

## **Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond**

### **Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports**

**Anna Maier, Adam K. Edgerton, and Linda Darling-Hammond**

Across the United States, state education agencies and school districts face daunting challenges and difficult decisions for restarting schools as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. As state and district leaders prepare for what schooling will look like in 2020 and beyond, there is an opportunity to identify evidence-based policies and practices that will enable them to seize this moment to rethink school in ways that can transform learning opportunities for students and teachers alike.

Our current system took shape almost exactly a century ago, when school designs and funding were established to implement mass education on an assembly-line model organized to prepare students for their “places in life”—judgments that were enacted within contexts of deep-seated racial, ethnic, economic, and cultural prejudices. In a historical moment when we have more knowledge about [human development and learning](#), when society and the economy demand a more [challenging set of skills](#), and when—at least in our rhetoric—there is a greater [social commitment to equitable education](#), it is time to use the huge disruptions caused by this pandemic to reinvent our systems of education. The question is: How can we harness these understandings as we necessarily redesign school? How can we transform what has not been working for children and for our society into a future that carries us forward into a more equitable future?

This section is part of a larger report, *Restarting and Reinventing School: Learning in the Time of COVID and Beyond*, that focuses on how policymakers as well as educators can support equitable, effective teaching and learning regardless of the medium through which that takes place. The full report provides an overarching framework to inform the restart of schools while also providing a long-term vision that can guide leaders toward new and enduring ways to address educational quality and inequity. It illustrates how policymakers and educators can:

1. Close the digital divide
2. Strengthen distance and blended learning
3. Assess what students need
4. Ensure supports for social and emotional learning
5. Redesign schools for stronger relationships
6. Emphasize authentic, culturally responsive learning
7. Provide expanded learning time
8. Establish community schools and wraparound supports
9. Prepare educators for reinventing schools
10. Leverage more adequate and equitable school funding

This section provides research, state and local examples, and policy recommendations for how policymakers and educators can establish community schools and wraparound supports. For the full report, go to <http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/restarting-reinventing-school-covid>.

## Priority 8: Establish Community Schools and Wraparound Supports

To effectively meet the urgent needs of students and families as schools reopen, state and district leaders should consider establishing and expanding community schools. Community schools replace the fragmented, bureaucratic, social services gauntlet that families in need must often navigate with a student-focused approach that organizes resources from community partners where they can be most easily accessed: in school. In community schools, students and families are engaged as partners in the educational process and have access to a broad range of well-coordinated supports and services. These kinds of services will be even more necessary in the coming year, one that will be traumatic for so many students and families.

While some community schools have school-based services, including health clinics, many wraparound models coordinate services that exist in the community in addition to or in lieu of housing them on-site. For example, students and families at Fannie Lou Hamer Freedom High School in New York City have access to comprehensive health services (including a specialized teen clinic) through a partnership with the Children’s Aid Society Bronx Family Center, located three blocks from the school. Through a partnership with the Helen Keller Institute, free vision screenings and eyeglasses are available to any student who needs them, while a health educator and a full-time social worker provide support during the school day. An extended learning program focuses on youth development, including culinary arts and a student government engaging with local officials.

When the school closed in response to COVID-19, staff were able to respond quickly and effectively. Led by the community school director, they mobilized to distribute Chromebooks to students and to set up systems to provide breakfast and lunch to up to 500 families daily. The community school director, family engagement coordinator, social worker, and other staff offered virtual tutoring, college coaching, and mental health support. They also helped families with housing and immigration issues, which can be complex and difficult to navigate.

### What Is a Community School?<sup>1</sup>

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the education system, the nonprofit sector, and local government agencies. While the specific programs and services vary according to local context, there are four key pillars of the community school approach.

1. **Integrated student supports.** Includes mental and physical health care, nutrition support, housing assistance, and other wraparound services.
2. **Expanded and enriched learning time.** Includes lengthening the school day and year, as well as enriching the curriculum through real-world learning opportunities.
3. **Active family and community engagement.** Includes both service provision and meaningful partnership with parents and family members to support children’s learning.
4. **Collaborative leadership and practices.** Includes coordination of community school services as well as site-based leadership teams and teacher learning communities.

## What Students Need

Skyrocketing unemployment rates and widespread school closures due to COVID-19 are creating economic instability and food insecurity for many children and families. In addition, some parents have expressed concerns that their families' mental health will suffer and that their children will fall behind in school, especially in lower-income communities. Even before COVID-19, more than half of the nation's schoolchildren (25 million) lived in low-income households.<sup>2</sup> They and their families have borne the brunt of a broken social safety net and long-term disinvestment in schools, particularly in primarily Black and Latino/a neighborhoods.<sup>3</sup> As the California School Boards Association reopening guide notes, "equity" and "equality" are not equivalent. Some students need extra supports—such as technology access, food assistance, and mental health services—in order to access educational opportunities. It is important that plans for the new school year ensure that all students have access to the supports that they need.

Community schools have emerged as a democratic and collaborative response to structural inequities in the education system. These schools are designed to address systemic barriers to education such as poverty or housing insecurity. They do so by drawing upon a community's assets and culture to bring powerful supports and learning opportunities to students and families.

For example, Oakland International High School supports newcomer students who have recently immigrated to the California Bay Area by providing free legal representation, after-school tutoring, English classes for parents, mental health and mentoring services, and after-school/weekend soccer programming. Oakland International staff conduct home visits and participate in "community walks" led by students and families to get to know the neighborhood better. A Community School Advisory Committee (a site leadership team) and a Coordination of Services Team (a team linking students with services) include community members in collaborative decision-making at the site.

Evidence shows that community schools can improve outcomes for students, including attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.<sup>4</sup> A recent RAND study of New York City's 250+ community schools initiative shows that community schools can work at scale.<sup>5</sup> Promising results include a drop in chronic absenteeism, with the biggest effects on the most vulnerable students, and a decline in disciplinary incidents.<sup>6</sup> Students were more likely to progress from grade to grade on time, accumulate more course credits, and graduate from high school at higher rates.

Evidence shows that community schools can improve outcomes for students, including attendance, academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and reduced racial and economic achievement gaps.

In the present moment, community schools offer a path forward for supporting children and families during a stressful time and can be leveraged across the education spectrum, from early childhood to high school. In the long term, this approach can offer a more inclusive and engaging learning experience that is grounded in research and designed to respond effectively to student and family needs.

## What Policymakers and Educators Can Do

The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the fraying social safety net in the United States, as well as the important role that schools play in filling current service gaps. Many schools have scrambled to provide digital access to students and to-go meals to families in response to widespread closures. Community schools are especially well positioned to meet the many needs of students and families during this time. For example, [community school leaders in Baltimore](#) found that they have been able to accomplish “at least 80%” of their normal school functions—despite school closures—thanks to the partnerships they already had in place. Baltimore staff have spent hours on the phone checking in with students and families, addressing needs from child care to emergency housing. They have done so by relying on a network of community partners who can provide services to families in crisis.

Similarly, at [Duarte High School](#) (which is part of the [community schools pilot initiative](#) led by the [Los Angeles County Office of Education](#)), when schools were physically closed, the community school coordinator ensured that the families of all 770 students received a call in their home language to assess needs related to technology, food, and mental and physical health supports. This task was distributed across school staff after the school shut down, with notes from each call entered into a shared spreadsheet. Once school reopens, a similar process will help to pinpoint the needs of individual students and families as well as [prioritize services for the school community as a whole](#).

By supporting community schools through stronger policies, funding, and coordination of services, state and local leaders have an opportunity to respond to the immediate needs of students and families and to support teachers as schools reopen, while laying a lasting foundation for a student-focused approach to learning.

### Enact local policies that support well-designed community schools

Sound community school policies:

- provide a comprehensive definition of the approach;
- incorporate the four evidence-based [pillars](#)—integrated student supports, expanded learning time, community partnerships, and collaborative practices;
- address key aspects of implementation (such as how schools can become community schools, how coordinators will be funded, and how services will be accessed);
- invest in professional development for school staff (including principals); and
- identify collaborative leadership structures and practices (such as decision-making committees that involve students, families, educators, and community partners).

At the local level, a number of different entities can pass policies in support of community schools. Local school boards can pass resolutions in support of community schools that address important elements of implementation, as [New York City](#) and Baltimore have done. For example, in 2016 the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners approved a [community school strategy](#) that lays out a vision, describes key features of implementation, and establishes a Community Schools Steering Committee to oversee the initiative. Both cities have been building comprehensive approaches since then that have made a substantial difference in schools’ abilities to support students during the pandemic.

Cincinnati has an especially strong policy infrastructure, with a 2009 [Community Learning Center \(CLC\) policy](#) accompanied by a board-approved set of guiding principles, partnership parameters, and [community involvement policy](#). The master facilities plan aims to redesign all Cincinnati public schools as CLCs through a community engagement process in which community members and school stakeholders identify their needs and assets and develop a strategy for rebuilding the school as a CLC. Each of these schools will have a resource coordinator funded by both Title I and local philanthropic organizations. This CLC financing philosophy is unique, as CLCs are not wholly dependent upon school budgets.

### **Enlist regional agencies that can provide technical assistance and help coordinate local services**

State leaders can support community schools by working with regional leaders (such as County Offices of Education in California, [Boards of Cooperative Educational Services](#) in New York, or [Educational Service Districts](#) in Washington State) to coordinate services and provide technical assistance for district community school initiatives. [Technical assistance](#) in this context includes the various supports needed to launch and sustain community school initiatives at scale, such as professional development and coaching for district and school staff, support for strategic planning, and partnership development that brings resources to schools (e.g., direct staffing, service provision, and funding).

Technical assistance can also come from local organizations, including districts (as with [the New York City Office of Community Schools](#) or [Oakland's Community Schools and Student Services division](#)); nonprofit partners (as with the [Community Learning Center Institute](#) in Cincinnati or [Children's Aid](#) in many cities); and universities (such as Binghamton University and Fordham University, which operate two of the [Technical Assistance Centers in New York State](#)).

State leaders can play an important role in supporting and expanding these efforts by providing funding, training, and guidance to regional leaders. For example, the West Virginia Board of Education passed [State Community Schools Policy 2425](#) to define and provide guidance for implementing sustainable community schools. Local boards of education that decide to implement the state guidance can receive technical assistance through the state education agency, which also developed a [resource guide for community schools](#).

Strong examples of regional support for community school initiatives can be found in different parts of the country. For example:

- In California, the Los Angeles County Office of Education is leading a [community schools pilot](#) that involves partnering with over a dozen Los Angeles county agencies to provide a range of services—including counseling, mental health education, enrollment support and case management of social services, parent workshops, after-school programming, and field trips—to 15 pilot high schools. Funding from the state Mental Health Services Act (administered in partnership with the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health) supports a full-time coordinator and family outreach worker at [each pilot site](#).
- New York State has funded three [Community Schools Technical Assistance Centers](#) to provide a [range of supports](#) to community schools in their regions, including professional development for community school practitioners via webinars and conferences; site visits to provide in-person coaching; working with district and school leaders to build capacity

through implementation and improvement science approaches; and maintaining a database of community partners, programs, and resources that can support community schools. In addition, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) in New York can support community schools across districts through a [cooperative service agreement](#), such as the [agreement established by the Rockland BOCES](#) in partnership with Rockland 21C, a nonprofit that operates a third Technical Assistance Center in New York State.

Many re-entry plans—including those from the [Alliance for Excellent Education](#), [Transcend Education](#), and [CASEL](#)—emphasize the importance of coordinating local services to meet students’ basic needs (such as food and health care) and address trauma and loss to promote whole-child well-being. As schools reopen, local leaders (such as an administrator, a community partner, or a community school coordinator) can start by conducting a needs and assets assessment as students return. The School Mental Health Collaborative offers a [universal screener](#), which can identify high-priority areas of need as well as existing programs on the school campus or in the surrounding community that can help to meet those needs. Information for the assessment can come from surveys; administrative data review; focus groups; and/or interviews of students, families, school staff, and community partners (including early education providers).

The School Mental Health Collaborative offers a universal screener, which can identify high-priority areas of need as well as existing programs on the school campus or in the surrounding community that can help to meet those needs.

Once the school community’s needs and assets are identified, local leaders can build on or expand existing initiatives to coordinate services. These initiatives may include state-, district-, or school-level efforts to help providers coordinate, deploy, and target their services efficiently. For example, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) are part of a [statewide initiative in California](#), and Coordination of Services Teams have been central to [Oakland Unified School District’s community schools initiative](#).

Initiatives may also build upon and include early education. The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) has [allocated funds](#) to Los Angeles Unified School District for an effort focused on early education and services for children from birth to age 8. Funding from multiple sources supports this work, including First 5 and the Mental Health Services Act (allocated by DMH). These funds are used to train social workers and resource navigators to coordinate services at early childhood centers and nearby elementary schools, and to implement trauma-informed practices, support the development of self-regulation skills in young children, and engage families. The mental health team has also received extensive training in early childhood mental health consultation.

### **Create reliable funding streams to support community school models**

As states implement plans to reopen schools, some are addressing community schools as a key support. For example, [Maryland’s plan](#) notes that [community schools in the state](#) have distributed food, hygienic supplies, technology equipment, and school supplies during closures, and have provided internet access, mental health services, housing information, and other crisis supports to families. As schools reopen, the plan calls for community schools to draw on existing needs



assessment data, reach out to families, and leverage community partnerships to provide academic enrichment and extended learning time, as well as family supports such as adult language classes and employment and health services. Importantly, Maryland passed a [2019 bill](#) that provides 2 years of funding to ensure that all schools serving high concentrations of students living in poverty will have a community schools coordinator and associated wraparound supports.

State and local leaders can blend and braid federal, state, and local funding streams to provide integrated health, mental health, and social services alongside high-quality, supportive instruction in community schools. In the short term, this can involve drawing on federal stimulus funds to provide [integrated student supports](#) as schools reopen. For example, the CARES Act [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief \(ESSER\) Fund](#) awards grants to state education agencies for the purpose of providing local education agencies with emergency relief funds to address the impact of COVID-19. These grants can be used to support any activity authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), including community schools. Relevant activities that are specifically named by ESSER include the provision of mental health services and supports, as well as planning and coordination to meet the needs of students during school closures. Similarly, the [Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund](#) can be used to support the community school approach in districts that have been significantly impacted by COVID-19.

In the long term, funding for community schools can come from a combination of federal (including Every Student Succeeds Act Titles I and IV, as well as Medicaid), state, and local sources. Local funding can come from city or county government, school or district budgets, or private philanthropy. For example, community schools in Lincoln, NE, were piloted using \$100,000 in seed funding from a local community foundation. In this early stage of the initiative, costs for site-based coordinators were split between foundation resources and contributions from the lead agencies partnering with each of the four pilot community schools. Now, 29 of the district's 59 schools are community learning centers. These schools are funded through [a combination of 16 sources](#), including district and city general funds, Title I, a federal 21st Century Community Learning Center after-school programming grant, financial and in-kind contributions from lead agency partners, and private foundation grants.

State policymakers can play an important role in reducing barriers to blending and braiding through actions such as streamlining and aligning application and reporting requirements for different funding sources, when possible.

States can also establish direct funding streams for community schools. Kentucky has long supported [Family Resource and Youth Services Centers](#) (dating back to the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990). Schools in which at least 20% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals may compete for funding. In 2019, there were [over 850 centers across the state](#), providing vital programs, services, and referrals to students and their families. Also in 2019, New Mexico approved a bill that created a community school framework and authorized \$2 million for a competitive grant program.

New York has annually set aside increasing amounts of its school funding formula to support community schools in districts designated as high need. This went from \$100 million in 2016–17 to [\\$250 million in 2019–20](#), which the state maintained in its enacted 2020–21 budget. In addition to supporting new community school initiatives, set-aside dollars can be used to sustain existing community school programs that had been funded under a prior community schools grant program.

### **Create Children’s Cabinets at the federal, state, and county levels to coordinate, integrate, and streamline services across agencies**

Leaders at multiple levels can help enable more effective and efficiently provided resources for services to children and youth by creating a Children’s Cabinet or other vehicle to coordinate services at the top of the system so that they flow to districts and schools more seamlessly. A centralizing approach can streamline the blizzard of programs and expectations placed upon schools, which can easily overwhelm school-based administrators and coordinators. Children’s Cabinets can start to streamline and integrate partner programs, assist with managing multiple funding streams, and create efficiencies where there are now bureaucratic barriers.

Children’s Cabinets can start to streamline and integrate partner programs, assist with managing multiple funding streams, and create efficiencies where there are now bureaucratic barriers.

Children’s Cabinets at the state or local level are typically composed of agency heads who govern a comprehensive range of child, youth, and family-serving programs. Some cabinets also have community, philanthropic, education, and business stakeholders appointed by the governor or mayor. These groups meet regularly to identify common outcomes, coordinate services, and develop joint plans to support children’s healthy development. This approach is becoming increasingly popular, with the [Forum for Youth Investment operating both local and state Children’s Cabinet networks](#).

As one example, the [Maryland Children’s Cabinet](#) includes the secretaries from the Departments of Budget and Management; Disabilities; Health; Human Services; Juvenile Services; as well as the State Superintendent of Schools for the Maryland State Department of Education and the Executive Director of the Governor’s Office of Crime Control and Prevention. According to the current 3-year plan, the Cabinet’s strategic goals include improving outcomes for disconnected youth and reducing childhood hunger and homelessness. In service of these goals, the Children’s Cabinet Interagency Fund (authorized by [Human Services administrative code](#)) provides dedicated grant funding for [Local Management Boards](#) to support wraparound services. Such structures are essential to managing the multitude of health and human services desperately needed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Resources**

- [Community Schools Playbook](#) (Partnership for the Future of Learning). This playbook provides model legislation, real-world examples, and many additional resources for state and local leaders who want to support community schools.
- [Financing Community Schools: A Framework for Growth and Sustainability](#) (Partnership for the Future of Learning). This finance brief discusses community schools funding in depth. It provides a framework for financing community schools and examples of how community schools at varying stages of development can identify and implement financing strategies.



- [Leveraging Resources Through Community Schools: The Role of Technical Assistance](#) (Learning Policy Institute). This brief provides information and examples of how local governments and nonprofit agencies in counties can play an essential role in supporting and providing technical assistance to community school initiatives in school districts.
- [Planning for Re-Entry & Recovery: A Guide for Promoting Equity, Improvement, and Innovation](#) (FourPoint Education). This guide provides a planning tool that emphasizes the importance of family, school, and community partnerships. Specifically, the guide suggests that district and school leaders can maintain a list of key community partners to connect families with, communicate with these partners about re-entry plans, and identify how partners can deploy their resources to help with re-entry and recovery and create a more integrated support system for students.
- [The Whole Child: Building Systems of Integrated Student Support During and After COVID-19](#) (Center for Optimized Student Support at Boston College). This action guide offers practical steps for schools to develop a system of integrated support.

## Endnotes

1. Information in this text box comes from: Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
2. Southern Education Foundation. (2015). *A new majority: Low-income students now a majority in the nation's public schools* [Research bulletin]. Atlanta, GA: Author. <https://www.southerneducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/New-Majority-Update-Bulletin.pdf>.
3. Carter, P. L., & Welner, K. G. (2013). *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press; Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (2011). *Whither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation; The Leadership Conference Education Fund & The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. (2015). *Cheating our future: How decades of disinvestment by states jeopardizes equal education opportunity*. Washington, DC: The Leadership Conference Education Fund.
4. Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community schools as an effective school improvement strategy: A review of the evidence*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.
5. Johnston, W. R., Engberg, J., Opper, I. M., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Xenakis, L. (2020). *Illustrating the promise of community schools: An assessment of the impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative*. New York, NY: RAND Corporation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3245.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3245.html).
6. Johnston, W. R., Engberg, J., Opper, I. M., Sontag-Padilla, L., & Xenakis, L. (2020). *What is the impact of the New York City Community Schools Initiative?* New York, NY: RAND Corporation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB10107.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10107.html).