

california educator

Reimagining PUBLIC EDUCATION



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- Shared Governance & Five Steps to Success
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- Family, Student, Educator Empowerment

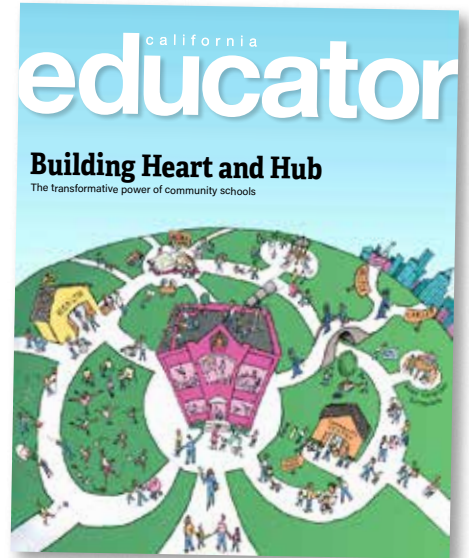
COMMUNITY SCHOOLS



Stories from the magazine of the California Teachers Association

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Stories from the
California Educator magazine



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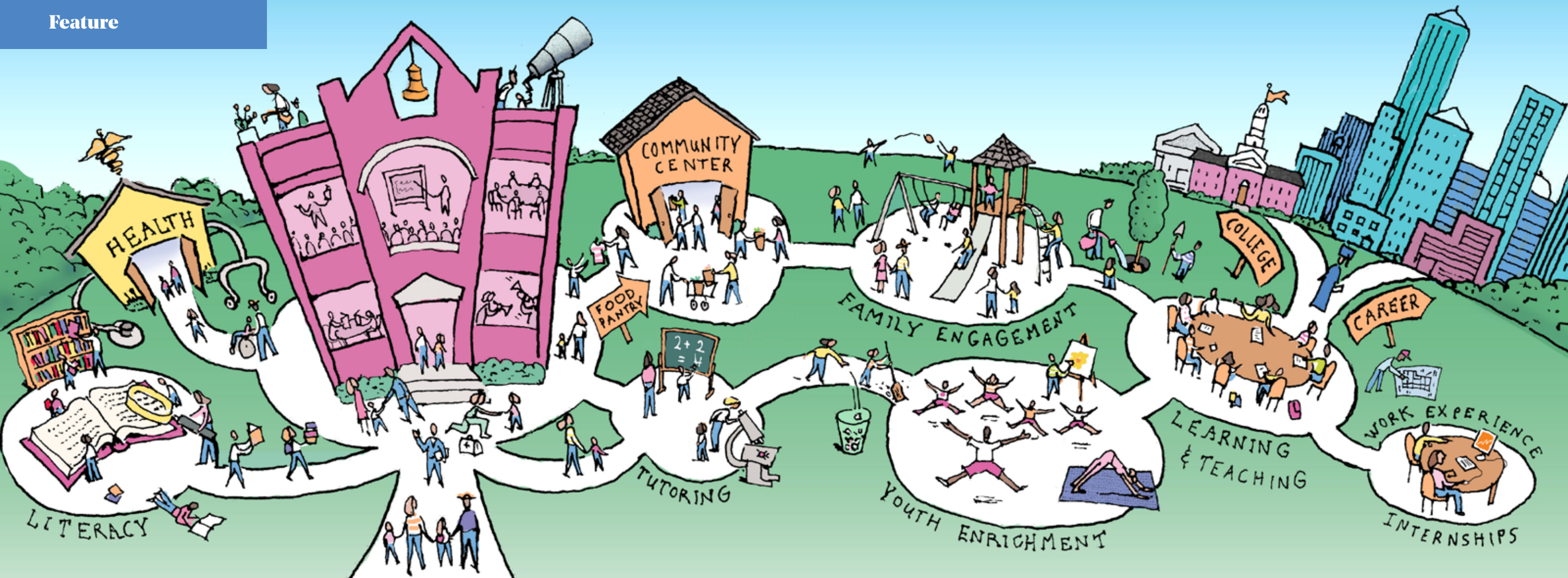
The Right Stuff

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Talking Community Schools at NEA Representative Assembly

Family Power

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Building the Heart and Hub

“WE’RE REIMAGINING SCHOOLS,” says educator Ingrid Villeda. “It’s so much more than what happens in class.”

As the community school coordinator at 93rd Street Academy in South Central Los Angeles, Villeda works with students and families to support and connect them with the resources they need to learn and thrive. During the pandemic, her work has included delivering groceries to 250 school families every two weeks, the creation of a “giving room” with clothing, shoes and other items for students and families in need, and an after-school virtual enrichment program focusing on dance, art and sports.

“The community schools program is meant to support everything the students do,” says Villeda, a member of



Ingrid Villeda

United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA). “They can’t focus on academics if they’re hungry or sad or tired.”

With massive investments by the state and federal government, community schools are getting historic resources at a time when students and families need the support most. The community schools model is aimed at disrupting poverty and addressing long-standing inequities, highlighting areas of need, and leveraging community resources so students are healthy, prepared for college and ready to succeed. A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership, and community engagement, leading to improved student learning,

Historic resources for the transformative power of **community schools**

Story by Julian Peeples Illustration by Daniel Baxter

stronger families and healthier communities.

Since each community school is centered around local needs and priorities, no two look exactly alike. But they all share a commitment to partnership and rethinking how best to provide the resources students and families need.

“Your school has needs. As a community school, you identify and elevate those needs,” says Nick Chandler, community school coordinator and United Educators of San Francisco (UESF) member. “It is our role to elevate and push until that need is met.”

CTA Vice President David Goldberg says supporting the community school movement is a priority for CTA, with significant implications for justice and democracy as schools and families examine whom schools serve and how decisions are made. The possibilities are exciting, he says.

“This is why I got into this movement and became a teacher

— to make a true difference in a powerful way,” Goldberg says. “Community schools are a chance to do this.”

The heart of the community

Danielle Rasshan had taught at Ganesha High School in Pomona for more than 20 years when the school was chosen to be part of the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) community schools pilot program in 2019. She was always “tied in” to which students needed more support and often intervened as the last stop to help some students before they faced serious discipline. Rasshan says she noticed the community school difference immediately, especially when it came to connecting students with resources and services.

“Now everything is located at my school. I know who to reach out to when I have a student who needs anything. I used to have trouble getting in touch with families, but now



Ingrid Villeda, forefront, with colleagues helping distribute food at 93rd Street Academy in Los Angeles.



▼ Nick Chandler at Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8 Community School in San Francisco. He helped the school open its gym to BVHM families who are unhoused in 2018, a program that continues today.



“Your school has needs. As a community school, you identify and elevate those needs. It is our role to elevate and push until that need is met.”

—Nick Chandler,
United Educators of
San Francisco

I can reach them through regular community workshops,” says Rasshan, a member of Associated Pomona Teachers. “Community schools empower parents because their health and success create the best environment for their students to succeed.”

Rasshan says having these relationships meant that when the pandemic struck, a network already existed to reach out to school community members to provide support. She says several food distributions were held at Ganesha High and its feeder schools (“We consider them part of our family, too”), while the school quickly distributed necessary technology and addressed connectivity issues. Ganesha also used COVID relief funds to hire more tutors when the pandemic forced in-person tutoring opportunities to go virtual.

“This work means so much to me, because you have to build love, passion and commitment for your town and the people we serve. Community schools are a way to cultivate that,” Rasshan says. “I think we’re going to see some real effective change.”

A community school should be the heart of a community,



“This work means so much to me, because you have to build love, passion and commitment for your town and the people we serve. Community schools are a way to cultivate that.”

—Danielle Rasshan,
Associated Pomona
Teachers

the school became a community hub during the pandemic, with families turning to it for everything from groceries

uniting diverse and engaged stakeholders to strengthen the school community and support the whole child — meaning students are not only supported in academics but also learning in environments that make them feel safe, valued, engaged, challenged and healthy.

At Buena Vista Horace Mann K-8 Community School (BVHM) in San Francisco, families expressed a need for help with a safe and stable place to sleep at night. What followed was a deliberate and coordinated effort to elevate the issue, leading to the creation of the Stay Over Program, a cross-sector collaboration that provides an overnight sleeping program for up to 20 BVHM families in the school’s gymnasium — the only program of its kind nationwide.

“We started with the need, we started with the data, and then we moved forward with shared leadership,” says Chandler. “We have successfully hosted hundreds of families.”

In Los Angeles, 74th Street Academy community school coordinator Nicole Douglass says

and school supplies to mental health services. Formerly a special education teacher there, Douglass continues to serve the school community, forging connections and helping families do more than just hold on.

One Friday at 5 p.m., a phone call came from a mother who needed food for the weekend, saying that being able to make her family a traditional Nigerian meal would mean everything during difficult times. Since items from food banks don’t typically include the necessary ingredients for such a meal, Douglass and her colleague pooled their money, delivering \$50 to the mother so she could cook the food that would bring smiles to her family’s faces during difficult times.

“There are a lot of stories like that for us, and it’s brought us closer to our families when we needed to be. If the pandemic didn’t happen, I don’t think we would’ve been able to dig this deep,” says Douglass, a UTLA member. “We’ve been able to connect with our families and students on a deeper level, and it will be lifelong.”



“We are committed to improving the educational experience of our young people. Community schools provide the framework for how we do that.”

—Leslie Hu, United
Educators of San Francisco

A movement born out of struggle

While community schools as a concept have been around since the turn of the century (thanks to famed social worker Jane Addams and educator John Dewey), the movement to create these centers of transformative change got a huge boost in 2019 when UTLA members included community schools in their demands during their historic strike. They won funding for 30 community schools and additional UTLA positions as part of Los Angeles Unified’s Community Schools Initiative. With California now investing more money into the community schools movement than all other states combined, Goldberg says, it’s important to remember the sacrifice educators made to win this funding for students and families.

“Part of the reason we can do this is because of the courageous efforts of our locals. It allows us to bring CTA support and infrastructure to these struggles that have been so powerful and meaningful,” Goldberg says. “What UTLA has done is the gold standard for community schools.”

UTLA’s victory has blossomed into a \$3 billion windfall for community schools — one-time Proposition 98



THE SIX PILLARS OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS model advanced by CTA and NEA includes six pillars of practice. Unlike most public education models, these pillars are adaptable to the needs of a school's students, staff, families and community, and pay particular attention to creating, supporting, and sustaining a culturally relevant and responsive climate.

Strong, Relevant Curriculum

Community schools provide a rich and varied academic program, allowing students to acquire both foundational and advanced knowledge and skills in many content areas. Learning and enrichment activities are provided before and after the regular school day, including sports, the arts, and homework assistance. Parents and families are supported through adult education.



Positive Behavior Practices

Community schools emphasize positive relationships and interactions. Restorative discipline practices such as peer mediation, community service, and post-conflict resolution help students learn from their mistakes and foster positive, healthy school climates where respect and compassion are core principles. Zero-tolerance practices leading to suspension and expulsion are avoided.



High-Quality Teaching

Teachers at community schools are fully licensed, knowledgeable about their content, and skillful in their practice. Instructional time focuses on learning rather than testing. Individual student needs are identified, and learning opportunities are designed to address them.



Family and Community Partnerships

Families, caregivers and community members are partners in community schools. Their engagement is not related to a specific project or program, but is ongoing and extends beyond volunteerism to roles in decision-making, governance and advocacy.



Inclusive Leadership

The leadership teams of community schools include educators, other school staff, parents, students and community members. The leadership team ensures that the community school strategy remains central in the decision-making process. The team plans development and implementation, including thinking about sustainability.



Community Support Services

Community schools recognize that students often come to school with challenges that impact their ability to learn, explore and develop in the classroom. Community schools provide meals, health care, mental health counseling, and other services before, during and after school. Connections to the community are critically important so support services and referrals are available for families and other community members.



For more information, examples and resources, visit cta.org/communityschools.

▼ NEA President Becky Pringle, left, listens to a student at Alhambra High School's Dream Center, a supportive space for undocumented, immigrant and other marginalized groups.



funding through 2028 to expand community schools across the state through the California Community Schools Partnership Program. School districts with more than 50 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch will be eligible for grants, with priority given to districts with greater need, those disproportionately impacted by COVID, and districts with a plan to sustain community school funding after the grant expires. Sustaining funding is a key piece to achieving the goal of turning every school where 80 percent or more of students live in poverty into a community school over the next five years.

On the federal side, President Biden's budget includes \$443 million for schools to become community schools, nearly 15 times the previous amount.

CTA has long been advocating for more funding for community schools. President E. Toby Boyd made a request to prioritize community schools as a member of Gov. Newsom's state Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery to provide more medical and mental health services to students amid the pandemic



"This is why I got into this movement and became a teacher — to make a true difference in a powerful way. Community schools are a chance to do this."

—CTA Vice President David B. Goldberg

and as an integral part of an equitable restart to in-person learning.

"This investment in community schools is hugely important. When we talk about reimagining public education, community schools are a big part of that vision," Boyd says. "It's how we connect what's best for students and educators to parents and our communities."

One prominent supporter of community schools first proposed funding the model when he was a school board member more than a decade ago. Now state superintendent of public instruction, Tony Thurmond says he is excited for the opportunity and grateful for the funding.

"It's like a dream come true for the types of supports our students need. Given what we've seen throughout the pandemic, the timing couldn't be better to make investments in community schools," Thurmond says. "As a former social worker, I see community schools as the ultimate way to support whole child learning."

Thurmond says the funding could result in one-third of all California public schools becoming community



▼ United Educators of San Francisco is holding webinars to educate members about community schools and organize for funding.



“We view it as an opportunity to empower all the stakeholders in our school communities. What’s transformative about community schools is the empowerment.”

— Kyle Weinberg, San Diego Education Association

SHARED LEADERSHIP: KEY TO SUCCESS

A CRUCIAL PIECE of the community schools model (and one of the most difficult) is shared leadership. School leadership teams include educators, students, parents and community members. These teams share the responsibility of school operations with the principal, and they ensure the school is serving the needs of the school community.

“Shared leadership is a difficult thing because people traditionally in power have to give some of that up,” says Leslie Hu, community school coordinator and secretary of United Educators of San Francisco. “When you center schools around student and community voices, it makes it hard for a traditional approach.”

As one of the major pillars of community schools, inclusive leadership is a commitment to the school community that students, families and educators will be part of the decision-making, implementation and accountability process. This ensures that solutions are built with shared interest and responsibility.

“That’s really a game changer for our

roles as educators,” says Kyle Weinberg, vice president of San Diego Education Association. “Governance of schools is not set up to be equitable. If you’re intentional about investing in collaborative leadership, it will pay dividends.”

For community school coordinator and United Teachers Los Angeles member Nicole Douglass, it’s just not possible to accomplish the goals of supporting students and uplifting communities without sharing goals, responsibilities and leadership.

“If this is a community school, there is no one leader,” she says. “Shared leadership is everything.”

A true test of family partnership at community schools, Hu says, is who the school considers to be experts on students and their needs.

“Do you think of the parents as experts, or do you center yourself as the expert? That’s a significant shift,” she says. “If we believe young people are the experts on their own lives, that families are experts on their own children, schools will look totally different.”



▼ State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, shown visiting Ganesha High School in Pomona, says community school funding is “a dream come true.”



Kim Bui



Mayra Alvarado

schools, and he’s eager to lay groundwork for supporting them past the one-time funds, including potentially leveraging federal funding for more mental health and medical services. He adds that the California Department of Education is planning to hold a series of listening sessions on the grant process before opening the application period, noting that CTA will be involved “in a significant way.”

Thurmond says he is eager to replicate the success of Los Angeles-area community schools in supporting the whole child and prioritizing equity.

“LACOE and LA Unified provide us with really rich examples of places we can learn from,” Thurmond says, adding that he’s excited to partner with educators in this important movement. “UTLA put it forward. I want to thank everyone in the CTA family for having the vision to call for community schools.”

Support from CTA and NEA

In addition to state and federal funding, NEA and CTA are providing resources to support local associations to join the community schools

movement. NEA is directing \$3 million annually to help school districts make the transition to community schools, starting with the 100 largest school districts in the country.

CTA is creating a network to support local associations in community school initiatives. There are 20 CTA locals taking part in the NEA Strategic Campaign on Community Schools, with most receiving NEA Community Advocacy and Partnership Engagement (CAPE) grants to support their organizing efforts. Westminster Teachers Association (WTA) is using some of its \$75,000 grant to build a partnership with the district’s parent-teacher association and start a conversation about community schools with families. WTA is also offering a stipend to a district parent to be a part of the community school leadership team and help promote and organize community schools in Westminster.

“I’m really happy that NEA is doing this,” says WTA President Kim Bui, noting how important it is to build a culture of collaboration with families. “We have each other and we support each other. We can do so much together for our community and our kids.”

Educators Request Parameters for Community School Funding

THE STATE'S \$3 billion investment is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and CTA leaders are focused on ensuring the historic funding is used to create the community schools that students and families need across the state.

In a letter to Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond and State Board of Education President Linda Darling-Hammond, the presidents of the 20 CTA local associations participating in NEA's Community Schools Strategic Campaign Institute requested the creation of a statewide Community Schools Steering Committee. This body would ensure democratic community stakeholder involvement, overall state-level ongoing guidance, community education and engagement, pathways to sustainable funding, and ongoing evaluation, assessment and support — essential to the success of community schools.

The CTA locals and their community partners also proposed regulations for school districts that receive state community schools funds, requiring:

- A rigorous and bottom-up application process to become a community school.
- Full-time community school coordinators at each school.
- Additional funding at each school annually to build the program.
- Training and systematic coaching for coordinators and others to support the leading and implementation of assessment of needs and development of a strategic plan at each school.
- Professional development, training and systematic coaching on culturally responsive curriculum, community organizing, and other key pieces of the community schools model.

San Diego Education Association (SDEA) leaders parlayed an NEA training on building a community schools coalition four years ago into convincing the San Diego Unified school board to adopt a supportive resolution last year and develop a plan to open five community schools for the 2022-23 school year. SDEA, which is also a CAPE grant awardee, is

working with school sites to prepare for the state grant application process, developing their community school pillars and strengthening partnerships, according to SDEA Vice President Kyle Weinberg.

"The funds from the grant are going into developing the leadership and coaching skills of our members who are doing this work," he says. "NEA has done some

groundbreaking work with community schools. It inspired us at SDEA to attempt to implement community schools with fidelity. We've taken a lot of the guidance from NEA and CTA to heart about what a community school can look like."

Leslie Hu, community school coordinator at San Francisco Unified and UESF member, has been working with NEA and

Children at book and backpack giveaway at 93rd Street Academy in LA.



"We are here as a community, working together to serve the whole child and the whole community."

—Olivia Udovic,
Oakland Education Association

- Expanded decision-making purview for parents, youth, community and educators at each community school.
- A Community Schools Steering Committee in each district that receives funding to guide the process with the above elements; help assess and evaluate the work; lead on broad community education about community schools; spearhead creating sustainable funding for community schools; and ensure broad and diverse community involvement and stakeholder leadership.



"When we talk about reimagining public education, community schools are a big part of that vision. It's how we connect what's best for students and educators to parents and our communities."

—CTA President
E. Toby Boyd

receiving coaching for the past few years to expand the community school movement nationwide. She says community schools are effective vehicles to uplift the voices of young people and families.

"It's all based on what they need, on what the communities hope for," says Hu. "We're really interested in centering our young people and families. How do we use the power and resources of the union, of CTA and of NEA, to push this work forward?"

Mayra Alvarado teaches at Manzanita SEED Elementary School — one of more than 40 community schools in Oakland. She says educators and parents got a lot closer as they weathered the pandemic together, utilizing their "parent-teacher union" to organize and fight for the needs of their school.

"It's about parents supporting teachers as workers, and teachers supporting parents in what they need for their children," says Alvarado, an Oakland Education Association member. "Our teachers are aware of where our families are coming from. I wish I went to a school like the one I'm teaching at!" ■

For more information about CTA and NEA's work on community schools, go to cta.org/communityschools.

CTA President E. Toby Boyd talks to a child at Prescott Elementary School in Oakland.

Money for Community Schools

TONY THURMOND, state superintendent of public instruction, says the increase in funding could result in one-third of California's 10,600 public schools becoming community schools.

• **\$3 billion from the state:** One-time Proposition 98 funding through 2028 to expand community schools across the state through the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP). The goal is to transition every school where 80 percent or more of students live in poverty into a community school over the next five years. School districts with more than 50 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-priced lunch will be eligible for grants, with priority given to districts with greater need, those disproportionately impacted by COVID, and districts with a plan to sustain community school funding after the grant expires. Thurmond will present the CCSPP plan to the State Board of Education for approval in November.

• **\$443 million from the federal government:** Funding in President Biden's budget for U.S. schools to become community schools, nearly 15 times the previous amount.

• **\$3 million from NEA:** Annual funding to help school districts make the transition to community schools, starting with the 100 largest school districts in the country. Twenty CTA locals are taking part in the NEA Strategic Campaign on Community Schools, with most receiving NEA Community Advocacy and Partnership Engagement (CAPE) grants to support their organizing efforts. Details about CAPE at nea.org/cape.

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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: A Transformative Journey

Educators, families and partners are key to the collaborative process

By Julian Peebles

EDUCATORS ACROSS THE STATE are embarking on the journey to build community schools in their local districts, identifying needs and developing partnerships to create transformative experiences for their students.

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership and community engagement, leading to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. With a historic \$3 billion in funding from the state (and another \$1.5 billion proposed in the governor’s May budget revision), many local associations are applying for planning and implementation grants from

the California Community Schools Partnership Program to help support their work.

These investments will strengthen and expand community schools across the state, with a focus on schools and communities with demonstrated need and an eye toward converting every high-poverty school (more than 80 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals) in the state to a community school within the next five years.

While locals like United Teachers Los Angeles and United Educators of San Francisco have been working to build community schools programs for some time, many others are at different points of the journey. We checked in with three local associations to learn about their progress.

1 ANAHEIM SECONDARY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION: Building Trust Along the Way

Anaheim Union High School District

Enrollment: 29,183

Unduplicated pupil count of free/reduced-price meals,

English Learners & foster youth: 80.1%

English Learners: 19.4%

Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) has been active in the community school movement for more than six years, with concerted efforts to build community schools. Last year, ASTA received a \$75,000 Safe and Just Schools grant from NEA to develop structures to create community school policies, forming a steering committee and two school site committees. ASTA President Grant Schuster says they are looking to further expand with grants they applied for this year.



Grant Schuster

“The only way this works is if we trust each other.”

The Anaheim Union High School Board adopted a resolution in March supporting community schools, acknowledging the work done by the steering committee and affirming the need for shared leadership as they move forward. The district will continue to develop two of its 18 schools to be community schools next year — Anaheim High and Sycamore Junior High — with a new \$23.275 million state grant funding these and 11 more schools, according to Schuster.

“It’s been a good process to start building trust as we build community schools,” Schuster says. “The only way this works is if we trust each other.”

Schuster says the community school movement is a generational opportunity to lift voices that have not traditionally been heard, so that schools become more reflective of the communities they serve.

“We’re looking at a measurable transformation of how public schools are operated and how they interact with their communities,” he says. “It’s really exciting.”

ASTA’s work has attracted the attention of fellow educators looking to build community schools in their districts. Schuster says a group from Chula Vista Educators (CVE) visited an Anaheim steering committee meeting to get ideas for how to collaborate in their community. CVE President Rosi Martinez says their local’s vice president is now on full release time to work on the community school effort, funded through a Community Schools Grant from NEA.

Next up in Anaheim: the completion of need and asset assessments, followed by recommendations by site committees to the school district with the steering committee presenting directly to the school board. Schuster says they will continue to build their coalition.

“Everyone is invested in success,” he says.

The Six Pillars of Community Schools

The Community Schools Model advanced by CTA and NEA includes six pillars of practice. Unlike most public education models, these pillars are adaptable to the needs of a school’s students, staff, families and community, and pay particular attention to creating, supporting, and sustaining a culturally relevant and responsive climate.



Strong, Relevant Curriculum

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High-Quality Teaching

Teachers at community schools are fully licensed, knowledgeable about their content and skillful in their practice.



Inclusive Leadership

The leadership teams of community schools include educators, other school staff, parents, students and community members.



Positive Behavior Practices

Community schools emphasize positive relationships and interactions. Restorative discipline practices such as peer mediation, community service and post-conflict resolution help students learn from their mistakes and foster positive, healthy school climates where respect and compassion are core principles.



Family & Community Partnerships

Families, caregivers and community members are partners in community schools. Their engagement is ongoing and extends beyond volunteerism to roles in decision-making, governance and advocacy.



Community Support Services

Community schools provide meals, healthcare, mental health counseling and other services before, during and after school. Connections to the community are critically important so support services and referrals are available for families and other community members.



2

OCEANSIDE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION:

Involving All Stakeholders

Oceanside Unified School District

Enrollment: 18,984

Unduplicated pupil count of free/reduced-price meals, English Learners & foster youth: 58.6%

English Learners: 11.9%



Tiffany Cooper-Ortega

“We can teach our hearts out, but our students need more.”

Educators in Oceanside are excitedly preparing for the debut of four community schools (three elementary, one middle) this fall, after pushing for and placing in the district’s Local Control Accountability Plan a process for this to happen. Oceanside Teachers Association (OTA) President Tiffany Cooper-Ortega says community schools are about so much more than the wrap-around services often associated with the model.

“It’s also the mindset of the stakeholders working together,” says Cooper-Ortega. “I don’t want to say this is the future of education — it’s what education should have always been.”

Cooper-Ortega says OTA and school district officials established shared leadership from the start of their collaborative work on community schools, lauding their “strong partnership.” With an active political action committee, OTA worked to get progressive leaders elected to their school board, which now has three

current or former CTA members. She says the district’s “ask a teacher first” mentality has laid the groundwork for the important community schools effort.

“We worked hard to cultivate this partnership and this shared decision-making in this district,” Cooper-Ortega says.

OTA is currently surveying key groups in school communities, informing members about community schools, and even looking at potential bargaining implications, such as winning contractually guaranteed shared leadership in community schools. With student needs exacerbated by the pandemic, Cooper-Ortega says the services and support provided in community schools are more important than ever.

“We can teach our hearts out, but our students need more,” she says. “I’m excited to see families and students validated, letting them know that this is their part in education. It’s not just something that happens to them but something they have a hand in.”



THIS STORY IS part of our ongoing coverage of community schools. See cta.org/communityschools for background and information, and cta.org/communityschools-building-heart-hub for a broad look at educators’ work around the state.

Benefits of Community Schools

Community schools help foster:

- Lower rates of absenteeism
- Better work habits, grades, test scores and behaviors
- Higher enrollment in college preparatory classes
- Higher graduation rates

Watch CTA’s video for details on community schools’ benefits at tinyurl.com/communityschools-benefits.

State Awards Community Schools Grants

The California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP)

supports schools’ efforts to partner with community agencies and local government to align community resources to improve student outcomes. These partnerships provide an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement.

The State Board of Education in May approved more than \$38 million in community schools planning grants to 193 local educational agencies (LEAs), with most receiving \$200,000. Central Unified School District and Chula Vista Elementary School District are among many districts with CTA-affiliated local associations that won planning grants.

Nearly \$600 million in community schools implementation grants were also awarded to 71 LEAs. Among many school districts with CTA locals, Oceanside Unified School District will receive \$8.3 million and San Francisco Unified will get \$33.7 million, while Oakland Unified will receive the largest grant in this funding cycle at \$66.7 million.

Alameda County Office of Education was also selected as the contractor for the CCSPP Lead Technical Assistance Center.

For a full list of grantees, visit: tinyurl.com/CommSchoolsPlanning (planning grants) and tinyurl.com/CommSchoolsImplementation (implementation grants).

—Julian Peoples

3

CENTRAL UNIFIED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION:

Empowering Families

Central Unified School District

Enrollment: 15,742

Unduplicated pupil count of free/reduced-price meals,

English Learners & foster youth: 71.2%

English Learners: 13.9%



Judee Martinez

The recent funding for community schools has accelerated plans in Fresno’s Central Unified School District, according to Judee Martinez, Central Unified Teachers Association (CUTA) president.

“It’s not going to take two to three years,” says Martinez. “We need to get on it now.”

CUTA set out to inform its members about community schools and their transformative power. When the district said it wanted to move

forward, Martinez says they decided to do it together. They selected a school, Teague Elementary, to designate as a community school, meeting with the staff and school community to build the team necessary for success. CUTA received a \$75,000 Safe and Just Schools grant from NEA.

Martinez says that when educators met with the Teague community for the first time, they learned of needs that included a food pantry and a bus to transport school families without vehicles to important appointments and tutoring services.

“This is about empowering our families and letting them know we want the same thing for their children,”

Martinez says. “The teachers were very emotional because they’re so excited.”

Martinez says the district is submitting a grant proposal for further community schools work. She says they already have eyes on a second and third school in the district, perhaps a middle school that Teague feeds into and then a high school. Martinez says she is grateful for community schools training from NEA as well as constant support from CTA along their journey.

“It makes me proud to be a part of CTA and NEA,” she says. “We have always said we will do what’s best for kids. They are our future, and community schools are the future of education.”

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS: *Second Round of Grant Funding Opens*

By **Lisa Gardiner**



At the core of developing community schools is organizing and building the shared decision-making structures that transform public schools.

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS are collaboratively imagined and democratically run public schools designed to meet the unique needs of local students. Through authentic governance structures and a bottom-up approach, educators, students, parents and community organizations utilize a model of shared decision making to provide academic, emotional and community support for student success.

Over the past two state budget cycles, California has invested \$4.1 billion — more than any other state — to support and expand community schools through the California Community Schools Partnership Program. Funding to support these ground-breaking schools, designed to disrupt poverty and address racial, economic and other inequities, is through grants from the California Department of Education.

Now, a second-round of grant funding for community schools is underway, creating opportunities for organizing and for expanding these transformative opportunities for students.

- Beginning Jan. 17, 2023, the application period for a second round of implementation grants — grants for those districts and Local Education Agencies with an existing community schools program — will open.
- Application deadline is March 17, 2023. Implementation grants are funding for up to five years for up to \$500,000,

depending on a school's enrollment. (A second round of planning grant applications closed on Dec. 20.)

At the core of developing community schools is organizing and building the shared decision-making structures that transform public schools. Districts must work with local chapters when applying for these grants. Be sure to talk to your superintendent if you have not heard from them, and CTA and local staff are available to help.

Around the state, local chapters whose districts received planning or implementation grants during the first round are working with districts to pass school board resolutions, create steering committees, hire community school coordinators, negotiate for community schools as part of collective bargaining agreements, or take steps toward democratically identifying school sites. None of this would be happening without the commitment and hard work of educators invested in the work and promise of community schools.

CTA's recently adopted organizing plan has resources to support local chapters and grant opportunities that can be used to build organizing capacity around community schools. For information, go to cta.org/OrgPlan.

More resources on community schools is at cta.org/communityschools. For details on CDE grants for community schools, go to cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/cspp.asp.



BUILDING A MOVEMENT IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

By Julian Peeples Illustrations by Audrey Chan

“IT’S EXCITING and invigorating to do this work,” says Elizabeth Kocharian, a Bell Gardens High School teacher on partial-release time working as a community schools coordinator for Montebello Teachers Association. “We all know the challenges our families are facing but now we have the opportunity to help them.”

The movement to build transformative community schools continues to grow in districts throughout California, thanks to resources from the state’s landmark \$4.1 billion investment and the efforts of educators and their local associations. With the first round of planning and implementation grants awarded in May 2022, school districts are developing and enacting plans to

build community schools that support the identified needs of their students and community.

During this first round of grants, local associations are generally encountering three distinct reactions from school districts: interested and willing to plan collaboratively with educators and stakeholders; interested but unwilling to work collaboratively; or uninformed and/or reluctant to apply. While each of these require a different response from locals in working toward the inclusive and collaborative planning needed to build community schools, the end goal is the negotiation of an agreement with the district outlining the shared governance structure for each community school.

A strong partnership between educators, parents, community and the school district are all vital pieces to a successful

community school, but the lack of a collaborative relationship with district management doesn’t mean the community school effort grinds to a halt. Local associations are organizing in their communities, building relationships with parents, neighborhood groups and other organizations, and continuing necessary work to build community schools.

CTA and NEA have been at the forefront of efforts to build community schools, providing resources and guidance to educators and local associations as they embark on this important work. And now, CTA leaders and staff have developed a five-step path to help locals build member and community support.

Here are the steps to building successful community schools, as illustrated through the journeys of five local associations.

FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESS

1

STEP 1: BUILD CHAPTER LEADER SUPPORT

Fairfield Suisun Unified Teachers Association (FSUTA)
 Members: 1,048
 Nancy Dunn, president
 Audrey Jacques, organizing chair



When **FSUTA President** Nancy Dunn first heard about community schools, it sounded a lot like the work Fairfield-Suisun educators were doing to build relationships in their community and capacity in their local. FSUTA applied and was selected for NEA’s community schools cohort in 2021, also receiving a \$75,000 NEA grant. Dunn says that the district’s superintendent is not interested in collaborative leadership, so FSUTA is focusing on building internal capacity, identifying new leaders, and developing





Nancy Dunn



Audrey Jacques

“We’re building relationships with community partners, but we needed to build relationships among our members as well.”

—Audrey Jacques, Fairfield Suisun Unified Teachers Association

partnerships to be ready when that changes.

Dunn says that community schools are a part of FSUTA’s organizing plan, which she and Organizing Chair Audrey Jacques presented to both their executive board and representative council to build support among FSUTA leaders.

“Part of it is the commitment to writing it down and being able to go back to our policy-making bodies to say ‘we committed to doing this,’” says Dunn.

FSUTA used the grant funds to release Jacques from the classroom to work full-time starting last February on organizing and community schools — engaging new members, building relationships and taking note of potential leaders.

“We’ve been able to identify a lot of members who were looking for something that spoke to them,” says Jacques, explaining that FSUTA established four new caucuses to provide spaces for members to meet and share. “We’re building relationships with community partners, but we needed to build relationships among our members as well.”

Dunn says FSUTA made changes to their structure to enhance member voice in the local and share leadership responsibilities among more members. Jacques is building action teams at school sites, creating new links between educators and their union, and developing collaborative leadership in FSUTA as a model for when they have district leadership willing to work together to support students and their families.

“We’re hitting all of the notes, so when the ability to collaborate becomes available, we’re ready to go,” says Dunn. “We have all the pieces in place other than the district.”



2

STEP 2: BUILD EDUCATOR AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Natomas Teachers Association (NTA)
Members: 695
Mara Harvey, president

NTA’s advocacy for community schools in the early stages of Natomas Unified’s planning grant application led to strong foundations for building a collaborative process. President Mara Harvey says the local continues to share resources with district administrators to ensure effective implementation, including development of shared leadership structures. NTA is focusing on working with members at the district’s selected community school site and districtwide to help foster understanding



Mara Harvey

about the potential impact of community schools. “We’re working to ensure educators and parents have voices in schools. That’s an exciting idea for

“We want to have a collaborative relationship. It’s about setting up a structure, so everyone has a voice.”

—Mara Harvey, Natomas Teachers Association
(if run in this story, no attribution because only one person in story)

educators,” says Harvey. “There’s this huge well of opportunities for our students. A lot of people are excited to get the resources to our families.”

Harvey says they are currently analyzing community needs at their future community school site to determine what supports are necessary when it opens next school year. That information will be used to help identify potential needs in other schools.

“The more resources we can get to our students, the better,” Harvey says. “It’s exciting to me because education is about bringing your community together.”

Harvey says talks are ongoing between NTA and Natomas Unified to reach a memorandum of understanding about shared governance.

“How do we guarantee a role in leadership in this effort? We see it as fundamental to the success of community schools. That is really the key piece,” she says. “We want to have a collaborative relationship. It’s about setting up a structure, so everyone has a voice.”

Harvey says it has been helpful to have a neighboring local — Twin Rivers United Educators — that is a couple years ahead on the community schools timeline and willing to provide advice and support as needed. For local associations just starting, she recommends reaching out to fellow CTA leaders building community schools in their districts.

“What are other districts doing and how can that work for us,” Harvey asks, adding that CTA support has been invaluable. “CTA has been really strong behind us and there’s so much excitement about it.”



3

STEP 3: BUILD PARENT AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Sacramento City Teachers Association (SCTA)
Members: 3,036
Nikki Milevsky, vice president

Sac City TA made a community schools proposal that the school district refused to even discuss during bargaining leading up to their strike last March, but that hasn’t stopped educators from moving forward with plans to build community schools in Sacramento. This includes successful action at the ballot box in the November 2022 election.

“Community schools fit very tightly with priorities we set in 2016 and build an avenue for things we want to accomplish for our students,” SCTA Vice President Nikki Milevsky says.

During their strike, three parents led more than 50 parents, students and community members in

“It’s amazing how similar educators’ thoughts are to parents’ and the community’s thoughts. The goal is the success of our students.”

—Nikki Milevsky, Sacramento City Teachers Association



▼ Nikki Milevsky and SCTA ran a school board campaign last year to elect leaders who would direct district management to collaborate with educators and the community on, among other issues, community schools. Three SCTA-supported candidates won, flipping the board and changing the direction of the district.



occupying the school district office and demanding to speak to the superintendent, signifying the community's solidarity with educators and helping lead to Sac City TA's settlement victory that ended the eight-day strike. SCTA hired one of those parents to work as a community schools organizer and help build relationships.

"She's been doing a great job organizing parents and school site councils for community schools," Milevsky says. "It's just amazing how similar educators' thoughts are to parents' and the community's thoughts. The goal is the success of our students."

Knowing that they would make no progress on community schools as long as their superintendent lacked the desire to work with them, SCTA set out on an ambitious school board campaign last year to elect leaders who would direct district management to collaborate with educators and the community. SCTA mounted an extensive community-based campaign, supporting a CTA educator and two community members who emerged during the strike as community leaders. In a massive victory, all three won election, flipping the school board and changing the direction of the district.

"That's been a critical step in moving forward for community schools," Milevsky says. "The teachers and community are going to fight to get true community schools for our students."

Milevsky recommends working with community and parent groups to learn about their needs and wishes for their students. She says it was inspiring to hear from other locals and working community school coordinators at last year's Summer Institute and learn from their experiences.

"We've found CTA and NEA support to be invaluable in this effort," Milevsky says. "It's so powerful to know you're not alone."



4

STEP 4: PLAN COLLABORATIVELY WITH THE DISTRICT

Montebello Teachers Association (MTA)
Members: 1,333
David Navar, president

Montebello educators are planning for community schools on the ground and at the bargaining table, with MTA making a community schools contract proposal late last year that outlines structures for shared leadership. MTA reached a tentative agreement in January on a new community schools article



David Navar

in their contract, which establishes a joint steering committee that will make recommendations regarding the implementation of the community schools program, including applying for an implementation grant from the state. While the grant would provide necessary resources, President David Navar says MTA educators are ready to build community

schools in Montebello, regardless of the outcome.

"We want community schools in our district whether we get the grant or not," Navar says.

▼ MTA leaders attended last year's Montebello Eggstravaganza to engage the community about the benefits of community schools and build support.



"The school board knows that MTA is leading the charge for community schools. Our students are who this was made for."

—David Navar, Montebello Teachers Association

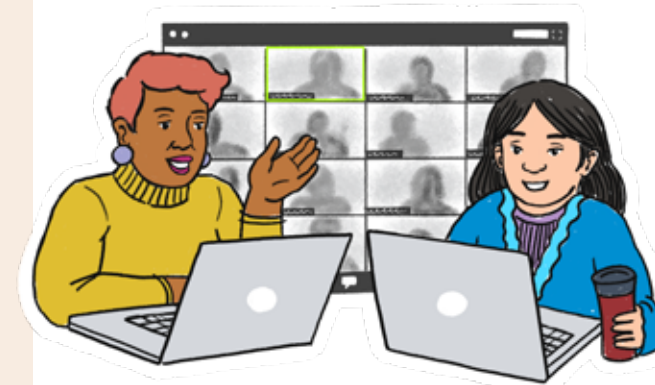
In 2021, MTA received a \$75,000 grant from NEA for community schools planning, which they used to organize internally and release a teacher full-time to work on community schools (see sidebar). MTA held a community schools public forum and a series of trainings on leadership development, inviting educators, parents and community organizations to participate. Navar says these sessions were wildly popular and important in building their movement.

"We need to be ready from an organizational perspective to demand and win community schools," he says. "The school board knows that MTA is leading the charge for community schools. It is in the minds of people that this is the focus of our association."

MTA adopted an educational justice resolution in 2021, which Navar says aligns with the goals of community schools. MTA is currently building capacity for the community schools effort, which includes educating members and the community about the power of these spaces. He's also hoping that district management will better embrace community schools — their responses have been tepid at times and collaboration lacking, according to Navar.

The groundwork continues to build community schools in Montebello, where Navar notes the amount of work they've done organizing and planning without yet having one (Note: There is a community school in Montebello, but it is funded by Los Angeles County Office of Education). He can't wait until these efforts come to fruition.

"Our students are who this was made for," Navar says.



5

STEP 5: BUILD STRUCTURES FOR SHARED DECISION-MAKING

Vista Teachers Association (VTA)
Members: 1,255
Keri Avila, president

Things are moving fast in Vista Unified, where the district is in the process of implementing five community schools. VTA President Keri Avila says



Keri Avila

schools at the district had already been providing wraparound services to students and families, so the community school model was a natural fit.

"It's an aggressive plan, so we're implementing while we're figuring it out," Avila says.

The district's community schools steering committee includes VTA educators, but

not education support professionals, parents or community — so Avila says VTA worked to ensure those voices are on site-level

"Our community school model is an aggressive plan, so we're implementing while we're figuring it out."

—Keri Avila, Vista Teachers Association



MONTEBELLO:
**EDUCATOR ON FULL RELEASE
 FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**

committees. Each of the district's community schools will have a community school coordinator, family liaison, school counselor and an additional full-time position, which Avila says could potentially be used to focus on personalized instruction.

With things moving quickly, Avila met with educators at the soon-to-be community schools to discuss the model and answer questions. VTA accepted an invitation from Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association to visit a community school there, bringing along educators, the district's community schools coordinator and a parent — who has become a staunch advocate for the same transformative experiences in Vista. Now, VTA and the district are building shared leadership structures.

"It really brought it home to see how Anaheim was doing shared leadership," Avila says. "It made us think about how we can build community schools like this in Vista and how can we get people to support them?"

Avila is working with the school board to craft a community schools resolution. She says it's an ongoing effort to get management to share power, noting that "being a part of the conversation is a good place to start." When VTA hit roadblocks with district-level management, Avila says they transitioned to working with school site administrators to share information and collaborate on community schools, building their local movement together.

"We could do a demand-to-bargain for all these things, but if we are working together on shared leadership, then that's not necessary," she says. "We're making sure the boxes aren't just being checked, and the collaboration is authentic and real."

Elizabeth Kocharian became fully immersed in the community schools movement last October, transitioning from teaching governance structures to Bell Gardens High School students to organizing and building them as a community schools coordinator for Montebello Teachers Association.

The 20-year history and government educator was on full and is currently on partial release time from the classroom, building relationships between educators and parents, community groups and the school district. Kocharian works closely with fellow teachers to create workshops and sessions to develop the foundational knowledge necessary to create transformative experiences for Montebello students. She's excited to work to build community schools in her hometown.

"We know our students and our families. We know what we need. And this is our opportunity to create schools where every student gets what they need to succeed every day," Kocharian says. "Being on release is really important — this isn't something you can do well if you're working in the classroom."

Kocharian is getting help and support from fellow educators. She attended the community schools strand at last year's Summer Institute, meeting members doing similar work from locals including Chula Vista Educators and United Educators of San Francisco, and joining a Slack channel set up by them to share information about community schools and their efforts.

Kocharian says MTA's adoption of an educational justice resolution in 2021 was the impetus to go further and learn more about community schools.

"It really expanded my view of what a community school can be, and the possibilities are limitless. We don't have to model our school like anyone else," Kocharian says. "How do we create educational justice and what does that even look like for our students?"

Looking ahead, Kocharian is hoping that one to three Montebello schools apply to be community schools by June, as they continue to develop the structures for shared leadership.

"MTA is building a model for how to meet every student's needs and engage the entire family in collaborative leadership," she says. "I want this to be sustainable, and that's the only way we can guarantee it will continue."



Elizabeth Kocharian

"This is our opportunity to create schools where every student gets what they need to succeed every day."



WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, leadership and community engagement, leading to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools are collaborative efforts, where school district administrators share decision-making power with educators, parents and community groups to provide the support students and families need every day. Visit cta.org/communityschools for more information and previous coverage.

For all CTA videos on community schools, including roundtable discussions with educators, interviews with CTA and state leaders, and more, go to our playlist at bit.ly/3HMkmcc.

Check out our story on Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) and the work its leaders and members are doing around community schools in Anaheim Union High School District, next page. And view a new video about the effort, with input from ASTA educators, students, school and district administrators and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Thurmond, at bit.ly/3R7Hmpe.



**SECOND ROUND
 OF GRANT FUNDING UNDERWAY**

California has invested \$4.1 billion to support and expand community schools through the California Community Schools Partnership Program. Funding is through grants from the California Department of Education.

A second round of grant funding is now underway: The application period for implementation grants — grants for those districts and Local Education Agencies with an existing community schools program — will close March 17, 2023. Implementation grants are funding for up to five years for up to \$500,000, depending on school enrollment. For details on CDE grants for community schools, go to cde.ca.gov/ci/gc/hs/ccspp.asp.

**COMMUNITY
 SCHOOLS EVENT
 AT CAAASA,
 MARCH 17**

A special panel discussion will take place at the California Association of African-American Superintendents & Administrators' annual summit on Fri., March 17: "Community Schools: The Roadmap to Academic Success for African American and Other Students of Color." CTA Vice President David Goldberg is one of the featured speakers.

The theme of the summit, at Hyatt Regency Orange County, is "Building a Powerful Equity-Centered Education." Attendees can register for virtual or in-person attendance.

For details, visit caaasa.org/2023summit.

CTA Vice President
 David Goldberg



▼ In September, Anaheim Union High School District opened the first of 13 Community Resource Centers that offer a variety of support services for families and the community.



LEARNING FROM SUCCESS

Anaheim union, district a model of community school collaboration

By Ed Sibby

IN EARLY DECEMBER, CTA Vice President David Goldberg and several board members met with Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) leaders and Anaheim Union High School District (AUHSD) officials representing community schools in Anaheim.

For several years, ASTA and the district have been a model of collaboration on community schools, serving some 22,000 students. They have worked with students, parents and the community while making strides to grow their community schools and meet the needs of all students. In May, AUHSD received a \$23 million California Department of Education grant distributed over five years, part of a \$4.1 billion statewide commitment to community schools.

The ASTA/AUHSD model is a study in partnership. Local union leaders were foundational to the institution of the community schools process, with active communication and consensus among all parties as the work progressed. The process has gone so well that it led to the district committing to a program that would include 13 school sites.

At the meeting, ASTA President Grant Schuster explained the all-in approach their local took to ensure the program's adoption throughout the district:

"Through the practices of shared leadership, engaging the community, providing integrated student supports and enriching student learning inside and outside of the classroom, we are focused to ensure the whole child and their family are supported to thrive. This process has more potential to transform public education than anything I have seen in my 30 years of teaching."

Successful community schools — in Anaheim and throughout the state — are in constant contact with their students and parents to deeply understand the needs and assets of their school community.

"Through those interactions, community-based partners bring resources that help meet these needs in a way that honors the hopes, dreams and assets of our community," Shuster said. "[For example,] Sycamore Junior High's school community works with North Orange Continuing Education to provide adult English as a Second Language classes Monday through Thursday

"Through the practices of shared leadership, engaging the community, providing integrated student supports and enriching student learning, we are focused to ensure the whole child and their family thrive."

—Grant Shuster, president, Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association

▼ ASTA President Grant Shuster talks about Anaheim's community school work.



▼ Part of the day's meeting included discussion with Sycamore Junior High community school staff.



▼ Community organizations sponsor a farmers market at Sycamore Junior High.



evenings; with Healthy Smiles for Kids of Orange County to provide preventative dental care to students and dental health education to parents; with Second Harvest Food Bank to host a monthly, free farmers market, and with Orange County Human Relations to embed restorative justice practices into all aspects of our school operations, from the classroom to the cafeteria, administration and beyond."

The community schools model adheres to overarching principles that invest in systems, not silos. Interventions are tailored to personal student needs, whether those challenges are social-emotional, food insecurity, language acquisition, special needs, or need for other specialized family services. It is both microtargeting and delivery based on specific needs that makes the program transformational, say its proponents.

Presenters at the meeting also pointed out that key to the success in Anaheim is dedicated human resources that help coordinate the program's many moving parts at each site. Community school coordinators work side-by-side daily with site educators and support personnel, administrators, community partners, students and others. They are embedded in the community and most are former students of the local school they serve.

"We're looking to serve our children and our families holistically because we know they can't leave who they are at the door," said Araceli Huerta, Sycamore's community school coordinator. "We want to make sure that we're creating the conditions they need to thrive."

Among their responsibilities, coordinators manage the events calendar, direct parents and students to community services, operate on-site food pantries and secure local donations. They co-lead school advisory committee meetings and keep all sides informed on progress and ongoing needs.

Another side of this critical partnership is the community school teacher lead on each site. This relationship ensures that each site has trained, trauma-informed educators who are committed to developing trusting and collaborative

relationships with students, families and community members. They encourage career pathway development with industry experts in and outside the classroom.

Jemma Rodriguez, teacher lead at Sycamore, believes that staff buy-in has been high because the model is making a difference.

"Through the community school strategy, we are taking care of the whole child. For instance, a single student has received on-site services such as mental health counseling,

holiday and winter clothing sponsorship through the school's 'Angel Tree' and conflict mediation through restorative justice practices within the classroom. The same student's family has also been referred to the resource center where they have received guidance and resource connections for legal matters and other basic needs, such as food and school uniforms."

Another axiom in Anaheim is that community school programs should supplement, not supplant, existing city services. Understanding and linking parents and students to local programs strengthens ties and builds community at both ends while avoiding duplication of effort. At Sycamore, parents have access to a small food bank, but provisions for addressing long-term food insecurity, as well as health care, immigration services and other needs, are directed out by staff to local and regional government providers.

Ensuring that every program is a value-added measure makes for more abundant services and is not a means for justifying cuts and reductions. In this way, every site can maximize resources according to their needs.

For AUHSD and the members of ASTA, the commitment to community schools is long-term. District officials see positive signs of progress as parents and students become reconnected to their local schools in the post-pandemic era. And confidence is strong among union members that this shared power model has the potential for transformational change throughout the public school system. ■

"This process has more potential to transform public education than anything I have seen in my 30 years of teaching."

—Grant Shuster

▼ Left to right: NEA-Jurupa Bargaining Chair and President-elect David O’Rafferty, JUSD Assistant Superintendent Daniel Brooks, CTA District K Board Member-elect and NEA-J past-president Wendy Eccles, and JUSD Superintendent Dr. Trent Hansen.



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

In Jurupa, relationships are key to community schools success

By Ed Sibby

AS JURUPA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT (JUSD) continues its community schools journey, Inland Valley school districts can learn much about the importance of effective relationship-building. With significant input from the NEA-Jurupa (NEA-J) chapter, JUSD has begun implementation of their community schools program in a 20,000-student district in north Riverside County: Six schools have adopted the model and an additional six are in the application process.

How this has come about is testament to the collaborative relationship between NEA-J and JUSD.

“Our success is a shared one,” said Wendy Eccles, CTA District K Board Member-elect and immediate past-president of NEA-J. “By taking a solutions-oriented approach to problem-solving, we are building a community schools model that will meet the learning and social-emotional needs of the community through our local public schools.”

BEGINNINGS

NEA-J’s partnership with the district has been built and solidified over the years.

In the 2016-2017 school year NEA-J’s member engagement/organizing team began an active campaign to support shared decision-making, and built a local campaign called #AskAnEducator. It was a challenge to the former model that largely ignored the voices of those closest to and most knowledgeable about issues related to students — parents, educators and support personnel.

NEA-J next began educating teachers, district officials and parents about community schools and how their structure differs from simply offering wraparound student services. True community schools are based on a shared decision-making model that determines each school’s needs separately. NEA-J called for a district equity audit and a shift to the community schools model, where services are

delivered only after educators, parents, community advocates and administrators have collaboratively determined those specific local needs. In this way every school community can build a model unique to their needs, whether the emphasis is educational, social-emotional, economic or some other locally determined one.

While COVID closures slowed some elements of that educational evolution, NEA-J and JUSD used the time to work through the challenges school closures created for administrators and educators. Those partnerships and the collaborative problem-solving they required became

foundational to the work they would do after the pandemic.

“Having been a member of NEA-Jurupa during my teaching career, I have seen firsthand how important it is to have a strong partnership between the district and NEA-Jurupa,” said Daniel Brooks, now JUSD assistant superintendent. “We have developed an effective and collaborative culture that allowed us to weather many storms during the pandemic shutdown and all that followed. The relationships we have built with NEA-Jurupa’s leaders sustain and drive so much of our work.”

“By bringing all our education stakeholders together to determine how to meet the community’s needs, we are discovering our true transformational power to change our public schools.”

—DAVID O’RAFFERTY, NEA-Jurupa President-elect

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

JUSD hired superintendent Dr. Trenton Hansen upon full return to instruction in the 2022 school year. He restructured some district departments to create a Pupil Services Department and Educational Equity Division. The shift toward JUSD’s “Collaboration, Community Schools, and Equity” — espoused for years by NEA-J leaders — was now enthusiastically embraced by district leadership.

Hansen explained, “One of the areas of focus in Jurupa Unified’s vision is employee relations. We have made it a priority to build relationships with NEA-Jurupa’s leaders so that we can keep the lines of communication flowing and work through issues together on a monthly basis.”

NEA-J took the lead by passing official school board resolutions in support of community schools, which were presented to JUSD leadership. Because of JUSD and NEA-J’s earlier collaborative successes, many of the pieces needed to successfully implement community schools (see cta.org/educator/five-steps) were already in place. That included JUSD’s expanded Parent Involvement/Community Outreach (PICO) Department, an ongoing effort with NEA-J input meant to enhance parent feedback and encourage positive interventions to meet site-identified community needs.

BUILDING COLLABORATIVE STRUCTURES

NEA-J partnered with JUSD in applying for a community schools implementation grant from the state Department of Education. That partnership included joint meetings to educate NEA-J site reps on community schools and any structural changes.

A Memorandum of Understanding between NEA-J and JUSD codified new committees, including the District Community Schools Council and site-based councils, and made provisions for Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSAs) on each participating campus. The mutual goals set at each participating site have also positively influenced contract negotiations.

Newly elected NEA-Jurupa President David O’Rafferty is pleased that collaborative relationship building is paying positive dividends for JUSD students. “It’s exciting and rewarding. By bringing all our education stakeholders together to determine how to meet the community’s needs, we are discovering our true transformational power to change our public schools.”

For more information about CTA’s work on community schools, see cta.org/communityschools. ■

▼ Mural on the campus of Hoover High School, one of five community schools in San Diego; 10 new community schools have been added for the 2023-24 school year.



COMMUNITY SCHOOLS AGREEMENT IN SAN DIEGO

Educators, district put their commitment in contract article

IN A VICTORY for San Diego students and communities, San Diego Education Association educators reached agreement with the San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) in April on a contract article that stipulates an ongoing and expansive commitment to community schools.

The “SDUSD Community Schools Initiative” acknowledges and supports the proven community schools model to advance racial justice and quality education in high-need school communities. In addition to articulating school site and district processes such as conducting needs and assets assessments, hiring full-time community schools coordinators and establishing shared decision-making and governance teams that involve all stakeholders, the article specifies several other items to ensure success:

- State and federal grant funds can be used for ongoing investment in, among other things, parent/community/youth organizing, outreach and training; and curriculum training time for educators, specifically around culturally responsive and community-based curriculum;
- Community school initiatives will be sustained “to the fullest extent possible” if grant funding expires;
- Establishment of community schools site coach project resource teacher positions, initially part-time but individual sites can expand to full-time if needed; site coaches are educators who work with school staff, site governance teams and community schools coordinators to support expanded

and enriched learning and collaborative leadership;

- Establishment of community schools district coach positions, who build the capacity of site coaches and site governance teams.

“This new community schools article in our contract is the product of five years of continuous advocacy by SDEA union educator leaders in partnership with the San Diego Community Schools Coalition,” said Dr. Kyle Weinberg, SDEA president and middle school special education, English Language Development and social science teacher. “Our SDUSD transformative community schools model is now enshrined

in what will soon be a legally binding agreement that provides accountability and resources to sustain the initiative.”

He anticipates that the contract article will be ratified by SDEA members and SDUSD soon after a yearlong SDEA contract campaign that includes pickets at over 140 schools, school board actions and a community rally to support a demand for expanded after-school opportunities.

The contract article ensures that educators, parents, students and community have a say in school site-level decisions for community schools. It also ensures that the community schools initiative is integrated and aligned with other racial justice, edu-

cation justice and equity initiatives at the district and school site levels.

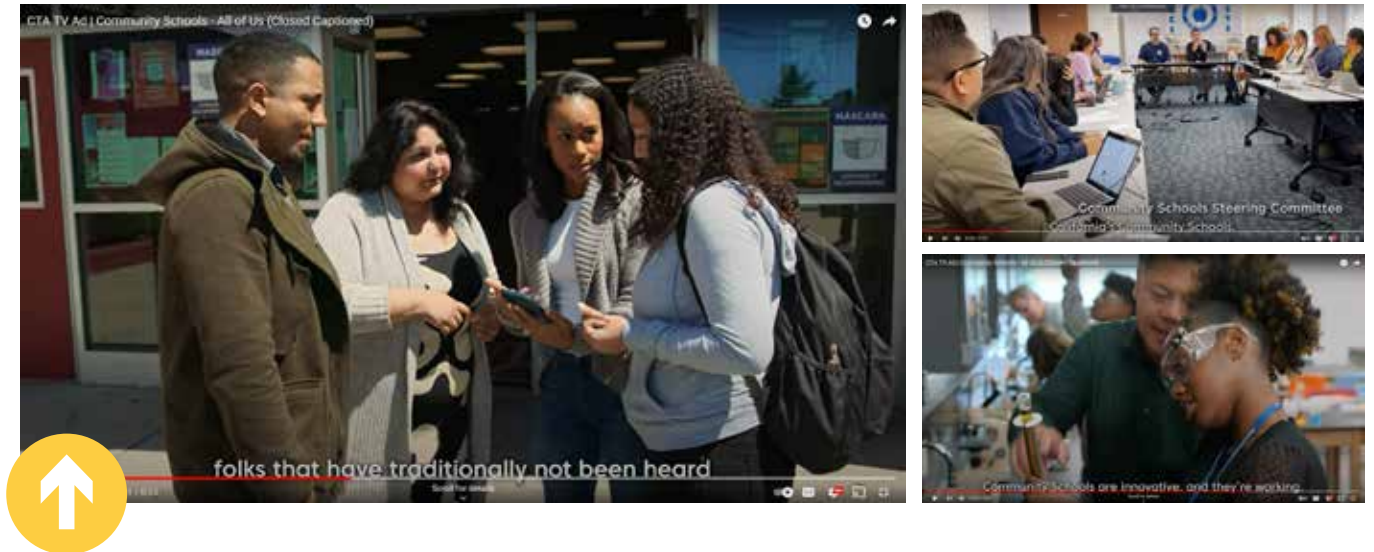
For more on CTA’s work with community schools, see

cta.org/communityschools. ■

“Our SDUSD transformative community schools model is now enshrined in what will soon be a legally binding agreement that provides accountability and resources to sustain the initiative.”

—DR. KYLE WEINBERG, president, San Diego Education Association

▼ The community schools model allows for shared decision-making among educators, parents, students, community stakeholders and school and district administrators. Watch the ads at youtube.com/@CaliforniaTeachers.



MEDIA SPOTLIGHT ON COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

CTA's new ad campaign focuses on shared leadership and decision-making

ON CALIFORNIA DAY OF THE TEACHER, May 10, CTA launched a series of TV, radio and digital ads spotlighting community schools – a campaign that will continue throughout the year. “Planting Seeds: Inspiring students and future educators” is the theme, which parallels California’s growing and thriving community schools movement.

The ads focus on the importance of the shared leadership and decision-making governance model that allows community schools to create new and successful opportunities for students and local communities.

“Community schools lift the voices of folks who traditionally have not been heard, whether they are parents, students, community groups,” said Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association President Grant Shuster in one of the ads.

“It’s shared decision-making with parents,” said United Teachers of Richmond President John Zabala in the same spot. “They’re saying that these are the priorities that they want to see for their kids.”

Both Anaheim and Richmond school districts, as well as other districts across the state, are well along the path to growing their community schools in partnership with CTA chapters, parents and community. With the support of the State Legislature and Governor Gavin Newsom, California is now leading the nation with a \$4 billion investment in the development and expansion of community schools.

Community schools have proven to foster lower rates of absenteeism, better work habits, grades, test scores, and behaviors, high graduation rates and higher enrollment in college-prep courses.

“Educators, parents and students are reimagining public education in their local communities through community schools,” said incoming CTA President David Goldberg. Watch the ads at youtube.com/@CaliforniaTeachers. Learn more about CTA’s work with community schools and ways to reimagine public education at cta.org/communityschools. ■

▼ Educator Tina Luu, center, teaches nutrition and culinary arts with fresh produce from Hoover High School's food market.



▼ Hoover High is situated in the most ethnically diverse neighborhood of San Diego County.



▼ In class with Chase Fite, Hoover's community schools site coach and AP Government teacher.



The Right Stuff

The essential elements that make a San Diego community school thrive by Katharine Fong

EACH COMMUNITY SCHOOL is different — they have to be. The community school model draws on the unique strengths of a neighborhood to address its students' unique needs. This is particularly clear at bustling Hoover High School in San Diego, one of five designated community schools in the San Diego Unified School District last year (another 10 have been designated to begin their transformation this year, 2023-24).

Hoover, with 2,136 students, is situated in the most ethnically diverse neighborhood of the county, City Heights. Many students and families are newcomers to the United States; 100% are eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch. "We have over 40 languages represented among our families," says Candace Gyure, the school nurse. The demographic breakdown, according to Hoover's website, is 75% Latino/Hispanic, 12% Asian, 9% African American, 1% White, 22.3% English Learners and 7.5% Homeless Youth.



Kyle Weinberg

"Hoover High serves one of the highest need communities in San Diego," says Kyle Weinberg, president of the San Diego Education Association (SDEA), which with CTA has long advocated for community schools. "Community schools are a great way to identify the unique needs of a community like City Heights, and also to transform how we do education within the classroom, have more culturally sustaining curriculum — more community-based curriculum, real-world projects, collaboration with community organizations on the issues that are facing our communities."

Like many schools, Hoover offered various services — including a wellness center, mental health center, etc., before officially becoming a community school. But the community school structure brought shared decision-making among students, families, educators, district and community as well as a data-oriented approach to assess needs and assets. This has resulted in

more accessible, coordinated services, and resources directed to or developed for specific needs. The structure has also allowed for enhanced partnerships with community organizations and stronger connections among the school, students and families.

"It's a long-term approach," Weinberg says. "Addressing [social, mental, physical] needs now will impact such things as academic performance, social emotional learning, and attendance in the coming years."

Here are the elements that Hoover has put in place and continues to refine:

Community Schools Site Governance Team

Composed of 10-12 elected positions who have an equal voice and represent all stakeholders: students, parents, community, union educators, district leaders. The team oversees the working group subcommittee, composed of about 22 people who work on strategy and communication, assessing needs and assets, developing protocols and processes, etc. SDEA has a precedent for shared governance won in a contract fight in the 1990s - see page 38 for details on how key this is to the community schools model, and what it requires..

Involvement of all stakeholders

- **Parents:** "Convincing parents that this is not district-driven but truly collaborative [is hard]," says Richard Gijon, Hoover High's community schools coordinator. "But I can see them get excited when I ask, 'What are the top priorities for your students,' and we actually listen to them and ask them to work with us and be part of that process."
- **Students:** It's the same with students, Gijon says. "To see their excitement has been amazing — 'not only are you asking me for my voice, but you're actually telling me what you're hearing!'"
- **Educators and community:** A big part is played by the community schools coordinator and site coach, says Chase Fite, Hoover's site coach, "You need someone who's trusted, [who can convince others that] this is something that is going to improve our site and improve the life of the students as well as all people surrounding our community."



"We've had top-down approaches to school transformation. But they didn't take into account the unique needs of each school. The community schools model is different."

—RICHARD GIJON,
Hoover High Community
Schools Coordinator





“Hoover reached out and invited us parents to get involved; they did a focus group to find out what we needed for ourselves and for our students. That was wonderful because, as a single mom, I could get comprehensive help for my child. And now I’m a member of the Site Governance Team — we get to make good choices, good decisions for the students...The school has a lot of activities to get involved with, a lot of clubs for young people, trainings and events for parents, family engagement.”

—LISA PEOPLES, parent and Hoover Site Governance Team member



“Because of community schools, we were able to expand Hoover Market; it gave us the infrastructure to give everyone more access. What made it meaningful is that it’s infused throughout campus, it’s part of our curriculum. Our lessons this month are on the connection between mental health and food, and how eating nutritious food can change your mood and decrease depression. Students are part of the transformational knowledge about how food impacts people, their health and their communities.”

—ELIZABETH LONACKER, English teacher who started Hoover Market

People power

It takes a village, of course, but specific people in specific roles are crucial to success.

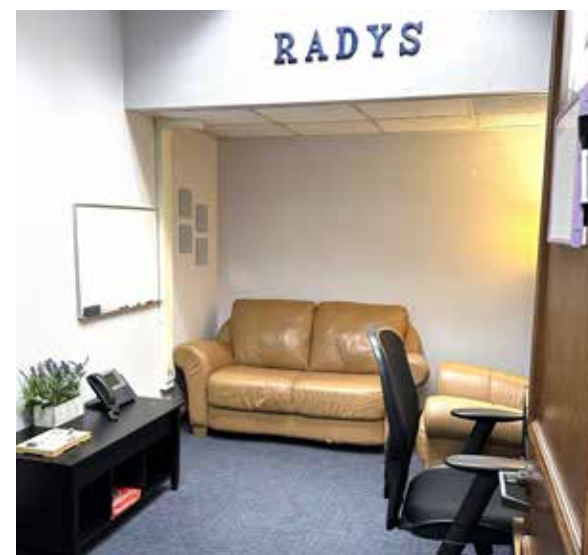
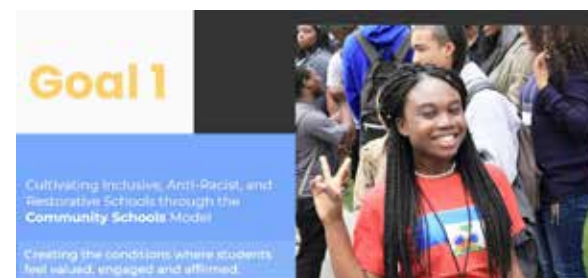
RICHARD GIJON, Community Schools Coordinator. Gijon works full time to coordinate all student and family support services and creates an environment that helps support student achievement and wellness. “The students and families in our community dictate what I do. Some days a family comes in in crisis [over] issues of food security, housing, and I connect them to the resources we have. Sometimes it’s mental health...We had all these resources [before, but] it was a little disjointed. Part of my role [is] trying to get all these programs to develop a plan to engage all our students.”

CHASE FITE, Community Schools Site Coach. The AP government teacher spends one class period on community schools work, including needs assessment and data collection and analysis; implementing expanded and enriched learning; and developing and implementing collaborative leadership and decision-making protocols and structures. “A site coach helps build up the relationships and the onboarding of the staff as well as the community partners on site. I’m also developing collaborative leadership protocols and structures and helping implement them.”

SITE GOVERNANCE TEAM, see previous page. The site team approach, with its shared governance, was actually established in the SDEA contract in the 1990s to ensure members’ ability to democratize the workplace, determining such things as school schedule and dress code. (Note: The team is different than the School Site Council.) Community schools’ work builds on these existing decision-making bodies.

SDEA AND MEMBER EDUCATORS, a critical force in supporting community schools as drivers of equity, democracy and engagement among students, families and community — and educators.

▼ At top: Slide from a San Diego community schools presentation. Bottom: At Hoover’s Health Center, students can visit licensed therapists from Rady Children’s Hospital.



Assessment of needs and assets

Hoover sought answers from all stakeholders: What does success for students and the school look like? What are the barriers to achieving it? What strengths — including from parents and community — can we draw on to address the challenges? Through surveys and focus groups, the top three needs, by group:

- **Students:** Working bathrooms (last year there were only 2-3 working bathrooms per gender for 2,136 students; some were closed due to maintenance, vandalism, drug usage); health, including improved food; and attendance (not just chronic absenteeism, but security and being consistent with school rules).
- **Parents:** Academic enrichment and tutoring, mental health, opportunities for students to connect socially.
- **Educators:** Attendance (including tardiness), mental health supports, student engagement. Mental health services and supports were also among the top needs for students and parents.

Data collection:

- **Students:** “We reached 83% of the student body through surveys and focus groups,” Fite says. “We audited the information to ID those students we have no data on — such as the chronically absent. Then we created a system to engage in home visits with those students and parents to ID a unique stakeholder group who have particular needs, assets and wants.”
- **Educators:** 92% of certificated staff completed surveys. Overall, an aggregated 74.5% of classified and certificated staff participated in focus groups.
- **Parents:** “By June 2023 we will have reached 75% of parents,” says Gijon. “We started multiple focus groups in January 2023, in Spanish and English, electronic and paper surveys in six different languages. Every day at drop-off we were asking ‘Have you done your survey? We want your feedback!’ We were also hitting all our big events, and asking community partners who have parent meetings to pass along the survey.”



“If we improve the community at large, we’re improving it for everybody, including ourselves. All the things that allow for us to be community schools is a product of union fights, union wins and continued union work.”

—CHASE FITE, Hoover High Community Schools Site Coach





“The numbers of kids who are referred or self-refer to mental health services just exploded. Families don’t always have access to services. So one of the things we’re hoping is [that] our students bring awareness around mental health to parents, to be a bridge to help destigmatize getting services. There is still a lot of shame in families about what it means if their child is struggling with a mental health issue. Through community schools, we connect more with them and help them access services for their students.”

—ELLEN HOHENSTEIN, Health Academy director



“Having health services at Hoover benefits students because they have access in a timely manner, they can have their needs met and remain in school. It benefits parents who take less time off from work. They don’t have to worry about transportation or hours. Everything’s right here. ... [I will soon have] a spot screener to test vision and screen students who would otherwise not be screened. It will take about 5 seconds to get a complete reading, and then provide information to a vision specialist for follow-up.”

—CANDACE GYURE, school nurse

Exploration of potential solutions

Use the data to determine the needs and assets; the working group with input from others are coming up with ways to use the assets to address the needs, as well as create other assets or bring in services for specific needs. This is an ongoing effort. Some early outcomes:

- **Class projects:** In a first-semester U.S. History class with juniors, Chase Fite’s students worked on a public health advocacy project using the community schools framework. “For me, this was a rough draft/dry run for implementing the framework before doing so with other stakeholder groups,” Fite says. Focusing on the bathroom issue (see previous page), students developed a needs and assets assessment survey and pushed it out to the school for completion, and created a website where they analyzed survey data, presented historical context of the issue, explained the science behind why the issue is harmful to the community, and put forward philosophical and ethical theories that they used to argue whether or not to act on the issue.

Students then presented their findings to other classes, teachers and administrative leaders, and engaged in collaborative dialogue about solutions the community would want to see implemented.

In a second semester AP Government class, Fite had students refine the working group protocols for determining and implementing solutions. This class found that the root cause of the bathroom issue was vandalism due to lack of student ownership, and that a student art installation, for example, could allow them to regard the space as their own and discourage vandalism. Another class found the root cause to be bathroom drug use and vaping, which cause other students to avoid bathrooms. Students suggested those who are caught using drugs take part in a Social Justice Academy-run student mentoring program with a focus on restorative justice.

- **Next wave of planning:** The district is paying for a two-week 2023 PBL summer institute where the working group and other stakeholders are delving deeper into the needs and assets data to come up with solutions. For example: creating a mental health campaign through Hoover’s Health Academy, as data shows more than half of students don’t know how to access the school’s mental health services; and dedicating community schools funds to more supports offered by community partners, such as those involving mental health.

These new efforts around mental health build on current/earlier initiatives by educators such as Ellen Hohenstein, whose students work on campus-wide projects to bolster mental health awareness and interventions, and Elizabeth Lonnacker, whose students created mental health public service announcements for the school.

- **More opportunities for engagement:** “Parents want the school to become that hub where they can have meaningful relationships with each other and with other positive adults,” says Gijon. To that end, he and Hoover have further developed resources and events for students focused on social connections, and for parents/families focused on health and wellness, government and community programs, etc.

▼ Below, students stock classrooms with items requested by teachers for their students — a variety of healthy snacks and other foods.



Featured Services, Programs

Based on its unique needs, Hoover High School has integrated a number of successful student and family supports, among them:

- **Hoover Market**, in partnership with Feeding San Diego; a variety of foodstuffs are free to students and available in classrooms as well as at the market. Special needs students and Hoover’s Health Academy students stock and distribute foods; educator and chef Tina Luu teaches nutrition and culinary arts with fresh produce and other ingredients from the market, and the food distribution center is open to the community twice a month. The market was started by teacher Elizabeth Lonnacker in 2022, after she noticed students were taking snacks she had in a classroom cupboard as “food for the weekend.” She used project-based learning with students to help bring the market to fruition. The initiative addresses some of the student absentee problems as well, as many students hold part-time jobs to help their families pay for food, rent, etc., but whose jobs interfere with school. (See a recent video about the market at tinyurl.com/2jc5s8sm).
- **Organic school garden project**
- **After-school programming** with strong parental input, focusing on arts and music, science, etc.
- **At-risk student support** through Youth Empowerment

- **Health center**, offering health assessments, general assistance with chronic illnesses, immunizations, vision and hearing screening, family planning services, dental services; some services through La Maestra Community Health Center (on campus)
- **Mental health supports**, through Mending Matters, offering drop-in and crisis services and Rady Children’s Hospital, offering licensed therapists (both on campus)
- **Recovery services**, through Union of Pan Asian Communities (on campus)
- **Laundry facilities**, washing machines for student/family use (on campus)
- **College and career services**, through Avenues for Success (on campus)





“Our counseling team facilitates attendance, academics, mental health, education, referrals. We saw that there is a high need for parenting workshops, how to parent your teen, so we recently started them, with childcare available. We have lots of resources for families — Hoover Market, our upcoming Cardinal Closet with clothing, lawyers to help with the undocumented, wrongfully eviction, students who have lost their only guardian or parent.”

—ANDREA MUNOZ, head counselor

“The biggest part about shared decision-making and why it is a strength [is that] no one has to be the most important voice in the room. We draw upon all the knowledge and experiences. So when we add all the voices, including student voices, we hear multiple perspectives and have to really think through what the impact for the student is.”

—TRACEY MAKINGS, Principal



Strong partners

In addition to community partners at individual school sites, a steering committee at the district level includes representatives from San Diego State University, community organizations, educators, high school students and others who meet monthly, oversee work groups and provide recommendations.

SDEA is a member of the San Diego Community Schools Coalition, which advocates with parents, community organizations, school board members and at the bargaining table to elevate parent and educator voice in the decision-making process.

Hoover High School maintains an extensive network of community, district and city resources for students and families in multiple arenas, including legal services, food and shelter, health and wellness, tutoring and more.

▼ At left, students working in Hoover’s garden. At right, inside the campus Health Center. Next page, across: Mural on the Hoover High campus.



▼ CTA President David Goldberg records a community schools spot.



CTA and Community Schools

CTA is deeply committed to helping grow and support California’s community schools, a partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and communities. Community schools’ democratic model of shared decision-making ensures all students’ needs are addressed so they can thrive and helps build power with community that leads to a more equitable society. Read more of our coverage of CTA and members’ work, and find information and resources, at cta.org/communityschools.

Media Spotlight

CTA’s series of TV, radio and digital ads spotlighting community schools are in full swing during this back-to-school season. They focus on the importance of the shared leadership and decision-making governance model that gives voice to educators, students, parents and community members. Watch them at youtube.com/@CaliforniaTeachers.

The Union Role

San Diego Education Association is unique in that it won a contract fight with the school district in the 1990s that codified shared decision-making. This has proved crucial to San Diego community schools’ success — and is a sticking point for other locals who do not have such contract language. Without it, educators, as well as parents, students and community members, often struggle to be heard and participate as equals. Many locals are now organizing to ensure shared governance is codified, for community schools and for the public education structure that best serves students.

“SDEA has advocated for community schools because we view them as a way to elevate the voice of our highest-need school communities and get more resources and better processes to the students that we serve,” says SDEA President Kyle Weinberg.

CTA’s role is important on a statewide level. “CTA has been essential to establishing strong community schools in California — lobbying with the State Board of Education, with the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, to make sure that the pillars and mechanisms of transformative community schools are embedded into state policy,” Weinberg says.



“Being part of the subcommittee has given us (students) a voice that we know will be heard and valued for many years”

—DANIELA SILVA, Hoover student

Daniela Silva graduated from Hoover in June and was a member of its community schools working group subcommittee. She spoke in a Hoover video presentation about how she and other students have been able to witness the many impactful changes at the school in recent years, including the community garden and Hoover Market. Watch the video at tinyurl.com/3fykue4.

▼ From left, Grant Schuster, Emma Alvarez, Cecily Myart-Cruz, Catherine Gilmore (Florida), Becky Pringle, Kelly McMahon (Iowa), Mary Parr Sanchez (New Mexico); not pictured: Nikki Woodward (Maryland).



“We are learning that we must go intentionally slow to build the structures so that in the future we can go much faster.”

—ASTA President **Grant Schuster**

TALKING COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

CTA and California were well-represented at an eight-person panel on community schools, held at NEA’s Representative Assembly in July and moderated by NEA President Becky Pringle. In addition to UTLA President Cecily Myart-Cruz and Anaheim Secondary Teachers Association (ASTA) President and CTA/NEA Coordinator Grant Schuster, a recent graduate from Anaheim’s Sycamore Junior High (a community school) also spoke.

The significant Golden State presence reflects California’s nation-leading \$4.1 billion investment in community schools as well as CTA chapters’ success in organizing, bargaining for and now implementing community schools in multiple school districts.

“The community schools model — an actual democratic model that includes every stakeholder — is for every school across this nation — urban, rural, suburban and every school in between,” said Myart-Cruz. “It is the absolute antidote to privatization.”

In 2019, following a six-day strike,

UTLA reached a deal with LA Unified School District that included funding to convert 30 campuses to community schools. LAUSD now has 55 community schools, with plans to add more.

Student Emma Alvarez, who was on Sycamore Junior High’s community schools site team, spoke of being heard as an equal. “I get a say in what I want in my classroom, what I want to learn. I have the same amount of voice as my principal, my administrator, my parent, my friend and the people in my community.”

Schuster talked about his and ASTA’s experience in working with the school district, parents and students and community allies to open/transition 15 community schools.

“What we’ve learned is that listening is critical in building trust. We engaged with and educated our members and built relationships with community partners. Then we went together to the district and said, ‘we want to implement this model! We built a steering committee including teachers, ESPs,

parents, students, community groups and our district.

“We set out a five-month path for teacher leads and community school organizers to talk to every teacher, ESP and facility worker at every site, and then followed up with parent and student conversations, and community circles and one-on-one interviews.

Before we started, parent participation averaged 15 percent. We made it a goal [to reach] 75 percent — and we got that at every one of the community schools.

“We were able to bring [what we learned] into the classroom. At Sycamore Junior High, for example, immigration [came] out in all the surveys. Parents did not understand what their rights were or what resources were available. Students were anxious about their families’ future, and teachers saw that reflected in the classroom.

“The site team got together to talk about solutions. We now provide services around immigration, so parents can understand what they can do. The 7th grade English teachers got together to create a unit on immigration, so students can study U.S. policy on immigration and deportation to not only relieve their anxiety and express how they feel but to learn about opportunities for civic engagement and to advocate for themselves and their families.

“We are only two years into this process, but we are learning that we must go intentionally slow to build the structures so that in the future we can go much faster. Because we know that progress only travels at the speed of trust.”

▼ Students relax at Buena Vista Horace Mann. Photo: Chris Robledo



▼ The Navas-Torrez family prepares their beds at the Buena Vista Horace Mann school gym.



▼ Not pictured is the eldest son, who will join the family later in the evening.



“[The Stay Over Program] is important because our kids aren’t in the streets. They have a place to be after school, a place to study. For them it feels like a second home.”

—Parent **Mayel Navas**

FAMILY POWER

San Francisco Community School puts family needs front and center

By **Katharine Fong**

TYPICALLY, says Nick Chandler, community schools coordinator at Buena Vista Horace Mann K–8 school in San Francisco, the family power structure in schools tends to fall within families with privilege. “Families with income, families with access, families with time,” he explains.

At BVHM, such families are few. A dual-language Spanish Immersion Community School in the city’s Mission District, BVHM enrolls about 600 students; in 2021–22, 86% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 64% were socioeconomically disadvantaged and 63% were English Learners.

“To ensure that we had authentic partnership with our families of students who needed the most support, we’ve had to be really strategic about how we engage families and set up shared decision making to hear the voices that often go unheard,” Chandler says.

The strategy involved continuous outreach, listening to and encouraging leadership from families — especially monolingual

Spanish-speaking families — and responding to their needs. This included creating the Stay Over Program about five years ago, which allows unhoused San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) families to sleep at the BVHM gym and receive case management services to support their eventual housing.

“We’ve had to be really strategic about how we engage families and set up shared decision making to hear the voices that often go unheard.”

—BVHM Community Schools Coordinator **Nick Chandler**

Housing remains one of the major challenges BVHM families face. Other immediate challenges identified by BVHM families are immigration and mental and physical health needs. “Basic needs supports have evolved over time. They’ve been a direct result of that family voice, of that student voice,” says Chandler.

It’s almost 6:30 p.m. on a late spring evening, and several families are already standing patiently outside the BVHM gym, backpacks and bags in hand, waiting for the doors to open at 7. Inside, workers are setting up partitions that give each family a modicum of privacy where they can unroll bed mats and settle in for the night.

Bathrooms, with showers, are at one end of the gym; at the other end is the room where families enter, sign in and eat dinner. Students can use the dining tables for homework.

Some 70 people will sleep at BVHM tonight. They’ll eat breakfast before leaving the gym by 7 a.m.

“When we arrived in San Francisco, we didn’t have a place to live, so we were living in the streets,” says Mayel Navas, who with her husband Saul Torrez has been staying at the gym with their four sons — one of whom is still in a stroller. “We met a friend who told us about this program. We feel super grateful.

“This place is important because our kids aren’t in the streets. They have a place to be after school, a place to study. For them it feels like a second home.”

“We came to the United States because our country [Nicaragua] was going through a time of social-political unrest and there was a lot of government persecution,” Torrez says. “We don’t have the words to say how much we appreciate [the Stay Over Program].”

A joint use agreement allows this S.F. Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing program to be operated on school district property by the nonprofit Dolores Street Community Services.

While each community school is unique, their common denominator is shared governance among educators, students, families, administrators and community partners. By achieving a truly equitable model of shared decision making and listening to all stakeholders, BVHM’s Stay Over Program and other initiatives are meeting vital needs that have led to healthier families, more engaged and productive students, educators who are able to teach and nurture children to their fullest potential, and stronger connections to the community.

CTA and local chapters are working in partnership with the state, school districts, students, families and community to help grow and support California’s community schools, bolstered by the state’s nation-leading \$4.1 billion investment. A primary focus among locals is to ensure shared decision making is contractually codified — necessary for all stakeholders to be heard and participate as equals.

“UESF has been working on three different levels” with SFUSD, says Cassondra Curiel, president of United Educators of San Francisco (UESF). “The first is in bargaining a contract that would codify community school language and the shared decision-making protocol.”

The second is UESF’s agreement with SFUSD to help select and hire a district director for community school →



BVHM Community Schools Coordinator **Nick Chandler**

▼ Bilingual teacher Marcos Espino with 7th grade students.



▼ BVHM Principal Claudia DeLarios Moran.



“What does every child need to be self-regulated enough to learn today’s lesson? The community school approach allows us to wrap ourselves around a child and their family’s need so we can get them there.”

—BVHM Principal **Claudia DeLarios Moran**

implementation, “working closely with them to make sure we are in close alignment with state guidance”; the person hired has a background in community nonprofits. Third, the local is involved at the ground level with UESF Secretary Leslie Hu, who is on full-time release as UESF’s Community Schools Initiative Coach.

“It’s a position we felt was important to have to bring up member ‘Community Schools IQ’ and to help directly at sites as they navigate the community schools process,” Curiel says. Hu works with educators, school staff and administrators.

Curiel adds that for “our 6,500 UESF members, learning about community schools is an ongoing process. We’ve been working to educate and elevate this — not just the application to become a community school, but what it means to be part of a community school.

“At school sites operating with a shared decision-making model where families are actively invited to help make decisions and embraced and empowered, we’re seeing a big impact.... At one elementary school, the administration and educators were trying to seek an intervention to raise reading and math scores. [Stakeholders] devised a plan collectively to shift schedules and carve out the school budget for extended hours so educators could work with the after-school program [toward] those math and reading goals. It spread into what families engaged their students on at home as well.”

Curiel points to multiple other examples of community

schools’ collective decision-making that have successfully addressed challenges at individual sites, and made students and families feel like they are represented and have a voice.

Boisterous students congregate in the BVHM yard at mid-day, some eating lunch and talking with friends, others engaged in games. The administrative offices also bustle with students and educators. In contrast, students in Marcos Espino’s 7th grade class upstairs quietly work on assignments. Espino, who grew up in the Mission District, moves from table to table, speaking in Spanish.

BVHM Principal Claudia DeLarios Moran is a native San Franciscan whose children attended the school before she stepped into her current role. She notes that BVHM has been a community school since its inception in 2012; she expects the new funding and protocols will amplify the school’s resources and programming. While DeLarios Moran was BVHM vice principal, she worked to pilot the Stay Over Program.

“The shelter started out of desperation during a particularly rainy winter,” she recalls. “A number of families asked us directly if they could stay overnight. We quickly realized that that is exactly what we should do.

“Our true north is ‘What does every child need to be self-regulated enough to learn today’s lesson?’ The community school approach allows us to wrap ourselves around a child and their family’s need so we can get them there.”

▼ Stay Over Program participants line up for dinner.



▼ A family set up to sleep in the BVHM gym.



This results in students who flourish academically and on a social-emotional level — and parents who are empowered to speak up, get involved and become leaders themselves. “We now have parents who serve on important boards within SFUSD, for example, on the community advisory council for special education. We have parents that are extremely adamant about demanding the kind of facilities our students deserve — having conversations not even at the district level, but at the state [level].”

Chandler says the development of the Stay Over Program taught BVHM administrators and educators a lot on how to engage families — how to build authentic partnerships and shared decision-making structures. “We surfaced flaws in how we were governing our school and how families participated. By having those hard conversations and building programming that was responsive to the highest needs as defined by our families, we were able to disrupt that pattern. It shifted our programming and our focus and intention. It shifted our goals and our mission.

“It forced us to really articulate ‘Why are we here? Who are we here to support? How are we going to be inclusive in that work?’”

Current needs, according to surveys and data, center on mental health. As Chandler puts it, “How do we deliver trained,



“UESF is very intent on making sure that community schools is not a trend. This is not a moment. This is a cultural shift.”

—United Educators of San Francisco President **Cassandra Curiel**

qualified bilingual mental health professionals to our students and families that need it?”

BVHM educators, he says, are fully aligned with the community school’s objectives, particularly around family involvement. “We have intentionally brought in teachers that have the vision and philosophy of teaching that includes the family. Teachers are always strong advocates for families at our site.”

Educators city-wide are working hard to make community schools work long-term, says Curiel. “UESF is very intent on making sure that community schools is not a trend. This is not a moment, but instead this is a cultural shift, a movement from traditional schooling to a community schools model that includes so much community input, so much student, family, educator [input] that the school itself is fundamentally changed to be a place where families and students feel they are part of the entire day.” ■



To view videos on BVHM Community School and its Stay Over Program, visit [youtube.com/californiateachers](https://www.youtube.com/californiateachers). Learn more about CTA and community schools and read previous coverage at [cta.org/communityschools](https://www.cta.org/communityschools).