Alameda County Community Schools Framework

Because it really does take a village.
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Community Schools Framework

Since 1996, the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities (CHSC) has worked to improve health and education outcomes for Alameda County youth by building a cornerstone of the community school approach – health and wellness. Since the public sector is critical to the success and sustainability of community school efforts, CHSC partners with school districts across the county to develop school-based and school-linked health and wellness programs to strengthen the foundational elements that underlie our approach.

Put simply, community schools are a strategy for organizing the resources of a community around student success and well-being. Public systems, school districts, and a host of partners work strategically to create a network of supports that ensure the academic success, health, and well-being of children and families.

In Alameda County, our Community School Framework is guided by the core belief that it will take commitment from a broad coalition — schools and school districts, city and county departments, non-profits, students, families, neighbors, businesses, philanthropists, and political bodies — working together to build such a network of support. The framework includes a set of community school program elements, supported by foundational elements, or roots, which we believe are at the heart of any effective school health strategy.1
Program Elements

Supports and Opportunities

While every community school is unique and grounded in the strengths and the needs of that school community, we believe that high quality and effective community schools and community school initiatives provide supports and opportunities in six core areas.

High Quality Teaching and Learning

First and foremost, a community school prepares students for success in college and career for the 21st century. This requires both academic and social-emotional learning, along with a strong instructional program with qualified teachers, and challenging and meaningful curricula. It also requires integrating the explicit teaching of social and emotional competencies and skills for youth and adults.

Health and Wellness

We know that healthy students learn better. To maximize student learning, community schools do not focus solely on academics, but rather address the needs of the whole child. A continuum of physical, social, and emotional supports advances academic success by creating a positive school climate, promoting healthy development, and reducing barriers to learning.

Cradle-to-Career Continuum

The community school approach creates a pathway to success for students from the cradle through their career. Early childhood, K-12, and higher education partner to create pipelines of support for school readiness, healthy development, student transitions, and a college-going culture. Together, the partners develop a system that nurtures learning and development.
Youth Development In and Out of School

Community schools engage in deep youth development practices that promote healing, capacity, and action. They provide a wide variety of services and opportunities that build skills, competencies, and resiliency. Youth are engaged in experiential learning during and after school, over the summer, and in community and career settings. Youth have input on shaping the programs and services.

Family Engagement and Support

Families are children’s first teachers and they are fundamental to their academic success and healthy development. Community schools partner with families to build nurturing relationships, positive connections, and overall stability. This component focuses both on engaging parents with the school, as partners in their child’s education, as well as engaging leaders and volunteers to support a family’s basic needs, access to health care, and social capital.

Community Engagement and Development

Community engagement and development in a community school can have many goals, such as linking schools to community resources, improving school and neighborhood climate, and serving the community. The community school approach combines an equally diverse mix of strategies, such as mentoring projects, community-wide truancy efforts, neighborhood improvement, and school-based food, health, and adult education services.
Foundational Elements

The Roots

These foundational elements are what make a community school greater than the sum of its parts. When these elements are in place, schools and the larger system move from a collection of wraparound services and co-located providers to a comprehensive, shared strategy that can achieve powerful and long-term results for youth and communities.

Transformative Leadership

Thinking and Acting Beyond Boundaries

System change requires innovative leaders who work creatively across sectors to solve problems. They can make a profound impact on the lives of children and families. In community schools, leadership happens at all levels as youth, families, teachers, administrators, and partners work together on planning, implementation, and decision-making. Strong site and initiative leadership teams are essential to success, sustainability, and true shared ownership.

Capacity Building

Strong Organizations, Strong People

Investing in the capacity of individuals and organizations strengthens their ability to manage change, collaborate, and fulfill their missions. Successful community school initiatives assess the needs of schools, partner organizations, and the overall collaborative. Then they dedicate resources to professional development, coaching, and peer learning for all of the stakeholders.

Dynamic Partnerships

Deep Collaboration Creates Deeper Impact

When partners come together around a shared vision of student success and wellness, their collective impact is greater than individual organizations acting alone. Deep collaboration is at the heart of the community school approach and it is supported by strong partnership practices such as coordination teams, partner collaboratives, formal partnership agreements, and joint self-assessments.
Equity Lens
Each and Every Child Gets What They Need to Thrive

The community school approach addresses the underlying causes of inequity in schools, embraces cultural humility, and engages groups whose voices are not traditionally heard. To remove barriers to learning, we use John Powell’s concept of targeted universalism. This concept involves setting a universal goal of quality learning and health supports for all children and families, coupled with targeting approaches and resources in ways that are responsive to how children and families are situated differently to opportunities for success.

Quality Practice
Doing and Sharing What Works

Implementing and scaling up high quality practices requires the combination of local wisdom with relevant evidence-based practices. Community schools leverage the expertise of educators and their many partners to design and implement effective strategies. An important example of “what works” is site-level coordination, usually in the form of a full-time coordinator and multi-disciplinary service coordination teams. The coordinator works with internal and external partners to integrate supports, which are also integrated with the school’s core instructional program. This creates a seamless system of care and learning for youth and their families across settings.

Results Focus
The Destination Defines the Journey

Successful initiatives define and track their progress toward shared results and make mid-course adjustments. Community schools use education and health data to set common outcomes, inform decisions, identify and prioritize needs, guide resources, measure success, and strengthen both services and partnerships.

Smart Financing
Sustainability Starts on Day One

Holding financial sophistication and having a multi-pronged approach to financing is key to growth and sustainability. The community school approach maximizes public, private, and non-profit resources by blending funding, leveraging in-kind resources, formalizing collaborative agreements, and encouraging joint fund development.
Working Together in New Ways

The Impact

Our ultimate goal at the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities is for all youth in Alameda County to graduate from high school healthy and ready for college and career. The community school approach is a proven strategy that contributes directly to this goal. It places schools at the center of their communities and brings people together across systems and sectors.

At CHSC, we use this as a framework to align resources and partners around common outcomes to achieve meaningful and lasting results, such as:

- Student learning, academic achievement, attendance, and improvement in graduation rates.
- School climate improvement. More students are connected to caring adults. High risk behaviors and disciplinary actions decrease, and self-esteem, conflict resolution skills, and future aspirations increase.
- Principals and teachers have more time to focus on quality instruction, and teacher attendance. Satisfaction increases. Turnover decreases.
- Families strengthen their capacity to support their child’s education and healthy development. Engagement with the school increases, including in areas of leadership and learning at home. Families feel supported because more basic needs are met and families are more stable.
- Communities are safer and more secure. The school and its students are a resource to the community, and the community is used as a classroom.
- Human and financial resources increase and are used equitably. Access to educational and health opportunities increases, especially for those students and families traditionally underserved.

References

1 Definition incorporates the Coalition for Community Schools’ conditions for learning, the Center for Healthy Schools and Communities’ core competencies and principles, and FSCS Framework developed by the Bay Area Community School Intermediary Group, with CHSC participation.

About Us

The profound and persistent health and educational inequities in this country require innovative and collaborative solutions. Far too many communities suffer from poor outcomes due to an absence of supports and resources, or “opportunity structures,” that enable children and families to thrive, such as quality schools, accessible health care, and economic opportunity. It is the leadership charge of the public sector to address these inequities by carefully targeting resources and supporting the voices of young people and their families. The Center for Healthy Schools and Communities is part of Alameda County Health Care Services Agency’s answer to that charge – working across sectors to build School Health Initiatives that ensure all youth graduate from high school healthy and ready for college and career.

School Health Works

CHSC’s School Health Works website offers resources and tools for health and education leaders to build school health initiatives that transform public systems and support all children so they can thrive.

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