SECTION II

# The Four Pillars of a Comprehensive Community Schools Strategy

Courtesy of Ben Filio for Remake Learning

**First Pillar: Integrated Student Supports**

**Second Pillar: Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities**

**Third Pillar: Active Family and Community Engagement**

**Fourth Pillar: Collaborative Leadership and Practices**

SECTION II

# First Pillar: Integrated Student Supports

Community schools take a "whole-child" approach to supporting students' educational and life success. This means that they pay explicit attention to students' social and emotional development as well as their academic learning, recognizing that they are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. They provide and coordinate a range of on-site services and supports to overcome both academic and nonacademic barriers to students' educational and life success. The mix of offerings can vary, since they are tailored to meet local needs, but some of the most common services and supports are medical, dental, and mental health care services; tutoring and other academic supports; and resources for families, such as parent education classes, job training and placement services, housing assistance, and nutrition programs. These programs may also provide conflict resolution training, trauma-informed care, and restorative practices to support mental health and lessen conflict, bullying, and punitive disciplinary actions, such as suspensions. Those in the community schools field use the phrase "integrated student supports"[6] to identify these critical components of community schools.

There is significant evidence to support this approach. Research shows that integrated student supports are associated with positive student outcomes. Students receiving school-based supports often show significant improvements in attendance, behavior, social well-being, and academic achievement. One of the responsibilities of a full-time community school director is to develop partnerships with community-based providers and connect students and families with available services, as well as fostering a positive and healthy school climate.

A dedicated staff member coordinates support programs to address out-of-school learning barriers for students and families.

Mental and physical health services support student success.

**Integrated Student Supports**

It is important to note, however, that the presence of these supports alone does not automatically make a school a "community school." Key differentiating factors include the way in which site-based needs are identified, how the services are provided and coordinated, and their integration with the other community school pillars, especially active family engagement and collaborative leadership and practices. For example, some integrated student supports focus on case management and determine the provision of student services through a top-down approach. In contrast, comprehensive community schools start with a meaningful process for engaging students and families in identifying needs and assets and connecting with potential service-providing partners. Only after these important and inclusive first steps does the community school director begin to develop a plan in collaboration with students, families, staff, and community stakeholders for integrating these services and supports into the life of the school. The trusting relationships established early on in this process provide a stable foundation upon which community schools can continue to grow and improve.

Many state and local policies seek to provide student supports at school sites but stop short of implementing a comprehensive community school. There is much to be learned from these policies. The discussion and principles that follow draw from the best policies on integrated student supports—whether as a stand-alone or part of a comprehensive community school approach.

## Why Provide Integrated Student Supports?

Growing economic inequality has profoundly shaped out-of-school opportunity gaps. Today, more than half of the nation's public school students—approximately 25 million—live in low-income households, the highest proportion since this statistic became available in the 1960s. Young people living in these circumstances may experience food and housing insecurity, inadequate health care access, exposure to violence in their neighborhoods, the need to look after other family members, and challenges with learning English and achieving a stable immigration status, among other concerns. All of these circumstances contribute to the presence of chronic or toxic stress, which is well-documented to diminish learning readiness and academic success.

> "A large number of students face severe challenges outside of school that can impact their ability to do well in school…"

Education is seen as one of the primary ways that students, regardless of their life circumstances, are able to reach their dreams. But the reality is that a large number of students face severe challenges outside of school that can impact their ability to do well in school, and these take a toll on schools' ability to provide a high-quality education. A 2015 Communities in Schools poll, for example, found that, on average, teachers in schools serving a high percentage of students from low-income families spend about 20% of their time helping students with nonacademic challenges or problems. Additionally, a 2014 UCLA study in California found that the time lost from instruction is far greater in high-poverty high schools than others because teachers take on added responsibilities to support students' needs. These findings were affirmed in a 2015 survey of teachers named "state teachers of the year" by Scholastic's Edublog. When asked how best to focus education funding to have the greatest impact on student learning, the teachers' top priorities included anti-poverty measures and reducing barriers to learning, such as providing access to health services.

Furthermore, despite increases in the resources that low-income families invest in learning opportunities for their children, the "resource gap" between low-income and more advantaged families still exists. For example, the gap in spending between the poorest and richest families on out-of-

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school learning opportunities from pre-k through high school has more than doubled over the past several decades, underscoring the importance of additional resources for low-income families and communities to ensure that all children have equal learning opportunities.

## The Need is Great and Public Support is Strong

Although community schools do not solve poverty, they can mitigate its impact on students and families. Hungry children can be fed, sick children can receive medical care, and students whose families can't afford tutors or enrichment programs can get academic and extracurricular support. By providing and coordinating needed services, community schools help ensure that students are ready to learn when they arrive at school each day.

Polling shows that Americans support this approach. A poll released in 2015 found that nearly two-thirds of swing state voters believe poverty is a barrier to learning, and fully three-quarters of swing state voters believe it should be a top priority to "make sure all children in my community have an equal opportunity to get a good education, no matter their economic circumstances." Similarly, a 2017 PDK poll found support for providing services to students who don't have access to them somewhere else. For example, 87% of respondents support offering mental health services in schools and 79% support providing general health services. Three-quarters of respondents agreed that schools should be able to seek additional public funds to provide such services.

Around the country, school districts and states are capitalizing on this growing public awareness and support by offering integrated student supports as a core pillar of a comprehensive community schools policy.

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## Policy Principles

The following principles and practices, derived from research and the experience of successful schools, demonstrate how state and local policy can support schools in providing and coordinating integrated student supports:

- Facilitate school, district, municipal, county, and state-level resource coordination by convening state or local children's cabinets comprised of representatives from state and local agencies whose programs serve pre-k-12 or pre-k-16 students. Such cabinets can streamline the administration of state programs to avoid regulatory conflicts or overlap and share/review existing data resources.

- Avoid a "one-size-fits-all" or top-down approach by requiring a systematic needs assessment process that includes input by students, families, school staff, and community partners. This assessment then guides the development of strategic partnerships for integrated student supports and direct services.

- Support a full-time community school director at each community school site who serves as a member of the school leadership team, leads the analysis of site needs and assets, and is responsible for developing, coordinating, and sustaining partnerships with service providers and organizing service delivery.

- Take a whole-child approach that provides customized, comprehensive, coordinated, and continuous services and resources to address students' academic, social-emotional, health, and family needs. The Brookings Institution found that integrating this approach into the core practices of the school enables services for individual children to change as needed over time.

- Provide funding for technical assistance and collaboration within and among schools and agencies. Intentional collaboration with teachers, school staff, students, and families helps align resources and opportunities to the areas of need, enhancing protective factors and decreasing risk factors, according to recommendations from the Brookings Institution.

- Increase the state's capacity to support efficiencies and effective practices. This can include technology infrastructure (such as a web portal), technical assistance to support districts' implementation of new technologies, a hub for identifying community resources, and a data infrastructure for tracking progress on a variety of outcomes and fostering shared accountability.

- Remove barriers to resource integration by aligning and simplifying areas of the law to ease the bureaucratic and cost burdens on schools. For example, states could follow the lead of the federal government, which is working to diminish bureaucratic complexities in programs like the Children's Health Insurance Program, Medicaid, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act, which have made it easier for schools to integrate screening, information and referral, and health services.

## Policy Types/Examples

Existing local and state policies that assist schools in providing and coordinating integrated student supports fall into two categories: 1) funding for integrated student supports and resources; and 2) regulatory support for integrated student supports service delivery and ease of interagency collaboration.

This section briefly discusses exemplary policies that have been passed in different states, school districts, and cities. These policies are exemplars because they support high-quality implementation of integrated student supports and are compatible with the other three pillars of the comprehensive community schools approach. Note that community school pillar three, active family and community engagement, is essential to successful delivery of integrated student supports.

### State funding for integrated student supports and resources.

State budgets can provide funding to support the coordination and delivery of integrated student supports. This can include student/family resource centers and school-based health centers, for example, as well as the community school directors who are critical to ensuring tight coordination of services with minimal disruption to the school day. Some of the examples below also explicitly link funding for resource coordination to family and community engagement efforts. This is smart policy, since the two pillars are closely linked and, when done well, reinforce each other. (There are also examples of this linking in Section II, "Active Family and Community Engagement.")

> "Pillar three, active family and community engagement, is essential to successful delivery of integrated student supports."

- **Connecticut** passed Senate Bill 458 in 2012, building on Chapter 163 of the state's General Statutes, which in 2000 established family resource centers at public school sites. This update provided for at least 10 new centers and at least 20 new or expanded school-based health clinics in the state's lowest-performing districts. As of a 2009 evaluation, these centers received approximately $6 million in funding (in the form of $100,000 grants) and served nearly


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20,000 children and families. These resource centers promote "comprehensive, integrated, community-based systems of family support and child development services located in public school buildings," including full-day and school-age child care, resource and referral services, parenting and adult education classes, training for family day care providers, and teen pregnancy prevention.

- In **Kentucky**, the school funding formula has supported statewide Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs) for the past 25 years, originating with the 1990 Kentucky Education Reform Act. In 2008, Senate Bill 192 established Family Resource Centers to serve elementary-school-age children and offer early childhood education, afterschool care, family education and literacy services, and health services and referrals. Youth Services Centers serve middle school and high school students, and offer career exploration and development, substance abuse education and counseling, and referrals to health and social services. Every school where at least 20% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals may compete for FRYSC funding, which totaled $51.5 million in 2017 and supports more than 800 centers serving more than 500,000 students.

  As noted in the Section I, "Policies That Advance Community Schools," the Kentucky approach is highly compatible with community school implementation, since "the primary goal of these centers is to remove nonacademic barriers to learning as a means to enhance student academic success." Further, "each center offers a unique blend of programs and services determined by the needs of the population being served, available resources, location, and other local characteristics." A 2016 study reported that educators, parents, and community partners believe the centers are "a necessary component of Kentucky educational programming." The program, now recognized as the nation's largest school-based family support initiative, has achieved strong results. Kentucky has moved from consistently having one of the largest socioeconomic achievement gaps in the country to outperforming half of all states academically and having the smallest gap in the country, according to Education Week's Quality Counts rankings. The 2015 Building a Grad Nation report found Kentucky to have the country's smallest graduation rate gap between low- and non-low-income students.

- The **Massachusetts** Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Wraparound Zones (WAZ) Initiative provided grant funding from 2011 to 2014 to help school districts address nonacademic challenges facing their students. The goals of the grant program were to enhance positive school climate, identify student needs, integrate services and resources, and create district-level feedback and improvement. Participating districts were expected to supplement state funding with federal and local funds. State resources supported school- and district-level coordinators, rather than the direct provision of services. Evaluation results show improvements in reading and mathematics test scores in WAZ schools. Although the grant program has now ended, Massachusetts has continued to promote the delivery of integrated student supports. The state funding process for Fiscal Year 2018 includes the Safe and Supportive Schools Commission, which was directed to incorporate "principles of effective practices for integrating student supports" into the tools it provides to districts. This approach is highly compatible with effective community schools implementation because it includes conducting needs assessments in key academic and nonacademic areas, integrating tailored resources to address individual student need, and developing districtwide support systems to ensure communication, collaboration, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

> "Improved interagency collaboration makes it easier to link/braid relevant funding streams in schools..."

**State support of interagency collaboration.** Regulatory support for the delivery of integrated student supports and improved interagency collaboration makes it easier to link/braid relevant funding streams in schools (e.g., Medicaid, TANF, housing assistance).

- In **Virginia**, the Comprehensive Services Act "provides for the pooling of eight specific funding streams to support services for high-risk youth. These funds are returned to the localities with a required state/local match and are managed by local interagency teams. The purpose of the act is to provide high-quality, child-centered, family-focused, cost-effective, community-based services to high-risk youth and their families." In addition, Virginia has also established the State Executive Council for Children's Services to assist with this collaborative process. These supports reflect the collaborative leadership that is necessary for successful implementation of a community schools strategy.

- **Washington** passed the Interlocal Cooperation Act to provide authorizing language for public agencies to share resources and engage in cooperative activities, including intergovernmental service contracting and joint facilities agreements. In 2016, House Bill 1541 established the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP) to promote the success of students by coordinating academic and nonacademic supports. The final protocol was released in 2017 by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning.

  In addition, the final report of the WISSP Commission offered several recommendations to make it easier for school staff to leverage outside resources to support students and families. These include revising or creating model policies to help districts partner more effectively with local health and human services agencies and community-based organizations; creating a state-level student support coordinating committee to increase

equity in access to whole-child supports; and providing targeted implementation support to pilot sites. All of these activities create an environment conducive to community schools implementation, in which state regulations are easing the way for schools to partner with community-based organizations and local government agencies in a collaborative problem-solving process to meet student needs.

- **West Virginia** has enacted legislative language requiring school districts to participate in and submit claims for Medicaid reimbursement for the delivery of health care services, thereby ensuring that the state pass through Medicaid funds directly to school districts and charter schools. The code also requires the State Board of Education to form a School Health Services Advisory Committee to draft recommendations on ways in which local education entities may improve their ability to provide Medicaid-eligible children with the school-based Medicaid services for which they are eligible. This type of interagency collaboration, which is fundamental to the community schools approach, maximizes the use of federal funds to facilitate the delivery of integrated student supports in schools.

**Municipal regulatory support for delivery of integrated student supports and ease of interagency collaboration.** These policies identify services available in different communities or require that schools plan to offer integrated student supports.

- In **Alameda County, CA**, a Community School Framework provides valuable support for the community school efforts in local school districts. In particular, the focus on coordination of various county agencies and departments and collaborative leadership structures at the county level—with bodies like the Alameda County Health Care Service Agency and the Office of Education—are essential for successful implementation. The framework articulates several collaborative elements and practices, including transformative leadership, capacity-building, dynamic partnerships, a shared vision and goals, and the importance of schools' connections to the surrounding community. (See Section II, "Fourth Pillar: Collaborative Leadership and Practices" for additional details.)

"State regulations are easing the way for schools to partner with community-based organizations and local government agencies..."

- A recent school board resolution from **Houston** directs the Superintendent of Schools to develop a framework—including a definition, processes, and goals—for community-based, integrated student supports and to codify the district's responsibilities regarding support and implementation of these services. This resolution is supported by the "Every Community, Every School" initiative, which works to connect schools to community resources and wraparound services. During the 2017–18 school year, the first cohort of nearly two dozen schools received support from full-time campus resource specialists who are charged with building relationships within their school, developing and managing partnerships with local service providers, and connecting students to needed services. In addition, each school is performing a comprehensive student and family needs assessment and an analysis of student data in order to develop an action plan tailored to its needs.

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## Implementation

High-quality implementation is a crucial determinant of positive program outcomes. High-quality programs do not happen by chance. They result from policy choices, resource allocations, and technical assistance that support both staff capacity and student participation. They also depend on active family and community engagement, which is addressed in Section II, "Third Pillar: Active Family and Community Engagement."

### Characteristics of high-quality implementation

The following guidance is derived from research into community schools and integrated student supports, as well as lessons learned from the field. Effective implementation of an integrated student supports strategy requires attention to several factors:

1. Make sure that integrated student supports are deeply connected to the other community school pillars and to the school's core instructional program. The administration of integrated student supports should be overseen by a well-prepared resource coordinator (or community school director) who works closely with a team comprised of students, parents, teachers, school staff, and representatives from community partner organizations. The provision of integrated student supports should be managed collaboratively, rather than by any one individual at a school site.

2. Find ways to connect providing integrated student supports with improving teaching and learning conditions schoolwide, including a positive climate in which students feel safe and cared for. Make attention to integrated student supports an essential element of teaching and learning, as they equip children to take full advantage of high-quality instruction by removing nonacademic barriers to learning. Including integrated student supports in school improvement plans can help them become more fully realized.

3. Recognize the value of creating a school environment in which providers of integrated student supports are a central part of the learning environment itself, rather than viewed as "extra" or "less than" teachers and other academically focused staff. One way to support this level of integration and partnership is by inviting providers to participate in schoolwide professional development, and to lead professional development for educators and other school-based staff on support services for students.

4. The organizational and operational infrastructure for providing integrated student supports should be aligned and developed across the school, district, and state department of education. They should also weave together school, home, and community resources, drawing from other public and not-for-profit sectors, such as housing, health, and children and family services, according to research by the UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools.

5. To be effective, integrated student supports should be geared to enhancing the capabilities, knowledge, skills, and assets of the child, the family, the community, and the school team. Effective plans include learning opportunities for students as well as service provision.

6. Supports and services should be designed to meet observable or measurable indicators of success so that progress can be monitored and plans can be revised as needed.

7. Provide sufficient flexibility to schools in their choice of services and in their implementation strategy. Successful schools tend to have an attitude of "doing whatever it takes" to support vulnerable students, working through setbacks toward achieving the goals established by a collaborative team.

## Endnotes


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## About The Partnership for the Future of Learning

The Partnership for the Future of Learning is a national network dedicated to an affirmative, equitable, evidence-based vision of a racially-just remodeled public education system. This playbook makes available research and tools to create a future of learning together, for all of us.

**Back Cover Photography**

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