

Framework: Essentials for Community School Transformation

Acknowledgments

This resource was published as part of the Community Schools Forward project. This project is a collaboration between the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution (CUE), the Children’s Aid National Center for Community Schools (NCCS), the Coalition for Community Schools (CCS) at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), and the Learning Policy Institute (LPI). Funding for this project was provided by the Ballmer Group. We are grateful to them for their generous support.

The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Core operating support for LPI is provided by the Heising-Simons Foundation, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Raikes Foundation, Sandler Foundation, and MacKenzie Scott. The ideas voiced here are those of the authors and not those of our funders.

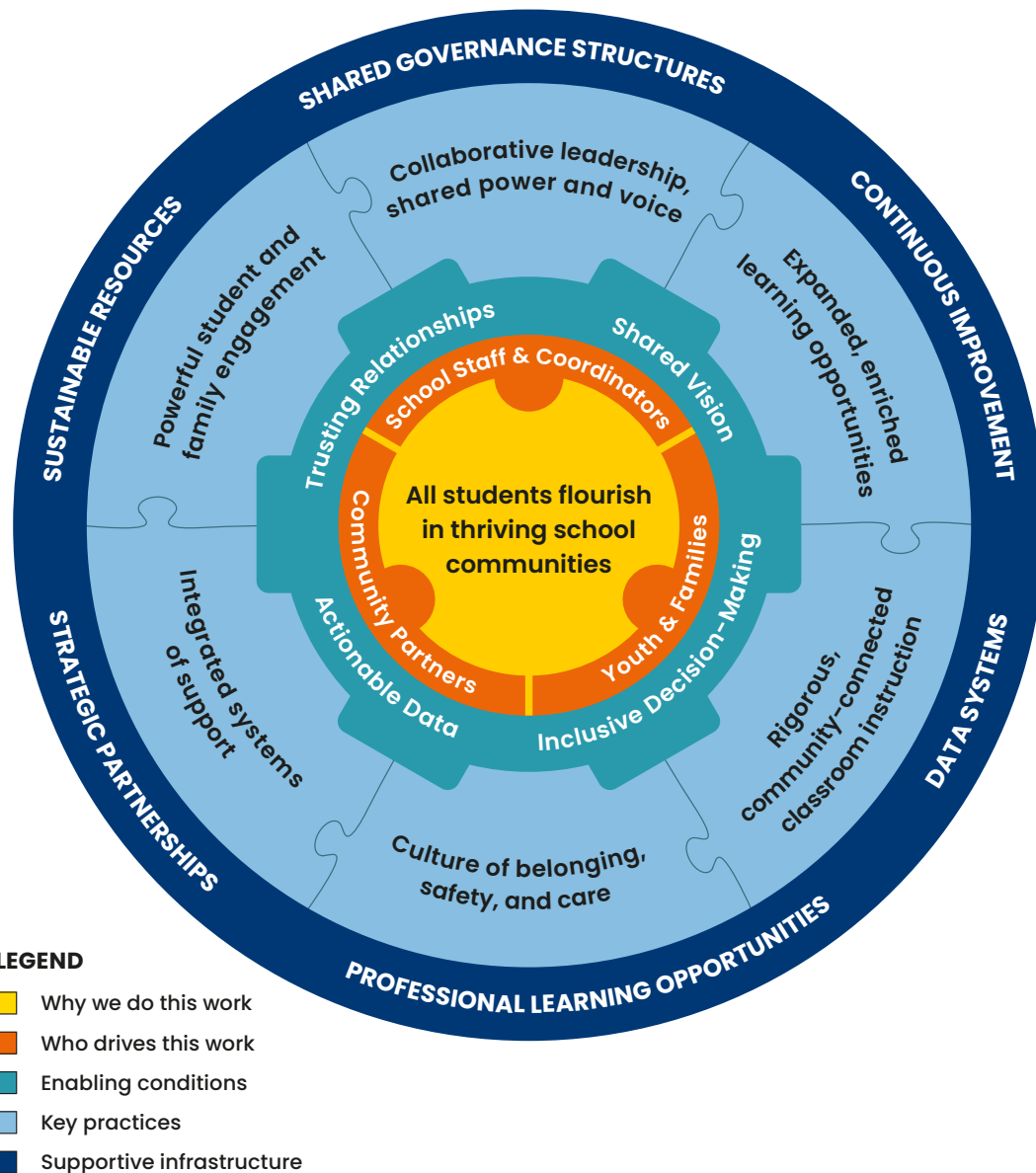
Suggested citation: Community Schools Forward. (2023). *Framework: Essentials for community school transformation*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/project/community-schools-forward>

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.


A Framework for Community Schools

The community schools strategy transforms a school into a place where **educators, local community members, families, and students work together to strengthen conditions for student learning and healthy development**. As partners, they organize in- and out-of-school resources, supports, and opportunities so that young people thrive. The school community, led by a community school coordinator/manager, works to develop a vision and goals for the school, student and family well-being, and student learning. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1. Essentials for Community School Transformation




Source: Community Schools Forward. (2023).



When educators, families, students, and community partners share responsibility for developing the resources that address the unique needs of their schools and communities, they create conditions for working together that enable them to make transformative changes. These conditions include **building strong, trusting relationships, engaging in inclusive decision-making, and creating a thriving community**. It is in this environment that schools are able to generate optimal, “whole child” conditions for student learning and development. This is accomplished through the integrated implementation of the **key practices**:

- **Powerful student and family engagement.** Families and students actively participate in the school community and are key partners in decision-making, shaping the school’s environment, priorities, and partnerships. Families’ lived experiences and wisdom inform approaches to student success. As a result, schools become hubs providing opportunities for adults as well as young people.
- **Collaborative leadership and shared power and voice.** Families, students, teachers, principals, and community partners co-create a culture of professional learning, collective trust, and shared responsibility as they make decisions together. These decisions are made in both formal structures, such as site-based leadership teams and regularly administered surveys, and through more informal engagement, such as coffee with the coordinator, hallway conversations, and community gatherings.
- **Expanded and enriched learning opportunities.** Before- and after-school, weekend, and summer programs provide expanded time, expanded staffing, and expanded opportunities for learning and engagement. These include academic instruction, enrichment and extracurricular activities, and individualized support. Students have opportunities to explore their passions, dive deeper into the application of academic content, and strengthen their knowledge and skills.
- **Rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction.** Teaching and learning in the school infuses high-level content and skills with real-world learning opportunities. The curriculum is deeply connected to the local community and students’ identities, cultures, and experiences, providing opportunities for students to engage in meaningful inquiry-based learning and problem-solving.
- **Culture of belonging, safety, and care.** The school climate is welcoming and fosters trust among students, families, partners, and staff. Each person in the school community is valued for their rich diversity of experiences and is encouraged to share their views, knowledge, and culture. The school becomes a place grounded in healthy relationships, in which members feel safe and comfortable navigating conflicts and taking risks. Students feel connected to and are active participants in the school community.

- 
- **Integrated systems of support.** To promote healthy learning and development, a dedicated team composed primarily of school staff and community partners intentionally and systematically coordinates services, supports, and opportunities that foster individual and collective well-being, using an assets-based approach to nurture the strengths and address the needs of students and families.

Community schools are not static entities; instead, they are constantly adapting and setting priorities based on intentionally collected, **actionable data**. Working together, the school community tracks progress in ongoing improvement cycles of shared reflection, analysis, revision, and inclusive decision-making. This continuous improvement process both builds capacity and draws on the support of the entire school community to develop and maintain a responsive, high-quality community school where **students flourish**. For this strategy to be effective and sustainable, a system-level support infrastructure needs to be in place. This includes, but is not limited to, **sustainable resources, shared governance structures, continuous improvement, data systems, professional learning opportunities, and strategic partnerships**. These can be provided in part by local, state, and federal policies, ongoing technical assistance, and private and public investments.