



Community Schools in Los Angeles Unified

Transforming Teaching and Learning

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Executive Summary

In 2021, California made a historic \$4.1 billion investment in the growth and spread of the community schools across the state through the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). The CCSPP offers planning grants, implementation grants, and extension grants for local educational agencies (LEAs) to launch, scale, and sustain community school initiatives. Designed to build system capacity, CCSPP dedicates \$200 million for technical assistance—delivered via statewide, regional, and county offices of education—to support LEAs in developing networks of schools and embedding community school practices.

This case study—one of three examining how California LEAs have used CCSPP funds to build systemic supports for community schools—focuses on Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It examines how LAUSD’s Community Schools Initiative (CSI) developed a robust support system that centers inclusive, deeper learning and established school-level systems and processes to sustain those practices. The findings provide valuable insights for district and school leaders seeking to advance community school transformation focused on inclusive classroom practice and academic achievement.

Los Angeles Unified School District’s Community Schools Initiative

Spanning more than 1,300 schools and serving more than 500,000 students, LAUSD is the second-largest school district in the nation. In 2017, LAUSD formally launched its CSI through a board resolution and collective bargaining agreement with United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), aiming to promote educational equity, eliminate opportunity gaps, and create racially just, relationship-centered schools.

The CSI has grown steadily through local investment and state funding. LAUSD allocates annual funding to community schools to fund a community school coordinator and community representative at each school site. Though flexible to each school’s context, these roles center on partnership development, family engagement, and data-driven planning; the community school coordinator leads these areas of work, while the community representative supports day-to-day implementation and relationship building between home and school. Building on this foundation, LAUSD has secured over \$83 million in funding from the state through its California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) and has expanded its initiative to include 70 community schools. Community schools in LAUSD are supported by strong systems-level infrastructure, including governance structures, strategic partnerships, and a comprehensive array of professional learning opportunities for community school staff.

LAUSD’s CSI is aligned with Community Schools Forward’s Essentials for Community School Transformation Framework, which extends the traditional four pillars of community schools—integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership—by adding two core features: (1) a culture of belonging, safety, and care, and (2) rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction. Together, these elements advance a holistic approach in which community schools integrate whole child strategies across all aspects of schooling.

As a core focus of its CSI, LAUSD has prioritized classroom practices that are inclusive, community-connected, project-based, and career-focused and established roles, systems, and structures to support the implementation of these approaches. These include extensive professional development opportunities for educators and out-of-classroom staff, the development of CSI and school-based positions that

bridge the CSI's vision for community school classroom practice with school-level implementation, and intentional cross-department collaboration to align community school approaches with other district initiatives that support secondary schools.

Not only has LAUSD's CSI invested in teaching and learning in meaningful ways, analyses show that the first cohort of CCSP community schools in LAUSD made greater academic gains than comparable non-CSI schools serving similar students in the district and achieved outcomes that exceeded their prepandemic achievement levels.

The results underscore the importance of the CSI's focus on classroom practice and make the initiative a compelling case study for other LEAs aiming to enhance instructional quality within community schools.

Findings

Recognizing that integrating additional services and supports for families is not the end goal, but instead is an essential component of a broader transformation effort to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for students, LAUSD has made inclusive, deeper learning approaches a central focus of its CSI. The CSI has coalesced its vision for classroom practice around three key priorities: (1) welcoming and inclusive classroom environments; (2) community-connected, project-based learning (PBL); and (3) the integration of Linked Learning—which offers career-focused pathways that meaningfully bridge high school education and real-world experience—and community school approaches at the secondary level. As these were implemented, related practices and changes took place at the two study schools. Key findings include the following:

- **The CSI has supported the widespread adoption of welcoming and inclusive classroom practices in community schools.** It has done this through professional development sessions that engaged staff from nearly all of the district's community schools. These sessions have intentionally targeted educators as well as classified staff. The two schools in this case study reported shifts in classroom practice—including changes to the arrangement of classroom and school spaces, more inclusive curricula and events, and the use of restorative practices—which they attributed to their participation in CSI professional learning.
- **LAUSD's CSI has made community-connected PBL a cornerstone of its vision for classroom practice in community schools.** The district has supported these approaches through professional development opportunities, the creation of a school-based PBL champion role at every community school, and funding for teacher collaboration time. The CSI tailored professional learning on community-connected PBL to schools' experience levels, placing greater emphasis on those new to PBL—an approach that proved effective for both schools in this study, one just beginning and the other more advanced. Observations of classroom instruction—such as integrating science lessons into a school garden revival and designing mini-golf courses to teach geometry—reflected the CSI's vision for community-connected, student-centered practice.
- **LAUSD integrated its CSI with other district-level strategies that share common goals, including Linked Learning, thereby reinforcing the strengths of each.** This process has included joint planning with LAUSD's Linked Learning and Career Technical Education (CTE) Department, the development of resources for schools pursuing both approaches, and positions jointly funded by the CSI and the

Linked Learning/CTE Department to support both initiatives. The CSI has also created the role of a secondary specialist who supports collaboration across departments and works with secondary community schools to strengthen postsecondary readiness opportunities. At the secondary school in this study, a jointly funded work-based learning coordinator built industry partnerships and integrated real-world learning into Linked Learning instruction, while the community school coordinator expanded learning opportunities through field trips, internships, and oversight of the school's Linked Learning Advisory Board.

- **The CCSPP implementation grants drove measurable improvements in student outcomes at LAUSD's community schools.** Compared to similar high-need schools that did not receive CCSPP grants, participating schools reduced chronic absence by approximately 9% more and improved math proficiency rates by approximately 10% more following grant implementation. ELA proficiency also improved in CCSPP schools, though these gains were not statistically significant. These improvements are particularly noteworthy given that all comparison schools served student populations with nearly identical concentrations of students from low-income households (92%), faced similar pandemic-related challenges, and had access to similar state and district supports outside of the community schools program. While all high-need schools in LAUSD have made progress recovering from pandemic-era achievement lows, by the 2023–24 school year, CCSPP Cohort 1 community schools' math and ELA scores exceeded their prepandemic achievement levels—an outcome not observed in comparable non-CCSPP schools.

Key Takeaways

LAUSD intentionally developed the infrastructure to implement their CSI vision across its network and sustain these learning approaches across schools. Key takeaways about how LAUSD structured its supports across schools include the following:

- **LAUSD's CSI provides extensive professional development and funding for teacher collaboration to support meaningful changes to classroom practice.** Professional learning opportunities offered three trainings focused on developing welcoming and inclusive schools and classrooms, one of which was attended by more than 500 educators representing 60 community schools. The CSI also offered comprehensive training in PBL from several providers, allowing community school staff to deeply engage in new instructional approaches with robust support.
- **Engaging teachers and other staff from all the district's community schools in shared professional learning creates the potential for a coherent set of positive changes at scale in the CSI.** LAUSD's CSI engaged educators from nearly every community school in the district in professional development opportunities. Additionally, LAUSD's Positive Behavior Interventions and Support/Restorative Practices team provided trainings on de-escalation strategies specifically for out-of-classroom staff, aiming to ensure consistent practices across all areas of community schools to support a welcoming, inclusive environment. As seen in the schools that participated in the case study, professional learning provided by the CSI led to substantive school-level changes in instruction and climate.

- **The unique placement of the CSI within the LAUSD Division of Instruction enabled alignment with other district instructional priorities, such as Linked Learning and CTE.** It also supported coordination across initiatives and departments, which enabled the CSI to achieve coherence around core classroom practices and prioritize these practices as central to LAUSD’s community schools approach.
- **The CSI created specific district- and site-level roles to offer targeted instructional support and resources aligned to the CSI priorities for PBL.** Roles such as the CSI’s secondary specialist and school-based PBL champions have offered targeted instructional support. The CSI secondary specialist plays a key role in coordinating instructional staff across the district to strengthen practice in secondary community schools. At the school level, PBL champions strengthen PBL efforts by advocating for teacher collaboration time, offering training and guidance, and securing resources to support PBL units and activities. School-based data collection suggests that these supports strengthened alignment between the CSI’s classroom and instructional priorities and school-level practice.
- **The CSI provided clear guidance and resources around classroom practice while recognizing each school’s unique context.** For example, CSI guidance established a structure and expectation for implementing PBL while allowing schools to adapt it to their specific needs. The elementary school in this study began with a small PBL cohort before expanding schoolwide, whereas the secondary school, already experienced in PBL, was able to forgo introductory opportunities. Looking ahead, the CSI plans to offer more advanced PBL opportunities for schools with greater experience to provide continued support for meaningful instructional change while honoring school-level strengths and needs.

Introduction

Everything you bring in has to be in service of improving academic outcomes for students. Community schools are about parent engagement, [integrated] services, and shared decision-making, but first and foremost they are about strong Tier 1 instruction.

– Community Schools Initiative Director, Los Angeles Unified School District

Across the country, support for community schools has grown as policymakers, researchers, and school leaders increasingly recognize the positive impact they are having on students, schools, and communities.¹ Yet, they are too often viewed narrowly as mechanisms for delivering social services, rather than as opportunities for transformative school redesign. While addressing out-of-school barriers to academic success is critical, there is an expanding recognition that high-quality community schools integrate whole child practices that drive comprehensive change across all aspects of schools, including family engagement, governance structures, and classroom practice.

The Essentials for Community School Transformation Framework, recently developed by Community Schools Forward, underscores the comprehensive nature of the community schools approach. Earlier conceptualizations focused on the “four pillars” of integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership. The updated framework expands on these pillars by adding *culture of belonging, safety, and care* and *rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction*, reinforcing the idea that additional services and supports are not ends in and of themselves but essential components of a holistic effort to improve learning conditions and academic achievement.²

Improving learning opportunities and achievement is contingent upon student engagement in a whole child educational approach grounded in the science of learning and development (SoLD). SoLD synthesizes research from neuroscience, developmental sciences, and related fields and reveals how biological and environmental factors—both in-school, like relationships and engaging learning, and out-of-school, such as family and neighborhood socioeconomic status—interact to shape development and learning. This research highlights how learning is optimized when educators implement learning experiences that spark curiosity and build on students’ prior knowledge, interests, and backgrounds. Moreover, it demonstrates the importance of positive relationships and school culture in catalyzing learning and engagement, especially among students facing adversity and those from marginalized identity groups.

Although research on the implementation and impact of community schools is growing,³ studies on classroom practice in community schools are limited. Early initiatives less commonly featured instructional improvement as a central priority, making research and guidance scarce for community school leaders. Existing research has demonstrated how essential community school structures—such as integrated supports, expanded learning, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership—provide a foundation and structure for rigorous, community-connected instruction.⁴ Most existing research on classroom practice in community schools consists of case studies that explore teaching and learning approaches within individual schools.⁵ These studies suggest that a growing number of community

schools are seeking to utilize strategies that nurture positive, developmental relationships and identity safety; project-based learning (PBL); culturally relevant pedagogy; community-connected learning; and youth participatory action research.⁶

With historic investments in community schools at federal and state levels of government,⁷ educational leaders will benefit from learning how to implement inclusive, deeper learning approaches at scale. This study examines the district-level supports needed for the effective implementation of widespread changes to classroom practice.

What Are Community Schools?

Community schools are an evidence-based⁸ school transformation strategy that unites the efforts of students, families, educators, and community partners to improve student learning and well-being.⁹ Embodying a whole child educational approach, community schools organize in-school 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.¹⁰

Community schools are constantly adapting and setting priorities grounded in local needs and goals. This refinement and adaptation occurs 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 school development and sustainability play an important role, particularly when seeking to support community schools at scale. This includes, but is 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. Research shows that, when fully implemented, community schools lead to higher academic achievement and graduation rates, especially for students from marginalized or disadvantaged backgrounds.¹¹ COVID-19 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 students' and families' holistic needs.¹² They also contribute to better attendance, stronger student connections to school, and reductions in exclusionary discipline.¹³

As evidence of their effectiveness grows, community schools have received unprecedented investments at both federal and state levels.¹⁴ These investments have fueled their expansion across the country, including in states like California, Maryland, New Mexico, New York, and Tennessee. Increased levels of funding forecast an expansion of community schools and community school initiatives across the country, underscoring the need for research that examines how systems-level support for community schools can enable the implementation of essential community school practices.

The Current Study

As funding for community school development increases, practitioners, policymakers, and community stakeholders are seeking clear guidance on how to effectively implement and sustain high-quality community schools that reflect local needs and strengths. However, there is limited research on the structures, processes, and practices that support high-quality, sustainable implementation—and even less on systems-level supports for SoLD-aligned classroom practice. This case study addresses this research gap by examining how a large urban district conceptualized classroom practice within community schools and implemented systems and processes to support it at the school level.

Specifically, this case study examined the efforts of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) to center classroom practice in their Community Schools Initiative (CSI). LAUSD has coalesced its vision for classroom practice around three key approaches: (1) welcoming and inclusive classroom environments; (2) community-connected PBL; and (3) the integration of Linked Learning—which offers career-focused pathways that meaningfully bridge high school education and real-world experience—and community school approaches at the secondary level.

Drawing on interviews, observations, and documents, this study investigated how the district organized resources, built structures, and implemented practices that enabled schools to embrace the initiative’s vision for classroom practice. (See [Appendix A](#) for the study’s methodology.) The study also included two school sites, Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary (Roybal-Allard) and the School of Business and Tourism (Business and Tourism), which allowed researchers to investigate school engagement and uptake of the CSI’s priorities around classroom practice. The CSI focused on several instructional approaches that are central to its vision for teaching and learning in community schools:

- The CSI has supported the widespread adoption of **welcoming and inclusive classroom environments** through a series of professional development sessions that have successfully engaged large numbers of community school staff members representing the vast majority of community schools in the district. These sessions have intentionally targeted educators as well as classified staff. Schools in this study noted several changes to their practice as a result, including changes to the physical arrangement of classrooms and school spaces, the adoption of inclusive curricular and school practices, and the incorporation of restorative practices.
- LAUSD’s CSI has made **community-connected PBL** a cornerstone of its vision for classroom practice in community schools. The district has supported these approaches through professional development, the creation of a school-based PBL champion role at every community school, and funding for teacher collaboration time. The CSI has supported schools in pursuing professional

learning around community-connected PBL in ways that reflect their unique needs and experience levels. This approach proved effective for the schools in this study—one just beginning to explore PBL, and the other with extensive experience.

- LAUSD’s CSI has taken strategic steps to **integrate Linked Learning and community school approaches** at the secondary level. This has included joint planning with the Linked Learning/Career and Technical Education Department, resource development for schools pursuing both approaches, and cofunding positions that support both approaches. The CSI has also created the role of secondary specialist, which supports collaboration across departments and works with secondary community schools to strengthen postsecondary readiness opportunities. Practices at the secondary school in this study highlight how this integration can be effectively supported by community school staff.

LAUSD’s CSI has made substantial, targeted investments in teaching and learning—from intensive professional learning and coaching to stronger alignment with Linked Learning. As detailed in analyses presented later in this report (see [Figure 6](#) and [Table 8](#)), the first cohort of California Community Schools Partnership Program community schools in LAUSD made greater academic gains than comparable non-CSI schools in the district. The results underscore the importance of the CSI’s focus on classroom practice and offer an example of how to successfully prioritize and weave academics into community school transformation, making the initiative a compelling case study for other local education agencies aiming to enhance instructional quality within community schools.

LAUSD’s CSI has made substantial, targeted investments in teaching and learning—from intensive professional learning and coaching to stronger alignment with Linked Learning.

This report begins with an introduction to LAUSD’s CSI and its academic achievements. It then describes how the district used investments to support classroom practice across community schools and illustrates the ways that these supports influenced school practice. The report concludes with a discussion of key takeaways from the case study.

Los Angeles Unified’s Community Schools Initiative

The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) serves the city of Los Angeles and numerous surrounding communities throughout Los Angeles County. As the second-largest district in the United States, it manages more than 1,300 schools and serves more than 500,000 students. LAUSD’s student population reflects the diverse demography of Southern California.

Approximately 74% of the student body identifies as Latino/a; 7.1% as Black; 5.1% as Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander; 10.1% as White; and 2% as multiracial. (See [Table 1.](#)) Almost 19% of students are classified as English learners, with students speaking more than 150 languages other than English within their households.¹⁵ The district enrolls a considerable number of newcomer students—students who have lived in the United States for less than 3 years—who made up 15% of English learners in 2022 (approximately 13,600 students).¹⁶ Throughout the district, 82.4% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

Table 1. LAUSD Demographics, 2024–25

Enrollment, by demographic group (all grades)	LAUSD	California
Enrollment	516,685	5,806,221
English learners	18.6%	17.4%
Students experiencing homelessness	2.7%	4.0%
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	82.4%	63.6%
Foster youth	0.5%	0.5%
Students with disabilities	15.6%	14.2%
African American/Black	7.1%	4.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.1%	0.4%
Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander	5.1%	12.7%
Hispanic or Latino/a	73.6%	56.1%
Two or more races	2.1%	4.8%
White	9.7%	20.0%
Not reported	2.2%	1.2%

Source: California Department of Education [DataQuest](#) data for the Los Angeles Unified School District and the state of California for 2024–25.

As in many other large, urban systems, differences across race, native language, and neighborhood influence students' experiences within LAUSD schools and have driven the district to prioritize initiatives designed to reduce disparities. These include a variety of redesign and equity-oriented initiatives, including the district's pilot schools (see [LAUSD Pilot School Program](#)), Local Initiative Schools,¹⁷ and the Black Student Achievement Plan,¹⁸ among others. LAUSD's Community Schools Initiative (CSI) is prominent among these priorities, as it seeks "to eliminate opportunity gaps and figure out how we give the same exposure and opportunity to students regardless of whether they live in a traditionally underserved community or not."¹⁹ However, as one initiative among many set in the context of a large district that serves half a million students, the CSI is an important and impactful effort, but one that must navigate a complex ecosystem and compete for limited attention and resources.

Recent crises have sharpened the urgency around the CSI's vision: The Eaton and Palisades fires closed parts or all of nearly two dozen districts, including LAUSD, disrupting learning for roughly 700,000 students,²⁰ while heightened threats to immigrant safety and stepped-up federal enforcement have curtailed opportunities for thousands more.²¹ These pressures underscore investing in schools not only as places of learning but as anchors of equity, stability, and safety.

To achieve its equity-oriented vision, the district used the four core values articulated by the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) grant as a guidepost: (1) creating racially just spaces that center relationships, (2) using shared power in decision-making, (3) centering classroom-community connections, and (4) focusing on continuous improvement. These four core values inform CSI's vision of creating environments where students can thrive and have guided numerous aspects of the initiative, including its governance structure, related professional development opportunities, and family engagement strategies.

History and Funding of the Community Schools Initiative

Though several community schools already operated within LAUSD, the district formally launched its CSI in 2017 with a board resolution signaling a sustained commitment to expanding the community schools approach throughout the district. A coalition of organizations—including United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), Students Deserve, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, and the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment—formed the advocacy group Reclaim Our Schools LA and played a pivotal role in the adoption of the board resolution.

The board resolution called for the cross-sector collaboration of business, education, community, and civic partners to develop a shared vision for community schools in the district.²² In their deliberations, they proposed setting up systems and structures to promote integrated systems of support in community schools, including hiring dedicated staff (e.g., community school coordinators), conducting an annual assets and needs assessment, and adopting a strategic plan.

While this commitment to community schools was codified in the 2017 board resolution, funding for community schools was secured through the revised collective bargaining agreement (CBA) following the 2019 UTLA strike, the first educator strike in LAUSD in over 3 decades. Interviews with district and community leaders highlighted that the strike's demands—driven by the UTLA and Reclaim Our Schools LA—were pivotal in securing the district's financial commitment to community schools. The CBA secured the following funding for the CSI's first two community school cohorts²³:

- 31 Cohort 1 community schools received \$150,000 per school in 2019–20 and \$250,000 in 2020–21.
- 23 Cohort 2 community schools received \$150,000 in 2020–21 and \$250,000 in 2021–22.²⁴

CSI district staff explained that these annual district allotments have allowed community schools to cover the salaries of dedicated community school personnel and for LAUSD to grow its district infrastructure to support community school implementation, each of which are described below. Overall, stipulations outlined in the CBA were instrumental in launching the systemic development and growth of community schools, helping to make LAUSD’s espoused commitment to this equity-oriented initiative a concrete and actionable reform effort.²⁵

At the same time, district officials underscored the importance of braiding federal, state, and local funding sources to grow and sustain their network of community schools. Prominent among these have been funds received from the CCSPP,²⁶ which has enabled LAUSD to grow and improve capacity-building opportunities for community school personnel and to create discretionary budgets for each community school, which schools can allocate to meet the needs and interests of their school community. (See [The California Community Schools Partnership Program](#).) The principal from Lucille Roybal-Allard explained that these varied funding sources allow the school to provide stable funding for community school personnel and meet the specific needs of their school by, for example, hiring additional staff to support attendance and providing paid collaboration time for teachers.

The California Community Schools Partnership Program

In 2021–22, California allocated a \$4.1 billion state investment in the growth and spread of the 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 school initiative and allots over \$200 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 that serve 80% or more students who are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, English learners, or youth in foster care, and 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. As of March 2025, LAUSD has received over \$83 million in CCSPP grants, which has enabled LAUSD to expand capacity-building opportunities for community school staff and strengthened the operations of its community schools.

Source: Los Angeles Unified School District. *Community Schools Initiative: Our schools*. (accessed 07/31/2025); Swain, W., Leung-Gagné, M., Maier, A., & Rubinstein, C. (2025). *Community schools impact on student outcomes: Evidence from California*. Learning Policy Institute.

Common Features and Approaches

Each community school in LAUSD is unique—this is by design, as community schools are intended to be responsive to the specific needs of their school community. However, they all utilize common roles, processes, and structures that enable community school transformation.

Common Roles

LAUSD community schools have two initiative-funded, school-level positions that are universal across the district. These common positions—codified and outlined in the CBA between the district and the union—include the community school coordinator (CSC) and the community representative (community rep). The CSC role generally encompasses building relationships with community organizations, increasing parent and family engagement, and conducting an assets and needs assessment to determine and support the improvement goals of the school community. While CSCs typically maintain these responsibilities, the role remains flexible and can vary depending on the needs of each specific school site. “We call it a systems manager. ... And no community school, I’ve discovered, is run the same way and every position is a little different,” explained one community school coordinator.

Additionally, all community schools have a designated community representative. This role is a 6-hour-per-day, 5-day-per-week, classified position. The primary responsibility of the community rep is to support the CSC to enact community school transformation as articulated in their community school plan, developed based on goals identified through the assets and needs assessment process. Like CSCs, the role of the community rep can vary across schools in order to respond to their school’s particular needs and goals. Community reps might support relationship building and collaboration in the school community, represent community needs in meetings, support parents/caregivers in communicating with educational staff, manage a parent center at their school, or work with the CSC to provide supports and resources to parents and caregivers.

Common Processes

LAUSD community schools also implement common processes to inform the design and continuous improvement of their school communities. One bedrock process in LAUSD community schools is the assets and needs assessment (ANA), a comprehensive CSC-facilitated process conducted in every community school during the first year and revisited and revised in subsequent years. The ANA process in LAUSD aims to “learn from students, school staff, families, and community members ... what their vision(s) and priorities for the school and surrounding community are.”²⁷

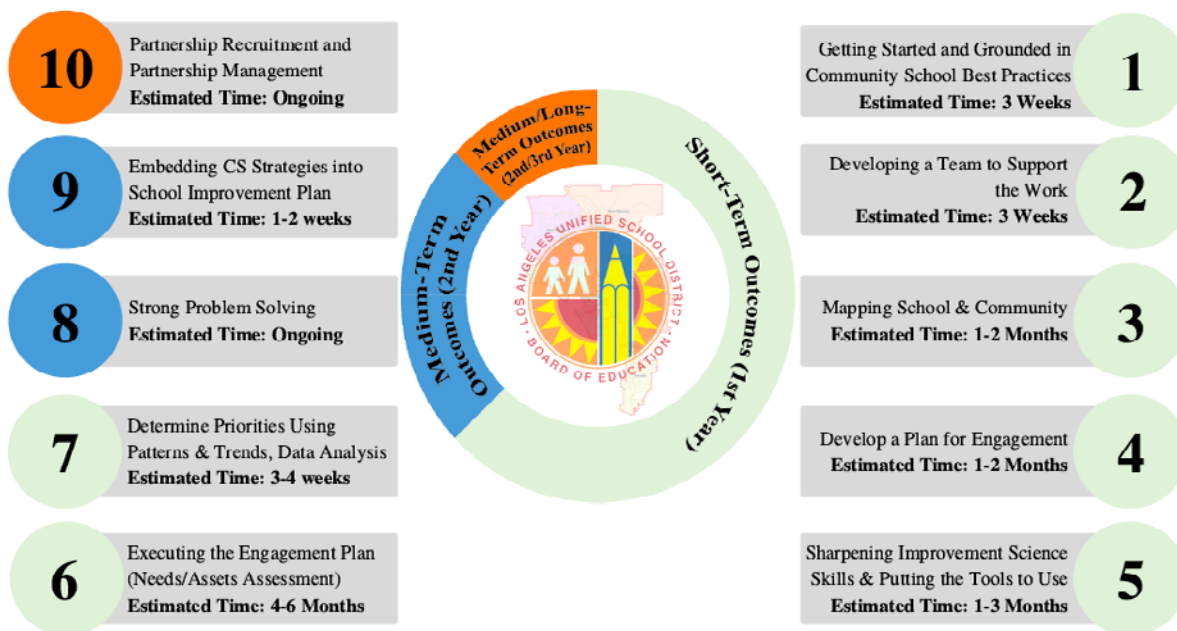
To this end, CSCs work with staff to gather data in ways that also support relationship building and community engagement. These strategies include conducting focus groups, interviews, and surveys to solicit perspectives from school actors. CSCs then collaborate with their community school implementation teams (CSITs), teams that convene community and school members, to advance community school plans and implementation. In their collaborative work, CSCs and CSITs identify priorities emerging from the data, conduct root cause analyses for emerging priorities, and ultimately develop an action plan to support community school design and improvement. The CSC at the School of Business and Tourism described the process this way:

Last year my role included conducting the comprehensive assets and needs assessment, and surveying our students, our staff, just figuring out what they like about the school, what they would want to see improved. And then a part of my role is then disseminating that information, making sure people are aware of it. And then working with my school to create priorities that are grounded in that data.

Because the ANA gathers data directly from school community stakeholders and reflects their goals for improvement, it plays a vital role in the school transformation process.

LAUSD community schools also use benchmarks as “a roadmap for building relationships, collective visioning, and grassroots-driven improvement”²⁸ to drive the process of community school transformation. (See Figure 1.) Benchmarks support fidelity to community school practices and ensure that schools are moving toward school transformation goals, keeping in mind each school’s unique set of needs. The benchmarks are divided into short-term outcomes (i.e., first-year implementation activities), medium-term outcomes (i.e., second-year implementation activities), and long-term outcomes (i.e., third-year implementation activities). By advancing along these benchmarks, schools are actively working toward the district’s community schools vision, tailoring efforts to their specific needs and priorities as part of the transformation process.

Figure 1. LAUSD Community School Benchmarks



Source: Document provided by Community School Initiative leaders from Los Angeles Unified School District. (2025).

Common Structures

Each LAUSD community school also maintains common structures to support community school transformation. Some of these structures, such as inclusive school-based decision-making bodies (referred to as Local School Leadership Councils in some schools and School Governing Boards in others), are stipulated in the CBA between the district and the teachers' union. These school-based decision-making bodies—composed of community members, school personnel, family members, and students—are responsible for decisions related to school programming, governance, and operations.²⁹ Their diverse membership ensures that various viewpoints are represented in important school decisions. As the CSC from Business and Tourism described:

As a community school, we had an opportunity to revisit our governing structures, leading to a broader understanding of processes and composition. Student and parent participation felt more authentic as a result of us taking the time to ensure that we were following inclusive and transparent procedures.

In addition to this universal decision-making body, each LAUSD community school institutes other structures identified in the CCSPP framework: (1) integrated student supports, (2) expanded and enriched learning opportunities, (3) family and community engagements, and (4) collaborative leadership and practice. Practical applications of these pillars include workshops and other enrichment opportunities for parents/caregivers, free or low-cost after-school programs, consistent collaboration across staff teams to support student needs and pull in external services, and additional leadership teams that include family and community members in school decision-making.

LAUSD's CSI also has been guided by the CCSPP commitments to racially just and restorative school climates and to powerful, culturally proficient, and relevant instruction. Together, these common roles, practices, and structures provide a cohesive foundation for community schools in LAUSD—ensuring that transformation efforts are responsive, inclusive, and grounded in the needs and aspirations of each school community.

CSI Infrastructure to Support Community Schools

LAUSD's CSI maintains a multifaceted, systems-level infrastructure to support the development and continuous improvement of all community schools in the district. This section provides a brief introduction to some of the initiative's supportive features, shedding particular light on how dedicated CSI personnel work with community school personnel to enable inclusive, deeper learning approaches at the school level.

Shared Governance

A commitment to shared governance lies at the foundation of LAUSD's CSI. As a co-led endeavor between the district and teachers' union, the two entities have collaborated on “both the strategic direction of the initiative and what that looks like in our structures.”³⁰ To do this, the district's initiative director and UTLA's lead coach not only maintain ongoing formal and informal communication, but also share responsibility for all major decisions related to the initiative.

Shared decisions include annual appointments to the CSI’s Steering Committee—a forum for shared governance established in the CBA in 2019 with the charge of “provid[ing] oversight and advocacy for the advancement of the CSI in collaboration with staff and key partners.”³¹ Steering committee members have included school administrators, district officials, union representatives, CBO partners, and community leaders. Regular monthly meetings and weekly planning sessions, facilitated by UNITE-LA, a key CSI partner, have helped maintain the initiative’s momentum and alignment with the vision for community schools in the district. Moreover, this forum has supported strategic thinking by soliciting the perspectives of its diverse members to solve emerging challenges.

Dedicated Community Schools Department and Staff

With strategic partnerships and systems for shared governance to enable the health and quality of the initiative, leaders of LAUSD’s CSI established necessary administrative capacity to both manage the initiative and lend dedicated support to community school implementation. To this end, LAUSD established the Community Schools Initiative Department, housed in the Division of Instruction, to manage and oversee the initiative. This distinctive placement—community school efforts are more often located in student services departments³²—facilitates direct collaboration with other instructional staff (e.g., Linked Learning, career and technical education) and the alignment of community school strategies with districtwide instructional priorities.

While the CSI was initially established with one dedicated staff member—the initiative’s director—it expanded to include nine additional staff members in 2023–24. Among new district staff are four community school coordinator (CSC) coaches, who lend ongoing support to CSCs in their given regions. New CSI staff also include an instructional coach, an elementary specialist, and a secondary specialist. While responsibilities of these district staff members have evolved as they enacted the roles during the first year, they have broadly supported instructional improvement and community school implementation across the initiative.

UTLA, the initiative’s coleader, also established positions to enable greater support for CSI implementation with the support of funding secured from the National Education Association. These positions include the UTLA lead coach, who leads the initiative in partnership with LAUSD’s CSI director, as well as two parent organizers, who support community school coordinators to engage family members and to develop their leadership skills.

District-Level Professional Learning Opportunities

CSCs in LAUSD are certificated staff typically with teaching backgrounds. While this professional experience helps them maintain expertise in creating supportive learning environments, they often need targeted support in developing skills and competencies needed for their new roles.

With this need, LAUSD’s systems-level personnel facilitate professional learning opportunities for CSCs. This includes an annual summer institute, which gathers CSCs and school principals to provide them with new tools and resources; time for relationship building and skill building; and opportunities for goal setting and progress assessment of their community school priorities. LAUSD’s CSC coaches also facilitate professional learning communities (PLCs) for CSCs. Coaches facilitate weekly PLCs for

new CSCs while monthly meetings convene both new and veteran coordinators. These opportunities allow CSCs to form peer networks with their counterparts at similar and different stages of community school implementation.

The district's CSC coaches and UTLA parent organizers also play a critical role in building the capacity of CSCs and community reps. Four LAUSD CSC coaches, with caseloads assigned by geographic region, support CSCs by providing individual coaching (e.g., mentoring new CSCs to develop community school strategies that are responsive to their schools' needs) and supporting the planning and delivery of professional development. Coaches might also support their CSCs to facilitate a meaningful ANA process at their school, plan workshops for families, or identify needed resources for their school. The UTLA CS parent organizers are tasked with facilitating the school–community connection through responsibilities such as supporting CSCs and community reps to organize parent meetings, engage in community mapping, conduct community walks, and develop representative school governance teams.

CSI officials also design and facilitate a broader system of professional development to enable high-quality community school implementation that extends to educators, school leaders, and out-of-classroom staff. These professional learning opportunities, focused largely on nurturing welcoming and inclusive school and classroom environments and enacting community-connected, project-based learning, are described in detail in the following sections.

Overall, LAUSD's CSI has established robust systems-level structures and supports to advance community school implementation. These supports enable community school staff to design and continuously improve their schools in ways that are responsive to the strengths and needs of their communities. They also play an important role in enabling the adoption and implementation of inclusive, deeper learning approaches. The following sections describe the schools that participated in this study and their efforts to integrate the CSI's classroom and instructional priorities.

The Community Schools Initiative in Action at the School Level

To understand how district-level infrastructure and supports intersected with school-level implementation of inclusive, deeper learning opportunities, this study includes case studies of two school sites within LAUSD: Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School (Roybal-Allard) and the School of Business and Tourism (Business and Tourism). School selection was guided by several criteria. The research team prioritized schools that demonstrated strong implementation of community school approaches and engagement with deeper learning practices.

Additionally, the sample included both an elementary and a secondary school to examine how inclusive, deeper learning approaches were enacted across grade levels. Schools with relatively strong student outcomes were selected, as these sites offered valuable opportunities to examine promising practices. Finally, researchers considered demographics, selecting schools that reflect the broader demographics of the district.

In both of these schools, school leaders understood the district's priorities for classroom practice in community schools and shared the district's commitment to center academic achievement. As the community school coordinator at Business and Tourism shared, "In LAUSD, community schools can lead the way when it comes to community-based instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy. We're setting academic goals and striving to achieve [them], and there [is also a focus on how instruction] can transform a school and community." The principal at Roybal-Allard echoed the initiative director's view, emphasizing that the ultimate goal of community school approaches is to improve student learning opportunities and outcomes:

School leaders understood the district's priorities for classroom practice in community schools and shared the district's commitment to center academic achievement.

All of these things that we're doing from the attendance piece to the community events to the relationship building, they all have to matter towards something. For me, the bottom line is they have to matter towards improving the academic experience for the kids.

Together, these case studies illustrate how the CSI has established inclusive, deeper learning as a central priority and how this focus has been enacted within community schools at the elementary and secondary levels.

Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School

Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School is a K–6 public school located in Huntington Park, a community predominantly composed of Latino/a residents in Southeast Los Angeles. In 2024–25, almost 92% of its 480 students were identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and more than a quarter were classified as English learners—statistics that reflect a higher proportion of these demographic subgroups when compared to the district average. Fourteen percent of its students received special education services, and 1.3% were experiencing homelessness. (See [Table 2](#).)

Table 2. Student Demographic Data for Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School, 2024–25

Enrollment, by demographic group (all grades)	Lucille Roybal-Allard	Los Angeles Unified School District
Enrollment	477	516,685
English learners	26.6%	18.6%
Students experiencing homelessness	1.3%	2.7%
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	91.8%	82.4%
Foster youth	1.0%	0.5%
Students with disabilities	14.0%	15.6%
African American/Black	0.8%	7.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.0%	0.1%
Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander	0.0%	5.1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	96.6%	73.6%
Two or more races	0.0%	2.1%
White	1.3%	9.7%
Not reported	1.3%	2.2%

Source: California Department of Education [DataQuest](#) data for Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary for 2024–25.

Roybal-Allard History and Programming

Roybal-Allard opened in 2012 and was established as a pilot school in 2015 as part of LAUSD’s Public School Choice initiative, which sought to create new, small, and innovative schools while relieving overcrowding. (See [LAUSD Pilot School Program](#).) As new schools were being planned by educator teams across the city, a group of educators, many of whom remain at Roybal-Allard today, met on nights and weekends to design a shared vision for a student-centered, community-connected school. Roybal-Allard was launched with a community-connected vision from the start, inspired by site visits and research into similar initiatives in cities such as Chicago, Oakland, and San Diego. The flexibility of being a pilot school enabled Roybal-Allard to preserve the integrity of its original community-oriented approach, enhance teacher collaboration, and foster a strong culture of shared leadership. All teachers at Roybal-Allard at the time approved the transition to a pilot school, and the school’s principal shared that Roybal-Allard continues to benefit from high teacher retention rates and low staff turnover.

In the 2021–22 academic year, Roybal-Allard joined the second cohort of LAUSD’s CSI bringing the school additional funding and support for its community schools approach. With these additional resources, the school has enhanced its capacity to meet the needs of its students. A full-time community school coordinator and community representative, along with a robust site-based “opportunity team,” ensure that supports are equity-oriented and grounded in the needs of the community. The opportunity team, composed of the principal, the community school coordinator, and several other counselors and support staff, systematically triages referrals and appropriately matches students to either in-school services or services provided by external partners depending on their needs.

LAUSD Pilot School Program

The LAUSD launched its pilot school program in 2007 to promote innovative, student-centered educational models within the district. Developed as an alternative to charter schools through collaboration between LAUSD, United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA), and local community organizations, pilot schools were designed “to be models of educational innovation and to serve as research and development sites for effective urban public schools.”

Pilot schools operate with a higher degree of autonomy than traditional district schools. They are granted flexibility across five key domains: budget, staffing, governance, curriculum and assessment, and the school calendar. These autonomies enable pilot schools to drive educational innovation and respond more effectively to the specific needs of their students and school community. Both of the schools that participated in this study are designated pilot schools, and there are currently 39 pilot schools across the district.

Source: [LAUSD Pilot Schools](#). (accessed 10/26/2025).

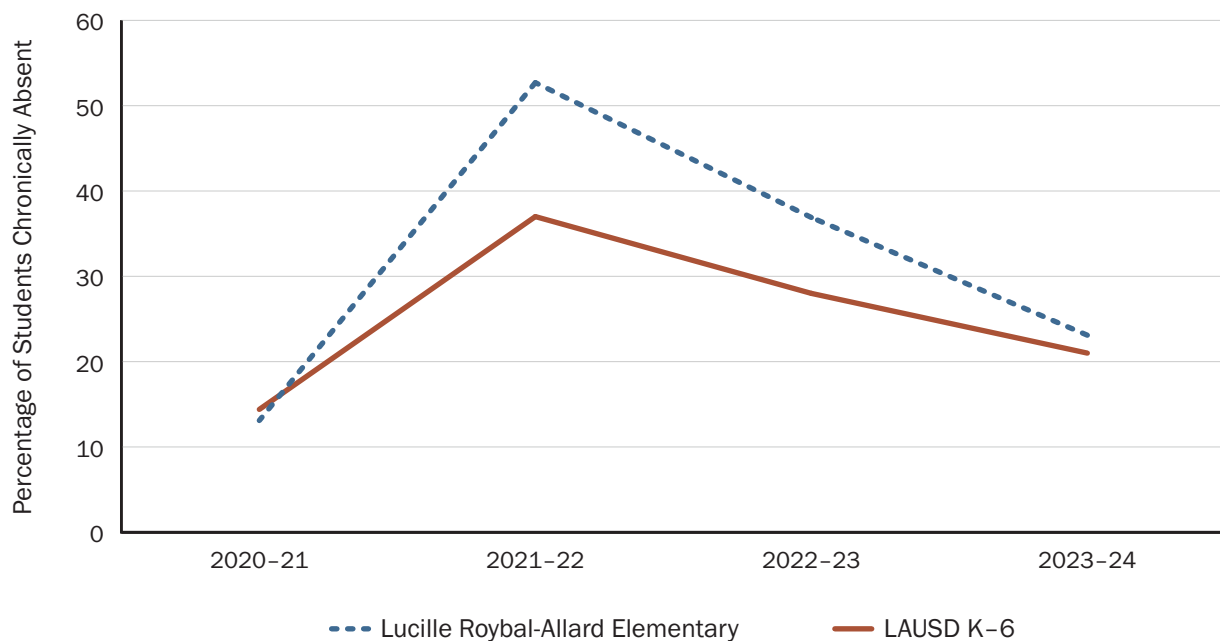
As a result of the CSI, Roybal-Allard has incorporated additional components into their comprehensive system of integrated supports, including a psychiatric social worker,³³ a pupil services and attendance counselor, a wellness center, and access to mental health services for both students and families through collaborative partnerships with Alma Family Services and Daybreak Health. Dedicated counseling services are also available for foster youth and students experiencing housing instability.

Programmatically, the school currently offers three academic pathways: a program for students residing in Huntington Park that has a global studies emphasis; a Spanish dual language immersion program; and the DREAMS magnet program, which integrates design thinking, research, engineering, arts, and mathematics. Roybal-Allard offers numerous enrichment programs, including a summer STEAM club for every grade level; a service learning club; sports programs such as basketball, cheerleading, and dance team; and collaborations with arts organizations like the Los Angeles Master Chorale. The school also played an instrumental role in establishing a youth chorus, which recruits students from East LA and Huntington Park.³⁴

Student Success at Roybal-Allard

Interviews with key Roybal-Allard leaders and staff suggest that the school’s community-driven model led to notable accomplishments, including its drastic postpandemic reduction in chronic absence rates. In line with nationwide trends, especially in high-poverty schools, Roybal-Allard’s chronic absence climbed to nearly 53% during the pandemic in the 2021–22 academic year. In response, school staff implemented a relational, multi-tiered strategy that included personalized outreach, family engagement, and attendance incentive programs. Within 2 years, the chronic absence rate decreased by nearly 30 percentage points, dropping to 23.1% in the 2023–24 academic year and nearing the district average among elementary school students. (See [Figure 2](#).)

Figure 2. Lucille Roybal-Allard and LAUSD Elementary Schools’ Chronic Absence Rates



Source: Ed-Data. Los Angeles Unified School District. Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary. (accessed 08/15/2025).

Data also suggest that Roybal-Allard’s community schooling approach has created a positive school climate. In addition to maintaining a 0% suspension rate for over the past 4 academic years (see [Table 3](#)), student perceptions of school climate characterize Roybal-Allard as a supportive and relationship-centered learning environment. To illustrate, on the 2024–25 LAUSD School Experience Survey, students at Roybal-Allard more favorably assessed their school across each school climate measure (e.g., connectedness, participation and leadership, safety) than the average rating provided by LAUSD elementary students. (See [Table 4](#).)

Table 3. Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School and LAUSD Suspension Rates, 2020–24

School	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Suspension rate				
Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
LAUSD	0.0%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%

Note: The LAUSD suspension rates reflect the number of students suspended across K–12, as publicly available district suspension rates cannot be disaggregated by grade level.

Source: Ed-Data. [Los Angeles Unified School District. Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary.](#) (accessed 08/15/2025).

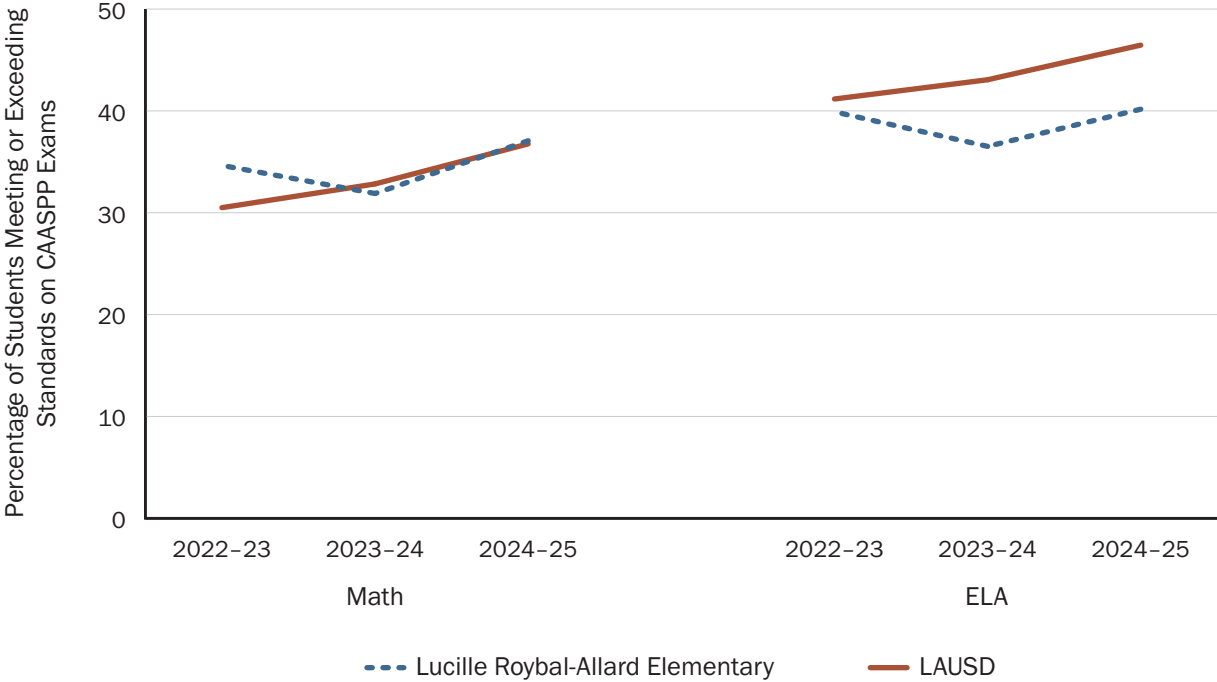
Table 4. School Climate Survey Results for Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School, 2024–25

School climate measures	Percentage agree or strongly agree	
	Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School	LAUSD elementary schools
Overall bullying (e.g., I have had mean rumors or lies spread about me)	19.0%	24.0%
Overall connectedness (e.g., I feel like I am part of this school)	81.0%	70.0%
Overall expectations for behavior (e.g., students know how they are expected to act)	84.0%	66.0%
Overall participation & leadership opportunities (e.g., students have a voice in decision-making at this school)	87.0%	63.0%
Overall safety (e.g., there is an adult on campus whom I trust and can talk to no matter what is bothering me)	82.0%	72.0%

Source: Los Angeles Unified School District. [LAUSD School Experience Survey results 2024–25.](#) (accessed 08/20/2025).

Advancing academic achievement in English language arts (ELA) and math remains an area of focus at Roybal-Allard, and the school is showing signs of improvement. Since 2022–23, the proportion of Roybal-Allard students reaching math proficiency has grown 2.4 percentage points. ELA proficiency rates also increased in 2024–25 by almost 4 percentage points after a decrease in scores the previous year. These data suggest some positive and incremental movement toward greater math and ELA proficiency among Roybal-Allard students—a notable feat given the school’s greater concentration of English learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. (See [Figure 3](#).)

Figure 3. Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary and LAUSD Math and ELA Proficiency



Notes: CAASPP = California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. CAASPP results for LAUSD include charter and noncharter schools and reflect average scores across all grades.

Source: California Department of Education [DataQuest](#) data for 2022–23 through 2024–25 for Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

School of Business and Tourism

The School of Business and Tourism, which opened in 2006 to relieve overcrowding at nearby schools, is a small high school situated on the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex campus in Los Angeles’s Westlake neighborhood—an area known for its rich cultural and ethnic diversity. Four independently operated community schools are located on the campus, a configuration that enables community school staff across the schools to collaborate, share resources, and plan campuswide activities. Community school coordinators and community reps from all four community schools meet weekly to coordinate community engagement events and services, such as food distribution and health exams.

Business and Tourism serves just over 390 students. A significant share of the student body is English learners (31.9%), and nearly all students are socioeconomically disadvantaged (99.2%)—percentages that substantially exceed district averages. (See [Table 5](#).) Almost 13% of students at Business and Tourism are experiencing homelessness, and approximately 9% receive special education services.

Table 5. Student Demographic Data for School of Business and Tourism, 2024–25

Enrollment, by demographic group (all grades)	School of Business and Tourism	Los Angeles Unified School District
Enrollment	392	516,685
English learners	31.9%	18.6%
Students experiencing homelessness	12.5%	2.7%
Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals	99.2%	82.4%
Students with disabilities	8.7%	15.6%
Foster youth	0.0%	0.5%
African American/Black	2.0%	7.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.0%	0.1%
Asian, Filipino, or Pacific Islander	0.6%	5.1%
Hispanic or Latino/a	94.9%	73.6%
Two or more races	0.3%	2.1%
White	1.8%	9.7%
Not reported	0.5%	2.2%

Source: California Department of Education [DataQuest](#) data for the School of Business and Tourism and the Los Angeles Unified School District for 2024–25.

Business and Tourism History and Programming

Like Roybal-Allard, Business and Tourism is a long-standing pilot school, having officially attained pilot status in 2013. The flexibility associated with being a pilot school has been instrumental in shaping the school’s identity as a teacher-led, student-centered learning environment. A key feature of Business and Tourism’s academic approach is its Linked Learning pathways, which integrate project-based learning (PBL) with practical applications related to pathway themes, designed to develop both academic skills and career preparedness. Ninth- and 10th-graders participate in the Hospitality, Recreation, and Tourism

pathway, and 11th- and 12th-graders participate in the Marketing, Sales, and Service pathway. Notably, the Marketing, Sales, and Service pathway has earned a Gold Certification from the Linked Learning Alliance, the highest distinction awarded to pathways that provide strong cross-subject integration, equitable student supports, and meaningful career and postsecondary learning experiences, as assessed through an independent review process.³⁵

In each grade, students engage in two major interdisciplinary projects per year—one per semester—which culminate in student portfolio presentations to a panel of judges composed of teachers, community members, and industry professionals. Business and Tourism’s instructional approach is reinforced by the school’s prioritization of teacher collaboration time. Educators meet twice a week for professional development and grade-level team planning focused on PBL activities related to Linked Learning pathway themes.

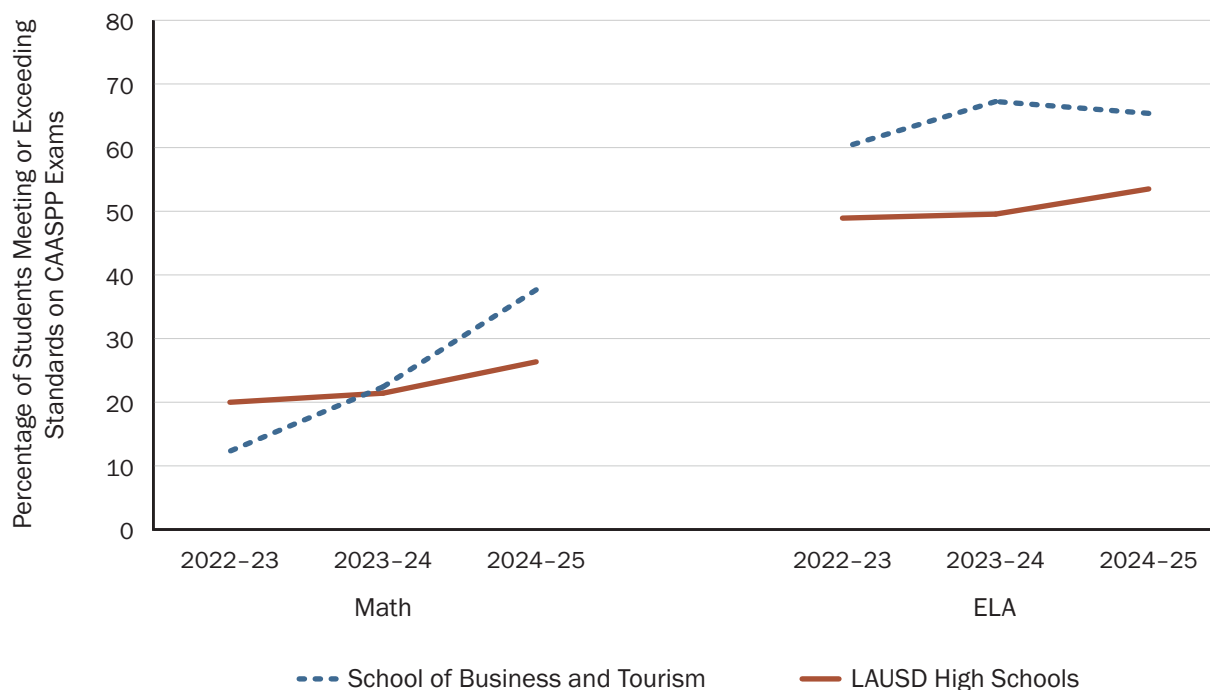
Having received funding to become a community school in 2022–23, Business and Tourism’s transition to a community schooling approach is still relatively recent. Nevertheless, funding for community schools and strategic partnerships has facilitated the expansion of counseling services, mental health supports, and enrichment programs that directly address needs identified through the school’s assets and needs assessment. Additionally, through its participation in the CSI, Business and Tourism now has a community school coordinator, who has been instrumental in supporting Linked Learning pathways by serving on the school’s advisory board with industry partners and helping to coordinate activities that enrich pathway instruction.

Student Success at Business and Tourism

This sustained focus on integrated, experiential learning has made Business and Tourism a place where students are not just prepared to graduate but also equipped to navigate postsecondary education and career opportunities. Many of the school’s student outcomes reflect this level of student success.

Despite having greater concentrations of English learners, socioeconomically advantaged students, and students experiencing homelessness, Business and Tourism students academically outperformed their district peers over the past 2 years in ELA, as assessed by the state’s annually administered CAASPP exam. In 2024–25 alone, 65.4% of 11th-grade students at Business and Tourism met or exceeded the ELA proficiency standard—a rate almost 12 percentage points higher than the district average among LAUSD 11th-graders. While math achievement on the CAASPP has often lagged below district averages before formally becoming a community school in 2022–23, the school has experienced rapid growth since then. By 2024–25, 37.7% of students at Business and Tourism met or exceeded the proficiency standard, exceeding the district’s proficiency rate by over 11 percentage points. (See [Figure 4.](#))

Figure 4. School of Business and Tourism and LAUSD High Schools Math and ELA Proficiency

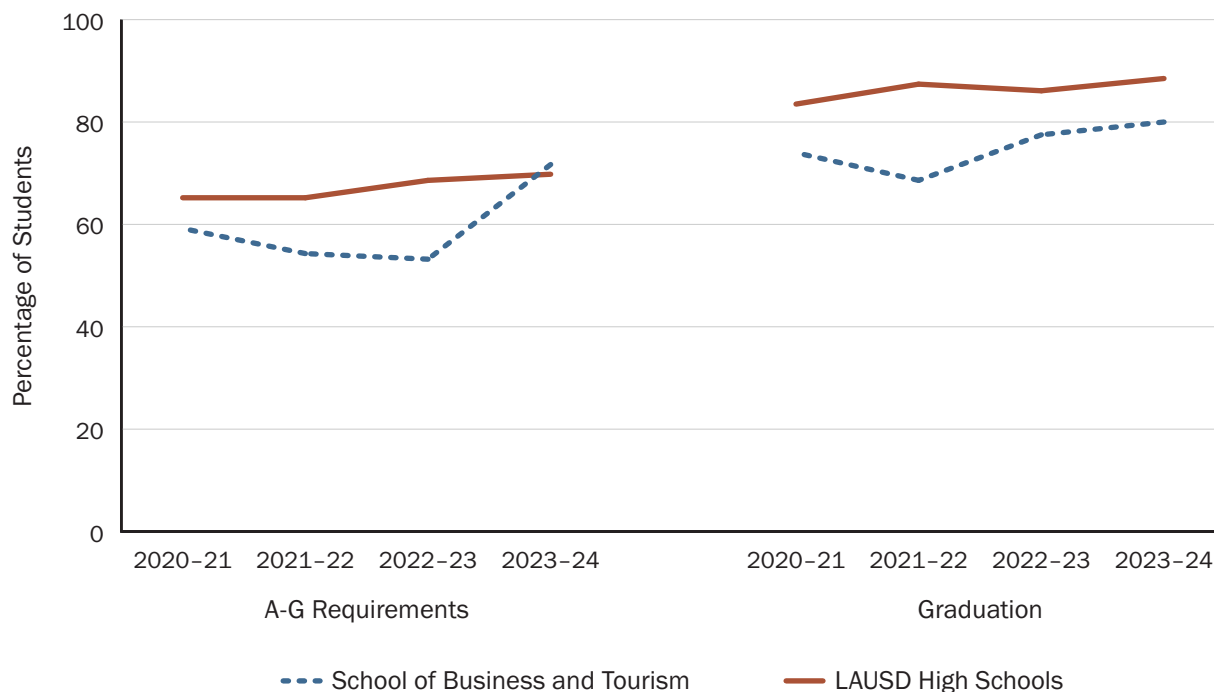


Notes: ELA = English language arts. CAASPP = California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. CAASPP results for the Los Angeles Unified School District include charter and noncharter schools.

Source: California Department of Education [DataQuest](#) data for 2022–23 through 2024–25 for the School of Business and Tourism and the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Other academic outcomes at Business and Tourism demonstrate a positive growth trajectory. This includes the percentage of graduates completing the series of college preparatory courses—the “A-G” course requirements—that students must pass with a grade of C or better to be eligible for admission to California’s public university system. Business and Tourism students have made steady progress in meeting this indicator of college readiness, and almost 72% of Business and Tourism students satisfied these requirements in 2023–24—a rate of college readiness slightly higher than the district average of 69.8%. Business and Tourism has also made steady improvement in its graduation rate, achieving an 80% graduation rate in the 2023–24 school year—an almost 12 percentage point increase since 2021–22 that has also maintained an upward trajectory since becoming a designated community school. (See [Figure 5](#).)

Figure 5. School of Business and Tourism and LAUSD A-G Requirements and Graduation Rates



Source: Ed-Data. [School of Business and Tourism](#). Los Angeles Unified. (accessed 08/15/2025).

Business and Tourism has also supported other positive outcomes through its schooling approach. For instance, the high school has seen an impressive reduction in chronic absence in recent years, decreasing its rate by over 15 percentage points since its pandemic-induced peak in 2021-22 (see [Table 6](#)). In 2023-24, the school also maintained a lower chronic absence rate (22.9%) than the district average among LAUSD high schoolers (30.2%).

Suspension rates at Business and Tourism have also remained significantly low and barely veered from 0% over the last 4 years, indicating the presence of a positive school climate. (See [Table 6](#).) Student survey results from 2024-25 indicate that more than half of students (64%) feel that the school is a supportive and inviting place for students to learn, that adults at the school treat students with respect (65%), and that teachers are responsive to reports of student bullying (64%). Additional school climate findings can be found in [Table 7](#). These survey results generally mirror the average ratings of LAUSD high schoolers on those measures.

Table 6. Chronic Absence and Suspension Rates for School of Business and Tourism and LAUSD, 2020–24

School	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Chronic absence				
School of Business and Tourism	22.1%	37.8%	27.4%	22.9%
LAUSD high schools	19.5%	36.8%	33.1%	30.2%
Suspension rate				
School of Business and Tourism	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
LAUSD	0.0%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%

Note: The LAUSD suspension rates reflect the number of students suspended across K–12, as publicly available district suspension rates cannot be disaggregated by grade level.

Source: Ed-Data. [School of Business and Tourism](#). Los Angeles Unified. (accessed 08/15/2025).

Table 7. School Climate Survey Results for School of Business and Tourism, 2024–25

School climate measures	Percentage agree or strongly agree	
	School of Business and Tourism	LAUSD high schools
Overall bullying (e.g., I have had mean rumors or lies spread about me)	8.0%	11.0%
Overall connectedness (e.g., I feel like I am part of this school)	58.0%	57.0%
Expectations for behavior (e.g., students know how they are expected to act)	58.0%	61.0%
Participation & leadership opportunities (e.g., students have a voice in decision-making at this school)	56.0%	58.0%
Safety (e.g., I feel safe in this school and in online school sessions)	58.0%	58.0%

Source: Los Angeles Unified School District. [LAUSD School Experience Survey results 2024–25](#). (accessed 08/20/2025).

Inclusive, Deeper Learning Approaches in LAUSD Community Schools

LAUSD's Community Schools Initiative (CSI) places classroom practice at the heart of its strategy for transforming schools, recognizing that additional services, programs, partnerships, and personnel are not ends in and of themselves but essential components of a broader effort to improve learning conditions and academic achievement.³⁶ As the CSI director explained, "Everything you bring in has to be in service of improving academic outcomes for students. Community schools are about parent engagement, [integrated] services, and shared decision-making, but first and foremost they are about strong Tier 1 instruction [instructional approaches for all students]."

A primary feature of the CSI included the engagement of district staff, external partners, and school staff in the development of a shared understanding of what classroom practice in community schools looks like. As described by a district-level secondary instructional specialist on the CSI team, "We really have to distinguish ... that this is not another program, that it is a strategy. [In] doing that, we need to differentiate what a non-community school classroom looks like versus a community school classroom."

Data analyzed for this study indicate that LAUSD's CSI prioritizes three aspects of classroom practice: (1) the development of welcoming, inclusive classrooms, (2) community-connected project-based learning (PBL), and (3) the integration of community school and Linked Learning approaches.

This section of the report describes how the district approached building the capacity of school staff to engage in each of the three district priorities related to classroom practice. Additionally, this section illustrates changes and practices in the two schools that participated in this study that reflect their engagement in the CSI's capacity-building opportunities and illustrate the types of classroom practices that the CSI has envisioned for community schools.

Welcoming and Inclusive Classrooms

District Support

A key aspect of classroom practice, as conceptualized by the LAUSD CSI, is the development of welcoming and inclusive classrooms. As the CSI director explained:

The idea is that you create an ecosystem in your classroom that is anti-biased, anti-racist, and restorative in nature. We're thinking through how the classroom should look and how we structure our interactions with each other and between students so that we can move away from a factory model to a more humanistic model.

As conceived by the district's CSI, welcoming and inclusive classrooms nurture positive interactions among students, their peers, and their teachers; support students to feel emotionally and physically safe; and reflect students' identities and experiences.

CSI staff supported the development of welcoming and inclusive classrooms through an intensive series of professional development offerings for educators and school staff offered to all CSI schools. Collectively, these professional development opportunities were attended by large numbers of staff

representing the vast majority of community schools in the district. These included two series of trainings provided by external partners, Joyful Disruption and the Sandy Hook Promise, as well as in-house trainings provided by the Positive Behavior Interventions and Support/Restorative Practices (PBIS/RP) Department.

Joyful Disruption

Joyful Disruption is a professional development series created by two professors from Claremont Graduate University. The series is divided into two parts, a *Planting the Seeds* series and a *Leveling Up* series, each of which includes four 2-hour sessions. The aim of the training is to support educators to identify and respond to the ways that systemic racism and discrimination show up in curricula, classrooms, and schools. As described in a newsletter produced by CSI and distributed to community schools in the district, the trainings are designed “to assist educators in recognizing, problematizing, and disrupting the deep structures of schooling. It equips them with strategies to continue honoring our students’ multifaceted selves and experiences.”³⁷

The Joyful Disruption trainings were offered in person and virtually and covered a wide range of topics, including educator identity and positionality, physical classroom setup, parent engagement, and culturally responsive curriculum. For example, during one training, participants were asked to reflect on their classroom ecology (broadly defined to include the teacher, the students, the content of what is being taught, the physical environment, and the social-emotional experience of those in the classroom) by asking themselves: “Which facets of positionality are centered, marginalized, and/or ignored in your classroom ecology?” Participants were encouraged to “Notice and wonder: Who is included and who is left out?”

LAUSD’s CSI strongly encouraged participation in these trainings. The *Planting the Seeds* series was offered in 2023–24 and 2024–25, and both offerings were attended by approximately 500 school staff members from more than 45 community schools. The *Leveling Up* series was offered in 2024–25 and was attended by more than 500 staff members from 60 community schools. School team attendees included administrators, community school coordinators, educators, and additional school staff. The size and composition of school teams varied. For example, at Business and Tourism a team of nine staff members, including the principal and eight educators, attended the *Planting the Seeds* series, and a team of six educators attended the *Leveling Up* series. At Roybal-Allard, both of the series were attended by a school team of 35 people, which included the entire teaching staff, the principal, and several additional staff members. CSI staff considered the high level of participation in the Joyful Disruption trainings a noteworthy success. As the CSI director shared, “I’m thrilled because we’ve never had 550 teachers receiving one thing.” The following section of the report describes school perspectives on the quality and relevance of Joyful Disruption trainings and other professional development offerings from the CSI that focused on welcoming and inclusive classroom environments.

The Sandy Hook Promise

The CSI also provided a training called *Start With Hello*, offered by the Sandy Hook Promise, in which participants learned strategies to foster welcoming school environments, support students’ social-emotional development and peer relationships, and prevent isolation and violence. As the CSI director shared, “We work with them on a program to reduce violence in schools and to create a more harmonious [classroom] environment.”

The training was offered over three sessions (totaling 7 hours) once in 2023–24 and once in 2024–25. Across both years, attendance included nearly 150 people representing 51 community schools. As with the training provided by Joyful Disruption, schools were asked to identify their own attendees, and the number and roles of attendees varied across schools. At Business and Tourism, the community school coordinator (CSC) was the sole attendee at this training, while at Roybal-Allard a cohort of six staff members attended the training, including the principal, educators, and additional staff members.

Professional Development Provided by LAUSD’s Positive Behavior Interventions and Support/Restorative Practices Team

In addition to the professional development opportunities offered by external partners, the CSI collaborated with the LAUSD’s Positive Behavior Interventions and Support/Restorative Practices (PBIS/RP) team to provide a training titled the *Art of De-Escalation* primarily for classified and outside-of-classroom staff. The intention was to ensure that practices in place to nurture positive classroom environments were also being used in shared school spaces such as cafeterias and hallways. As the CSI director explained, “This year we are focused on our classified staff who supervise students for periods of time but frequently don’t get any training. [Because of this], the world created in the classroom is not in harmony with the world that exists on the playground, in the lunch area, in the library.” The training was designed to equip participants with strategies and hands-on practice to prevent, de-escalate, and effectively respond to challenging student behaviors.

The *Art of De-Escalation* training was offered in two 3-hour sessions in the 2024–25 school year and was attended by nearly 150 attendees from 46 community schools. As with other professional development offerings, schools selected their own attendees. Ten staff members from Roybal-Allard attended this training, including the community school coordinator, the school psychologist, two behavioral intervention and prevention support coordinators, and several teachers. Though Business and Tourism staff did not attend the *Art of De-Escalation* training, they requested training from the PBIS/RP team focused on social and emotional learning foundations. This training was subsequently provided on the school’s campus and attended by 28 staff members, including two administrators, six support staff, and 22 educators.

School-Level Practices Influenced by CSI Trainings

School sites included in this study noted several changes that they made to school and classroom practice in response to the trainings provided by the district described above. These included physical changes to the arrangement of classrooms and school spaces; inclusive classroom, school, and curricular practices; and the incorporation of restorative practices.

Creating Welcoming and Supportive School Spaces

As described above, a primary emphasis of the Joyful Disruption professional development series was the physical environment in which students learn. During the training, participants explored the physical classroom environment as a central component of a classroom’s overall ecology and took part in several activities designed to help them reflect on the inclusivity of their classroom environment. These activities informed practice at both Roybal-Allard and Business and Tourism. At Roybal-Allard, the principal provided a follow-up training for her staff focused specifically on the importance of the classroom environment.

As she explained:

I did a PD with teachers about room environment as the third teacher in the classroom. [The teacher] is the first one, the kids are the second one, and the room environment you provide is the third one. So how do we make it one that's welcoming?

The principal continued to explain that a focus of the follow-up professional development session was to ensure that all teachers at the school had the capacity and resources to provide "Calm Corners" in their classrooms. "The expectation is that everyone has a Calm Corner in their room, which they do," she shared. For example, in a 5th-grade classroom, the research team observed a Calm Corner tucked into a private area with a comfy blue chair, a small rug, and a bookshelf with reading materials. On the wall were several posters, including one that shared "calming recommendations" such as breathing techniques and reflection questions, with prompts such as "How much energy are you using right now?" for students to use in moments of high stress.

Business and Tourism also prioritized designing a space where students can process their emotions, take time for reflection, or simply relax in a calm and safe setting. This space is called the Zen Den and is housed in the community school coordinator's office. The Zen Den, created with community school funding, offers several green, cushiony chairs and a table as well as a poster with guidelines that explain how the students can use the space. There are several materials to facilitate activities that students can engage in while in the Zen Den, including journals, drawing and painting supplies, and tactile materials such as sculpting clay. There is also a wall display of affirming messages such as "you are enough" and "you are beautiful." Similar to the Calm Corners at Roybal-Allard, there are also posters decorating the walls that describe reflection and relaxation techniques.

Inclusive Classroom, Curricular Practices, and School Practices

Trainings offered by the district prompted the schools to adopt several other inclusive practices. The Business and Tourism principal affirmed her alignment with the CSI's commitment to inclusive practice. As she shared:

Having that underpinning of belongingness and inclusivity is very important. And community schools, a lot of their sessions that they provide really help to affirm that and [provide] inclusive strategies that help bring community within your school, within your classroom.

She described several classroom practices adopted by educators at Business and Tourism that she attributed to their participation in trainings provided by the CSI. These included social-emotional check-ins, community-building circles in which students shared stories about their lives, small-group learning stations, and gender-affirming language.

At Roybal-Allard, trainings provided by the CSI prompted reflection on inclusive curriculum. As the community school coordinator explained:

I believe now every single one of our teachers has done a training that was offered by the Community Schools Initiative, Joyful Disruption, and cultural relevance is a key piece of that. So, they've really tried to implement what they're learning there. I mean, we are 98% Hispanic, so just teaching the kids about Cesar Chavez isn't going to cut it. That's not being culturally relevant.

This theme came through during interviews with teachers who described classroom activities that intentionally drew upon students' identities and backgrounds. For example, a 5th-grade teacher described a genealogy project in which students chose between creating an intergenerational family photo book, producing a family recipe book, or conducting interviews with family members. The teacher described the project as a meaningful learning experience that helped students explore their family heritage. She highlighted its impact on one student in particular, explaining, "I know for Gabriela [pseudonym], it was really powerful just figuring out where her family is from. She had no idea they were from Chihuahua, and it was powerful for her to learn about her own history."

In addition to curricular changes at Roybal-Allard, staff used their learning from the *Start With Hello* trainings to build out several whole-school practices designed to promote inclusion, including a Kindness Week. As the Roybal-Allard principal explained:

We looked at our annual School Experience Survey and identified kindness as an area that students highlighted as a need, and that's where the initial inception for the [Kindness] week began. Using Sandy Hook's *Start With Hello* program, our goal was to create a shared opportunity amongst students, staff, and families to establish a more inclusive and caring environment focused on building a sense of connection and belonging. We wanted to create a space where students are seen, accepted, valued, and included.³⁸

As part of Kindness Week, school staff members created a flyer highlighting different ways that students could connect with one another and introduced the No One Eats Alone campaign. As the Roybal-Allard principal described, "We talked to students about why it's important to check in with each other and include others at the same table. Kids drew pictures and posted them around the cafeteria."

Restorative Practices

At Roybal-Allard and Business and Tourism, developing welcoming and inclusive school and classroom environments also included the incorporation of restorative practices. At Business and Tourism, staff pursued training for both school staff and family members from the district's PBIS/RP team. As described above, Business and Tourism sought out training from the district on social and emotional learning foundations for their staff. The CSC described helpful tools and strategies they learned during the training:

The PBIS and RP team, they do PDs for us on Tuesdays, and they've shared different strategies for how to build connection with students and how to de-escalate conflicts in the classroom. There is one [strategy] I always remember called four to one. For every correction you do, students should hear four affirming things.

In addition to training for their staff, Business and Tourism also sought out training for parents and caregivers from the PBIS/RP team focused on understanding and naming emotions, stress management, adolescent development, and strategies for talking to teenage children.

At Roybal-Allard, the principal explained that CSI trainings contributed to the development of more restorative classroom environments by shifting the focus away from punitive consequences and toward accountability and personal responsibility. As she shared, “One thing that we’ve taken away from our classrooms is the consequences list. There is no, if you do this, there’s this infraction. That doesn’t exist in the rooms.” She went on to explain that, rather than matching behaviors with consequences, Roybal-Allard staff, herself included, were engaging in discussions to help students understand the impacts of their behavior and how to make amends with those harmed by mistakes they made. As she explained:

It’s a lot about restorative justice. When I bring kids in here and things have happened, it’s like, you know what, how can we fix this? How can we make this right? What can we do? And then we [help] them to come to a resolution and walk away with some semblance of that relationship still intact.

Collectively, these changes suggest a move toward more inclusive, restorative, and emotionally responsive school environments. These shifts represent meaningful change as research shows that positive school climates reduce stress, foster resilience, and promote students’ holistic growth and engagement in learning.³⁹

Community-Connected, Project-Based Learning

District Support

Community-connected PBL is a cornerstone of CSI’s vision for classroom practice in community schools. CSI staff widely agreed that this approach—grounded in real-world connections and student agency—is essential for making learning engaging, meaningful, and student-centered. According to the CSI’s secondary specialist, PBL is “a signature element that defines a community school classroom.” The CSI director shared:

The instructional aspect that we’re training on is the project-based learning interdisciplinary instruction. And the reasoning for this is our commitment to have meaningful rigorous curriculum for students, and meaningful in the sense that they actually care about it. Our hypothesis is that project-based learning where there’s more student voice and more student choice is what’s going to make it meaningful.

To build the capacity of community schools to engage in community-connected PBL, the CSI developed the role of PBL champion, increased opportunities for teacher collaboration, and provided professional learning opportunities.

Project-Based Learning Champions and Teacher Collaboration Time

To support the implementation of community-connected PBL, the CSI has prioritized teacher collaboration by creating the PBL champion role and providing funding for collaborative planning hours. Each community school designates a teacher as its PBL champion, with a stipend from the CSI, to serve as a key point of contact for CSI staff and a collaborator with colleagues. As a CSI instructional coach explained:

We’re creating a champion, like a point-of-contact person at every school, so that hopefully going into next year I have an actual person at each school site that I can ask, “Hey, how are things going with professional learning for your teachers?”

PBL champions' responsibilities are school based and grounded in collaboration, including advocating for PBL planning time, codesigning and facilitating professional development, coaching other educators, and enriching instruction through supplemental activities. For example, a PBL champion at a secondary community school collaborated with teachers to secure grant funding that supported PBL-related field trips. In addition to the PBL champion role, the CSI supports teacher collaboration more broadly by allowing schools to use CSI funding to support paid planning time.

Professional Development Opportunities

Unlike professional development around welcoming and inclusive classroom environments, which was provided to attendees from the vast majority of community schools in the district, the CSI intends to embed community-connected PBL instructional practices using a differentiated approach over the course of several years. As explained by the CSI director:

We're starting on that training, but we know that with the number of teachers we're talking about that we've got about a two-year to three-year period that we will be working with, introducing [these instructional approaches] for some schools and enhancing [these instructional approaches] for other schools that are at a higher level of awareness in terms of interdisciplinary instruction. The idea is that within five years, community schools are implementing at least two project-based or community-based learning units or modules, preferably with Capstone projects once per semester.

For this reason, the CSI prioritized depth over breadth and engaged a smaller number of schools in professional development opportunities focused on these instructional strategies. This differentiated engagement across community schools is illustrated by the two schools that participated in this study. Roybal-Allard engaged deeply in CSI trainings to launch PBL by starting with its 5th-grade team, while also involving teachers from across grade levels. In contrast, Business and Tourism—where PBL was deeply embedded in the school's culture—sent only one teacher to training, focusing on alignment with CSI's vision and identifying new resources to strengthen ongoing practice.

The CSI provided professional learning opportunities through two external partners—Defined Learning and the Center for Powerful Public Schools (CFPPS)—focusing on PBL that, as one CSI instructional coach described, “centers student experiences and priorities in the classroom.” Between these two trainings, participating community schools benefited from a variety of capacity-building activities such as in-person and virtual learning sessions, professional learning communities, in-school coaching, and office hours. Defined Learning also provided every community school with access to their digital platform, which includes a database of PBL units, activities, and lesson plans.

The series from Defined Learning is composed of three sessions (totaling 11 hours) and was offered twice, in 2023–24 and 2024–25. Additionally, Defined Learning provided one 2-hour session just for administrators to better understand their needs around PBL. As a CSI instructional coach shared:

We did one professional learning for administrators, so that we're sharing with the administrators what the teachers need for support to be able to do implementation, and then listening to what the administrators need, because they have responsibilities to the district and [we need to know] how we can support them without taking them too far away from whatever their priority goals are.

These professional development opportunities were primarily intended for educators but were also attended by community school coordinators and other school staff. In total, training was attended by nearly 135 participants from 17 community schools.

The training from CFPPS was provided over 10 sessions (totaling 40 hours) and attended by 55 staff members from nine community schools. Several schools, including Roybal-Allard, opted to continue their work with CFPPS. The same group of Roybal-Allard staff that attended the Defined Learning training and the initial CFPPS training continued trainings with CFPPS virtually on weekends. The opportunity to continue working with CFPPS allowed the Roybal-Allard cohort to dive more deeply into community-connected PBL.

Together, these efforts reflect the CSI's strategy of building sustained, school-level capacity for community-connected PBL, with the goal of making such practices a defining feature of community schools across the district. A CSI-wide event (described in [First Annual LAUSD Community Schools Instructional Showcase](#)), illustrates the district's commitment to building the capacity of school staff to implement community-connected PBL.

First Annual LAUSD Community Schools Instructional Showcase

On a Saturday morning in May, more than 120 educators, students, and community partners gathered at the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex for the first annual Community Schools Instructional Showcase. The atmosphere was welcoming, with colorful balloons marking the path into the campus and lively music echoing across the courtyard, where local organizations, such as Linked Learning and United Voices of Leaders, hosted booths showcasing resources. Educators checked into the showcase while others sat at the lunch tables, talking, laughing, and sharing breakfast before a day dedicated to celebrating instruction and student-centered learning as a core part of LAUSD's community school transformation. Inside, community school educators hurriedly placed the finishing touches on displays that showcased student work grounded in community-oriented, project-based learning (PBL).

The event opened with a high-energy performance by the Audubon Middle School drumline and dancers, setting a celebratory tone for the day. In her welcome, CSI Director Cora Watkins highlighted that, while LAUSD community schools have pursued varied instructional efforts, this was the first event dedicated to celebrating instruction. She emphasized that instructional transformation must be grounded in social justice and relationships, creating healing, student-centered spaces. Watkins also noted CSI's progress, with more than 500 educators trained in antiracist and antibias frameworks and 26 schools engaged in PBL professional development.

Following the welcome activities, attendees participated in a gallery walk during which teachers and students presented PBL experiences that exemplify how academic content can be made relevant to students' communities, cultures, and lived experiences. For example, at the display from the School of Business and Tourism, students described an interdisciplinary project that incorporated content from their government, English, and business courses. In this project, students interviewed neighborhood business owners about problems they noticed in their community, and then designed a public safety event in response to these concerns. One student shared that the

project was “nerve-wracking” but ultimately “gave me a way to engage with the community and see what employees go through living in such a populated area.” Another reflected, “PBL helps us for the future,” noting how it had improved her ability to collaborate and communicate. Nearby, educators from other schools presented projects on environmental justice, sustainability, and heritage storytelling.

Beyond showcasing student work, the event also spotlighted how community school coordinators were driving instructional improvement at their sites. Community school coordinators shared how they utilized data to direct instructional improvement, initiate peer mentorship programs to support new educators, and establish dedicated time for staff to collaborate on lesson planning. One coordinator described how her team regularly hosts workshops and office hours, creating opportunities for teachers to collaboratively explore project-based strategies and engage in peer coaching.

The presentations from community schools across the city underscored that community schools in LAUSD are not only transforming support services but also reimagining instruction. The day celebrated the initiative’s commitment to making classroom practice a central feature of the community schools approach, aiming to make every classroom a space where students’ identities, experiences, and communities shape meaningful learning.

Source: Learning Policy Institute observation of Community Schools Initiative event. (2025, May 17).

PBL School-Level Practices Supported by CSI Trainings and Resources

Role of the PBL Champion and Teacher Collaboration Time

As noted above, the CSI funds schools to designate a teacher as a PBL champion—a role that provides upward feedback to CSI instructional staff and advocates for resources and collaboration time to strengthen PBL instruction at school sites. To further support collaboration, schools may use discretionary community school funds to compensate educators for joint instructional planning.

The schools in this study used these resources and supports differently because they are at different stages of implementing PBL. For example, Business and Tourism has integrated PBL into instruction for many years prior to the CSI and already has common planning time built into its schedule; as a result, the school allocates its discretionary funds to other purposes. Roybal-Allard, however, is only beginning to engage PBL as a core instructional practice, and therefore discretionary funding to support teacher planning time was essential. As one Roybal-Allard teacher shared, “As part of community schools, you can get collaborative hours. You can use that to meet as a team and work. It could be data, it could be lesson planning or whatever you need. That’s something that we have as a resource that we didn’t have before we became a community school.” The principal at Roybal-Allard estimated that teachers received about 3 hours of paid collaboration time each month.

Because the two schools in this study were at different stages of PBL implementation, the PBL champion role took on distinct forms in each context. Because Roybal-Allard began its PBL implementation with their 5th-grade teachers, the PBL champion is on the 5th-grade team and attended all of the professional learning opportunities with her colleagues. She also took on a turnaround training role to introduce the

full teaching team at Roybal-Allard to the instructional resources made available to their school through the CSI (e.g., through the Defined Learning platform) and to share the PBL lessons and units that the 5th-grade team had introduced into their curriculum.

At Business and Tourism, the PBL champion is a veteran teacher leader who has supported PBL for more than a decade and continues to sustain the school’s commitment to high-quality, community-connected learning. Her role centers on safeguarding PBL by cultivating buy-in among administrators, teachers, and students. She inducts new staff—strategically placing them on grade-level teams—and helps teachers adapt PBL for diverse learners, including English learners. She also secured dedicated collaboration time: two weekly PD blocks (a whole-staff session on Tuesday and a 45-minute planning block on Wednesday) used to design projects, develop rubrics, and plan differentiated supports.

Beyond planning, the champion actively circulates among teams to provide guidance and ensure resources are available to sustain PBL. A California Partnership Academy grant she secured 12 years ago has brought \$80,000 annually, which she distributes equitably across teams while providing stipends to grade-level leads for key administrative tasks like coordinating portfolio presentations. She also works to bring in community and industry professionals to evaluate projects—an effort made more difficult postpandemic but essential for maintaining real-world relevance. Although the PBL champion title is new, her long-standing contributions—inducting new teachers, securing funding, and building strong community connections—illustrate the value of a dedicated point person and demonstrate how CSI’s strategy of designating PBL champions can enhance instructional practice across community schools.

Culminating Presentations for 9th-Grade Team Projects

On a rare rainy day in May 2025, 9th-graders at Business and Tourism made their way to the campus’s two-story library to present learnings from a semester-long group project on a neighborhood in Los Angeles County. This annually instituted project asked student groups to research an LA neighborhood and draw upon concepts learned in varied subject areas to create a compelling presentation that would encourage tourism.

After weeks of developing slides and rehearsing talking points in both their classes and advisory periods, project teams entered the library donned in professional attire—a strategy taught at Business and Tourism to support effective communication and presentation—at their designated time slot to present to a panel of four judges. Judges included a mix of 9th-grade teachers, other school staff (e.g., principal), and one outside expert, referred to at Business and Tourism as an “industry professional.”

One project team made their way to the second floor of the open-concept library to share their presentation on the neighboring cities of Pasadena and Altadena. As they entered the space, the students greeted the judges—some timidly, some confidently—before taking their positions on either side of the large screen that projected their title slide.

After formally introducing themselves, the students progressed through their 4–5-minute presentation, imparting information about Pasadena and Altadena that infused concepts learned in their courses. Students shared about the cities’ histories and beloved cultural activities and events. They applied claim-evidence-reasoning to raise awareness of the community and climate-related

challenges in the area after the devastating Eaton fire in 2025. They also integrated their knowledge of effective marketing in presenting designs for a new city logo and for a proposed food truck that would capture the culture of the cities while providing the community with healthy options. Students took turns presenting, ensuring that each student verbally contributed to the presentation and showed command of the content.

After the short presentation, a question-and-answer period ensued. The judges first posed clarifying questions, including “Why did you design the food truck or the revised city logo that way?” or “How was pathos/ethos reflected in these slides?” After students had the opportunity to respond to each question that was posed, the judges turned to providing students with both constructive and encouraging feedback. Judges typically grounded their feedback in the content that was included in the presentations and the degree to which it reflected points of learning from across the courses. Judges also provided feedback on students’ communication tactics, highlighting both areas of strength and areas for improvement related to verbal and nonverbal moves used in the presentation and appeals made in presentation slides. Once the judges were finished providing feedback, the students were dismissed, and the judges began to deliberate. To do this, each judge reviewed a shared presentation rubric, going row by row to determine the group’s score, before the next group of presenters made their way up the stairs.

These presentations illustrate Business and Tourism’s rigorous, cross-disciplinary, and community-connected approach: Students synthesize work across subject areas to produce a project related to a neighborhood in their city, present to an authentic panel, and receive feedback that supports academic mastery and professional communication.

Source: LPI site visit observation at School of Business and Tourism. (2025, May 7).

Community-Connected PBL at Roybal-Allard and Business and Tourism

Both Roybal-Allard and Business and Tourism demonstrate how PBL can strengthen engagement, connect instruction to real-world contexts and communities, and build students’ academic and social-emotional skills. While both schools share a commitment to PBL, their approaches reflect different stages of implementation—Roybal-Allard taking a gradual, cohort-based approach, and Business and Tourism embedding PBL within a fully developed Linked Learning structure.

At Roybal-Allard, PBL began with a small cohort of 5th-grade teachers who participated in training with Defined Learning and continued their learning with Center for Powerful Public Schools, which allowed them to deepen their understanding of community-connected PBL.

As one teacher explained:

This past Saturday when we attended [CFPPS], it was about what issues do you see in your community, right? The tiny houses [project] worked for us because it’s related to the issue of homelessness or affordability of homes which impacts some of our kids. We were also talking about sanitation, and maybe can we create a project around making our community cleaner? Things like that. So, we’re trying to think of some issues within our community that can translate into project-based learning.

Using these resources, teachers engaged students in hands-on projects that connected directly to their school and community. One example is the revival of the school's garden, a green space in an otherwise blacktop-covered yard, decorated with murals of native plants and community landmarks. Students cultivated raised beds with edible plants, created hummingbird feeders, and built succulent planters out of recycled bottles. As Ms. Alvarez (pseudonym) described, "A lot of the kids bring plants and herbs from home, and then we replant them there. If they have something like a cactus or succulents at home, they'll ask their parents if they could take a piece and bring it. So, it's like bringing something from home to the school." Students also shared their knowledge with families, extending the project's reach into homes and neighborhoods. Looking ahead, students will design an irrigation system for the summer months and expand into composting and sustainable food systems.

The 5th-grade team also implemented a geometry-based mini-golf project using Defined Learning materials. Students designed and constructed miniature golf courses, complete with obstacles and par values, and presented their designs to peers. Teachers intentionally structured groups for collaboration and collective accountability, while one project was enhanced by input from a local architect, invited by the community school coordinator. Teachers noted the enthusiasm students brought to this work: "They don't see it as schoolwork. They're super excited. They want to do something hands-on and fun." In addition to engagement, teachers saw lasting impacts on confidence and communication skills. One recalled a student who initially "broke down ... sobbing" during presentations but now "doesn't have any problems speaking up. ... To see the growth and the difference, I think a big part of that is project-based learning." To expand PBL schoolwide, the trained 5th-grade teachers now lead professional development for colleagues, introducing the Defined Learning platform and modeling projects. As the principal explained, "We showed everyone, you have access to these same lessons ... we're going to fill your strategy basket with this. Then you, through your teacher lens, can determine how this might fit into your curriculum and standards." This phased, teacher-led approach has begun to spread PBL beyond the initial cohort.

At Business and Tourism, PBL is fully integrated into the school's wall-to-wall Linked Learning pathways (see [What Is Linked Learning?](#)), with all students participating in interdisciplinary, career-connected projects each semester. Teachers emphasized that Business and Tourism is "definitely a teacher-led school" where "every teacher is involved in Linked Learning and project-based learning," reflecting an essential community school practice: collaborative leadership, shared power, and voice. At Business and Tourism, teacher involvement in instructional planning is supported by weekly professional development and grade-level collaboration. Projects are designed to integrate content across disciplines, strengthen collaboration and communication, and culminate in portfolio presentations evaluated by community and industry professionals. (See [Culminating Presentations for 9th-Grade Team Projects.](#))

One 10th-grade project tasked students with designing an eco-friendly hotel and a complementary artisanal soap product. Students drew on history and geography to situate their designs in cultural and environmental contexts, explored sustainability in science by testing soap formulas and pH levels, applied math skills in creating architectural blueprints and scaling measurements, and studied rhetoric in English to develop commercials promoting their products. As the math teacher explained, "They had to design a blueprint for the hotel ... then scale it up to a real-world situation and calculate the effect of the area of different rooms on the materials they need." The project culminated in professional-style pitches modeled on *Shark Tank*, where students presented logos, commercials, and persuasive arguments. Technology and media tools were integrated throughout, enhancing digital literacy alongside academic content.

Students recognized both the challenges and benefits of Business and Tourism’s PBL approach. One student reflected that although they “hated it at first,” the process helped them grow, teaching them practical skills like interviewing and resume writing. Another explained:

I feel like our school prepares us a lot for our future because most of the things that we do in school are professional. And we work all together as a team, and communicating with others will help us in the future when we get jobs and start careers.

These reflections highlight how PBL at Business and Tourism develops both academic and professional skills, preparing students for life beyond high school.

Taken together, these cases illustrate PBL implementation across a spectrum. Roybal-Allard demonstrates how schools can begin implementation with a focused teacher cohort and build momentum through teacher leadership and shared learning, while Business and Tourism exemplifies full-scale integration into a Linked Learning model with interdisciplinary projects and community partnerships. In both contexts, teachers shared that PBL engages students deeply, fosters student collaboration, and connects learning to real-world skills and experiences.

What Is Linked Learning?

The Linked Learning Alliance formed in 2008 in California, in an effort to provide combined college and career preparation to high school students, opportunities that are typically offered separately. By integrating college and career technical education, the Linked Learning approach sought to strengthen educational experiences, while deepening connections to schools’ surrounding community and local economy. Since the rollout in 2008, the Linked Learning approach has expanded to include more than 600 pathways in 250 schools across California. The Linked Learning approach has also been adopted in 18 additional states throughout the country.

The Linked Learning approach is composed of several key elements implemented through school-based industry pathways: (1) an integrated program of study through which students are offered a sequence of both college preparatory courses and career technical education, (2) a continuum of work-based learning during which students engage with local businesses and other employers to gain practical career experience through opportunities like internships and apprenticeships, and (3) personalized supports that help students navigate their pathways and strengthen their experience through targeted interventions. These elements are designed to work together to give students educational experiences that both prepare them for college success and are relevant for real-world application in their future careers.

Sites (e.g., schools or LEAs) can be certified in the Linked Learning approach (through the Linked Learning Alliance) as candidate pathways, silver pathways, or gold pathways. A designated district administrator first registers their Linked Learning pathway (determined by and in partnership with

their local industry), and the site begins working toward fidelity of implementation of the Linked Learning approach. Once all crucial elements are in place, sites may apply for silver and gold certifications, which denote high-quality pathways and rigorous instruction.

Sources: Linked Learning Alliance. *About the Linked Learning Approach*. (accessed 10/23/2025); Linked Learning Alliance. *Certifying Quality*. (accessed 10/23/2025); Linked Learning Alliance. *A California Success Story: Linked Learning*. (accessed 10/24/2025).

Integration of Linked Learning and Community Schools Approaches in High Schools

District Support

At Business and Tourism, the curriculum, instruction, and assessment approaches described in the previous section are reinforced by the school's Linked Learning structure. Linked Learning is a comprehensive, research-supported strategy that redesigns high school instructional approaches by offering career-focused pathways that meaningfully bridge high school education and real-world experience. The approach intends to equip every student for success in postsecondary life, including college, civic engagement, and the workforce.

Experts in the community school and Linked Learning fields acknowledge that there is a natural alignment between these two strategies for school redesign. A report from the UCLA Center for Community Schooling and the Linked Learning Alliance states:

Both are community-based efforts that aim to connect students to life-long learning and success through in-school and out-of-school educational experiences that are meaningful and engaging, foster strong relationships with caring adults, and integrate support structures that address students' academic, social-emotional, mental, and physical well-being.⁴⁰

CSI staff and staff from LAUSD's Linked Learning Department also described natural connections and mutual priorities of the two approaches. As a Linked Learning administrator in LAUSD shared, "Right away, I could see the connection between Linked Learning [and community schools]. There's a lot of overlap ... the main connection that I see between [Linked Learning and community schools] is the community emphasis and the emphasis on project-based learning." Relatedly, the CSI secondary specialist shared a vision for postsecondary readiness where he described Linked Learning as a "sibling strategy" for community schools and went on to share:

Ideally, we are preparing students to be not just college-ready in a community school, but career-ready. ... So, I think it's providing students the opportunity when they leave that community school, they could go get a career. We want students to explore a plethora of opportunities.

The CSI director also noted that the guiding strategies of Linked Learning and community schools "really line up," bolstering the potential to integrate services, ideas, and instructional practices.

While collaboration between the departments within LAUSD has deepened an understanding of their shared goals and strategies, it has also led community school and Linked Learning staff to reflect on the ways in which the two strategies complement one another, rather than overlap. As a Linked Learning administrator shared, “There is a lot of overlapping, but there’s ways where they [community schools and Linked Learning] kind of push on each other. I can see how they strengthen each other.” For example, she noted that while both community school and Linked Learning approaches value community connections, community schools place greater emphasis on recognizing local assets and involving families and students in addressing community issues. She also pointed out that while Linked Learning encourages PBL, these projects could be more intentionally tied to local community issues, aligning more closely with the community schools’ approach.

The collaboration between LAUSD’s Community Schools Initiative (CSI) and the Linked Learning and Career Technical Education (CTE) Department represents a values-aligned effort to better serve students across the district. The goal of this collaboration is to ensure that students in community schools not only receive academic and social-emotional support but are also given clear pathways to meaningful careers.

At the district level, interdepartmental collaboration has led to a shared understanding of the alignment between their missions and goals. This has resulted in practical efforts to integrate the two approaches at the district level, including adding the role of the CSI secondary specialist, which involves deep collaboration with the Linked Learning Department; the development of resources for schools; and joint funding of several district-level positions that are able to support both CS and Linked Learning approaches at school sites.

Adding a Secondary Specialist at the District Level

The CSI has developed the position of secondary specialist, which plays a vital role in supporting secondary community schools by aligning district strategies—such as Linked Learning and Career and Technical Education—with the broader community schools framework. The secondary specialist shared that their role has helped the partnership between the CSI and the Linked Learning/CTE Department to evolve from reactive coordination to proactive planning. Regular weekly meetings now focus on taking inventory of secondary community schools’ offerings and developing strategic plans to guide community schools toward the implementation of Linked Learning pathways and other postsecondary readiness strategies.

The secondary specialist is deeply involved in advancing Linked Learning across community school sites. His work involves direct engagement with schools to assess their postsecondary readiness goals, determine their interest and readiness to implement a Linked Learning pathway, and share resources about career exploration opportunities. He works with the Linked Learning team and their instructional coaches to conduct overview sessions for schools to introduce the Linked Learning approach and help identify existing strengths at the school that can serve as a foundation and thematic focus for a certified Linked Learning pathway.

Rather than starting from scratch, his approach is about cultivating what already exists and growing it into something more structured and sustainable. Once needs are identified, the secondary specialist acts as a strategic matchmaker—connecting schools with the appropriate district departments, resources, or external partners to bring those goals to life. As the secondary specialist described:

So, with Linked Learning, if I was going to work on a school site with Linked Learning, I would bring along my instructional coach and I would bring along a Linked Learning instructional coach. And then we'd do an overview session with administrators and teachers. ... Let's say it was the school that wanted to build their health offerings or maybe even think about a clinic or something, then I want to partner with Student Health and Human Services, and I might work with the coordinator and some classified individuals around that planning. It really just depends on what the need is and what department needs to come along, and then I would facilitate and support the logistics and operations of that.

In this way, the secondary specialist serves as both a systems-level strategist and on-the-ground facilitator, bridging district vision with school-site realities to promote college and career readiness strategies and programming for community schools.

Coordinated Supports for Community Schools and Linked Learning

Recognizing the shared goals and overlapping values of both initiatives, LAUSD has taken several practical steps to support the integration of community schools and Linked Learning. One strategy has been the development of guidance documents that help schools navigate the integration of the two approaches. As a Linked Learning administrator shared:

We created documents that showed if you are already a Linked Learning school and community school, what is the trajectory for you? What are you working on as a community school? And then the opposite. So, if you are community school but not Linked Learning at this point, how are you going to get there? So we are working on alignment and determining the key practices that community schools are going to engage in that will lead them to integrate Linked Learning.

These tools outline tailored trajectories for schools that are already designated as Linked Learning or community schools and provide guidance for those looking to adopt or deepen their engagement with either approach.

Interdepartmental collaboration has also resulted in jointly funded positions. For example, community schools funds are being used to support work-based learning coordinators who focus specifically on building industry partnerships and expanding real-world learning opportunities for students in community school settings.

Lastly, collaboration between the two departments has led the Linked Learning/CTE Department to streamline its application and onboarding processes for community schools, eliminating the need for schools to submit information already provided in a community schools application, to make participation in both initiatives more feasible. Shared onboarding sessions, like one involving a middle school team that participated in both approaches, nurture collaborative planning and reinforce the message that these strategies are interconnected, rather than competing or disconnected, systems.

Community School Access to Postsecondary Readiness Programs

The partnership between the CSI and the Linked Learning/CTE Department has increased access to postsecondary readiness programming for community schools. For example, three community schools at the high school level are now partnering with the College Access Network (CAN), which supports students

to complete college and FAFSA applications. The secondary specialist serves as a liaison with CAN and supports the schools' partnership with CAN by organizing regular meetings to help them track key data and coordinating travel for convenings with CAN.

Additionally, six community schools have been able to implement Paxton/Patterson Career Labs, which were funded by the Linked Learning/CTE Department. These are elective courses that allow students to gain hands-on experience with a variety of career paths ranging from culinary arts to tourism to human services. While the labs are funded by the Linked Learning/CTE Department, it is the CSI secondary specialist who works with administrators to bring the labs to community schools. As he explained:

Career exploration is another signature strategy. So, how do I work with the CTE administrator in office to bring that alive? One of those key elements would be increasing and supporting the Paxton/Patterson career exploration labs in our middle schools. So, I work with their specialists to support those labs, bring them to schools or sustain them.

This is aligned with the CSI director's vision for a K–12 trajectory for postsecondary readiness. As she explained, "Elementary starts with interdisciplinary instruction and career awareness. Middle school, you've got some CTE offerings [e.g., career labs], and high school has at least one certified Linked Learning pathway that students will go through."

The growing collaboration between LAUSD's CSI and the Linked Learning/CTE Department has already yielded concrete results, including jointly funded positions, a new secondary specialist, and a streamlined application and onboarding process that support schools to engage in community school and postsecondary readiness approaches. Further collaboration and integration of the two approaches will help prepare students in community schools for postsecondary success while expanding their opportunities to explore a range of future careers.

School Practices

This section describes the two primary ways Business and Tourism benefits from the district's efforts to align and integrate community school and Linked Learning approaches: (1) collaboration with a work-based learning coordinator, jointly funded by the community schools and Linked Learning departments, and (2) the CSC's understanding of her role as one that supports both community school approaches and Linked Learning pathways.⁴¹

One of the jointly funded work-based learning (WBL) coordinators, a role described above, works directly with Business and Tourism. This coordinator supports multiple schools but visits Business and Tourism weekly to help develop industry partnerships and integrate real-world learning into Business and Tourism's Linked Learning pathway instruction. For example, the CSC at Business and Tourism described the WBL contributions to the 10th-grade team, which participates in the Hospitality, Recreation, and Tourism pathway. As she shared:

She's super helpful for our 10th-grade team, and she's really helpful at reaching out and making connections. And so, we had a field trip to the Ritz-Carlton at LA Live, and she brought in the general manager, and then he's connected to Cal Poly Pomona School of Hospitality Management. So, part of her job is making all of these connections and then sharing those opportunities with us.

The CSC also noted that, as an out-of-classroom employee, she is well-positioned to support the WBL coordinator's work with teachers. Her role allows her to regularly check in with teachers to understand the types of field trips and opportunities they hope to incorporate to enrich their pathway instruction.

The CSC's understanding of her role has been key to integrating community school and Linked Learning approaches at Business and Tourism. Informed by data from the assets and needs assessment (ANA), she recognized that supporting Linked Learning pathway instruction should be a central part of her role. During the ANA, a foundational component of the community schools approach, CSCs conduct focus groups, interviews, and surveys to gather this data from staff, students, and family members.

Using this data, the CSC works with a school governance team to develop school priorities and a strategic plan for community school implementation. At Business and Tourism, the school's Linked Learning coach led an exercise in conjunction with the collected ANA data with the purpose of clarifying staff roles. As part of this exercise, the CSC and the Linked Learning coach discussed her role and, as described by the CSC, decided that "the job of a community school coordinator is very specific to the school site based on what comes up from the data collected during the assets and needs assessment." The CSC explained how the ANA clarified her school community's needs and shaped her understanding of her role:

Our [ANA] data shows that students and parents are overwhelmingly asking for connections to career exploration, work-based learning opportunities, and internships. However, teachers were saying they don't have the time to put this together. So, part of my job is finding resources to support the school and, here at Business and Tourism, that looks like finding internships and working with external partnerships. So, at a Linked Learning school, my job is very much in support of the instructional program.

Business and Tourism's CSC supports Linked Learning instruction in several ways, including the coordination of resources and enrichment activities that supplement classroom learning and her role on the Business and Tourism advisory board. The CSC intentionally attends all of the school's professional development sessions, as they provide an opportunity to connect with Business and Tourism's educators. As she shared, "I try to make it a point to go to all of them to ask, 'What do you need from me?' And they generally know that they can ask me."

Teachers and staff described this as an incredible source of support. As one teacher shared:

The CSC has been huge this year. Always. I feel like she's just always there. If you need help. I'll be like, "I need pictures of 10th-graders on field trips, or I need some graphic novels with *Animal Farm* because I have a lot of emerging bilinguals this year," and then she'll help me out.

The CSC also plays a key role in connecting learning to the real world through field trips and internships. For example, she helped coordinate visits to the Career Academy, hosted at the Los Angeles Convention Center, for 12th-graders. These industry-specific events gave students direct access to professionals in tourism and other career pathways. The CSC often takes the lead in organizing these opportunities, from initial outreach to day-of logistics. This removes a planning and administrative burden for teachers. As another teacher recalled, "Sometimes I get emails about opportunities for kids. I just forward them to

our CSC, and she sets it up—or she even goes with the kids. She’s done that many times.” Field trips like this aren’t one-off events—they’re part of a broader effort the CSC has undertaken to align experiential learning with each grade level’s focus.

She’s also seen as a key link between external partners, families, and students—particularly when it comes to internships. While other staff members oversee internship logistics, the CSC plays a crucial communications role. As Business and Tourism’s principal explained, “She helps make those internships more known. She does recruitment with students, presentations—she’s the liaison between the families, students, and the opportunities.”

In addition to the direct support she provides to teachers, the CSC works with other school staff to oversee and coordinate Business and Tourism’s advisory board. The advisory board includes approximately 10 community members, alumni, and industry professionals who support the school’s instructional program. The CSC works with the WBL coordinator, the PBL champion, and the principal to coordinate and lead the board’s monthly meetings. She also provides critical updates to the advisory board about the interdisciplinary projects that students are involved in so that the board can support pathway instruction through partnership connections and by providing judges for students’ end-of-semester portfolio presentations.

These efforts demonstrate how the CSC at Business and Tourism has become a strategic link between Linked Learning and community school approaches, promoting a more responsive and enriching instructional program. By intentionally aligning her role based on site-specific data and district support, the CSC effectively integrates both strategies to improve instructional quality and expand students’ access to real-world learning opportunities.

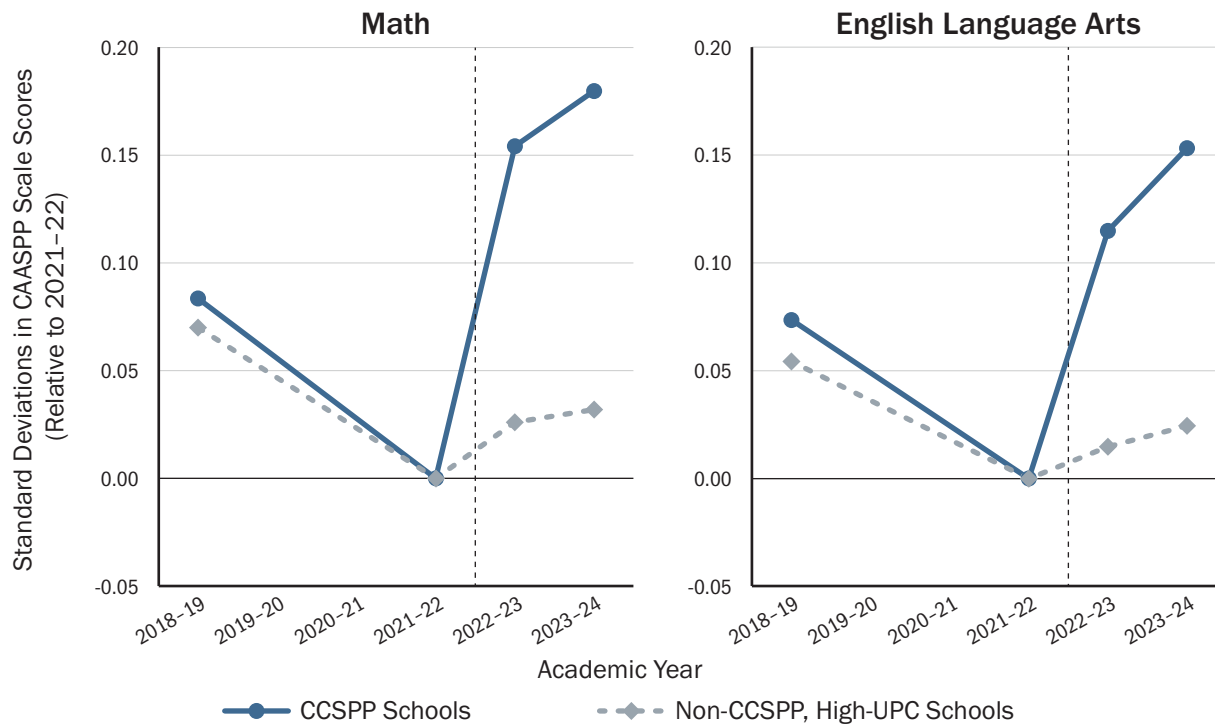
Impact of the California Community Schools Partnership Program in LAUSD

In 2022 LAUSD’s community schools efforts received a substantial infusion of support from the state, when it was awarded a \$44 million grant to support 31 schools in the first cohort of the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) implementation grants, all of which were Community Schools Initiative participants, and had hired community school coordinators. Its longer standing initiative—coupled with its embrace of high-quality community school practices—allowed researchers to examine the local education agency’s sustained change process and its implementation of whole child-aligned practices.

To assess the extent to which the CCSPP implementation grants helped support greater learning gains than would be expected in their absence, we compare the trajectories in student outcomes of the first cohort of CCSPP community schools to similarly high-need non-CCSPP recipients before and after receipt of the grants. We find that the first CCSPP cohort of community schools in LAUSD (31 schools total) made substantially greater academic gains than comparable non-CCSPP schools, with measures of achievement now exceeding prepandemic levels.

[Figure 6](#) depicts the diverging trajectories of community schools from similar non-community schools in both math and ELA standardized scale scores. The comparison group is non-CCSPP LAUSD schools that met or exceeded the target unduplicated pupil count (UPC) level of 80%. UPC includes students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM), who are English learners (EL), and/or who are foster youth. Both CCSPP and comparison schools have an average UPC rate of 95% at the time of the intervention. Controlling for a range of school characteristics, we see that the first cohort of CCSPP schools in LAUSD improved at substantially greater rates than non-CCSPP high-UPC schools in the years following the arrival of state support. (See [Appendix B](#) for detailed information about data sources and methods.)

Figure 6. Student Achievement in CCSP and Non-CCSP Comparison Schools Before and After CCSP Implementation Grants



Notes: CCSP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. CAASPP = California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. CAASPP Scale Scores are standardized and modeled controlling for school characteristics and include school and year fixed effects. Standardized test scores in this figure reflect levels relative to 2021-22, the baseline year before implementation grants were distributed. The vertical line after 2022 indicates distribution of CCSP funds. Due to limited in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2019-20 and 2020-21 are excluded.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2018-19 to 2023-24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files. (2025).

CCSP community schools also made substantial progress in addressing chronic absence and raising the proportions of students meeting or exceeding state proficiency standards. From 2022 to 2024, CCSP Cohort 1 community schools' chronic absence rates dropped by 33%, math proficiency rates improved by 29%, and ELA proficiency rates rose 9%.

These gains exceeded those made by similar schools. After controlling for any changes in school enrollments and demographics and statewide annual trends using a fixed-effects regression model, participating CCSP schools reduced chronic absence by approximately 9% more ($p = 0.03$). Community schools improved math proficiency rates by approximately 11% more than similarly high-UPC comparison schools in the 2 years following grant implementation ($p = 0.02$) and also exhibited greater improvement in ELA proficiency rates than in non-CCSP schools, though ELA impacts were not statistically significant. (See Table 8.)

Table 8. Impacts of CCSPP Community Schools on Chronic Absence and Math and ELA Proficiency

Variables	Chronic absence	Math proficiency	ELA proficiency
CCSPP	-0.087*	0.108*	0.037
Standard error	(0.039)	(0.047)	(0.038)
R-squared	0.541	0.206	0.083
N of schools	803	780	798

Note: * $p < 0.05$, CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Outcome variables are log-transformed. For ease of interpretation, coefficients represent approximate differences in percentage changes between the groups. All models include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). For test scores, grade fixed effects are also included, and observations represent grade cohorts within years. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Analysis excludes schools with prior exposure to community school approaches.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the [California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files](#) and the [California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files](#).

These differential improvements in student outcomes are particularly noteworthy given that the comparison schools served similar student populations with nearly identical concentrations of high-need students, faced similar pandemic-related challenges, and generally had access to similar state and district supports for mental health, expanded learning, transitional kindergarten, and other supports outside of the community schools program.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the CCSPP grants helped schools improve academically at a faster pace than what would have happened on their own, without CCSPP funding. These findings indicate that not only is the LAUSD CSI investing in teaching and learning practices in meaningful ways but that the district’s CCSPP-backed community schools are driving substantial positive academic improvements. Notably, while all high-need schools in LAUSD have made progress recovering from pandemic-era achievement lows, by the 2023–24 school year, CCSPP community schools’ math and ELA achievement levels exceeded their prepandemic achievement levels—an outcome not observed in comparable non-CCSPP schools.

Key Learnings

By making classroom practice the central focus of its Community Schools Initiative (CSI), LAUSD emphasizes that additional services and family supports are not the ultimate goal, but essential elements of a broader effort to transform schools and improve student learning and outcomes. Importantly, LAUSD's CSI is situated in a large district that affords access to extensive resources, infrastructure, and partnerships that facilitated its focus on classroom and instructional practice; nevertheless, many of the study's key findings are adaptable to LEAs of smaller size and can be scaled to local capacity.⁴²

Findings

The CSI has coalesced its vision for classroom practice around three key priorities: (1) welcoming and inclusive classroom environments; (2) community-connected, project-based learning (PBL); and (3) the integration of Linked Learning—which offers career-focused pathways that meaningfully bridge high school education and real-world experience—and community school approaches at the secondary level. As these were implemented, related practices and changes took place at the two study schools. Key findings include the following:

- **The CSI has supported the widespread adoption of welcoming and inclusive classroom practices in community schools.** It did this through professional development sessions that engaged staff from nearly all of the district's community schools. These sessions have intentionally targeted educators as well as classified staff. Schools in this study reported shifts in classroom practice—including changes to the arrangement of classroom and school spaces, more inclusive curricula and events, and the use of restorative practices—which they attributed to their participation in CSI professional learning.
- **LAUSD's CSI has made community-connected Project-Based Learning (PBL) a cornerstone of its vision for classroom practice in community schools.** The district has supported these approaches through professional development opportunities, the creation of a school-based PBL champion role at every community school, and funding for teacher collaboration time. The CSI tailored professional learning on community-connected PBL to schools' experience levels, placing greater emphasis on those new to PBL—an approach that proved effective for both schools in this study, one just beginning and the other more advanced. Observations of classroom instruction—such as integrating science lessons into a school garden revival and designing mini-golf courses to teach geometry—reflected the CSI's vision for community-connected, student-centered practice.
- **LAUSD integrated its CSI with other district-level strategies that share common goals, including Linked Learning, thereby reinforcing the strengths of each.** This process has included joint planning with LAUSD's Linked Learning/Career and Technical Education (CTE) Department, the development of resources for schools pursuing both approaches, and positions jointly funded by the CSI and the Linked Learning/CTE Department to support both initiatives. The CSI has also created the role of a secondary specialist, who supports collaboration across departments and works with secondary community schools to strengthen postsecondary readiness opportunities. At the secondary school in this study, a jointly funded work-based learning coordinator built industry partnerships

and integrated real-world learning into Linked Learning instruction, while the community school coordinator expanded opportunities through field trips, internships, and oversight of the school's Linked Learning Advisory Board.

- **The California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) implementation grants drove measurable improvements in student outcomes at LAUSD's community schools.** Compared to similar high-need schools that did not receive CCSPP grants, participating schools reduced chronic absence by approximately 9% more and improved math proficiency rates by 11% more following grant implementation. English language arts (ELA) proficiency also improved more in CCSPP schools, though these gains were not statistically significant. These improvements are particularly noteworthy given that all comparison schools served student populations with nearly identical concentrations of low-income students (92%), faced similar pandemic-related challenges, and had access to similar state and district supports outside of the community schools program. While all high-need schools in LAUSD have made progress recovering from pandemic-era achievement lows, by the 2023–24 school year, CCSPP Cohort 1 community schools' math and ELA scores exceeded their prepandemic achievement levels—an outcome not observed in comparable non-CCSPP schools.

Key Takeaways

LAUSD intentionally developed the infrastructure to implement their CSI vision across its network and sustain these learning approaches across schools. Key takeaways about how LAUSD structured its supports across schools include the following:

- **The CSI provides extensive professional development and funding for teacher learning, skill development, and ongoing collaboration to support meaningful changes to classroom practice.** Professional learning opportunities offered three trainings focused on developing welcoming and inclusive schools and classrooms, one of which was attended by more than 500 educators representing 60 community schools. The CSI also offered comprehensive training in PBL from several providers, allowing community school staff to deeply engage in new instructional approaches with robust support.
- **Engaging teachers and other staff from all the district's community schools in shared professional learning creates the potential for a coherent set of positive changes at scale in the CSI.** LAUSD's CSI engaged educators from nearly every community school in the district in professional development opportunities. Additionally, LAUSD's Positive Behavior Interventions and Support/Restorative Practices team provided trainings on de-escalation strategies specifically for out-of-classroom staff, aiming to ensure consistent practices across all areas of community schools to support a welcoming, inclusive environment. As seen in the schools that participated in the study, professional learning provided by the CSI led to substantive school-level changes in instruction and climate. This underscores the CSI's capacity to advance instructional and classroom practice in meaningful ways, even as it brings a focus that is distinct from the broader district context.

- **The unique placement of the CSI within the Division of Instruction enabled alignment with other district instructional priorities, such as Linked Learning and CTE.** It also supported coordination across initiatives and departments, which enabled the CSI to achieve coherence around core classroom practices and prioritize these practices as central to LAUSD’s community schools approach.
- **The CSI created specific district- and site-level roles to offer targeted instructional support for CSI priorities like Linked Learning and PBL.** Roles such as the CSI’s secondary specialist and school-based PBL champions have offered targeted instructional support. The CSI secondary specialist plays a key role in coordinating instructional staff across the district to strengthen practice in secondary community schools. At the school level, PBL champions strengthen PBL efforts by advocating for teacher collaboration time, offering training and guidance, and securing resources to support PBL units and activities. School-based data collection suggests that these supports strengthened alignment between the CSI’s classroom and instructional priorities and school-level practice.
- **The CSI provided clear guidance and resources around classroom practice while recognizing each school’s unique context.** For example, CSI guidance established a structure and expectation for implementing PBL while allowing schools to adapt it to their specific needs. The elementary school in this study began with a small PBL cohort before expanding schoolwide, whereas the secondary school, already experienced in PBL, was able to forgo introductory opportunities. Looking ahead, the CSI plans to offer more advanced PBL opportunities for schools with greater experience to provide continued support for meaningful instructional change while honoring school-level strengths and needs.

Conclusion

Support for community schools is expanding across the country as policymakers, researchers, and school leaders recognize their potential to positively impact a range of student outcomes. However, they are often misunderstood only as vehicles for social services rather than a comprehensive approach to school transformation. The Essentials for Community School Transformation Framework underscores the holistic nature of the community schools approach.⁴³ Earlier frameworks focused on the “four pillars” of integrated student supports, expanded learning time, family and community engagement, and collaborative leadership. The updated framework expands on these pillars by adding *culture of belonging, safety, and care* and *rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction*, emphasizing that services and supports are not stand-alone goals but vital parts of a broad approach to strengthen learning environments and advance academic success.

This vision has become even more urgent for LAUSD as families and schools have faced severe challenges in recent years. The Eaton and Palisades fires—the costliest climate event in U.S. history—caused full or partial closures for almost two dozen districts, including LAUSD, disrupting learning for approximately 700,000 students.⁴⁴ At the same time, increased threats to immigrant safety and intensified federal enforcement actions have heightened fear and disrupted educational opportunities for many more.⁴⁵ These realities underscore the importance of investing in schools not only as sites of learning, but also as anchors of stability, safety, and community engagement.

While research on the impact and implementation of community schools is growing, studies on classroom practices have been limited. Available evidence suggests that the core features of community schools create a structure and foundation that promote whole child educational approaches aligned with the science of learning and development (SoLD). Case studies of community schools suggest that a growing number of community schools are seeking to utilize student-centered classroom practices such as project-based learning, culturally relevant pedagogy, and practices that promote positive relationships and identity safety. With major public investments now flowing into community schools, educational leaders have a unique opportunity—and need—to understand how to scale SoLD-aligned, rigorous, and community-connected instruction.

This case study fills this gap by examining how LAUSD’s Community Schools Initiative (CSI) centered inclusive, deeper learning approaches and developed systems and processes to support their adoption at the school level. Not only has LAUSD’s CSI made substantial investments in strengthening teaching and learning, but analyses of student outcomes indicate that the first cohort of California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) community schools in LAUSD achieved greater academic gains than comparable non-CCSPP schools in the district. These findings highlight the value of the initiative’s emphasis on classroom practice and position it as an instructive example for other local education agencies seeking to improve instructional quality in community schools.

Appendix A: 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 School Partnership Program (CCSPP) grant leveraged resources to enable community school transformation in their settings. The purpose of the broader research study 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 process implemented/redesigned by LEAs that received CCSPP grants to support community school implementation, (2) how LEA-level changes enable the development of high-quality community schools, and (3) the emerging impacts of community school transformation on students, families, and communities.

Within the framework of the broader study, the LAUSD case study specifically examined how the LAUSD centered inclusive, rigorous classroom practice within its initiative and developed systems and processes to support the development of those practices at the school level. This exploration was guided by the following research questions:

- What infrastructure, structures, and process are implemented and/or redesigned by LAUSD to support and sustain inclusive, rigorous classroom practice in the district’s community schools?
- How are LAUSD’s community school transformation efforts enabling the development of inclusive, rigorous classroom practice in community schools?
- What lessons, if any, can be garnered from LAUSD efforts to center classroom practice? How can those lessons be applied to other LEAs with community school initiatives in place?

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 School Transformation Framework, 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, Los Angeles Unified School District’s (LAUSD’s) Community Schools Initiative (CSI) emerged as an information-rich case and was thus selected as one of three LEAs for this investigation. LAUSD received three CCSPP implementation grants: Round 1 (\$44,412,500), Round 2 (\$30,162,500), and Round 3 (\$8,550,000), which it used to bolster the CSI it established in 2017. Its longer standing initiative—coupled with its embrace of high-quality community school practices—allowed researchers to examine the LEA’s sustained change process and its implementation of whole child-aligned practices. Furthermore, the LAUSD CSI’s unique focus on classroom practice and instruction allowed researchers to examine the systems and approaches utilized by the CSI to promote SoLD-aligned classroom and instructional approaches across its community schools.

In order to investigate school engagement and uptake of the CSI's priorities around classroom practice, the research team identified two schools to participate in the study. School selection was guided by several criteria. The research team prioritized schools that demonstrated strong implementation of community school approaches and engagement with deeper learning practices, assessed through informational interviews with school leaders. Additionally, the sample included both an elementary and a secondary school to examine how inclusive, deeper learning approaches were enacted across grade levels. Schools with relatively strong student outcomes were selected, as these sites offered valuable opportunities to examine promising practices. Finally, researchers considered demographics, selecting schools that reflect the broader demographics of the district.

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 district practices and their interplay in community school sites in the district.⁴⁶ 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 exert control over the research sites.⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ 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 LAUSD 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 Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) case study was collected from January 2024 through May 2025. Primary data sources for this study include interviews, observations, and documents.

Interviews

The research team conducted 29 interviews and four focus groups with 40 shareholders affiliated with LAUSD, including LAUSD CSI leaders, district officials and administrators, school leaders, community school coordinators, community representatives, teachers and additional school staff (e.g., family resource navigator, pupil services and attendance counselor), students, and parents. (See [Table A1](#) for a complete list of participants.) Interviews were conducted in multiple rounds. Initially, investigators used

purposive sampling to identify prospective study participants based on their affiliation with LAUSD and its CSI. First-round interviewees included district officials, union leaders, and staff from community-based organizations who played key roles in the CSI's rollout. Participants were asked to describe the history of the initiative and its growth over time; the vision, mission, and purpose of community schools in LAUSD; and district-level systems and structures designed to support key community school practices.

After these systems-level interviews ($n = 15$), researchers interviewed school-based personnel in an effort to learn more about their experiences interacting with systems-level supports and structure, and their central roles in implementing the community school approaches at their schools. CSCs, the entry-point interviewees at school sites, were asked to describe community school approaches at their school site and their primary roles and responsibilities. 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.

Upon completing interviews with community school coordinators, researchers used both purposive and snowball sampling to identify site-based personnel at both Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary School (Roybal-Allard) and the School of Business and Tourism (Business and Tourism) as potential interviewees and focus group participants. Final participants in interviews and focus groups included relevant school-based shareholders: principals, teachers, students (Business and Tourism only), parents (Roybal-Allard only), a family resource navigator, a pupil services and attendance coordinator, and parents. They were asked to describe community school implementation at their site and to reflect on the successes, challenges, and impact the approach has had on their experience and the school community.

They were also asked to reflect on the ways in which LEA supports and structures had enabled them to engage in community school transformation work. These interviews specifically asked participants about their schools' engagement with CSI professional development focused on classroom practice and the ways in which these professional learning opportunities shifted school practices. Researchers identified these two schools for deeper study after considering their performance outcomes in conjunction with data gathered from systems-level interviews about robust site-based implementation at the elementary and secondary levels.

Interviews were semi-structured and lasted 60–120 minutes (longer interviews were conducted over multiple sessions). Focus groups followed a similar structure but were conducted over a shorter period of time (45 minutes). In most instances, study participants were interviewed once, but several district and initiative leaders, community school coordinators, and additional school personnel were interviewed multiple times to solicit additional information given their leadership in community school efforts. In three instances, two study participants requested to participate in joint interviews due to scheduling reasons. Interviews and focus groups were primarily conducted virtually via Zoom, but researchers did conduct four in-person focus groups with select participants during site visits. With permission from participants, all interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and later transcribed to support data analysis.

Table A1. Study Interviewees

Role	Number of interviewees
District and initiative leaders	4 (1 LAUSD CSI director; 1 UNITE-LA compact coordinator; 1 UNITE-LA education systems strategy director; 1 UTLA president)
District and United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) staff	11 (2 Linked Learning administrators; 1 lead coach; 3 CSC coaches; 1 instructional coach; 2 specialists, elementary and secondary; 2 UTLA parent organizers)
Community partner representatives	1 (1 Reclaim Our Schools LA employee)
Principals	2 (1 from Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary; 1 from School of Business and Tourism)
Community school coordinators	2 (1 from Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary; 1 from School of Business and Tourism)
Additional school-based personnel	4 (Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary only: 1 pupil services and attendance counselor; 1 family resource navigator; 2 community representatives)
Teachers	10 (3 from Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary; 7 from School of Business and Tourism)
Students	3 (School of Business and Tourism)
Parents	3 (Lucille Roybal-Allard)
Total	40

Note: While there were 40 individuals interviewed in the LAUSD case study, researchers conducted a total of 29 interviews and four focus groups.

Observations

Researchers also conducted observations to support case study research. Observations included a 3-day site visit to the district in May 2025, which enabled researchers to observe day-to-day operations of community school implementation at two school sites, Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary (Roybal-Allard) and the School of Business and Tourism (Business and Tourism) at the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex. Researchers spent 2 days at each school site.

At Roybal-Allard, researchers observed classroom instruction and on-site leadership team meetings, including an “Opportunity Team” meeting during which team members discussed recent attendance data, social-emotional supports for students, community partnerships that could support students and

their social-emotional needs, and positive behavior intervention supports (PBIS) strategies. The team also observed an instructional leadership team meeting during which an LAUSD administrator walked the team through an application and rubric for California PBIS statewide recognition. At Business and Tourism, researchers observed classroom instruction, end-of-semester student PBL-based presentations, and a professional development session for teachers. They also observed a community school coordinator and community representative meeting, which brought together individuals in these roles from across the four schools on the Miguel Contreras Learning Complex. Investigators also shadowed community school coordinators at both school sites to gain insights into their daily activities and the ways CSCs engaged with school actors to promote community schooling on a day-to-day basis.

In addition to site visits, the research team observed approximately 25 hours of CSI meetings and professional learning opportunities for community school staff. These included two coaching sessions for community school coordinators, a 2-day summer institute for community school coordinators, and a professional learning session for teachers facilitated by Joyful Disruption. Additionally, the research team observed the CSI's first instructional showcase, where community schools shared project-based learning units implemented at their sites. Lastly, the research team also observed two CSI Steering Committee meetings.

These observations provided insight into how schools used the systems-level supports in the implementation of community school approaches and in advancing community school aims, specifically with respect to classroom practice. In conducting observations, researchers were able to triangulate data from interviews and relevant documentation. Raw field notes were taken during observations and later converted into narrative field notes.

Documents

The research team collected and reviewed approximately 50 organizational documents related to community school implementation in LAUSD, including:

- documents related to the history of the LAUSD CSI, including school board resolutions, collective bargaining agreements, and a report by Reclaim Our Schools LA;
- district documents such as community school role/job descriptions, LAUSD community school benchmarks, and memorandums of understanding, among others;
- professional learning materials for community school coordinators and school staff, including summer institute agendas, session slide decks, and resources to support the assets and needs assessment process; and
- CSI Steering Committee documents, including meeting agenda minutes.

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 district's history and trajectory of student outcomes.

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 semi-structured 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 individually analyzed, the research team convened to compare their code applications in order to refine their analyses and ensure consistency across coders. 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.

Appendix B: Data Sources and Methods for CCSP Test Score Impact Analysis

Data Sources

The analysis presented in this report examines academic performance outcomes using administrative data from the California Department of Education spanning academic years 2018–19 through 2023–24, excluding 2019–20 and 2020–21 due to disrupted in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Outcomes assessed include chronic absence rates, proficiency rates (percentage of students who met or were above standard), and standardized California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) scale scores in math and English language arts from the CAASPP Research Files, standardized within the analytic sample and expressed as deviations from the 2021–22 baseline year in [Figure 6](#). Proficiency and chronic absence rates were log-transformed to adjust for skew in distributions. For ease of interpretation, coefficients represent approximate differences in percentage changes between the groups.

Control variables are drawn from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and include school enrollment and student demographic characteristics (percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless students, English learners, and foster youth, as well as racial/ethnic composition). The unduplicated pupil count (UPC) captures students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English learners, and/or foster youth, with both treatment and comparison schools averaging 95% UPC rates. The analytic sample includes LAUSD schools receiving California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) Cohort 1 implementation grants awarded prior to the 2022–23 school year as the treatment group and non-CCSPP LAUSD schools meeting the target UPC threshold of 80% or higher as the comparison group.

Methods

The analysis presented in this report compares trends in achievement among CCSP Cohort 1 implementation grantees (grants awarded prior to the 2022–23 school year) with eligible non-grantees that serve similar levels of low-income students (>80% UPC) to approximate a difference-in-differences design. This approach allows for the assessment of whether improvements in treated schools above and beyond those observed in untreated schools may be attributable to the CCSP. The statistical model employs school and year fixed effects to control for time-invariant school characteristics and districtwide temporal trends, while including time-varying covariates for enrollment and student demographic composition. School fixed effects account for unobserved factors such as historical performance patterns and community context that might influence both program selection and outcomes, while year fixed effects control for districtwide policy changes and external factors affecting all schools simultaneously. This identification strategy isolates treatment effects by comparing within-school changes over time while adjusting for contemporaneous trends in comparison schools.

We employed a school-level ordinary least squares (OLS) model with school and year fixed effects and time-variant school-level controls. The main predictor of interest is an indicator for whether the school was awarded a CCSP implementation grant beginning in 2022, and our outcomes of interest were school-level standardized math and English language arts CAASPP test scores, and chronic absence rates.

The basic OLS model with school and year fixed effects and time-variant school-level controls can be understood as follows:

$$y_{st} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CCSPP_{st} + \alpha_s + Z_{st}\beta_2 + \beta_3 Year_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Where y_{st} represents the student outcome measure (chronic absence, math or ELA test scores) for school s in year t . The $CCSPP_{st}$ is an indicator for whether a school s received a community school implementation grant prior to year t (2023–24 for Cohort 1), and the parameter of interest β_1 captures the differential outcomes in the post-grant period for CCSPP grantees relative to comparison non-grantees. The α_s represents a school fixed effect, which accounts for all characteristics of a school that are constant over time, and the Z_{st} is a vector of time-variant school characteristics including % UPC, % Hispanic, % White, % Black, % Asian, % English learner, % homeless, total enrollment, charter school status, and subsequent cohort selection. The $Year_t$ represents a year fixed effect that accounts for any statewide trends each year, and the ϵ_{it} represents the heteroskedasticity robust error term clustered at the school level.

Results for chronic absence and proficiency rates are shown in [Table 8](#) and can be interpreted as percentage changes in CCSPP schools above and beyond those in non-CCSPP schools in treatment years. [Figure 6](#) illustrates that LAUSD CCSPP schools exhibit superior academic performance relative to comparison schools following implementation grant distribution, with the vertical line marking the post-2022 period when funds were distributed and subsequent years showing positive divergence in standardized test scores for treatment schools. For interpretability the test score levels for both groups in the figure are indexed to be zero in the 2021–22 school year. The magnitude and pattern of these apparent effects provide evidence supporting the effectiveness of community school interventions in improving student academic outcomes within high-need school contexts. While there may be unobserved characteristics of the participating schools that changed in tandem with the rollout of the CCSPP, the collective movement of test scores upward in treated schools, while student demographic compositions remained largely constant, strongly suggests the program was effective.

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