



ABC
Alliance for a
Better Community



**Southeast Los Angeles (SELA)
Education Transformation
Through Community Schools**
May 2026

Message from our CEO



“Community schools create environments where all students can thrive.”

Community schools have the potential to play a crucial role in addressing educational inequities by providing holistic support for students, families, and communities. Access to these support systems is essential, especially in the current political landscape, where funding and policy decisions disproportionately impact under-resourced communities.

As national discourse around public education intensifies, the role community schools play as community hubs becomes evermore vital for academic excellence, authentic family engagement, and for the wellbeing of our students and community. By offering a proactive and inclusive response to the challenges our communities face, community schools create environments where all students can thrive.

Community schools reflect and support the values of their surrounding communities and exemplify resilience during uncertain times, adapting to local needs and reinforcing our vision for an inclusive education.

In Solidarity,

Handwritten signature of Vanessa Aramayo in black ink.

Vanessa Aramayo
CEO and President

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California Community School Partnership Program

The California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) is a state-led initiative to support the development and growth of community schools throughout California. By providing grants and resources, the program promotes partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to create a unified system of support that addresses students' academic, social, emotional, and health needs, enriching their educational experience. Part of the broader national community schools movement, the CCSPP champions the concept of schools as central hubs for community life. This movement focuses on upholding the four pillars of the Community School Model: integrating student support services, expanding learning opportunities, engaging families and communities, and fostering collaborative leadership. Community schools work to enhance student outcomes and build stronger communities by coordinating local resources and services.

The CCSPP initiative was rolled out in the Spring of 2022 with an initial investment of \$4.1 billion and upwards in planning and implementation grants to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) (California Department of Education, 2023). The state legislature approved four additional funding rounds, with funding for the four cohorts set to expire in 2030 (California Department of Education, 2023). The CCSPP investment is now one of the largest in the country, meaning that schools across the State of California will be growing and implementing the four pillars of the Community School Model, which is research-backed. The four pillars are critical in implementing the model with fidelity.

Research has consistently demonstrated that the Community School (CS) Model positively impacts student achievement, showcasing the effectiveness of this comprehensive approach. A 2020 study by the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) revealed that well-implemented community schools improve academic outcomes, particularly for students from low-income families. The study found that schools adhering closely to the four pillars experienced significant gains in student performance. For instance, community schools have been associated with an increase in graduation rates and academic achievement, including a 10% increase in math and reading scores (Learning Policy Institute, 2020). Additionally, data from the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) highlighted that CS models create conditions that bolster attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism, both of which are linked to academic improvements (NEPC, 2019). These findings underscore the transformative potential of community schools in enhancing educational equity and outcomes.

Four Pillars of the Community Schools Model



Family & Community Engagement



Collaborative Leadership & Practice



Integrated Student Supports



Expanded Learning Times & Opportunities

About Southeast Los Angeles (SELA)

Alliance for a Better Community’s (ABC) research initiative in the Southeast Los Angeles (SELA) region emerges from a critical recognition of the systemic challenges and untapped potential within this vibrant yet underserved community. By focusing our study on SELA, we aim to illuminate the complex socioeconomic landscape that has historically been marginalized and to document the resilience of its community. Our research seeks not only to document the existing challenges but to center the narratives, experiences, and innovative community-driven solutions that have emerged from SELA’s diverse, predominantly first-generation immigrant population. Through this focused examination, we intend to provide a comprehensive understanding of the region’s unique strengths, ongoing struggles, and the critical importance of targeted, community-centered investments in transforming urban ecosystems.

According to the “2021: The SELA Agenda” report by the SELA Collaborative, a nonprofit organization, SELA consists of “a series of independent cities and unincorporated areas with a demonstrated history of resilience and self-reliance.” The region’s 440,000 residents identify primarily as Latina/o (90%) and first-generation immigrants (43%). SELA has faced decades of underinvestment, which has led to detrimental challenges, including unstable housing, underperforming schools, poor access to adequate healthcare, and overall civic disenfranchisement. This region has also been included in Loyola Marymount’s Center for the Study of Los Angeles as a civic desert, or a community with declining and low voter turnout and little opportunity for civic engagement¹.

The SELA community has historically been underinvested due to a combination of factors, including socio-economic, political, and structural challenges. This disinvestment can be traced back to the practice of redlining, where banks and financial institutions systematically denied loans and services to neighborhoods predominantly inhabited by people of color². This led to a lack of economic development, deteriorating infrastructure, and limited access to essential services. As noted, SELA is home to a largely Latina/o population with a significant portion being first-generation immigrants.

These communities often face socio-economic challenges, such as lower household incomes, higher rates of poverty, fewer investments in broadband and public infrastructure, and limited access to education and healthcare. These factors contribute to the difficulty in attracting investment and resources to the area as businesses and developers may perceive the community as less economically viable despite the opposite being true. The broader economic inequality in the Los Angeles area continues to play a role in the underinvestment in SELA. Wealth and resources have been concentrated in more affluent neighborhoods with policy decisions reinforcing this disparity by prioritizing more economically developed areas for infrastructure improvements and business incentives.



¹ Loyola Marymount University. n.d. “LA County Civic Deserts - Loyola Marymount University.” Accessed November 13, 2024. <https://academics.lmu.edu/study/da/releases/maps/lacounty/civicsdeserts/>.

² “Bank to Pay \$31M for Avoiding Mortgages to Minorities, Largest Such Settlement in U.S. History.” 2023. PBS News. January 12, 2023.

Report Overview



This report explores the perspectives and experiences of families and community members in the SELA area regarding community schools. The discussions with SELA families revealed a strong consensus on the importance of community schools in fostering inclusive, supportive, and resource-rich environments. Families emphasized the value of these schools in providing essential services, facilitating family involvement, and creating a welcoming atmosphere for all community members.

Key challenges identified include the unmet demand for mental health services, communication barriers for non-English speaking families and students, skepticism from elected officials about budget cuts affecting community schools, and the crucial need for effective communication between teachers and families.

First, expanding mental health services is essential. This includes increasing the number of qualified professionals and ensuring adequate

resources are available to support students' well-being. In parallel, schools must implement robust multilingual support systems to provide clear, effective, and culturally sensitive communication with students and families of all backgrounds. Transparency is crucial in building trust and fostering strong relationships among school staff, families, community leaders, and partners.

Additionally, schools should provide culturally responsive programs and workshops tailored to the diverse needs of their communities. These offerings should engage both students and families, creating inclusive spaces for learning, healing, and connection.

The pandemic has made family engagement more difficult, highlighting why strong communication and empathetic interactions between schools and families are crucial. When addressing challenges or implementing new tools, programs, or services to support success and engagement, families and students must be active participants in the decision-making process.

The community has expressed clear desires for holistic education that supports students' academic, emotional, and physical well-being. This includes access to after-school programs, mental health support, arts and sports programs, nutrition programs, and reliable high-speed internet.

Families have consistently expressed that warm greetings on campus, supportive Parent Centers, and the presence of Spanish-speaking faculty significantly enhance their sense of being welcomed and valued. In contrast, language barriers, perceived indifference from school staff, and lack of access—or outright exclusion—from programs contribute to feelings of isolation and disengagement. While there have been improvements, schools must prioritize these straightforward but powerful changes to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for all families by committing to taking the small, intentional actions that can have a deep and lasting impact on family engagement.



"When you go to a school with a question or a problem and the school advises you to come another day, it is frustrating because as parents, we may have taken a day off from work to be at the school. We have commitments as well."

Elizabeth Learning Center, Parent Leader

Growing the number of community schools in SELA is a vital step in meeting the needs of students and families in the region. Research and case studies show that the Community Schools Model can transform educational environments when implemented correctly and centered on community voices. For instance, an evaluation by the RAND Corporation of the New York City Community Schools Initiative, along with a review of 143 studies, suggests that community schools can increase attendance, reduce chronic absenteeism, decrease suspensions, improve school climate, boost academic performance, increase graduation rates, and improve peer and adult relationships. (US Dept of Education) In New York City, community schools reported significant academic and behavioral improvements, including higher attendance rates and test scores (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018). These examples underscore how this approach can foster a more inclusive, supportive, and engaged educational environment, ultimately strengthening bonds between schools and families and paving the way for more vibrant communities and more prosperous futures for all.

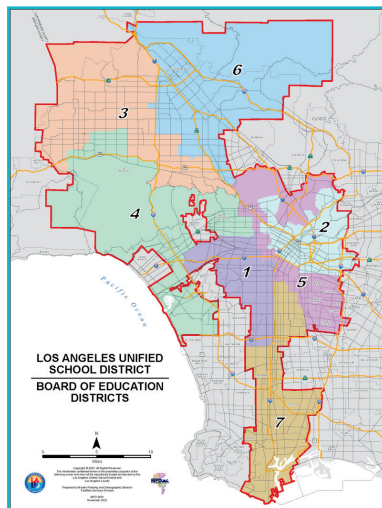
Policy Opportunity & Equity

The California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) aims to enhance educational experiences by integrating academic, health, and social services at school sites. Our examination of key documents, such as the [CCSPP Framework](#) and the Request for Applications (RFA), offered a thorough understanding of the framework's goals and fundamental implementation strategies. These documents highlight the critical role of building partnerships between schools, families, and community organizations to meet the varied needs of students. The framework promotes a holistic approach to the four pillars of the Community School Model. When implemented, these pillars can transform SELA by addressing its unique assets and challenges through integrated support systems, enhanced academic opportunities, increased family and community engagement, resource leveraging, trust-building, and cultural inclusivity. This comprehensive approach can help create a more equitable, resilient, and thriving community for all its residents.

While the Community School Model can be invaluable to schools and the broader community, notable inequity exists in how this state investment has been implemented locally in regions such as the SELA community. This disparity suggests that while the model's benefits are recognized, there are challenges in ensuring equitable and effective application across all schools. Addressing these inconsistencies is crucial to maximizing the Community School Model's benefit and ensuring that all students and families in SELA can benefit from the support it provides and the transformation it can have in a local community.

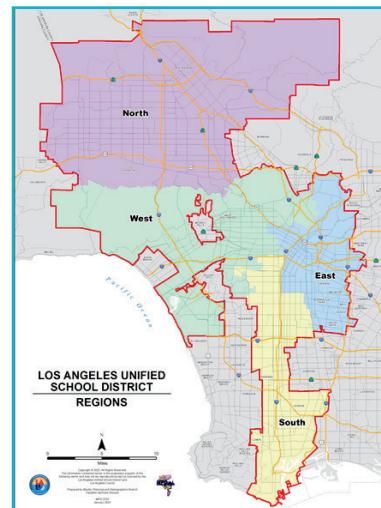
To highlight the lack of investment in the SELA region, we conducted a detailed analysis of existing CCSPP school site investments within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LA Unified). Our analysis aimed to identify critical areas of need and measure the gaps in resources and support, underscoring the necessity for increased investment in community school initiatives in SELA. The data below illustrate the distribution of community schools within LA Unified, mapped by Board District boundaries. It is worth noting that Board District 5 (BD5), which encompasses part of the Southeast Los Angeles community, is the second largest district, serving 73,400 students, following only Board District 7 (BD7) with 75,351 students (LAUSD Open Data, 2024). Despite this significant student population, the analysis highlights a disproportionate investment in the Southeast Los Angeles area, emphasizing the urgent need for more targeted resources and support for community school initiatives. This disparity becomes evident when examining the number of students in Board District 1 (BD1), which has the highest concentration of community schools despite having the fewest students (LAUSD Open Data, 2024). In 2024, BD1 served 44,858 students across 96 schools, meaning approximately 16.7% of its schools benefit from the Community Schools Model. In contrast, Board District 5 (BD5), which has 136 schools, sees only 6.6% of its schools receiving the additional investments provided by the CCSPP. Notably, BD3 and BD7 also experience significant disparities, with just 2% and 5.4% of their schools, respectively, designated as community schools. However, this report focuses specifically on BD5 and the Southeast Los Angeles (SELA) community.

LA Unified Current Community Schools



- District 1
- District 2
- District 3
- District 4
- District 5
- District 6
- District 7
- Total: 70

LA Unified Community Schools by Region



- West 18
- East 22
- South 16
- North 14

Current SELA Community Schools

- Walnut Park Elementary
- Ellen Ochoa Learning Center
- Lucille Roybal-Allard Elementary
- Miramonte Elementary
- Diego Rivera Learning Complex
 - Public Service
 - Communication and Technology School

SELA is currently home to only 5 of the 70 community schools in LA Unified. The SELA community, split between the "South" and "East" districts, has notably fewer community schools compared to the "West" and unrepresented portions of the "East" districts. This disparity highlights a significant imbalance in the distribution of educational resources and support services across different regions. Community schools are designed to provide comprehensive support that addresses students' academic, social, and emotional needs by integrating health services, after-school programs, and family engagement initiatives. The underrepresentation of community schools in SELA suggests that students and families in this area are not receiving the same level of holistic support and opportunities available in other local districts.



This lack of investment in the SELA region is particularly concerning given the socio-economic challenges many families face, including high rates of poverty and limited access to essential services. According to the California Department of Education (CDE, 2023), community schools that are equipped with holistic support services see significant improvements in student outcomes, such as increased attendance rates and academic achievement. Without these necessary supports—including mental health counseling, nutritional programs, academic support, and extracurricular activities—students in SELA may miss critical services essential for their development and well-being. Data from the Learning Policy Institute (2020) underscores that well-implemented community schools lead to better student engagement and reduced behavioral issues, both of which are vital for overall school effectiveness.

Additionally, the limited number of community schools in SELA can strain existing community schools, contributing to increased staff workload and higher risks of burnout, which impacts teaching quality and student support (Coalition for Community Schools, 2018). This imbalance further exacerbates resource disparities compared to more adequately funded regions within LA Unified. With BD5 serving 73,400 students and facing such challenges, the need for more targeted funding becomes evident (LA Unified Open Data, 2024).

Investing in more community schools in SELA would address these inequities by providing comprehensive services that foster educational equity and strengthen community resilience. Comprehensive studies of family engagement in the context of community schools have also found positive effects. In a study of Redwood City community schools, students whose families participated in support services improved their attendance by 40% (NEPC, 2017). By addressing these disparities and strengthening family and community engagement, policymakers and academic leaders can work toward balanced educational opportunities, ensuring every student has the chance to thrive.

CA's Four Cornerstone Commitments

California policy leaders have prioritized equity within the CCSPP framework, embedding it in statute, principle, and practice through the foundational CA's Four Cornerstone Commitments.

1) A Commitment to Assets-Driven and Strength-Based Practice, 2) A Commitment to Racially Just and Restorative School Climates, 3) A Commitment to Powerful, Culturally Proficient and Relevant Instruction, and 4) A Commitment to Shared Decision Making and Participatory Practices. These commitments align with consistent themes from the initial community engagement process (California Department of Education, 2021).

Equity is the core foundational value in all aspects of the CCSPP. The Request for Applications for the CA CCSPP was intentionally designed to support an equity-driven, place-based initiative. Given this commitment, it is essential to ensure that resources are distributed and pursued equitably at the local level, particularly in underinvested areas such as Southeast Los Angeles (SELA). A prime example of the transformative impact of CCSPP investment can be seen at Oakland International High School (OIHS) in California, which serves recently arrived immigrant students. By integrating comprehensive support services, including academic, social, and health programs, OIHS has achieved higher graduation rates and improved academic performance (EdPolicyINCA, 2024). Additionally, newcomer students at Oakland International drop out at half the rate they do at other district schools, and roughly 63 percent graduate, compared to just 40 percent of newcomer students districtwide (PACE, 2023).

Ensuring that SELA receives its fair share of funding and resources can help to address long-standing disparities and promote educational equity across the state. This includes not only increasing the number of community schools in the area but also ensuring these schools receive continuous support to enhance their effectiveness. By embedding equity into every aspect of the CCSPP - ensuring that is not treated as an afterthought but as a fundamental component in decision-making, resource allocation, implementation, and evaluation - and maintaining a steadfast commitment to the Four Cornerstone Commitments, California can bridge gaps, foster community resilience, and ensure all students have the support and opportunities needed to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

Focus Group and Family Survey Design and Participant Outreach

The preparation for focus groups involved several critical steps to ensure that the space was welcoming, that participants felt included, and that discussions would be productive and provide valuable insights into the community's perspectives on community schools.

Tool Development

A comprehensive focus group protocol was developed to guide the discussions. This tool included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about participants' experiences, needs, and suggestions related to community schools. The tool was crafted to encourage honest and open dialogue, allowing participants to share their thoughts freely. In addition, a family survey consisting of 27 questions (Open-ended and closed-ended, in English and Spanish) was created and distributed to SELA families.

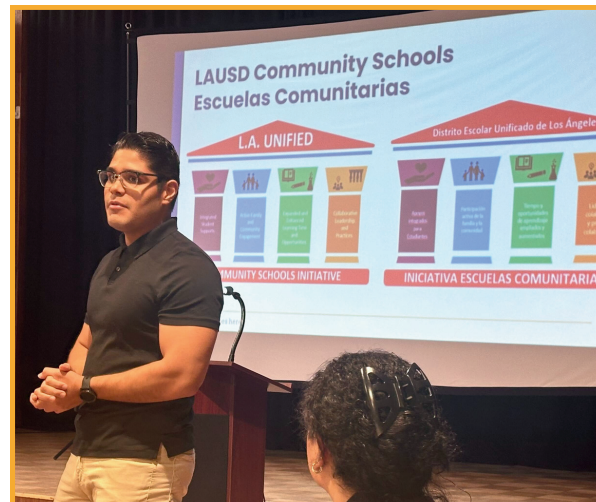
Purpose and Design of the Focus Group Protocol

The purpose of the focus group protocol was to gather qualitative data that would inform the development and enhancement of community schools in SELA. The protocol design focused on critical areas such as welcoming environments, accessibility, family involvement, and the types of programs and services that would benefit students and families the most. Specific questions were crafted to delve into these areas, providing a comprehensive understanding of what community members value and what improvements they believe are necessary. In addition, to ensure inclusivity and cultural responsiveness, focus groups were conducted primarily in Spanish with English translation provided upon request.

This approach acknowledged the linguistic diversity of the SELA community and aimed to make all participants feel comfortable, included, and respected. The discussions were structured to cover all relevant topics while allowing for flexibility, enabling participants to explore issues in depth and bring up additional points of importance to them.

Outreach Efforts

An extensive outreach campaign was launched to inform families and community members about the focus groups. This campaign utilized various channels, including social media, local community centers, schools, and direct communication from community leaders. Additionally, a peer-to-peer outreach effort was utilized to share the opportunity among parent/community leaders. Scheduling was coordinated to accommodate the availability of participants, ensuring maximum attendance and engagement. Through these efforts, the focus groups were organized to gather essential feedback that would help shape the future of community schools in SELA.



Luis Lopez, ABC's Policy & Advocacy Coordinator, leads a conversation with SELA parents.

The preparation for these focus groups was thorough and intentional, designed to create an environment where community members felt valued, included, and heard. Ultimately, the focus groups consisted of a total of 19 participants, while the family survey was completed by 58 respondents and by combining detailed focus group discussions with a broad-based family survey, the initiative aimed to gather rich, nuanced data that would guide the development of community schools in SELA, ensuring they are tailored to meet the specific needs and aspirations of the community. This approach is one that school leaders themselves could replicate as they continue to do community outreach during the community school implementation phases.

Community and Key Stakeholder Engagement

Community partner organizations were engaged through the Alliance for a Better Community (ABC) SELA Community Schools Advisory Committee (hereafter referred to as the CS Advisory Committee) and other coalitions. Nonprofit organizations play a crucial role as trusted messengers in creating space for conversations to help support the development and implementation of expanding community schools in the Southeast Los Angeles area.

The primary objectives of the CS Advisory Committee meetings are to strengthen capacities by gathering insights, discussing strategies, and fostering collaboration among various stakeholders, including local families, community leaders, educators, direct service providers, and local organizations. These meetings aim to ensure that the community schools model aligns with the specific needs and priorities of the SELA community. Its goal is to dive into existing best practices that are already taking place within the SELA community and support with scaling and cross-coordination across public sector partners.

Critical Services

During the CS Advisory Committee meetings, participants discussed various topics, including identifying critical services needed in SELA schools, strategies for increasing family involvement, and ways to leverage community resources effectively. Discussions also focused on the importance of cultural and linguistic inclusivity, health and social services integration, and the development of expanded learning programs that support student well-being and academic achievement.

In addition to the needs identified by the CS Advisory Committee, the parent survey results revealed that parents want to see more of the following types of programming and services in SELA schools in order to help scholars succeed:



Career exploration programs particularly in the STEM fields.



After-school tutoring to support academic advancement.



Programs that teach students about civics, financial empowerment, technology, and college readiness.



Mental health services and programs that offer emotional support for young people.



Free or low cost enrichment programs that expose students to sports, the arts and culture.



Access to fast, affordable, and reliable internet services.



“In SELA, we want more programs like GEAR UP that help middle school students become motivated and prepared for college. Parents also need to know what students need to go to local and state colleges and universities.”

SELA High School Parent

Economic Challenges

In addition to academic and enrichment programs, a significant portion of survey participants, 47%, shared that some of the biggest challenges facing them, their families, or the community during the COVID-19 pandemic were job loss or reduced income. This indicates that nearly half of the respondents faced economic hardship, highlighting the financial strain on many families and influencing various aspects of community life and stability. While the pandemic may feel as though it is behind us, the high percentage of participants reporting economic challenges underscores the critical need for community schools to provide support services beyond academics and enrichment.

However, it is unrealistic for schools to address the economic needs of families on their own. This is where robust partnerships with community-based organizations and experts become essential. These partnerships allow schools to leverage resources and specialized expertise to address the diversity and specificity of community needs effectively. Community schools can act as hubs for learning, and social and economic support by integrating services such as job assistance programs, financial literacy workshops, and other vital resources through these partnerships.

The challenges families faced during the pandemic reinforce the importance of a holistic approach to education. This approach can help mitigate the adverse effects of external factors on students' educational outcomes. Policymakers and educational leaders should consider these findings when developing strategies for community schools. Together with the support of strategic community partnerships, schools can ensure they are better equipped and resourced to address the variety of economic needs of families that can lead to more resilient communities and create better educational environments for students.

Need for Digital Equity

Another glaring need that exposed the lack of adequate resources for families in the SELA community was a lack of access to fast, affordable, and reliable internet services and technology. The survey data underscores the critical role that internet connectivity plays in enabling essential activities such as remote work, education, and access to virtual telehealth.

Another large portion of respondents (44%) reported that insufficient internet access significantly hindered their ability to engage in remote work and learning. This finding reflects the growing reliance on internet connectivity for daily activities. The inability to access reliable internet likely results in reduced productivity, job performance challenges, and potentially, economic instability for those affected. Respondents also indicated their children's online learning was adversely affected by poor internet access. The findings reveal a persistent digital divide that continues to affect educational equity, particularly for students in underserved communities. The lack of reliable internet can impede students' ability to participate in virtual classes, complete assignments, and access educational resources and economic opportunities for youth, potentially widening the achievement gap.



A significant 28% of respondents indicated that they experienced difficulties in all of the areas above – remote work, online learning, and telehealth – due to poor internet access. This points to the widespread and multifaceted impact of inadequate internet services on daily life, affecting multiple domains simultaneously and compounding the challenges faced by individuals and families. An additional 3.4% of respondents cited other unspecified challenges related to inadequate internet access. This category suggests that there are further, perhaps more niche, impacts that are not captured by the primary categories but are still significant enough to be noted by respondents. The high percentage of respondents who reported challenges in multiple areas underscores the critical need for improved internet infrastructure, particularly in underserved communities.

These findings underscore the importance of investing in reliable, affordable, and fast internet services for policymakers and stakeholders. This will support economic stability, educational equity, and access to essential goods and services. Addressing these issues is crucial not only for individual well-being but also for broader community resilience and development. It is important to note that despite efforts to be as comprehensive as possible, limitations in digital literacy and access to information may have impacted the accuracy of responses and the level of participation. Digital literacy and equity continue to be a barrier for many.



Need for Collaboration

The key takeaways from the meetings with focus group participants and the CS Advisory Committee underscored the necessity of a collaborative approach to developing community schools. Participants emphasized the importance of building strong relationships between schools and community organizations, ensuring that programs and services are accessible and inclusive, and maintaining ongoing communication with families to foster trust and engagement. Noting that partnerships with nonprofits and other experts will help alleviate demand on schools to address a variety of issues. The committee also recognized the need to tailor community school initiatives to address the unique challenges and opportunities within SELA.

Community members expressed a strong desire to enhance school partnerships and build trust within the community. The Community School Model and the four pillars provide a framework for implementing these key strategies alongside the community. By taking the voices of those most directly impacted into account, the Community School Model, if implemented appropriately, can facilitate this collaborative process and address the specific needs of the SELA area.

Key Local Leader and Elected Input

In addition, a series of strategic meetings were conducted with essential community stakeholders. These included both one-on-one meetings and group discussions with local leaders and elected officials. The primary objective of these interactions was to glean insights from the broader community vision, identify collective goals, and assess the resources necessary to secure support and involvement from influential stakeholders. These consultations were pivotal in aligning the project's direction with community expectations and ensuring robust stakeholder engagement. Additionally, they served as an opportunity to open up the line of communication between local elected officials and school leaders to promote the seamless integration of services between public entities.

The meetings with key community leaders and elected officials revealed a spectrum of familiarity and support for the Community School Model and its funding mechanism. Some officials had limited knowledge and expressed skepticism, particularly concerning funding and implementation logistics. Others were more informed and supportive, citing examples of successful community schools and expressing interest in leveraging the model to address specific community needs, such as creating technology centers.

Common themes emerging from the meetings and discussions highlighted the need for cultural sensitivity, effective communication, and collaboration between schools and community organizations. Concerns were raised about the workload for school principals, especially those nearing retirement, and the importance of securing buy-in from new leadership. Officials appreciated the outreach efforts and emphasized the importance of keeping them updated on the progress and impacts of community schools in their respective areas. Overall, the meetings underscored the importance of building strong relationships with community leaders to support and sustain the development of community schools in SELA. The Community School Model encourages cross-collaboration across schools, government, community organizations, families, and students.



Emerging Themes and Recommendations

The themes that emerged from the focus group discussions and one-on-one meetings with families, community members, and elected officials were organized according to the four pillars of the Community Schools Model: Integrated Student Support, Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities, Active Family and Community Engagement, and Collaborative Leadership and Practices. The following are recommendations based on the identified themes and input gathered from these conversations.



Integrated Student Supports

Existing Challenges

Recommendation

Mental Health Support

There is a strong demand for mental health services to help students navigate their emotions and mental well-being.

Expand Mental Health Services

Increase the availability of mental health professionals and school resources to support students' emotional and psychological needs. As the American School Counselor Association recommends, schools should aim to have a student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1.

Language Barriers

Communication barriers are a significant issue, particularly for non-English speaking families and students.

Multilingual Communication Channels

Multilingual Communication Channels: Implement multilingual support systems, including bilingual staff and translated materials, to ensure effective communication with all families and students.

Lack of Asset-Based Language

Failing to use language that recognizes and builds on the strengths of communities can reinforce deficits, overlook cultural wealth, and limit empowerment and inclusion.

Asset-Based Narratives

Prioritize asset-based language when discussing and working with multilingual learners and their families. This approach has improved family engagement and student outcomes (American Institutes for Research, 2017).

Lack of Digital Equity

Currently, there is a lack of adequate high-speed, reliable, and affordable internet.

Promote Digital Equity

Ensure that every community school has high-speed internet access available not just during school hours but also during evenings and weekends. This access can be extended to the community by making school Wi-Fi available in surrounding areas or by providing hotspots to families in need.

Community Resource Hubs

Schools should serve as hubs for community services and resources accessible to all community members.

Community Resource Integration

Strengthen the role of schools as community resource hubs by providing accessible services and resources to support families. Partnerships with local organizations can enhance the range and quality of services available to the community (Coalition for Community Schools, 2020).

Other Community Partner Recommendations

Increase in Health Care navigators and more citizenship and immigration services in local schools for students.



Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities

Existing Challenges

Recommendation

After-School Programs

There is a high demand for after-school tutoring and enrichment programs, including art, music, sports, and technology classes.



Develop After-School Programs

Establish various after-school programs to provide students with additional academic support and enrichment opportunities. Various community partners with existing ties and understanding of the SELA local community exist and are ready to collaborate on these programs.

Summer and Enrichment Programs

Families expressed a need for enrichment activities beyond the regular curriculum, including financial literacy and college preparation workshops.



Introduce Enrichment Activities

Offer diverse enrichment programs that cater to students' interests and developmental needs, such as arts, sports, technology, and life skills.



College Preparation Workshops

Implement workshops to prepare students for higher education, covering financial aid, college applications, dual enrollment opportunities, and career planning. Provide college access information across the k-12 pipeline, creating various entry points for families and students to access information and resources.

Interest in Technology Centers

Local officials expressed interest in creating tech centers as part of the community school model.



Create Technology Centers

Explore opportunities to establish school tech centers to provide students and the community with access to computer labs and additional resources. These efforts can support digital learning and community development.

Workshops for Families

There is high interest in practical workshops for families, including technology, financial literacy, and civic engagement.



Offer Family Workshops

Provide a variety of workshops for families to arm them with the skills and knowledge to support their children's education and development. Workshops should be hosted with family availability and accommodations in mind, considerations include time, language translation, and childcare, amongst others.

Other Community Partner Recommendations

Increase early job exposure with strategies including but not limited to; career clinics, shadowing, and internships to offer an alternative pathway to college and also leverage existing industries in Los Angeles County like film, biotech, aviation, and green economy careers.



Active Family and Community Engagement

Existing Challenges

Recommendation

Welcoming Environment

The importance of a welcoming environment, starting with greetings and a positive customer service experience.



Foster a Welcoming Environment

Train school staff to create a welcoming atmosphere through friendly greetings, personalized interactions, and respectful communication. This approach can make families feel valued and more willing to engage with the school (National PTA, 2016).

Family Involvement

Families feel their opinions are often undervalued or ignored in school decision-making processes, even when they are part of school site councils and other committees.



Inclusive Decision-Making

Create more inclusive and transparent committee structures to ensure family voices are heard and valued in decision-making. Providing multiple avenues for family engagement—such as advisory councils, focus groups, surveys, listening sessions, and town halls—can ensure diverse perspectives are represented. Involving parents and families in meaningful ways can enhance school governance and student outcomes (Harvard Family Research Project, 2018).

Community Outreach

Elected officials appreciated outreach efforts and expressed the need for continuous updates and involvement in the community school process.



Maintain Community Outreach

Regularly update local officials and community members about the progress and developments of community schools to ensure their continued support and involvement. Transparent and frequent communication and ongoing engagement are key to building trust and collaboration.

Teacher Communication

The relationship and communication between teachers and families are crucial for student success.

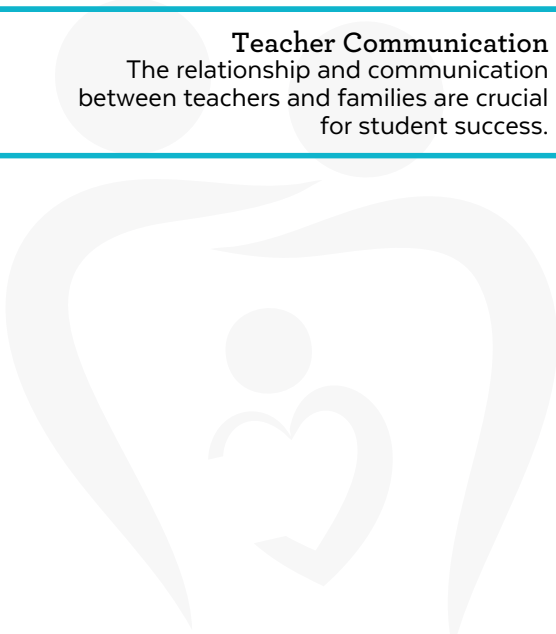


Building Relationships

Foster solid and reciprocal relationships between school staff and families to ensure consistent and comprehensive student support. Initiatives like regular parent-teacher meetings and community-building events can improve these relationships (Harvard Family Research Project, 2018).

Other Community Partner Recommendations

Affordable childcare, mental health resources, training/workshops for families on basic functionalities of the schools. Scheduling school meetings at times that accommodate families' availability which could include morning and evening meetings with proper interpretation services and translated resources available for families.





Collaborative Leadership

Existing Challenges

Recommendation

Trust and Respect

Trust issues between families and school staff, often due to perceived disrespect and lack of effective communication.



Build Trust and Respect

Develop trust-building initiatives that promote mutual respect and effective communication between families and school staff. Programs such as restorative practices and regular forums can help build a positive school environment (Harvard Family Research Project, 2018).

Skepticism about Workload

Concerns were raised about the workload involved in implementing the Community School Model for principals.



Support School Leaders and Key Community Model Staff

Provide adequate training and resources for principals to manage the Community School Model's implementation effectively. Engage with incoming principals early to ensure smooth transitions. Adequate support and resources are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of community school initiatives (National Education Policy Center, 2020).

Skepticism of LA Unified

Elected officials expressed skepticism about LA Unified's budget cuts impacting community schools.



Address Skepticism

Communicate community school funding sources and budget allocations to build trust and transparency with stakeholders, including local officials. Providing detailed budget reports and holding public forums can enhance accountability and stakeholder confidence (National Education Policy Center, 2020).

Other Community Partner Recommendations

Increase opportunities for student leadership & involvement in the decision-making process in allocation of resources.



Conclusion

By maximizing the “community” component of the Community Schools Model, school leaders and faculty will be better supported in addressing the avalanche of challenges our students and families face. There are Community Based Organizations (CBOs), public and private agencies that can help share in the responsibility of our students’ success.

By addressing the identified themes and implementing the recommendations within the four pillars of the Community Schools Model, schools in the SELA region can create more inclusive, supportive, and engaging environments for students and their families. Effective communication, mutual respect, comprehensive support programs, and active community engagement are key to fostering a positive and collaborative school community.

Regular outreach and updates to local officials and community partners will also ensure sustained support and involvement in community school initiatives. This approach aligns with the community schools model, which emphasizes partnerships and holistic support to meet the needs of students and their families, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes and stronger community ties. SELA schools can thrive as vibrant, collaborative, and supportive learning environments by leveraging the collective resources and expertise of educators, community-based organizations, families, community members, and local government.

The Community Schools Model offers the ingredients necessary to create a community and systems that facilitate impactful change and investments within schools. Addressing the themes above and pairing them with a results-driven recommendation can be the beginning of growing relationships across the various sectors. This work cannot be done by one particular group or entity. School leaders operate under distress post-pandemic, stretching limited financial and human capital resources. Community leaders in SELA have long organized around shared goals, but institutions must now be held accountable for addressing the persistent disinvestment in the region. Equitable change will only come when systems shift their priorities and resources toward the communities most impacted. The community holds the solutions and has waited long enough. We are out of time. When implemented effectively, the Community Schools Model offers a critical opportunity to deliver the resources and support SELA students and families deserve, and to begin repairing decades of systemic neglect.



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