



**PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

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## **Fact Sheet: Community Schools**

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### **WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?**

It is well understood that children living in poverty bring a wide range of needs to school each day. Many of these children face daunting challenges that significantly diminish their ability to engage at school. For some, painful conditions from hunger, to untreated dental disease, to homelessness make it difficult for them to attend school at all.

Schools are struggling to meet the ever-growing needs of students and families, yet schools have neither the resources nor expertise to provide all of the support necessary. The bottom line: schools are being asked to do more with less. They simply cannot meet these challenges alone, nor is it good policy to expect them to.

### **Community Schools—Improving School Success through Collaboration**

A community school is the result of collaboration between a school, community partners and local government. All of these entities join forces to make sure every child has access to the academic, health and social supports they need. The partners work together to identify and understand children's needs, as well as coordinate and leverage the necessary resources to address those needs.

A community school is not a program. It's a collaborative approach to supporting student success that includes such components as afterschool and summer programming, family engagement and support services, and physical and mental health services. A community school strives to be a full-spectrum resource for families and children, reflecting the needs of and becoming the center of the community.

### **THE CRITICAL NEED FOR STUDENT AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES**

It is clear that we must remove barriers to learning if we are going to truly make a dent in the achievement gap. A community schools approach isn't just an "add-on" we should think about in good times—it's a critical strategy we must employ if we ever hope to provide an equitable learning experience for all of California's children. A school district can significantly enhance its ability to educate when local government and community-based organizations apply their resources and expertise to collaboratively address the full range of student needs. Partnerships are critical to ensuring that schools can focus on academic success, while providing students and their families access to additional, necessary supports.

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The achievement gap is demonstrated by a variety of indicators beyond actual test scores:

**Attendance and Chronic Absence**

It is common sense that students need to be in school in order to learn. However, an alarming number of students miss significant amounts of school. Chronic absence occurs when a student misses 10% or more (nearly a month) of school over the course of a year for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences. Chronic absence—even in the early grades—is one of the best, early predictors of school failure and drop-out. Truancy is a measure of unexcused absences only.

- Nearly 1 in 4 (24.2%) California public school students were considered truant in 2009. (California Department of Education, DataQuest, October 2010).
- An analysis of student attendance in nine school districts across the country showed that 11% of kindergarteners and almost 9% of first graders were chronically absent (National Center for Children in Poverty, September 2008).
- An examination of literacy development among kindergarteners and first graders shows that chronic absence has a significantly greater negative impact on children living in poverty. (American Sociological Association, *Sociology of Education*, 2010)
- In the Los Angeles Unified School District, only 17% to 24% of chronically absent ninth-graders eventually graduated from high school. (Children Now, California Report Card 2011)

**Summer Learning Loss**

All children need summer learning opportunities in order to stay on course academically. The debilitating effect of an absence of summer learning and enrichment is often referred to as “summer slide.” Summer slide is characterized by measurable learning loss and significant achievement gaps between lower- and higher-income children. Reading loss is a telling example. Research has shown low-income children to be nearly three grade equivalents behind their more affluent peers in reading by the end of the fifth grade as a result of summer learning loss.

These gaps in achievement result in low-income youth being less likely to graduate from high school, to enter college, or to be successful later in life.

- Summer school is currently the largest provider of summer programming in California, but budget cuts have had a devastating effect on program availability (National Summer Learning Association, 2009).
- A study of five California cities revealed that nearly 75% of children and youth are not served by the most common providers of summer programming (NSLA, 2009).
- Research spanning 100 years shows that children experience learning loss when they do not engage in educational activities during the summer (White, 1906; Entwisle & Alexander, 1992; Cooper et al., 1996, Downey et al., 2004).
- The summer achievement gap affects low-income children disproportionately. Unequal summer learning opportunities during elementary school years are responsible for about two-thirds of the ninth-grade achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth. As a result, low-income youth are less likely to graduate from high school or enter college (Alexander et al., 2007).

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**High School Dropouts in California**

California's schools and communities must collaborate to address detrimental dropout rates.

- Approximately one in five (22%) California students dropped out by 12th grade in the 2008-09 school year (Children Now, California Report Card 2011).
- The four-year dropout rate is 37% for African Americans, 30% for Native Americans, 27% for Latinos, 25% for Pacific Islanders, 14% for whites, 11% for Filipinos, and 10% for Asians (Children Now, California Report Card 2011).

**Physical and Mental Health**

Health, mental health and community climate issues can have a significant negative impact on students' ability to make it to school and to be engaged when they do. Statistics show that multiple barriers exist:

***Asthma***

Asthma is one of the most prevalent health issues among California's children and youth. Low-income communities are disproportionately affected by asthma.

- Asthma is the leading cause of school absences and accounts for three times more lost schools days than any other cause (Journal of School Health, December 2008; UCLA Policy Brief, July 2008).
- Nearly 18% of California adolescents have asthma, which was responsible for an estimated 1.9 million missed days of school in 2005 (Journal of School Health, December 2008; UCLA Policy Brief, July 2008).
- In many counties, more than 20% of children have been diagnosed with asthma, including 23 % in Alameda, 21 % in Napa and 32% in Placer County (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research 2007; kidsdata.org).

***Mental Health***

Educationally relevant health disparities play a significant role in creating and perpetuating the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income children.

- Only 53% of California's children, ages 2-17, receive necessary mental health services. (U.S. Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007, National Survey of Children's Health).
- Roughly 15% of California's high school students report having seriously considered committing suicide within the past year. (WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey, 2007-09, Statewide Results: Main Report).
- 29% of seventh-graders, 32% of ninth-graders and 33% of 11th graders in California report feeling "so sad and hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more that [they] stopped doing some usual activities" (WestEd, California Healthy Kids Survey, 2007-09, Statewide Results: Main Report).
- Healthy Families offers mental health services to children, but only a small percentage (0.07% to 3.98%) access outpatient mental health services through qualified providers. (APS Healthcare, Inc. and San Jose State University, Final Report to California Managed Risk Medical Insurance Board: Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Provided by Health Plans Participating in the Healthy Families Program, 2010).