rollout. Participants were asked to describe the history of the initiative and its growth over time, initiative priorities, and district-level systems and structures designed to support key community school practices. The research team also had an informational conversation with several staff members from the LACOE, which is also the Regional Technical Assistance Center for Lynwood, to better understand the technical assistance and professional development landscape.

After these systems-level interviews (*n* = 8), researchers interviewed school-based staff, including community school coordinators and principals, seeking to understand their experiences and pivotal role in implementing the approach and their strategies to advance community school priorities. Interview prompts asked community school coordinators and principals to describe their site’s community schools model and their primary roles and responsibilities in its implementation. Coordinators also reflected on the ways they collaborated with families, school leaders, and educators and how district structures supported them in engaging in their daily work.

Interviews were semistructured and lasted 60–120 minutes. In most instances, study participants were interviewed once, but district and initiative leaders and several community school coordinators were interviewed multiple times to solicit additional information, given their leadership in community school efforts. Interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, as well as in person during the site visit. Each interview was audio-recorded with permission from participants and later transcribed to support data analysis.

Table A1. Study Interviewees

Role	Number of interviewees
District and initiative leaders	7
Intervention specialists	1
Principals	2
Community school coordinators	13
Total	23

Note: While there were 23 individuals interviewed in the Lynwood case study, researchers conducted a total of 18 interviews.

Observations

Researchers also conducted observations to support case study research. Observations included a 2-day site visit to Lynwood in May 2025, which enabled researchers to observe two highly effective community school coordinators in their daily routines, a community schools night for five elementaries and a middle school, and the weekly professional learning community (PLC) meeting. In addition to site visits, the research team observed approximately 7 hours of professional learning for community school coordinators.

Taken collectively, these observations provided insight into the professional development structures that enabled implementation and advanced community school aims. They also helped researchers triangulate data obtained from interviews and relevant documentation. Raw field notes were taken during observations and converted into narrative field notes.

Documents

The research team collected and reviewed more than 250 organizational documents related to community school implementation in Lynwood, including:

- district-level documents related to the implementation of the community schools initiative (e.g., meeting agendas, implementation plans and timelines, and organizational charts);
- materials to support professional learning opportunities for community school coordinators (e.g., meeting agendas and slide decks); and
- school-based documents illustrating community school practices and approaches (e.g., asset mapping, assets and needs assessments, and engagement plans).

In addition to these documents, the research team accessed publicly available data on student demographics as well as student outcome measures. Investigators reviewed these data sources to better understand the initiative's implementation and the trajectory of student outcomes in the district.

Analysis

Investigators used a multistep process to engage in qualitative data analysis. They began by creating a preliminary list of descriptive and deductive codes based on the ideas present in the semistructured interview protocols. Researchers then refined the code list after a review of select interview transcripts to include themes, structures, and practices reflected in the data. Through this process, researchers clarified, added, and deleted codes from the initial list to ensure key concepts were reflected in the codebook and to minimize perceived redundancies. They also revised code definitions to more clearly capture the dynamics, processes, and structures supporting community school implementation.

After refining the codebook, investigators engaged in activities to ensure interrater reliability in code application. Each member of the research team applied the codes to select interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. Once the data were individually analyzed, the research team convened to compare their code applications in order to refine their analyses and the consistency of their findings. Once a strong measure of interrater reliability was achieved, the research team coded the study's data sources using Dedoose qualitative analysis software, a web-based application for qualitative analysis.

Once qualitative coding was completed, researchers analyzed code frequency and identified patterns within and across the case and its embedded units. Researchers identified something as a finding if the conclusion was triangulated and convergent. At the same time, researchers examined divergent findings to understand the complexity, nuances, and variations in community school implementation where relevant.

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