



PARTNERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Recommendations on Community Schools

**California Working Families Policy Summit
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INTRODUCTION

Every child holds the potential for great success in school and in life. It is our collective responsibility to surround our children and youth with the supports and the opportunities they need and deserve to live healthy, happy and productive lives. Key to the success and livelihood of California's children is the elimination of socioeconomic inequities and the closing of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income students. California's schools, school districts, local government agencies and communities must work together to improve overall achievement, increase graduation rates for all of our students, and ensure all students are prepared for college and careers.

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 impossible 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. Local government agencies with the resources and expertise to address social service and health needs must do their part to support children and families at schools.

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, and coordinate and leverage the necessary resources to address those needs.

A community school is not a program. It is a collaborative approach to supporting student success that includes such components as after school and summer programming, family engagement and support services, and physical- and mental-health services. The systems that comprise a community school evolve and change to respond to the specific needs of the school's students and families. A community school strives to be a full-spectrum resource for families and students, reflecting the unique needs of the community and becoming its center, or hub.

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POLICY OBJECTIVE #1

Design state-controlled funding mechanisms to foster community-school partnerships and to support corresponding systems change at the local level.

Background

Successful community school efforts require that local health and human services agencies partner with school districts to improve access to services in a meaningful way. This often necessitates redeployment of resources—using schools as the primary access point for services, either by providing services on site at the school or by establishing the school site as the functional source of referrals.

As the Governor and Legislature consider strategies to address the state's structural deficit, proposals to devolve a greater portion of health and human services funding to counties will likely arise (with corresponding funding caps to achieve cost savings). Central to such an approach is an exchange of increased funding in return for greater program flexibility. This presents an important opportunity to incentivize systems change that focuses on improvement of service delivery in terms of both access and effectiveness. More specifically, systems change and a corresponding cost savings could be accomplished by attaching a requirement on participating counties to coordinate with school districts in order to provide more integrated and less duplicative services, as well as early, more preventive interventions.

Recommended Actions

- A. Any devolution or realignment of funding from the state to county level in the health or human services sphere should include a requirement for county agencies to coordinate with school districts to provide better integrated and more preventative, family-centered services and supports.
- B. The Legislature should propose pilot programs that allow funding flexibility in health and human services programs in exchange for robust partnering between the county and its school districts serving the neediest communities.

POLICY OBJECTIVE #2

Replicate the cross-agency coordination and program/service integration required for successful community-school partnerships across agencies and programs at the state level.

Background

Most community school efforts emerge from the community taking a hard look at the large amounts of resources that have been invested into the same highly needy neighborhoods year after year – for relatively little or no positive results. Efficient use of scarce resources and real impact from services delivered arise very quickly as the motivating factors for partnering and aligning efforts. However, while this approach may seem compelling, it is not easy to partner effectively and for the long haul across government entities or even across departments within a single government entity. Funding silos and slow-to-change systems tend to impede collaboration. Therefore, state agencies must coordinate more effectively among themselves in order to help reduce barriers to local-level partnering.

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California has a long history of community school development through the Healthy Start program – established in 1991 through the Healthy Start Support Services for Children Act (SB 620). Healthy Start funding has since languished, but there is much to be gained by state agencies looking to the lessons learned from its successes, as well as its failure to make cross-agency coordination and resource maximization the norm.

The Healthy Start initiative gave grants to local education agencies (LEAs) to provide comprehensive, collaborative, school-linked supports and services to improve the health and academic performance of children, youth and their families. Since its inception, Healthy Start awarded over 1,400 planning and operational grants to LEAs and their collaborative partners, reaching more than 3,100 schools and over one million students. Despite its achievements, Healthy Start was never brought to scale as a school-reform or service-delivery strategy, even though over 80% of Healthy Start sites sustained their services after the end of their state grant funding (CDE, 2001).

Recommended Actions

- A. The Governor, Legislature and Superintendent of Public Instruction should be charged with promoting and implementing information sharing, collaboration, increased efficiency and improved service delivery among and within the state's child-serving agencies. This could be accomplished through an Interagency Children's Task Force or a Children's Cabinet to be co-convened by the Governor and the Superintendent for Public Instruction.
- B. The California Department of Education should provide technical assistance for planning, funding and evaluation of local community-school partnerships.
- C. The California Department of Education should encourage school districts to use Title 1 funds for coordination of community school partnerships.
- D. The California Department of Education should encourage school districts to use reimbursements from the Medi-Cal Administrative Activities (MAA) for coordination of community school partnerships.
- E. The California Department of Education and the California Department of Health Care Services should work together to ensure that California school districts are maximizing their ability to access Medicaid reimbursements through the LEA Billing Option.
- F. State legislators and the California Department of Education should continue to promote the inclusion of attendance data in the new statewide student data system (building on SB 1357, 2010) and promote the use of individual attendance as a measure of program effectiveness – especially to understand the impact of program integration.
- G. The Legislature should make policy changes to the Healthy Start program (SB 620, 1991) to lay the ground work for a more scalable program when funding for grants becomes available in future years.
- H. The Governor, Legislature and Superintendent of Public Instruction should advocate at the federal level for additional funding for the Full Service Community Schools program, the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and other like programs.

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POLICY OBJECTIVE #3

Enable more California children to attend summer and/or year-round academic and enrichment programs.

Background

Extensive, ongoing access for children and families to school sites and on-site resources is a critical component of the community school approach. A child's need for support services and meaningful learning experiences does not end in June when school doors typically close for summer vacation. Without opportunities during summer to reinforce and learn skills, children—especially children in low-income communities—fall behind dramatically in many areas of academic achievement. Additionally, the health of many low-income children is put at risk during the summer because they lose access to healthy school meals and organized physical activity.

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.

Recommended Actions

- A.** The Legislature should enable 21st Century Community Learning Centers and After School Education and Safety program grantees with summer supplemental grants to operate full-day summer programming, in line with research showing that full day programs provide more student benefit.
- B.** The new Superintendent of Public Instruction should place a high priority on summer learning and establish a workgroup to explore how summer learning programs can be built in California using research-based strategies. The Superintendent should build off of work done in 2010 by the Legislative Task Force on Summer and Intersession Enrichment.
- C.** The Superintendent and the Governor should advocate for increased federal investment and prioritization of summer learning programs through funding for the 21st CCLC program, Title 1, and reforms to Supplemental Education Services.